

Original Research Article

Employing the Semiotic Theory in the Translation of Selected Idioms from Mokpe into English

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Abstract

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This study sets out to look at the semiotic theory as an approach to the translation of idiomatic expressions from an indigenous language (Mokpe) to a non-indigenous language (English). Besides the inherent figurative and cultural constraints in the translation of Mokpe idioms into English, a survey of the selected idioms reveals that they refer to signs and significations like seeing the fox and its child, seeing the bride falling with the bridal salt, etc. in the Mokpe language. The idioms therefore require in-depth semiotic analysis to uncover their meaning. Aware of the constraints inherent in the translation of this discourse genre, the following research questions were posed: 1) what are the difficulties inherent in the translation of idiomatic expressions from Mokpe into English? 2) Why is the semiotic theory a relevant approach to the translation of idiomatic expressions from Mokpe into English? Twelve randomly selected idiomatic expressions in Mokpe were the focus of this study, which adopted descriptive and analytical research procedures. The Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) Model served as a basis for the presentation, analysis and translation of the selected idioms. The findings of the study have been presented based on the research questions. On the whole, the study posits that to overcome the constraints in the translation of idiomatic expressions from Mokpe into English, substitution, deletion and omission could be used in varying degrees with the semiotic theory as a complementary approach or macrostrategy.

Keywords: Idiomatic Expressions, Semiotic Theory, Translation

INTRODUCTION

Equally referred to as idiomatic expression, an idiom is a combination of words or phrases with figurative meanings that are conventionally understood by native speakers. This definition is somehow simplistic and tends to imply that the native speakers of a given language should, of necessity, immediately understand the use and meaning of an idiomatic expression. This is not usually the case, as most idioms are said to be frozen expressions whose meaning cannot be deciphered transparently from the meanings of its constituent words, due to their figurative and unpredictable nature. Simply put, idioms do not

exactly mean what the words say and most often, their semantic implication may be completely different from their lexical content.

Most scholars are unanimous with the fact that idiomatic expressions are a universal feature of language. However, different languages may use different idiomatic expressions but with similar referential meanings. Thus, without a sound mastery of idioms, one cannot acquire near native fluency in a given language. The situation is even more complex when we attempt to render the meaning of an idiomatic expression into

another language. A survey of idiomatic expressions in Mokpe reveals that idioms are highly figurative and culturally embedded in our local languages. And that they undergo innovative processes such as substitution, omission and even deletion in an attempt to render them in another language. This study therefore seeks to investigate how the semiotic theory can be employed as an alternative approach with the above three processes (substitution, omission, and deletion) in overcoming the hurdles of translating selected idiomatic expressions from Mokpe into English. To this effect, the study attempts to provide answers to the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. What are the problems inherent in the translation of idiomatic expressions from Mokpe into English?
2. Why is the semiotic theory a relevant approach to the translation of idiomatic expressions from Mokpe into English?

Literature Review

Providing answers to the above research questions would therefore call for probing the three core concepts of the semiotic theory, translation, and idiomatic expression. For purposes of coherence and logical consistency, the concepts will be presented in a reverse order, beginning with translation.

What is Translation?

Like other disciplines, translation has, as a field of study, attracted definitions from many researchers and scholars. It is not the purpose of this study to provide a comprehensive array of definitions posited by different scholars. What is worthy of note is the fact that contemporary translation studies can be attributed to three paradigms in the definition of the discipline: the linguistic paradigm, the cultural paradigm as well as the social and psychological paradigm. For the purpose of this study, only the linguistic and cultural paradigms will be considered because idioms, which are the object of this study, are linguistic forms that are culturally embedded.

The linguistic paradigm demonstrates the role of translation from the standpoint of language. Here, translation is regarded as the exchange of messages between languages. One of the proponents of the linguistic paradigm is Catford. He defines translation as *the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)* (1965:20). According to Catford, the theory of translation is concerned with a relationship between languages,

hence it is unreasonable to study translation without considering its relationship with linguistics. He believes that translation should be guided by linguistics. These ideas are well expressed in his book, *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*, where he notes that any theory of translation must draw upon a theory of language, a general linguistics theory (1965:1). It should be observed that Catford views translation from a purely linguistic point of view, suggesting that it is performed exclusively through languages. Other theorists who followed the trail of the linguistic scholars are Nida and Taber (1969:12). They viewed translation in the following words:

Translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language, the closest natural equivalent of the source language (SL), first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style.

Catford, Newmark, as well as Nida & Taber can be credited for being the precursors of the linguistic theory of translation, as their suggestions and insights triggered a wave of propositions by other theoreticians along the same linguistic lines. However, their definitions were purely linguistic and failed to take into consideration other aspects that influenced language as a whole and translation in particular. Thus, trailing the blaze of the linguistic theory put forward by Catford and Newmark, Larson (1984:1) defines translation in the following words:

Translation consists of studying the lexicon, grammatical structure, communication situation and cultural context of the source language text, analyzing it in order to determine its meaning, then reconstructing the same meaning using the lexicon and grammatical structure which are appropriate in the receptor language and its cultural context.

Larson's definition contains elements from Catford's and Newmark's definitions. However, the latter definition is more specific, highlighting aspects that must be taken into consideration by the translator: lexicon, grammatical structure, communication situation and cultural context, to recreate and reconstruct meaning.

Coming on the hills of the linguistic paradigm of translation is the cultural paradigm. One of the leading scholars of the cultural paradigm of translation is Duff (1989:5) who considers language and culture as two interwoven concepts and defines translation as follows:

As a process of communication, translation functions as the medium across linguistic and cultural barriers in conveying the messages written in the foreign language. It functions as the bridge to carry the message (meaning) from the source language to the receptor language.

Duff therefore views translation from a functional perspective, as performing both linguistic and cultural functions by facilitating communication between linguistic and cultural entities.

Still along the lines of the cultural paradigm, Reiss (in Venuti 2000:160) defines translation in the following words:

Interlingual translation (translating from one language to another) is a bilingual mediated process of communication, which usually aims at the production of a TL text that is functionally equivalent to a SL text. Translation is a process of communication: the objective of translating is to impart the knowledge of the original to the foreign reader.

It should be observed that Reiss has not explicitly used the term 'culture' in his definition, but has referred to 'culture' implicitly by making reference to the 'foreign reader.'

Another leading theoretician of the cultural school of thought is the Belgian scholar, Lefevere. In his work *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, Lefevere views translating as a process of rewriting: *Translation is of course, rewriting of the original text* (2004a:12). Thus, according to Lefevere, as a social phenomenon, translation is inevitably influenced by ideology and the poetics of society. The translator is therefore urged to rewrite the text according to the requirements of society.

Lefevere also concurs with Haetius who defines translation in his book *Translation/History/Culture: as sourcebook*, in the following words:

A translation...is a text in a well written language which refers to and represents a text in a language which is not as well known. This to mind, is the most productive definition of a translation made within the tradition and represented here, simply because it raises many, if not all of the relevant questions at once (Lefevere, 2004:4).

It is obvious from the above definition that though Lefevere also views translation from the point of view of language transfer, he does not fail to point out the important influence of cultural aspects on translation. This is especially the case when he refers to 'tradition.' From the foregoing discussion, it is obvious that the linguistic and cultural paradigms complement each other in enhancing the debate on translation theory. Both paradigms are of utmost importance in establishing the interface between language, culture and translation. However, translation is a complex activity that is not only limited to linguistic and cultural transfer. Contemporary translation studies also deals with signs and signification (semiotics). This is especially the case with our local languages that are highly metaphorical and make profuse use of imagery. That is why this study seeks to investigate the relevance of the semiotic theory in the translation of selected Mokpe idiomatic expressions into English. This logically leads to the next concept of the study, which is idiomatic expressions.

What is an Idiomatic Expression?

Finding a universal definition that covers the variety of what can constitute idiomatic expressions might appear difficult. On the difficulty of defining idioms, Grant (2003:1) notes that "linguists have not reached a consensus on idiom definition and classification for language teachers and learners." Rafatbakhsh and Ahmadi (2019:1) also note that scholars have always had difficulty in defining idioms. This, according to them, is due to the fact that 'although there exist a lot of definitions, it is sometimes impossible to differentiate between collocations, phrasal verbs and idioms.' However, this does not mean that attempts at definition of this discourse genre have not been made. Some of the definitions will be looked at in this study.

The definition proposed by Gramley and Patzold (2003:55) is more concise. They define an idiom as a *'complex lexical item which is shorter than a word form but longer than a sentence and which has a meaning that cannot be derived from knowledge of its component parts.'*

Another scholar, Saeed (2003:84) defines an idiom *'as collocated words that became affixed to each other until metamorphosing into a fossilized term.'* He notes that this collocation of words redefines each component word in the word group and becomes an idiomatic expression.

Fernando (in Rafatbakhsh and Ahmadi (2019:3) considers idioms as 'conventionalized multi-word expressions often, but not always non-literal.'

Semantically speaking, scholars have proposed different scales or continuum of idiomaticity (Alexander, 1987; Cowie et al., 1983, Fernando, 1996; Moon, 1988b; Wood, 1981). Grant (In Rafatbakhsh and Ahmadi (2019:3) summarized the scales used by such scholars in six categories:

- a) Semi-idioms, including at least one word connected to its literal meaning (e.g., 'white lie')
- b) Semi-opaque idioms whose meanings can be guessed but not easily (e.g., 'sail too close to the winds ;)
- c) Pseudo idioms including an element that has no meaning on its own (e.g., 'spic and span')
- d) Pure idioms, well-formed idioms or idioms of decoding that have both literal and non-literal meaning (e.g., 'Kick the bucket')
- e) Full idioms which consist of constituents whose ordinary meanings are not related to the idioms' semantic interpretation (e.g., 'butter up')
- f) Figurative idioms that have figurative meanings besides current literal interpretations (e.g., 'catch fire').

Whatever the definition and/or classification of idioms might be, it is worth noting that idioms have three prominent features, which are:

- Compositionality: the idioms are not compositional since their meanings are not the sum of the meanings of their parts;

- They are institutionalized which means that they are commonly used by a large number of people in a speech community, and
- The idioms are frozen and fixed but the degree of their frozenness varies.

It is the above three features of idioms that renders the task of translating them into another language difficult. The task is especially more challenging when the translator attempts to translate from an African indigenous language into a European language. Commenting on the translation of idiomatic expressions Baker (2012:68) notes that:

A person's competence in actively using the idioms and fixed expressions of a foreign language hardly ever matches that of a native speaker. The majority of translators working into a foreign language cannot hope to achieve the same sensitivity that native speakers seem to have for judging when and how an idiom can be manipulated.

The difficulty involved in translating idioms is therefore inherent. Commenting on the challenges faced by translators in rendering this discourse genre, Baker (2012:68) notes that the major problems in the translation of idiomatic expressions relate to two main areas: 'the ability to recognize and interpret an idiom correctly; and the difficulties involved in rendering the various aspects of meaning that an idiom or fixed expression conveys into the target language.'

The above difficulties notwithstanding, the need to translate idiomatic expressions has become paramount. This is in view of the fact that idiomaticity is increasingly becoming a common feature in everyday communication, be it oral or written communication. Moreover, cross-cultural communication should not suffer because of difficulties involved in translating idiomatic expressions from one language into another. Aware of this, researchers have proposed several strategies that should help the translator in rendering this discourse across different languages and cultures.

Strategies for Translating Idioms

Baker is one of the leading researchers who has researched extensively on the translation of idiomatic expressions and her work on this domain has influenced other researchers. Commenting on the difficulty of translating idioms and the need to adopt strategies for their translation, she noted that 'idiom is one of the problems of non-equivalence' (2018:111).

Other scholars have equally researched on idioms. Hence, commenting on strategies for their rendering, Dwiek & Thalys (2016) (cited in Ali & Al-Rushidi, 2016) state that in translating idioms the translator needs both source language and target language competence, good

cultural knowledge and the strategies in translating the idioms in order to transfer the message. They also note as follows:

The translator must pay attention to the cultural aspect and meaning when transferring the message from the source language into the target language. The translators should replace the idioms with target language equivalents without changing what the original writer means.

The above does not provide a checklist of strategies that translators should resort to when translating idioms. That is why Baker's (1992) and other works are often cited. Thus, the latter considers idioms as 'frozen patterns of language which give no space and variation in form and sometimes convey meanings which are difficult to discuss from their individual components. She therefore provided five conditions that translators should take into consideration when translating idioms:

- The order of the words cannot be transformed. That is, their place is fixed.
- The words in an idiom cannot allow neglecting or deleting some words e.g., 'shed crocodile tears' not 'shed tears.'
- Extra words cannot be added e.g., 'have a narrow escape' not 'have a quick narrow escape.'
- Replacement of words by other words is not allowed e.g., 'out of sight, out of mind' not out of sight, out of heart.'
- The grammatical structure remains unchanged e.g., 'ring the bell' not 'the bell was ringed.'

The above five conditions for translators to consider when translating idioms are accompanied by strategies to use when translating this discourse genre as proposed by Baker (1992:2). They are presented as follows:

- Using an idiom with similar meaning and form (SMF): the translator uses a target language idiom which has the same meaning and lexical items;
- Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form (SMDF): the translator uses an idiom which has the same meaning but different lexical items;
- Using a paraphrase: this strategy is commonly used in case the translator could not find any equivalent idiom in the target language. The translator uses different lexical items and/or style;
- Translation by omission: if the translator does not find any equivalent idiom in the target language, he often omits the idiom provided the message can still be conveyed within the context.

It should be observed that the above strategies proposed by Baker are not exhaustive and translators are free to choose from the plethora of translation strategies during the process of translating idioms. However, they provide a ready-made solution when confronted with difficulty in

rendering this discourse genre. Using these strategies are not in themselves sufficient. They must be backed by approaches and theories. The next section therefore focuses on the theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework

The 'semiotic theory' is among the key words used in this study. The choice of the semiotic approach as a framework for this study stems from the fact that most of the selected proverbs are semiotic in nature. Hence, they deal with signs and signification. From the perspective of semiotics, translation is studied as a purely semiotic act that involves the translation from one semiotic system (source language) to another (target language). Bassnet's (1991:13) supports the relevance of the semiotic theory when she says 'although translation has a central core of linguistic activity, it belongs most properly to semiotics, the science that studies sign systems or structures, sign processes and sign functions.'

House's (2009:4) thoughts on translation also lend credence to the relevance of the semiotic theory for this work. She views translation as 'the process of replacing the original text, known as the source text, with a substitute one, known as the target text.' House's views may appear simplistic. However, it points to the fact that the two terms 'text' and 'substitution' are crucially relevant in semiotics, owing to the fact that they enable the translatability/substitution of every semiotic system/text for another.

Pitrelli (2011:278-279) opines that 'translation is a phenomenon of sign and reality and as such is the object of study of semiotics.' This observation by Pitrelli is the basis of the use of the semiotic theory as a framework for this study. It should be observed that the selected Mokpe idiomatic expressions relate to sign systems, sign processes and sign functions, hence, justifying the use of the semiotic theory as a framework.

The thoughts and reflections of other scholars support the relevance of the semiotic theory as an approach to translation. Thus, the thesis of Petrelli and Ponzio (2012:20) is worth revisiting, especially due to their reference to translation from/into our local languages which they term 'national languages.' They observe that in the process of translating, the translator is faced not only with verbal texts but also with other semiotic texts, even non-verbal texts, since:

The translator must navigate the iconic dimensions of language and move beyond the conventions and obligations of the dictionary to enter the live dialogue among national languages, among languages internal to a given national language, and among verbal signs and non-verbal signs.

The relevance of the semiotic theory to this study can therefore not be over-emphasized, as it (the study) seeks

to 'navigate the iconic dimensions of language' while investigating the translation of idiomatic expressions (that is 'languages internal to a given national language) from Mokpe into English. Also, the semiotic approach, which deals with signs and signification can be said to be mostly concerned with '*languages internal to a given national language.*'

METHODOLOGY

This study is geared towards investigating the relevance of the semiotic theory to the translation of selected idiomatic expressions from Mokpe into English. The study is corpus-based and therefore essentially qualitative, with a corpus referring to a collection of texts (in this case, idiomatic expressions in Mokpe) assumed to be representative of a given language used for linguistic analysis. The study also has some elements of quantitative research as part of the collected data were analyzed using frequency counts.

Data was collected randomly, mostly through focus group discussion with some persons who are very knowledgeable in Mokpe, a language spoken by people who hail from Fako Division from the South West Region of Cameroon. Using a purely qualitative method, the collected data is provided by presenting the source text, presenting the gloss (that is, Mokpe, linguistic and literal) for proper appreciation by the target language audience. Lastly, the data is analyzed following the semiotic approach and the descriptive translation studies (DTS) model. The methodology is therefore based on the classification, analysis and translation of some twelve (12) randomly selected Mokpe idiomatic expressions into English.

Classification of the Selected Idioms

The idiomatic expressions have been classified following Katan's (2004:43) logical levels of culture, which provides a comprehensive view of how culture reveals itself. Thus, according to Katan, culture reveals itself in each of the following logical levels: (a) Environment, including food, climate, housing, etc.); (b) Behaviour, that is, actions and ways of behaving in certain cultures; (c) Capabilities, strategies and skills used to communicate; (d) Values of society and its hierarchy; (e) Beliefs; (f) Identity. Classifying the idioms following Katan's logical levels of culture is very relevant given the direct correlation that the idioms have with these headings. For the twelve that will be used for this study, with regard to the *environment*, the wisdom embedded in most of the idioms is drawn from the landscape, flora and fauna, objects, body parts, etc. With regard to *behaviour*, it goes without saying that some of the idioms castigate unruly behaviour while extolling the virtues of responsible attitude that help in

comfort of their kitchens, since they have dry wood to keep them warm

Action

Possible Translation Constraints: The culture specific nature of the idiom renders comprehension difficult

Proposed Translation: *To be very comfortable*

Researcher's Method: Complementary translation strategy: Deletion

Justification/Explanation of Researcher's Method

The expression is very difficult to comprehend due to its culture specific nature, hence necessitating deletion of source text lexical items and paraphrasing them in the target language to enhance understanding. In a purely traditional society like the Mokpe's, a person who has not been seen for some time, especially a responsible person, is deemed to have been enjoying the warmth and comfort of his home.

Excerpt 3

Identification

ST: lì tìmba mòkala nà íhvàrzè

Gloss: Mokpe: lí/tímbá/mòkálá/nà/íhvàrzè

Linguistic: to/become/whiteman/and/efasa moto

Literal: to become like the whiteman and efasa moto

Element of Interest: mòkálá; íhvàrz

Description

Context of Production: Like Excerpt 2, this idiom is also used to state that it has been long since one met with another person, just like the whiteman and *efasa moto* have not also met for long.

Theme: Consensus - Among the Bakweris, it is common knowledge that *efasa moto* and the whiteman have nothing in common so they are unlikely to meet.

Action

Possible constraints to translation: The idiom poses cultural constraints, especially to someone who does not know about *efasa moto*

Proposed Translation: *To be for so long without seeing someone* (who is supposed to be a close person).

Researcher's Method: Complementary translation strategy: Deletion plus expansion.

Justification of Researcher's Method

Not only is it necessary to delete the source language lexical items *mokala* (whiteman) and *ihvarze* (efasa moto) during the process of translating into the target language. It is also necessary to resort to expansion (explicitation) to differentiate meaning in excerpts 2 and 3. Thus, while excerpt 2 is referring to anybody (who has not been seen for long), excerpt 3 refers to someone who is close to the speaker.

Excerpt 4

Identification

ST: ɲɔndɔ yà wúhwà lí índà èrzàí

Gloss: Mokpe: ɲɔndɔ/yà/wúhwà/líndà/érzàí

Linguistic: young/of/hen/fell/feather

Literal: Feather fell off from a young hen

Element of Interest: The whole text

Description

Context of Production: This idiom is used to console someone, usually a young person, who has experienced a setback

Theme: Consensus: It is a truism that other opportunities will come, no matter the setbacks that one faces; just like another feather will grow when a hen loses a feather.

Action

Possible constraint: Difficulty in understanding the ST

Proposed translation: *A young person will certainly face setbacks but that does not signal the end of opportunities*

Researcher's Method: Complementary translation strategy: Substitution

Justification/Explanation of Researcher's Method

The SL phraseological items ɲɔndɔ yà wúhwà (young hen that lost a feather) has been substituted with a young person who experienced a (temporary) setback. The substitution is apt and enhances understanding of the fact that it is only a setback and does not necessarily signal the end of opportunities. Thus, just like the young hen's feathers will still grow, there will be other opportunities for the young person albeit the setbacks experienced.

The above idioms explain the truth condition. That is why they have been grouped under the theme 'consensus' because they refer to what is generally acceptable and obvious. The next group of idioms under 'environment' are classified under the theme 'collective

responsibility.' Thus, human beings are deemed to be collectively responsible for maintaining social cohesion in their society.

Collective Responsibility

Excerpt 5

Identification

ST: li èmbya ítótɔwɔ ó míyungmbani

Gloss: Mokpe: li/èmbeya/ítótɔwɔ/o/míyungmbani

Linguistic: to/recognize/slug/on/dry leaves

Literal: to recognize a slug on dry leaves

Element of Interest: èmbeya; ítótɔwɔ; miyungmbani

Description

Context of Production: This idiom is usually employed in legal contexts in Mokpe.

Theme: Collective Responsibility: Within the Mope community, human beings are deemed to be collectively responsible in ensuring the maintenance of social cohesion, by not attempting to twist facts in litigious situations.

Action

Possible constraints to translation: Difficulty in understanding concepts in the SL and finding an appropriate TL rendering. Also poses a problem of context.

Proposed Translation: *To have unimpeachable evidence*

Researchers Method: Complementary translation strategy: Substitution

Explanation/Justification of Researcher's Method

Among the Baweris, recognizing a slug on dry leaves is symptomatic to having evidence that cannot be contested on an issue. The substitution of the expression with an existing equivalent rendering can be used to good measure as a complementary strategy to the semiotic theory in the rendering of the idiom. Also, the equivalent expression 'unimpeachable evidence' is used most often in legal parlance to refer to 'prima facie' evidence or evidence that cannot be contested.

Excerpt 6

Identification

ST: meèmbeya mo mà hvanja è njìya

Gloss: Mokpe: meèmbèya/mo/mà/hvanja/è/njìya

Linguistic rope/it/has/jumped/the/road

Literal: The rope has crossed the road

Element of Interest: meèmbeya; hvanja ;njìyá

Description

Context of Production: This idiom is used in a conflict resolution context. When all efforts at resolution have been exhausted to no avail, the rope is deemed to have gone across the road.

Theme: Collective Responsibility: Stakeholders in a situation of conflict have the responsibility of ensuring that they avoid position-taking as this can make situations go out of hand and hence render resolution efforts useless.

Action

Possible constraints to translation: There is noticeable cultural difficulty in the translation of this idiom.

Proposed translation: *The situation has gone out of hand/control*

Researcher's Method: Complementary translation strategy: Substitution

Explanation/Justification of Researcher's Method

Among the Bakweris, having the rope going across the road bespeaks of a situation going out of hand. This can very aptly be substituted with the expression 'the situation has gone out of hand' to enhance understanding of the TL audience. The substitution is also effective in the sense that this expression exists in other cultures.

CATEGORY 2: BEHAVIOUR

Consensus

Excerpt 7

Identification

ST: li akà muanjà nà matàngá

Gloss: Mokpe:li/akà/muanjà/nà/matàngá

Linguistic: to/cross/sea/with/legs

Literal: to walk on top of the sea

Element of Interest: The whole text

Description

Context of Production: This idiom is used to describe a situation of less stress. It alludes to the biblical story of Jesus walking on the sea.

Theme: Consensus: The impossibility of such an act (walking on top of the sea) is very telling. However, it is

very true that with hard work, one's situation is bound to be less stressful.

Action

Possible translation constraint: Difficult to decipher the message behind the idiom. That is, the idiom's intended meaning.

Proposed translation: *To live a less stressful life*

Researcher's method: Complementary translation strategy: Substitution

Explanation/Justification of Researcher's Method

The *skopos* behind this expression is to enjoin young people to aspire to live a less stressful life. It is to enjoin them to substitute indolence for hard work, hence the use of substitution as a complementary strategy to the semiotic theory. Walking on the sea is symptomatic to living a less stressful life. This comes only after hard work.

Excerpt 8

Identification

ST: moombi li kpà nà i ngengi

Gloss: Mokpe: moombi/li/kpà/nà/i/ngengi

Linguistic: bride/to/fall/with/the/bells

Literal: the bride to fall with the bells

Element of interest: The whole text

Description

Context of Production: Among the Bakweris, this idiom is used in situations of litigations, especially to refer to someone who always likes to take people to court.

Theme: Collective Responsibility: Humans are deemed to be collectively responsible to avoid situations of conflict.

Action

Possible constraint to translation: difficulty in understanding the expression

Proposed Translation: *The case does not always favour the plaintiff.*

Researcher's method: Complementary translation strategy: Deletion

Explanation/Justification Of Researcher's Method

Among the Bakweris, it is considered disgraceful and a taboo for the bride to fall with the salt brought by the

groom. This is symptomatic to ill-luck and a warning for the stakeholders to discontinue the marital process. Thus, the purpose of this idiom is to dissuade perpetual offenders from always looking for trouble because judgment will not always be in their favour. SL phraseological items (e.g. the bride falling with the salt) have been deleted completely from the translation, in sync with the idea that parties should refrain completely from living in contention.

Excerpt 9

Identification

ST: li àgba mooli

Gloss: Mokpe: li/àgbá/mooli

Linguistic: to/climb/rope

Literal: to climb a rope

Element of Interest: àgba; mooli

Description

Context of Production: This idiom is used in many circumstances, among the Bakweris, most often to make people to refrain from mounting unnecessary pressures on themselves, as this is considered suicidal (climbing a rope).

Theme: Collective Responsibility: Human beings are collectively responsible for their lives and livelihood.

Action

Possible constraint to translation: Culture specific, as climbing a rope may mean different things to different cultures.

Proposed translation: *To commit suicide*

Researcher's method: Complementary translation strategy: Substitution

Explanation/Justification of Researcher's Method

The semiotic theory is sufficiently relevant in rendering this idiom. This is because climbing a rope is synonymous to taking or attempting to take one's life. Substituting 'climb a rope' with 'to commit suicide' is not only effective because of the existence of a TL expression, but also because this expression lends itself easily to the understanding of the TL audience.

Communal Solidarity

Closely related to collective responsibility is the theme of communal solidarity. Thus, to ensure social cohesion

within the community, kith and kin must live in solidarity. These expressions are also related to the environment.

Excerpt 10

Identification

ST: lì kεε mòtò mēyolí
 Gloss: Mokpe: lì/kεε/mòtò/mēyolí
 Linguistic: to/cut/somebody/ropes
 Literal: to cut/remove ropes from somebody
 Element of Interest: kεε; mòtò; mēyolí

Description

Context of Production: The Bakweris usually employ this expression to mean helping someone get out of a messy situation. It is usually used in financial contexts, although it can equally refer to other situations.
 Theme: Communal Solidarity: Humans need to come to each other's aid to ensure communal solidarity and social cohesion.

Action

Possible constraint to translation: Difficulty in making meaning out of the ST, as removing ropes from somebody may be interpreted differently.
 Proposed Translation: *To bail somebody out of a difficult situation.*
 Researcher's Method: Complementary translation strategy: Substitution

Explanation/Justification of Researcher's Method

The mental image of untying somebody (from ropes) captures the idea of rescuing the person from an uncomfortable situation. The semiotic theory is therefore appropriate in rendering the idiom in the TT. The translation strategy of substitution equally brings out the overall meaning, since there is an equivalent TL expression 'to bail somebody out.'

Excerpt 11

Identification

ST: lì rzìirzε mekòmbá o rzè
 Gloss: Mokpe: lì/rzìirzε/mekòmbá/o/rzè
 Linguistic: to/put/gun/down
 Literal: to put the gun down
 Element of Interest: rzìirzε; mekòmbá; rzè

Description

Context of Production: This idiom is usually employed in conflict situations, when protagonists are urged to seek for alternative rather than forceful methods to resolve their differences.
 Theme: Communal Solidarity: If parties must maintain cohesion through communal solidarity, they must seek alternative methods to resolve their differences.

Action

Possible constraint to translation: Contextual difficulty may lead to mistranslation of the text. Thus, the right context must be considered for effective rendering
 Proposed translation: *To bury the hatchet; to throw in the towel*
 Complementary Translation Strategy: Substitution

Explanation/Justification of Researcher's Method

The mental image of putting down the gun symbolizes using the force of argument rather than the argument of force, particularly in a situation of conflict. The substitutions above, which are also idiomatic expressions, are a good replication of the source text in the target language. This calls for a good mastery of the working languages by the translator.

Excerpt 12

Identification

ST: lì tìmbana erzùwà o liyandò
 Gloss: Mokpe: lì/tìmbana/erzùwà/o/liyandò
 Linguistic: to/take/wrestling/to/dressing room
 Literal: to bring back the wrestling to the dressing room
 Element of Interest: tìmbana/erzùwà/liyandò

Description

Context of Production: Wrestling is a consuming pastime among the Bakweris. During wrestling contests between villages, each of the competing villages rehearse in their respective dressing rooms before the wrestling proper. This expression is used in conflict situations, when parties are urged to go back and (re)consider their positions on the issue.
 Theme: Communal Solidarity: To maintain communal solidarity and peaceful co-existence, parties are supposed to reconsider their positions before embarking on full-scale action.

Table 1. Type of Translation Constraint

S/N	Constraint Type	Occurrence Frequency	Percentage
1.	ST comprehension	5	41.7
2.	Cultural constraint	4	33.3
3.	Contextual constraint	3	25
Total		12	100

Table 2. Translation Strategy

S/N	Translation Strategy	Occurrence Frequency	Percentage
1.	Deletion	4	33.3
2.	Substitution	7	58.3
3.	Omission	1	8.3
Total		12	100

Action

Possible constraints to translation: Difficulty in understanding the source text and producing a functionally relevant target text.

Proposed translation: To resolve the issue internally
Complementary Translation Strategy: Omission

Explanation/Justification Of Researcher's Method

Source language lexical items like 'erzuwa' (wrestling) and 'liyandò '(dressing room) have been omitted in the target rendering and substituted with 'issue' and 'internally' respectively, for maximum equivalent effect and understanding of the target language text.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study have been presented with regard to the research questions. Consequently, the first research question focuses on the constraints inherent in the translation of the selected idioms while the second research question targets the complementary translation strategies and cultural referents.

The findings reveal that the translator is confronted with a plethora of constraints during the translation of idiomatic expressions from Mokpe into English. The constraints generally relate to comprehension of the source language text, culture specificity of the text and difficulty relating to context. During the course of translating the idiomatic expressions from Mokpe into English, 5 out of the 12 idioms had constraints relating to comprehension difficulty, 4 of the idioms had constraints relating to their culture specific nature while 3 of the idioms' constraints are as a result of difficulty in situating the idiom within the right context. The frequency of occurrence of the constraints are presented in the following Table 1.

The above constraints point to the fact that translating idiomatic expressions from an African indigenous language into English is not a mundane task and calls on the translator to be very careful in selecting translation strategies. Above all, the translator should do a thorough ST semiotic analysis before embarking on translation, since all the idioms are pregnant with signs and significations. Knowing the sign systems of the source culture is particularly relevant.

There are many strategies in the translation of text that present the above constraints. This study has however, focused on deletion, omission and substitution as complementary translation strategies (to the semiotic theory/approach) because they lend themselves appropriately to the translation of idioms. This is not to say that the other strategies are of less importance.

The findings reveal that during the course of translating the selected idiomatic expressions, the researcher used the strategies in varying degrees as shown on the Table 2 above.

From the findings, it goes without saying that the strategy of substitution should be employed more regularly than the other two when translating idiomatic expressions from Mokpe into English. This may be due to the fact that if the SL lexical and phraseological contents are replicated into the TL, it will lead to mistranslation and a complete distortion of meaning. With regard to the two strategies that are less used, it should be observed that there is a very tiny thread that runs between them (that is, deletion and omission).

It should be observed that the use of the above translation strategies (in addition to the semiotic approach) is inevitable. Thus, if the source language (SL) meaning is to be replicated in the target language (TL), the translator has to resort to either deletion, omission or substitution. However, this seriously compromises the local colour inherent in the source language text, hence highlighting the musicality of our African indigenous languages. It is also a pointer to the fact that target language idiomaticity can hardly be attained if the

Table 3. Idiom Classification Type

S/N	Classification Type	Occurrence Frequency	Percentage
1.	Environment	6	50
2.	Behaviour	6	50
Total		12	100

translator attempts to replicate the SL sounds because different languages have different sound systems.

The next aspect has to do with cultural references or elements. Two cultural elements (environment and behavior) were used to classify the idioms. This is due to their direct correlation with these expressions. Hence, most of the idioms are either drawn from the flora and fauna or they relate to behavioural tendencies. Findings reveal that 6 out of the 12 expressions relate to environment while the other 6 relate to behavior. This is represented in Table 3 above.

It should be observed that the above classification and translation strategies though appropriate, are means to an end rather than ends in themselves when translating idiomatic expressions from Mokpe into English. This is because the expressions in general, refer to signs and significations within the Bakweri culture. Thus, seeing the fox with its child, seeing the bride falling with the bridal salt, taking the wrestling to the dressing room, becoming like the white man and *efasa moto*, etc. are all very telling in the Bakweri culture. There is therefore the need for an in-depth semiotic analysis to uncover the meanings behind these signs and significations rather than just resorting to translation strategies to render them from Mokpe into English. That is why this study posits that semiotics should not only be used as a theory but also as an approach, if idiomatic expressions are to be rendered appropriately from an indigenous language into a non-indigenous language like English.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined if and how the semiotic theory can be used as an approach to the translation of idiomatic expressions from Mokpe into English. To achieve this, twelve selected idioms were classified firstly, following Katan's logical levels of culture (environment and behaviour exclusively) and secondly thematically, following Yakubu's tripartite classification of consensus, collective responsibility and communal solidarity. The Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) Model served as a basis for the presentation, analysis and translation of the selected idioms, as the idioms were presented in the analysis grid prior to their translation under the following headings: identification, description, action and finally justification or explanation (of researcher's method). The study concludes by positing

that Mokpe idiomatic expressions naturally refer to signs and signification. Thus, apart from complementary translation strategies like substitution, deletion and omission, there is need for thorough and in-depth semiotic analysis of the selected idioms in order for the translator to effectively render them from an indigenous to a non-indigenous language.

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