

## **STRUCTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF TRANSLATING PHRASES IN *ONCE UPON FOUR ROBBERS* INTO FRENCH**

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### ***Abstract***

*Studies in drama translation are often centered on general difficulties of translating plays with particular focus on rhyming, verse forms transposition, gesticulations, cultural elements and other extra linguistic materials . Little or nothing has been done on what translation of grammatical aspects poses to translation of a dramatic text such as Once upon Four Robbers of Femi Osofisan into French. Translation of phrases in the play engenders language reformulations which have significant effects on the sense of the entire message. We draw our data from the dramatic text and its French version: Il était Une fois quatre voleurs by Nicole Medjigbodo. We adopt both descriptive and analytical approaches in our analysis. About eight types of phrases with sundry examples from both the original and the version were treated. This is to enable us cover varying degrees of phrases and their structural imports in the translation of Once upon Four Robbers into French. Linguistic theory of Translation (1975) by J.C. Catford is employed to analyze our data. We conclude that the difficulty in translating phrases in English in the play into French is multidimensional. Though language variation in translating the phrases into French may contribute to the structural embellishment of the version, the nucleus of the assignment is the re-expression of meaning. We recommend, to a large extent, the linguistic approach of J.C. Catford in treating similar texts.*

*Keywords: Translation, structural imports, drama, language*

## **Introduction**

Every text is a web of words. A word is a sound or a group of sounds that correspond to an idea. Every idea is a product of language which is otherwise expressed as a code. Though a code or a means of communication is a reserve of a given community called a linguistic community, variation in its usage equally comes to play in literary parlance. Words modification in sentences and language manipulations lead to varying degrees of meaning. These language maneuverings constitute the ecstasy of every genre of literature. Drama is distinguished as it involves stage performance, use of choice words to demonstrate this in dramatic text for stage performance and reading pleasures.

One language structure people hardly take account of is the use of phrases in written drama. Phrases in written drama help readers in the understanding of the actions of the dramatis personae. For phrases in apathetical positions, they give additional information which may come in form of gesticulation to add glamour to the setting and plots of the play. When phrases are employed in the presentation of the actors and the actresses, they impress the messages in the mind of the spectators or readers of the play.

*Once upon Four Robbers*, published in 1980 was written by Femi Osofisan. The play, written between 1976 and 1978 and republished in 2011, centers on armed robbery and public execution in 1970s. Armed robberies, as bi-products of Nigeria civil war, were daily experiences in Nigeria. This led to the promulgation of Armed Robbery and Firearms Decree 47 of 1970. As a result, convicted armed robbers were executed by a

military firing squad in the 1970s. To witness the event at the Lagos Bar Beach and other public places, members of public were invited. In the play, so many gang members were shot dead including the Leader, Alhaja's husband who has just been ridden with bullets at the Bar Beach Show (the site of his public execution). Angola, Major, Hassan (ex-soldiers turned armed robbers) and Alhaja, an attack trader who watched in horror, the execution of their leader, were filled with indignation. Aafa, a muslim preacher who also doubles as babalawo (Ifa priest), reinforces the robbers with magic to enchant their victims and make away with their monies and goods. He gives them the injunctions to rob only public places and corrupt leaders. The magic works only for three times.

The last operation at the market initially brought the robbers fortune with one of the soldiers led away in dance with the robbers making away with the traders' monies. Luck however ran against them as Major tried to outsmart other robbers by appropriating to himself the whole booties. Soldiers came on them, seized the money from Major and kept same for themselves instead of returning the monies to the robbed traders agreeing with themselves to tell the public that the robbers went away with the money. The audience is left with the judgment: executing the armed robbers and corrupt soldiers, and sparing corrupt politicians, fraudulent civil servants, corrupt judicial officers and profiteers or freeing them.

Translating phrases for phrases is a herculean task for Nicole Medjigbodo. Besides playing down on Yoruba cultural leanings of Femi osofisan in the play, Medjigbodo, the translator of the play into French, is faced with the choice of communicating the sense or giving the sense as presented by the author of the original to the reader of the translation.

Translation of phrases in *Once upon Four Robbers* into French reveals linguistic variations that ensue in language transmission across codes and the implications it has on the messages the structure (phrases) carries from one language into another. We observe the limitability of the linguistic theory of translation in sense transfer with language structures and with particular reference to the use and translation of phrases in drama.

Phrases are of different types. Each type presents challenges according to the structure of other language elements in which it appears in a sentence. This study employs both descriptive and analytical approaches in the appraisal of the examples drawn from both the original and the version of the dramatic text of our study.

### **Drama Translation and Problems**

Drama translation is simply the translation of dramatic texts from one language and culture into another language and culture. It is transposing the original dramatic text whether translated or adapted on to the stage. In the view of Zuber Skerrit in *Translationjournal.net* (1988: 485), “drama translation is a science and the center of the success of this kind of translation is the written text as the basis of stage production, taking the individual performance ability into account.” Though written, dramatic text does not lose sight of the peculiarities of stage production and performance.” To perform on stage, spoken and unspoken languages constitute the basis of action. To Basnett MC Guire (1985:87) cited by Zuber Skerrit “a theatre text exists in a dialectical relationship with the performance of that text”. This definition underlines the indispensability of dialectical relationship in the action in display. How this dialectical relationship within the same language of drama is transported

into another language without variance to the original message is a force to reckon with in drama translation.

Looking at language and its structure in drama translation, Walter Benjamin in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation* (1997:194) asserts that “pure language is force hidden within certain texts, a poetic potential, a kernel that is striving to go beyond the immediate shell of words”. Be it as it may, drama uses language that matches the personality and pedigree of the characters. Where language is culture routed and action is culture inspired, the translator is under obligation to reconstitute in favour of his target audience without despising the culture and language of the original text. While meaning takes precedence over form in translation, the translation of phrases midfields in drama translation. Language is, indeed, the carrier of message in literature and the astute use of same is a task to do for drama translator as language structure does not all the time allow for lexical re-expression.

Writing on problems encountered while translating theatrical plays, Louisse Ladouceur in <http://theatretranslationcompany.org> observed that most translators of theatrical plays chose to make the text understandable rather than rigidly close to the original words. However, in literary translation, particularly in the translation of drama we need to distinguish text understandability from rigid adherence to the words of the original text that convey the drama message. In his effort to make the title of the play: *Once upon four Robbers* understandable to the francophone readers, Nicole Medjigbodo opted for slim lexical correspondence as “*Il était une fois quatre voleurs...*” with suspension marks. The marks do not only betray the frustration of the translator in finding accurate re-expression of the noun phrase the author used in

entitling the play but present the title as the common opening formulae of a storyteller. The word “robbers” bears heavier sense than “voleurs” (thieves).

To rob is to take money or property illegally from a place, organization or person, often with violence. This explains clearly the violent activities of the Robbers in the play. Substituting such a word as “robbers” for “voleurs” (thieves) who steal but not often with violence is an under translation of the gravity of the crime. Though the word “bandits” can conveniently translate the word “robbers” in this case, content based title would successfully translate the spirit of the original in the target language. Again, since the title of the original text does not present or imply ‘Once upon a time there were four robbers’, substituting that phrase for a sentence could not as well be said as rigidly having close equivalents of the version to the original text. Even while the remark of Louisse Ladouceur is a fact, the translator has it as a duty to, to a great extent, wear the spirit of the author to produce equivalent effect of the message on the target reader.

One of the paramount characteristics that set drama apart from other genres of literature is performance on stage before spectators. Speak ability, perform ability and extra linguistic features make up other distinct natures of drama. In dynamic view, employing dynamic and pragmatic equivalences rather than using formal and linguistic approaches in translating the entire message constituent of a text has been a key in a successful drama translation.

The translation of plays in verse forms presents a peculiar problem. According to Gillepsie Stuart (1992:104) in *Translation and Literature*, “apart from the fact that poetry is by its very nature untranslatable, so that even the most brilliant

versions of Shakespeare and Racine are perversions, there is a wide linguistic difference between English and Spanish that makes rhyming too difficult in English and too easy in Spanish. Golden Age dramatists, moreover made use of a great variety of verse forms considered appropriate to the content, whereas in Elizabethan drama, there is a preponderance of blank verse, an increasing use of prose and diminishing use of rhyme”. These observations could be true of translating Golden Age plays. However the translation of *Once upon Four Robbers* into French, though not in verse forms, is fraught with omission of songs, poems and incantations that enhance the fervor of the original text. These omissions in the French translation of the play explain again the shortcoming of the translator in the appreciation of the cultural lodes of the original text.

Competence and performance constitute the hallmarks of a successful translation. Translating drama from one language into another transcends being bilingual. Like every other genre of literature, performance or close performance in the original culture of the writings helps to decipher the meaning of the coded messages. It’s obvious that the cultural setting of the play is Yoruba. The Yoruba culture and beliefs feature across the play. It behoves the translator of such a text to understand that one of the interests of the author is selling Yoruba culture, traditions and beliefs to the Anglophone world. The translator of the play into another language such as French should have as well sustained this interest by translating the songs, poems and incantations which are oral literary markers of Yoruba tradition so as to market same to the Francophone world.

In the case of translating phrases in *Once upon Four Robbers* into French, the major constraint is not only situated in the structural equivalent but equally in intended meaning. It

takes interpreting the thought expression of the author and imagination of the practical display of the action of the Dramatis Personae to understand and re-express the phrasal messages of the original. But of what importance is the use of phrases in drama?

### **Use of Phrases in Drama**

A phrase is one of the fundamental structures of language. It is a group of words that express a concept and is used as an integral unit within a sentence or clause. <http://www.dailywritingtips.com> defines a phrase as a small group of related words within a sentence or a clause.” In drama where song and dance form part of the message passed, phrases amplify the understanding of such messages. This is evident in the Yoruba songs in the play translated into English by the author, Femi Osofisan himself. For example: “And said, Aafa of *billowing robes!*” for “Won ni , Aafa abewu yetu yetu!” the adjectival phrase “of billowing robes” succinctly describes the appearance of the Muslim preacher in robes in the play.

A phrase could be used as a guide to the actions on the stage. It describes how an actor or an actress comports him/herself on the stage. How he or she gesticulates; the movement on the stage, the arrangement of items, the description of the scene, the asides, the behind the scene actions, etc, are well illustrated by phrases. Phrases can separate one item of discussion from another thereby making the story inside another story distinct. This could be in form of flashback, reveries and projection into the future. For example, “the execution centre stage is a set of barrels arranged one upon another behind a tall white stake” p.21 is illustrative of the preparation for action and performance on the stage. The phrase: *arranged one upon*



*another behind a tall white stake* is indicative of the execution scene set for the Robber.

The understanding of the perform ability of actors in the written play is often presented in acoustic manner using a phrase to achieve this. This may be done with the use of gerund phrase as in the description preceding one of MAJOR's parts on page 23 of the play. "(taking out his knife); one more step, Angola, and your blood's going to wet this market" (p.23). The action of drawing out his knife is a performance that precedes the words of the actor. The acoustic imagery of taking out his knife comes suddenly to the imagination of the reader of the play. Thus this presents an imaginative scene of acting before the reader.

A phrase is employed in the emotive presentation of words in a play. In the text understudy, noun phrase is used to express the boastful achievement of one of the robbers: "That Alhaji in Kano with his ten Alsations and fifty guards!" (p.25). This is a fore statement to how the innocent businessman was brought down in cold blood with machine guns by the robber.

Uses of phrase in written plays are inexhaustible. How these phrases are translated into French bearing the same impression on the target readers as they do on the readers of the original text is our focus of this study. While language structure is not unidirectional as it is dependent on the author's diction, maturity and experiences, translating language structure such as phrase in drama is a matter of linguistics in original author's thought process and the corresponding meaning issues. Every word is an item of meaning in a string of structure.

Translating phrases from one language into another is an effort that at times brings the structure of the target language into conflict with the original especially when translating structure for structure runs counter to the sense of the message. The

language structure becomes elegant where the phrasal structure of the two languages can be retained without prejudice to the intended meaning of the message of the author of the original text.

### **Structural implications of translating phrases in *once upon four robbers* into French.**

Language is a code used in any given social situation to communicate ideas. In the words of J.C. Catford (1980:1), “language is a type of patterned human behavior.” In translating drama, language behavior is externalized or manifested in some kind of bodily activity on the part of a performer; and presupposes the existence of at least one other participant in the situation as a spectator or as a reader.

In this section, we study different types of phrases employed in the original text and how they are translated into French by Nicole Medjigbodo. By this, we appraise the translation of the examples identified and the ensued manipulations. The implications the re-expression in French has on the structure of the phrases in English are viewed in the light of the meaning of the messages intended by the original.

The first type of phrase we consider is the Appositive phrase. By appositive phrase we mean that phrase which restates a preceding term or expands or explains it, in a parenthetical statement. The following example from the text illustrates this and its translation demonstrates its structural implication in French. We henceforth recognize *Once upon Four Robbers* as *Once upon..* and *Il était une fois quatre voleurs* as *Il était une fois...* for the purpose of the analysis of our data.

Example 1: He repeats this, *gets the same response and playing his instruments*, starts the song of the story-teller (*Once upon... p.19*)

Translation: il répète la formule, obtient la même réponse et tout en jouant de son instrument, commence à jouer (Il était une fois... p.3)

The phrase: *playing his instrument* in the sentence of the original assumes a different grammatical structure in the translation. “Tout en jouant de son instrument”, an aside, is structured in present participle (participle present) often composed with the preposition *en* and adding the ending form – *ant* to the stem of the verb in French. The use of *tout* taken as an adverb and signifying *tout -à -fait* (completely) though by nature *l'adjectif indéfini* (indefinite adjective) changes the level of meaning of the original in the above example. What does the phrase: *playing his instrument* in the sentence of the original connote in the entire message? “As he begins to play his instruments”, of course. Variation in the corresponding meaning of the version to the original originates from sense rearrangement of the whole idea presented in the original. It’s about the traditional opening expression of a story-teller in Yoruba oral tradition. “He shouts out the traditional introductory formula: ALOO! As usual, everybody replies: AAALO! He repeats this, gets the same response and, playing his instrument, starts the ‘Song of the Story-Teller’. (*Once upon...* p.191). The translation: “il lance la formule traditionnelle d’introduction: ALOO! Le public répond : AAALO! Il répète la même formule, obtient la même réponse et, tout en jouant de son instrument, commence à chanter”.

Looking critically at what pushes for meaning variation of the phrase in question, we discover possible shaky touch or lack of contact experience with the Yoruba oral tradition of story-telling in the moonlight. The expression: “la formule traditionnelle d’introduction” translated for “the traditional

introductory formula” is conserving the implicit where explicit message is inevitable. Translating literature is target audience oriented. The adjectival phrase: *the traditional introductory formula* is of what or who? Ability to answer this question would make the version read “la formule introductive traditionnelle d’un narrateur”: AALO O! The phrasal adverb: ‘As usual’, in the original, is paramount to the cultural understanding of the declaration of the story-teller. That is omitted in the translation. ‘As usual’ (comme d’habitude) reminds us of the spontaneous reaction of whoever hears the formula: Aalo o!. It goes beyond “le public”. It is “tout le monde” (everybody).

Efforts to employ literal translation or lexical correspondence in translating the verb “gets” as “obtient” and the phrase: “playing his instrument as “tout en jouant de son instrument” speaks volumes of the problem of thinking of words rather than the message. This accounts for the lacuna in the re-expression of the message of the original in French. The translation can read thus: *il lance la formule introductive traditionnelle d’un narrateur :Aaalo o! Et comme d’habitude, tout le monde répond « Aaalo o ! » Il répète cette formule et obtient la même réponse. Il commence à jouer de son instrument et à chanter la chanson d’un narrateur.* Here, the appositive phrase in the original becomes a phrasal verb as the object of the sentence structure.

Translating a gerund phrase poses a structural challenge that has to do with the interpreting before re-expressing the message of the original in French. A gerund phrase includes a verbal hybrid that functions as a noun (or adjective). It can serve as the subject of the sentence or object of the sentence or as the object of a preposition. In the case of the following example, the

gerund phrase which serves as the object of the sentence in the original text becomes an infinitive verb in the translation.

**Example II:** Major: The only rubbish I know is you standing there, you bundle of guinea-worm (*Once upon...* p.23)

Translation: Major : En matière de bêtise, c'est quand je vous vois rester là, tas de vermisseaux (*Il était une fois...* p.8)

The above quotation is a response to the reaction of Angola, a fellow armed robber to Major, who after the death of their leader, insists the gang remains resilient in armed robbery. To major, they should call it quit. Angola considers Major's speech as rubbish (Nonsense). 'What? Why the rubbish from your mouth?' (p.23). What follows is the question under appraisal. Translating 'what's the rubbish from your mouth?' as 'Quoi! Qu'est-ce que c'est que ces bêtises?' lays the foundation for playing down on the meaning force of the French version. A well de-verbalized text would opt for a better alternative such as: 'Mais comment! Quelle barbe provient de ta bouche? Or 'Quelles bêtises débite-toi? are capable of keeping the flow of the conversation and at the same time retaining the meaning of the original message..

Now to the example itself, one wonders if the translation stems from the original message or it's a message of its own. The original message does not begin with the expression or imply the structure such as 'as for the rubbish' but with an expression of insult: *the only rubbish I know is you standing there, you bundle of guinea-worm*. The gerund phrase 'standing there' becomes 'rester là' with the items around it presented in weak impression to the target reader. The translation: "En matière de bêtise, c'est quand je vous vois rester là, tas de vermisseaux" hardly penetrates the spirit of the original and this affects the correspondence accorded it. In translating from

English into French, the use of infinitive verbs can substitute verbs ending in -ing in translating a list of instructions, guidelines and manual guides of the statement at the initial position. Therefore, it may not be out of place to render the statement as “ Toi, rester là, es la seule bêtise que je reconnais; toi une statue de vers”. This suggestion does not only keep the style and movement of the message but also retains the sense of the message level of language used by the author.

The use of infinitive phrase features through the whole play. By definition, an infinitive phrase includes the word ‘to’ and a verb as the basis of a modification of a root sentence. In the following example, we observe the replacement of an infinitive phrase with a verb used in reflexive form in the translation.

**Example 3:** Angola; He’s beginning *to dodge* (*Once upon...p.34*)

Translation: Angola: Il cherche à *se défiler*, oui! (*Il était une fois...p.24*)

The conversation between Alhaja and Aafa shows a kind of secret other gang members are not made to know. This prompts the question of Major who does not see the correlation between the duo and the Aafa’s promise to make them rich. His question “but what’s the man talking about? I thought you wanted to make us rich?” elicits Angola’s reaction in which the infinitive phrase features. The verb “se défiler” used to translate ‘to dodge’ in the first instance is out of the context as it means ‘to take cover (from the enemy).’ The actors in question are not enemies neither do they engage in a free-for-all. They are birds of the same feather. The sentence “He’s beginning to dodge” here implies “he wants to or he’s trying to avoid (fulfilling) his promise. « il cherche à s’esquiver or il essaie de s’esquiver/éviter la tache » translates the original message better.

While the original acts as the subject of the sentence, the version is rather a complement. Even where swap in grammatical category should not be a problem if the sense is retained, the meaning accorded the phrase of the original is capable of confounding the message of the author to the French reader, actors and audience of the version. This brings to question the issue of literality versus choice of words in translation. Where a translator tries to be literal in his approach, he must keep his eyes on the communicability of his product to his target audience without destroying the initial meaning of the message. In a situation where the grammatical category has to be varied, it should be done in favour of the sense as such will be equally reacted to by the readers of both the original and target texts. The following example illustrates this idea.

**Example 4:** *To rob* only the public places (*Once upon ...*, p.35)  
Translation: *N'attaquer* que les lieux publics (*Il etait une fois...* p.25)

The use of ‘**ne expletif**’ to translate the warning of Aafa is a welcome approach in this example. The infinitive phrase serving as the subject of the statement in the message of the original assumes just an infinitive level to pass the warning. The style and sense restituted here is an example of translation done with the interpretation of what we call “le vouloir-dire” and “le vouloir-comprendre” of the message in literary translation.

Translating Noun phrase in the play, at times, puts the translator at a crossroad as he has to choose between lexical adaptation and fetching another insult to translate insult. A noun phrase, as we know, consists of a person, or thing and another modifier. Many noun phrases are continuous. They contain words in sequence. However, a noun phrase may be discontinuous, meaning that is broken up into more than one

element. We dwell on the continuous one for the purpose of our analysis of the example that follows.

**Example 5:** Angola: Let me mangle *the foul-mouthed coward* (*Once upon... p.23*)

Translation: Angola: laisse-moi massacrer *cet enfoiré* (*Il était une fois ... p.8*)

First, the noun phrase of the original simply becomes a demonstrative adjective in the version. Meaning is the central issue in translation. As J.C. Catford (1965) stresses replacement of one textual material by another textual material as translation, the phrase: *the foul-mouthed coward*, is it replaceable by *cet enfoiré*? The two words are not compliments, of course; but they are not as well complementary at the level of meaning. The expression: *The foul-mouthed coward* is fallout of the conversation between Major and Angola. The public execution of Leader freezes the heart of Major who thought that was the end of them all and decided to quit. Angola saw this attempt as cowardice. A *foul-mouthed* person swears a lot and uses offensive language. The word *enfoiré* used to substitute the same means ‘a bugling idiot’ a French synonym of it is ‘imbécile’. While both ‘foul-mouthed’ and ‘enfoiré’ are expressions of insult, they hardly convey the same meaning. Where is the place of the word ‘coward’ that makes up the noun phrase in the original going by the translation? While we do not translate words but sense, words are tools through which meaning is derived depending on their usage in the sentence. What we observe in the translation of the insult above is not trying to find exact meaning of the message of the original but using one insult to translate another. This runs counter to the assertion of J.C Catford that translation is unidirectional as the preservation of



the style he calls on the translators to ensure may be a difficult venture as we can see in the example.

To translate the noun phrase in the play, the translator opts for a transposition process of translation. Where literalism seems not to communicate the spirit of the original text, the version changes the grammatical class. Its function is equally affected as each language respects the structural order of the language. Let us consider the following example.

**Example 5:** her resistance breaking down before *her overt sexual provocation* (*Once upon ...* p.60)

Translation; ‘ne pouvant résister aux avances d’Alhaja (*Il était une fois...* p.59)

Alhaja, the wife of the executed leader, is here making serious efforts to seduce the soldiers. They understand her seductive message – sexual advances! The soldiers, because of her sexual provocation, nearly fall prey of the woman. That scenario informs the context in which the statement was structured. The word ‘resistance’ accorded the attribute of breaking down fades out in the translation as the stylistic elegance of the original gives way to ‘the soldiers’ possessing the quality. The noun phrase of the sentence “her overt sexual provocation” becomes the possessive adjective (aux avances d’Alhaja) in French. We conclude that in dynamic equivalence stance, when the style (the form) does not convey meaning at the same level as the style of the author, sense takes preeminence. Literary translation demands astute understanding of both the web of words and the message the whole amalgamated units of words bear.

The translation of the participial phrase presents another form of variation in the grammatical point of view of the whole message. The following example affirms this. A participial

phrase consists of verbs ending in -ing or -ed or another irregular form of a verb, and serves as an adjective.

**Example 6:** Then *discovering the costumes*, they begin to pick and choose, and then to dress up, gradually establishing the various roles they will be playing (*Once upon...* p.20)

Translation: Puis ils font leur choix parmi les costumes, en s'identifiant peu à peu aux différents rôles qu'ils vont interpréter (*Il était une fois...* p.4)

From a participial phrase to a simple sentence, the translator could not de-verbalize the elements that make up this structure. A close look at the original reveals that the actors, at first, notice the costumes on the stage. The action of noticing (discovering) is not depicted in the version. The action of picking, choosing and dressing up in the costumes is very significant to the understanding of the kick-off of the drama. All these are not represented in the structural reconstruction of the version. The choice of costumes by the actors establishes the roles each of them would play. In other words, they choose costumes that match their role play. The version is a departure from the perform ability of the actors. The impression it gives on the actors interpreting the roles instead of playing same moves the actors from being performers to being critics of the play. Deformed understanding of the imaginable arrangement of the stage is capable of signaling the code wrongly in the translation. When the play is staged by the actors of the two books (the original and the version), it is certain the actors would act the part differently. Such a lacuna will generate different reactions from the audiences of the *plays*. Though change in grammatical point of view may enrich the understanding of the play, the translator needs to prioritize meaning in his expression of the message in another language such as French. The variation in the

point of view as seen in the analysis above could be considered as the translator's attempt to rewrite the message of the original author which is doing something else in translation discipline.

The use of preposition is vital in many languages of the world as they show the relationship between two words and expressions. A prepositional phrase consists of a preposition and a noun or pronoun that serves as the preposition's object and often one or more adjectives. In the play under study, we note where a prepositional phrase is restructured in a way to appeal to the emotions of the reader of the French version. We consider this in the example that follows.

**Example 7:** Major: This day is beautiful *in the sunlight* (*Once upon ...* p.69)

Translation: Major: Quelle belle journée ensoleillée! (*Il était une fois ...* p.73)

Major is here asked to say his last words having been tied up for execution. The time setting is a broad day light. The sun shines brightly and so Major describes the day as 'beautiful in the sunlight'. The French version presents an exclamatory statement that is capable of sparking off emotional outrage. *Quelle belle journée ensoleillée !* (What a beautiful sunny day). This re-expression is in the effort of the translator to sustain the tempo of the message in the original text. The declarative statement of the original is transposed into an exclamatory one creating different affective reactions between the source text readers and target text readers of the message of the play.

In drama translation, like in every translation of literature, there is always the need to interpret beyond the form. However where we have literal translation communicating the meaning of the original text, the version has a safe passage. The

following example of another prepositional phrase illustrates this idea.

**Example 8:** Then, *at the orders of their officer*, they take position. They fire. (*Once upon... p.21*)

Translation: Puis, *sur l'ordre de leur officier*, ils prennent position et ils font feu (*Il était une fois... p.5*)

The above translation respects both the grammatical and semantic structures of the original. However the second segment of the sentence: *They take position* and the simple sentence that follows: *They fire* are taken as a unit of idea in the translation as *Ils prennent position et font feu*. The second part of this compound sentence (*font feu*) is suggestive of a meaning different from that intended by the original. *Ils font feu* (they make fire) is not the same as *They fire*. When soldiers 'fire', they shoot. If the message is interpreted in that understanding, "Ils tirent" would be a better option to translate *they fire*.

The translation of a verbal phrase presents another linguistic dimension in literary translation. In linguistics, a verb phrase is a syntactic unit comprised of at least one verb and its dependents – objects, complements and other modifiers – but not always including the subject. It is that portion of a sentence that contains both the verb and either a direct or indirect object. We consider the translation of an example of this in the following.

**Example 9:** Five o'clock in the morning, as cold as in harmattan, they all came out to watch, *to gloat over* his death (*Once upon ... p.22*)

Translation: A cinq heures du matin, malgré un froid d'harmattan, ils sont pourtant tous venus en spectateurs pour savourer sa mort (*Il était une fois... p.6*)

The phrasal verb *to gloat over* is simply translated as *pour savourer*. Here, the simple preposition *pour* is used to amplify the verb *savourer* in the version. Though this is not an aberration the verb *savourer* does not translate *to gloat over* in this context. *Savourer* means *to savor* (to enjoy the full taste or flavor of something/to enjoy the feeling or an experience thoroughly). *To gloat over* on the other hand is to show that you are happy about your own success or somebody's else failure, in an unpleasant way. Therefore if the original is well de-verbalized in the spirit of the turnout of people to watch the execution, the translation will possibly read *A cinq heures du matin , en dépit du froid d'harmattan, ils sont sortis en masse pour assister à et jubiler de son execution capitale*. Meanwhile the modulative strategy of substituting the expression *came out* for *sont venus* may be appropriate as the variation in general point of view preserves the general idea of people coming or going out to catch glimpse of how Leader would be ridden with bullets to death.

## **Conclusion**

Drama translation is both style and sense specific taking into consideration the cultural interpretation of the original text and cultural acceptability of the receptor's correspondence. The translation of phrases in *Once upon Four robbers* is one of the linguistic barriers the translator has to struggle with in communicating the message to the target audiences. Sense is the nucleus of every message. The translator of any literary translation and by extension of any other types of text must work out the task through the words in the passage of meaning from one language into another. As we have seen in this work, efforts to adopt lexical correspondence or implied lexical structure to translate phrases in the play often resulted in meaning nonconformity. In a situation where meaning is seen as having

precedence over the form, variation in the general point of view or variation in grammatical point of view is acceptable so long the intended meaning is preserved.

Femi Osofisan, the author of *Once upon Four Robbers* employed sociological approach in the treatment of the themes of social vices and attendant measures put in place to arrest same in Nigerian society. These include armed robbery, bribery, corruption among public functionaries, religion, culture, magic, hypocrisy, nepotism, etc, The translator's emphasis is rather on the style as most of these themes are played down in the version. The author's use of Yoruba songs, poems, proverbs, incantations, etc structured many at times in different kinds of phrases and translated into English side by side add fervor to the enjoyment of the play for readers. Nicole Medjigbodo, the translator of the play into French lost sight of the relevance and importance of these artistic values of the original text as he avoids completely their translation into French. His retention of only the Yoruba version of the oral Yoruba traditions in the translation communicates nothing to a French reader who does not understand Yoruba language. The French translation plays down on the structural, contextual, extra-linguistic and stylistic importance of these devices through a faulty adoption of linguistic approach which in any way does not reject the translation of such cultural norms in any text.

In his discussion about the limits of translatability, J.C. Cartford (1965:91) states that "translation fails or untranslatability occurs when it is impossible to build functionally relevant features of the situation into the contextual meaning of the Target Language Text." He identifies linguistic and cultural occurrences as being responsible for translation failures.

Most of the constraints encountered in the translation of phrases in the play under consideration into French are due largely to the translator's attempt to preserve the formal linguistic features of the original text in the version. Substituting phrases for other language structures in translating the meaning of the text is seen as an acceptable approach as we could see in our analysis of the data. Languages do not behave the same way though they have features that communicate the same message from one language into another. Fixed expressions with corresponding equivalents in the target language need not be manipulated in spite of the structural variations. However where culturally rooted terms such as insults do not have direct fixed corresponding equivalents substituting such with entirely different terms may be seen as translation failure.

In this study, we have been able to establish various structural implications that translation of phrases portend on the translation of the dramatic text written in English and translated into French. The approach adopted for this work could be used in the analysis of any literary text of similar status in the appraisal of the translation of any grammatical structure from one language into another.

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