

*Original Research Article*

# The Role of Cultural Convergence in Quality Assessment of Community Translation in a Bilingual Setup: The Case of Cameroon

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Abstract

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As a bilingual country (French and English), official information is systematically translated into any of the two languages to facilitate communication between the French and English-speaking Cameroonians. This translation is visible in newspapers, media houses, churches, law courts, billboards, signposts, and banners. This paper argues that the quality of some of these translations leaves much to be desired, especially the handling of cultural elements, which remains uncultured mainly. The paper hypothesizes the coexistence between French and English in Cameroon leads to the easy and inadvertent use of deceptive cognates in translation, side-lining the cultural equivalence technique. Using translated texts sourced from newspapers and posted information in French and English across Cameroon, data was collected and analysed in a grid. The objective was to popularise the study of Community Translation, thereby improving quality and contributing to nation-building. Using the cultural translation theory, this paper reveals that one of the causes of such uncultured translation within Community Translation in Cameroon is the cultural convergence trend. For this problem to be elucidated in a bilingual setup like Cameroon, the symbiosis between language acquisition and communication should be a reality. Otherwise, acquiring a language and not communicating and writing it amounts to dealing with a dead language. In translation, it is essential to boost the cultural awareness of the would-be translator by allowing the trainee to stay with native language speakers for about six months. During this stay, they would acquire through immersion all the cultural subtleties of a language to be able to speak, write and even translate most or all the cultural elements inherent in that language.

**Keywords:** Community Translation, Cultural convergence, Culture, Unculturedness

## INTRODUCTION

This article traces the historical background of the uncultured translation problem observed in Community Translation - a subfield of Translation Studies brought to the limelight in 2015 (Mustapha, 2016). The First International Conference on Community Translation took

place in Sydney, Australia, in September 2014. It considered Community Translation as the "translation of different types of texts intended to facilitate communication between public services and people who do not have a good command of mainstream

language(s)". Furthermore, it presents uncultured translations, which are any improper use of cultural elements, like mistranslation and non-respect for the everyday use of the English language, investigates their cause and proposes solutions. The aim is to highlight the role of cultural convergence in a bilingual setup. Cultural convergence is the tendency of cultures to change and adapt to frequent exposure to other cultures. Ultimately, analysing the text-based documents enabled me to examine to what extent the false friend incidence orchestrated by the coexistence of French and English in Cameroon mars the quality of Community Translation in a bilingual milieu.

As an officially bilingual country (Bikoï et al., 2012), translation constitutes a significant communication vehicle to access information of general interest by English-speaking Cameroonians. Given the numerical strength of the French-speaking Cameroonians over the English-speaking ones, most of these translations are from French to English. A closer look at these translations reveals that some are uncultured because there has been some laxity in the quest for cultural equivalents in English in Community Translation. This lag negatively impacts access to public information by the English-speaking minority population and impedes nation-building.

## Background

Community Translation in Cameroon has its place in colonial history. Cameroon was handed to France and England to administer as Trust territories (Goldstein, Erik 11 October 2013) by the League of Nations after Germany, the first colonial master, lost the First World War. These two powers remained in Cameroon and dominated all aspects of life till 1960 and 1961. From that period to date, French and English, enshrined in the constitution as the two official languages of the country, have been taught in schools and used in different administrations. However, the French-speaking population numerically outnumbers the English-speaking people (Ayafor, 2002). The official interaction through conversation must occur as one country but two nations, hence the need to ease communication between these two major linguistic and cultural groupings. Thus, translation has to be used to facilitate the understanding of these two major linguistic groupings. However, given the geometric advantage of the French over the English-speaking, most decisions are taken in French for eventual translation into English, hence the importance of Community translation in Cameroon.

## Theoretical Framework

Cultural translation by Mounin is adopted as the theore-

tical framework for this study. It is "the practice of translation while respecting and showing cultural differences". Mounin (1963:4) introduced the first theory developed in cultural translation. He underlined the importance of the signification of a lexical item, stating that only if this notion is considered will the translated article fulfil its function correctly;

- (1) personal experience in its uniqueness is untranslatable;
- 2) in theory, the base units of any two languages are not always comparable;
- 3) communication is possible when an account is taken of the respective situations of speaker and hearer, or author and translator. "Translation may always start with the clearest situations, the most concrete messages, the most elementary universals. But as it involves the consideration of a language in its entirety, together with its most subjective messages, through an examination of common situations and a multiplication of contacts that need clarifying, then there is no doubt that communication through translation can never be completely finished, which also demonstrates that it is never wholly impossible either".

The lexical items here go beyond vocabulary to refer to culturally-embedded terms, which constitute a translation problem. All the cultural aspects in a given text are not only operationalised through lexical items; some are only implied.

Nida (1964:130) suggests that the translator should confer equal importance to linguistic and cultural differences between the source language (SL) and the target language (TL) because "differences between cultures may cause more severe complications for the translator than differences in language structure." Furthermore, he explains that cultural equivalents often provide a common understanding despite significant formal shifts in translation. Cultural implications for translation are thus of significant importance and lexical concerns. According to Nida (ibid: 129), a "gloss translation" mainly symbolises formal equivalence where form and content are reproduced as faithfully as possible. The TL reader can "understand as much as he can of the customs, manner of thought, and means of expression" of the SL context.

A lot has been said about the implication of culture in the translation process. Since the cultural turn in the 80s, the common denominator has been the realisation that cultural consideration in translating is part and parcel of the translation process. Consequently, any translator who ignores this reality cannot produce a good translation.

## METHODOLOGY

The documentary instrument was used to collect data to determine instances of uncultured translation. Most of

Table 1. Excerpt one from Cameroon Tribune

French version SL	English translation TL	Proposed translation TL
Le <b>présent</b> certificat d' <b>immatriculation</b> est délivré à...	The <b>present matriculation</b> certificate is issued to....	<b>This registration</b> certificate is issued to...

Table 2. Excerpt No. 2 from Cameroon Tribune

French version SL	English translation TL	Proposed translation TL
Le Ministre de la Communication <b>invite</b> par conséquent, les éditeurs et les distributeurs de presse, au respect des dispositions légales sus évoquées, ...	The Minister of Communication therefore <b>invites</b> publishers and distributors of newspapers to comply with the aforementioned provisions.	The Minister of Communication, therefore, <b>calls on/urges/asks</b> publishers and distributors of newspapers to comply with the provisions mentioned above.

these uncultured translations are sourced from Cameroon Tribune. It is the government newspaper through which information of general interest is given out. It is also suitable for businesses and corporations to advertise their products and services. I also collected some from signposts, billboards, and banners posted on highways, public establishments, and streets. My colleagues and acquaintances made further information available online (email and WhatsApp). For this article, I selected ten representatives of such obnoxious translations, and their unculturedness was tested under the following elements that form the grid:

- the source language text indicating the phrase to be translated
- the target text showing the poorly translated expression (uncultured translation)
- the proposed translation

The table-by-table qualitative analysis shows the French excerpt, its source, the uncultured translation in English and a proposed English translation. The following comments attempt to expose the unculturedness of the elements of interest in each case.

### Analysis of Data

Ten instances representing the uncultured translation are analysed in the following section. The aim is to highlight perceived unculturedness, indicate their sources and propose an acceptable translation.

#### Analysis of excerpt No.1

This translation was obtained from Cameroon Tribune No.12090/8289 of 7 April 2020, page 28. It is centred on a registration certificate. Table 1

We can note from the table above that the unculturedness of elements of interest creates ambivalence in the users' minds. Matriculation in English refers to admission to a group (especially a college or university), while *immatriculation* in French denotes registering a new object, like a car. Because of cultural convergence, linguistic, and foreignization methods, the translator employed literal strategy without taking cognizance of the natural way and terms as expected or as said in the English-speaking culture. The existence of matriculation in English language usage and language contact in Cameroon must have confused this translator. He thought matriculation refers to the same *immatriculation* in French. Therefore, a glaring example of a deceptive cognate,

#### Analysis of excerpt No. 2

This translation was obtained from Cameroon Tribune No.11853/8052 of 28 May 2019, Page 34. It is essentially centred on calling on or urging someone to do something. Table 2

The table 2 above highlights the unculturedness of elements of interest at the morphological level. Simply put, **invite** in English implies a willingness of the interlocutor. At the same time, **urge or call on** indicates an unwillingness to act by force. Therefore, the Minister is warning newspaper vendors and not inviting them: a semantic unculturedness. It is an expository text which demands the Skopos theory. The literal strategy is out of context as we are talking about a warning from a Government Minister calling on defaulters to toe the line. The trouble with this translator is that **inviter** exists in English, i., e-invite. Therefore, he did not take time to consider the context and the cultural difference between words written the same between French and English,

**Table 3:** Excerpt No. 3 from an examination centre

<b>French version</b> <b>SL</b>	<b>English translation</b> <b>TL</b>	<b>Proposed translation</b> <b>TL</b>
Les candidats <b>libres</b> sont autorisés à composer sans porter les tenues...	<b>Free</b> candidates have been authorised to compose without uniform....	<b>External</b> candidates have been authorised to write the examination in assorted attire...

**Table 4.** Excerpt No. 4 from a billboard

<b>French version</b> <b>SL</b>	<b>English translation</b> <b>TL</b>	<b>Proposed translation</b> <b>TL</b>
La <b>force</b> de l'expérience	The <b>force</b> of experience	The <b>power</b> of experience.

**Table 5.** Excerpt No. 5 from Cameroon Tribune newspaper

<b>French version</b> <b>SL</b>	<b>English translation</b> <b>TL</b>	<b>Proposed translation</b> <b>TL</b>
Un <b>extrait</b> d'acte de naissance ou de jugement supplétif en tenant lieu	An <b>extract</b> from a birth certificate or supplementary judgement in lieu	<b>Copy</b> of a birth certificate or a supplementary judgement in lieu thereof.

with the contextual and cultural differences-another influencing cultural convergence.

### Analysis of excerpt No.3

This translation was obtained from the Department of Examinations and Certification (DECC). This body is one of the structures that run official exams under the Ministry of Secondary Education. The excerpt is centred essentially on External candidates. Table 3

The unculturedness of elements of interest and the literal level. "Free" shows liberty that is word-for-word. However, the cultural equivalent in English is external-a semantic unculturedness. Indeed, culture-specific concepts and the source and target languages make different distinctions in meaning. Accordingly, a translator is inevitably the product of their society: our socio-cultural background is present in everything we translate. In the same vein, adaptation is a cultural element that replaces the original text with one better suited to the target language's culture, as is the case here. The use of free for external owes to the coexistence of English and French in one country.

### Analysis of excerpt No. 4

This translation was obtained from billboards posted across the streets of Yaounde entirely, Cameroon, during the 2018 presidential elections in Cameroon. It is centred on power. Table 4

The unculturedness of elements of interest is at the

semantic level because the translator copied and pasted without bothering about usage. Differences in expressive meaning because the source and target languages make a different distinction in a sense, partly because force exists in either languages or cultures. Cultural convergence is misleading in most cases because it relies on linguistic interpretation and uses foreignisation through literal strategy at the micro level. Power is more abstract than concrete-like force. Besides, force sounds verbalised, not suitable for the translator, except he has no choice. In spoken English, you hardly hear of the force of experience. In usage, one quickly goes in for power rather than force.

### Analysis of excerpt No. 5

This translation was obtained from Page 24 of Cameroon Tribune No.12086/8285 of 30 April 2020. Basically, it is on a copy of a birth certificate. Table 5

We can note from the table above that the unculturedness of elements of interest is confusing because it is deceptive. Extract is synonymous with excerpt and means part of a whole or salient point. It has nothing to do with a birth certificate or a copy of a birth certificate. Cultural convergence is misleading in most cases because it relies on linguistic interpretation and uses foreignisation through literal strategy at the micro level to convey a cultural term. There is a problem with the cultural background of the said translator. The existence of a similar morphological word in English must have confused the translator to go in for it without considering the cultural term or the way it is said in

**Table 6.** Excerpt No. 6 from *Cameroon Tribune* newspaper.

French version SL	English translation TL	Proposed translation TL
NB: La date limite de <b>recevabilité</b> des dossiers préalablement prévue le mardi 31 janvier 2019 sur l'avis...	NB: The deadline for the <b>admissibility</b> of the files previously planned on Tuesday 31st January 2019 on the notice...	The deadline <b>to receive</b> the files previously set for Tuesday, 31 January 2019, on the notice of.....

**Table 7.** Excerpt No. 7 from a billboard in Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon.

French version SL	English translation TL	Proposed translation TL
Il est strictement interdit de jeter les ordures ici ! <b>sous peine</b> de poursuite judiciaire	It is strictly forbidden to throw dirt here! <b>under court</b> case for it will lead	It is strictly forbidden to dump refuse/waste/ garbage here! <b>or face</b> the legal proceedings/otherwise, you will be prosecuted

**Table 8.** Excerpt No. 8 from *Cameroon Tribune*

French version SL	English translation TL	Proposed translation TL
Les épreuves se dérouleront le jeudi 04 juillet et le vendredi 05 juillet 2019 à l'Institut Sous-Régional de Statistiques et d'Economie Appliquée (ISSEA)	The tests will take place on Thursday 04 July and Friday 05 July 2019 at the Sub-Regional Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics (ISSEA).	The Competitive entrance examination will take place on Thursday, 4 July, and Friday, 5 July 2019, at the Sub-Regional Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics (ISSEA).

English. This is a glaring example of false friends due to cultural convergence. Care has to be taken to resort to cultural translation rather than translating words that, most of the time, are misleading.

### Analysis of excerpt No. 6

This translation was obtained from Page 11 of *Cameroon Tribune* No.117763/77962 of 16 February 2019. Basically, it is centred on the receipt of candidate files. Table 6

We note from the above table that the unculturedness of elements of interest is cultural interpretation. In applications and examinations, applications are received and not admitted in the English culture—a semantic unculturedness. An attempt to put it precisely the way it is said in French without referring to the culture of the TL will only lead to uncultured translation. The existence of the two terms in English and French lured this translator. Admissibility is more of a legal term than examination. A file is deposited/submitted, or received. We do not admit a file.

### Analysis of excerpt No. 7

It was obtained from a billboard posted before a public

building in Douala and centred on legalese. Table 7

One notes from the table above that the unculturedness of elements of interest in a legal proceeding. It sounds odd that the translator finally missed the target in trying to take it literally. So the unculturedness is at the semantic level. The existence of the same term in English makes the translator not think further. He quickly goes in for the literal equivalent word. This cultural convergence is deceitful as it leads to word-for-word translation, which is too foreignised to make real sense in the TT culture. The translation is not only words but, more importantly, the search for cultural equivalence, hence the need to domesticate to make it fit in the target culture, especially when it concerns idioms and legalese.

### Analysis of excerpt No.8

This translation was obtained from page 6 of *Cameroon Tribune* No.11863/8062 of 13 June 2019. It is centred on the entrance examination. Table 8

The unculturedness of elements of interest rests on the nuance between an examination and a test. The test is taken for examination. Unculturedness at the semantic level where the absence of precision on the part of the translator renders the translation unacceptable. The literary technique in translation misleads users most of the time, so it is advisable to avoid it. That is why

Table 9. Excerpt No. 9 from a banner

French version SL	English translation TL	Proposed translation TL
FORUM MINESUP/UNIVERSITES/AGRO- INDUSTRIES Thème: « Mise en place du cadre réglementaire de la formation en <b>alternance</b> : cas des établissements facultaires <b>classiques</b> des universités d'état du Cameroun »	minesup/universities/agro- industries forum general theme: «putting in place of the statutory framework for <b>the work-and-study training</b> : the case of <b>classical</b> facultaties of cameroon state universities »	Theme: "Setting up the regulatory system for <b>sandwich courses</b> : the case of <b>standard/traditional</b> faculties in Cameroonian State universities."

Table 10. Excerpt No. 10 from Cameroon Tribune

French version SL	English translation TL	Proposed translation TL
Découvrir des partenaires de choix	Discovering partners of choice...	Discovering valuable/great/ very important partners.

foreignisation has not been appreciated by many translators. Test and examination are sometimes used interchangeably. However, in reality, there is a difference. A test is a tool to measure the knowledge level of students and adjust the learning material accordingly. An examination or the examination is more formal, and it tells you if a student has passed or failed a class or course. The nuance between test and examination is solved through domestication.

### Analysis of excerpt No. 9

This translation was obtained from a banner posted beside the Ministry of Higher Education building in Yaounde on 16 December 2020. It is centred on the entrance examination. Table 9

### The unculturedness of elements of interest

THE WORK-AND-STUDY TRAINING is not the adaptation in English of "la formation en alternance". Instead, it means working and studying—poor interpretation of training concepts. The transposition strategy leads to a completely different concept. The translator has gone in for an adjectival equivalence in English, ignoring that there is a cultural concept to designate this type of educational system in the English culture. However, he domesticated it but the wrong choice of terms. This education system exists, and from the etymological meaning of sandwich, it shows go-between-two activities. Also, he uses classical for classique, which is not used in English.

### Analysis of excerpt No. 10

This translation was obtained from Page 12 of Cameroon Tribune No.11740/7939 of 10 December 2018. It is centred on an idiom. Table 10

The unculturedness of elements of interest stems from the fact that they translated an idiomatic expression literally. At all three levels, the translation is wrong. The translation is not a one-to-one business. No cultural consideration has been taken care of here. *Les partenaires de choix*, locution adjective does not mean a partner of choice as translated by this; instead, this phrase refers to a particular partner, a significant personality. The existence of the same terms in English must have prompted the resolve of the translator. This translation has focused only on the source text. It betrays his cultural background. A good translation should be more concerned with dynamic equivalence, focusing on context and sense-for-sense adaptation.

These preceding samples suggest difficulties in effectively handling culturally-embedded terms in translation into English owing to the closeness between English and French as the two world languages are spoken, written and used in translation and interpretation in Cameroon.

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The outcomes of this investigation reveal that several uncultured translations are perceptible mainly through language, a prominent element of culture. These cultural element lags are traceable through several variables, including false cognates, literal translation or word-for-word translation, wrong usage of untranslatability terms, incorrect spellings, omission cases, citation marks, and

translating out of mother tongue and especially as a result of cultural convergence (Khunju:2022). This lag is also seen through customs, social norms, economy, education, politics and marriage. In this article, terms with similar orthographies that do not refer to the same realities form the bulk of misuse of cultural equivalents in the quality assessment of translation, in general, and Community Translation, in particular in a bilingual environment like Cameroon (Echu, G. 1999).

Cultural convergence is responsible for many uncultured translations revealed in this study. From the ten examples of poor translations surveyed, this researcher found the following excerpts: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9 and 10 are caused by cultural convergence representing 80% of the cases sampled here in Cameroon.

Christopher, E (2005) defines cultural convergence as “the theory that two cultures will be more and more like each other as their interactions increase. The more those cultures interact, the more that their values, ideologies, behaviours, arts, and customs will start to reflect each other.” When this definition is adopted and adaptable to translation, it shows that the closeness of French and English languages at the lexical level coupled with the interaction of Cameroonians in places of social gathering: the media, schools, markets, weddings, National Assembly/ the Senate, bars, football stadia, and workplaces, greatly influence this cultural convergence. In the translation process, translators with poor cultural backgrounds converge on terms in English and French because of their linguistic closeness. However, such terms are false cognates or must be adjusted for the appropriate adaptation. It means that French and English existing side-by-side in Cameroon is more of a liability to translators who, because of resemblance in terms, i.e. homonyms, quickly go in for the identical term without reflecting whether, beyond the morphological resemblance, the said term corresponds culturally in the TL to the SL one.

Therefore, cultural convergence is prominent among this country's causes of uncultured translation. The similarity in some terms in English and French, on the one hand, and their cohabitation in the same region, on the other, make it easier for culturally deficient translators to fall prey to deceptive cognates. They employ terms that are similar morphologically but semantically different. Therefore, the decision or mistake inevitably leads to uncultured renditions. Of course, this translation does not augur well with the nation-building philosophy. A translator's principal role is facilitating communication and bridging language barriers between people who belong to different language communities, especially when it concerns Community Translation.

Studies have proven that the closeness between French and English stands at 27% (Diana, 2016). This number accounts for a high level of uncultured translations in Cameroon. This cultural convergence is

perceptible through homonyms in the two languages, which, at first sight, appear to be connoting the same cultural objects. However, a closer look reveals that similar spellings are sometimes deceptive. This semblance accounts for many translation errors experienced in translating under Community Translation in Cameroon.

Two of the main factors influencing cultural convergence are time and instances of contact. The more cultures are in contact with each other, the more similar they will be. In a situation where cultures are heavily engaged with each other (Cameroon) with communication between French and English that is felt daily, cultural convergence becomes inevitable, with a direct bearing on translation.

## CONCLUSION

Communication is indispensable and critical in acquiring and developing cultural competence. When one communicates with others, the individual learns the culture of a particular language and obtains culturally appropriate and effective behaviours, including verbal and non-verbal conduct. This natural revelation entails that learning a language through schooling is not enough. The most practical way to learn a culture and its language is by communicating with it. The case of Cameroon is a glaring example of this situation. Several bilingual or Anglo-Saxon schools exist in the French-speaking zones. Many learners in these schools come from French-speaking backgrounds but cannot explore their full potential in English because when they return home daily, French imposes itself as the language at home. Of course, mastery of languages, at least two, is fundamental to translating correctly. It is hard to translate well if you do not master the cultural subtleties of the two languages in play. Translating in a bilingual setup, far from being an asset, is a liability to translators not versed in the two cultures as cultural convergence derails their good intention and betrays their poor cultural background. I submit that symbiosis between language acquisition and communication can thus redress this imbalance. Indeed, communication is indispensable and plays a critical role in acquiring and developing cultural competence, which is necessary for a good translation.

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