TRANSLATION OF SELECTED ZAKES MDA'S PLAYS INTO THE ISINDEBELE LANGUAGE: PERSPECTIVES ON ACCURACY AND NATURALNESS

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Abstract

Although the isiNdebele language has been listed as one of the official languages in the Republic of South Africa, it is still amongst the youngest of the twelve official languages. IsiNdebele language lags notably in aspects such as terminology, literature, translation projects, and general language use. The translation of selected Zakes Mda's plays into the isiNdebele language, is a milestone in the history of this language, as it removes some barriers that prevent interaction and expression of ideas between the English and isiNdebele-speaking communities. In the process of translation, which involves de-coding, re-coding, and en-coding the texts, translators often find themselves having to tread carefully between accuracy and naturalness, especially between the Western and African cultures. A domestication (localisation) approach has been adopted in the translation of the five plays, viz. *Dead End, We Shall Sing for the Fatherland, Dark Voices Ring, The Hill,* and *The Road*, which are authored by Zakes Mda, and were later translated into the isiNdebele language. The paper aims at understanding translation choices that the translator had to contend with, regarding accuracy and naturalness between the two languages, viz. English and the isiNdebele languages. Lessons gleaned from this study also assist in developing strategies for future similar or related projects.

Keywords: IsiNdebele, translation, Zakes Mda, South Africa, naturalness, accuracy

1.0. INTRODUCTION

Translation is a complex process sometimes nuanced, requiring not only linguistic proficiency but also other competencies such as textual, subject, cultural, and transfer proficiencies (Zainurrahman, 2010). Translation is a universal language of all languages, especially in multilingual environments where more than one language is used. South Africa like many other countries is linguistically heterogeneous, and therefore translation becomes crucial to serve as a tool for communication across different languages and cultures. The exchange of ideas, experiences, and information is facilitated through appropriate translation strategies. Adherence to the source text is crucial to convey the intended meaning. At the same time, cultural norms and expectations also play a significant role in delivering an acceptable translation product. It could therefore be argued without any doubt that one of the key challenges translators face is finding a delicate balance between maintaining accuracy and naturalness in the target language. Translators must navigate a thin line between fidelity to the original text and adherence to the cultural norms of the receptive text. This article explores the importance of balancing naturalness and accuracy in translation between the isiNdebele and the English languages in the plays authored by Zakes Mda. Furthermore, the aim is to provide insights and

strategies for achieving this delicate balance between these two languages, viz. English and isiNdebele.

2.0. PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to Munday (2016, p. 9), Jakobson contends that there are three translation categories, viz. intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic. While these three categories cover at most what translation is all about, they nevertheless fail to touch some crucial aspects implied in translation. For example, in the Republic of South Africa, there are 12 official languages, that are equal in the eyes of the law. But in reality, the English language is still usually the source language while the other languages are in most cases, the target languages, and thus seen as minor or taking a secondary position in the polysystem. The English language also portrays a Western philosophy of life while the African indigenous languages, an African one. In this study, the English and the isiNdebele languages represent the two divergent philosophies of life. To translate from the English language into the isiNdebele language, is, therefore, a complicated exercise, because the two languages represent two different worlds. What the English language may easily express, may not necessarily be the case when it comes to the isiNdebele language because of cultural issues, for example. That is the reason why strategies to embrace naturalness in the target language are so important and overshadow accuracy, particularly when observing the African philosophy of life. Hence the topic of this study.

3.0. RESEARCH PARADIGM

According to Maree (2018, p. 23), critical theory prioritises critical meanings of experiences as they relate to gender, race, class, and other forms of social oppression. To understand human relations, conflicts, and inequalities must be carefully examined. In this study, the critical theory approach has been adopted because this article looks at the relationship between the English language and the isiNdebele language when it comes to translation equivalence. The two languages are not, in essence, equal because one language is seen as 'superior' while the other one is regarded as 'inferior', even though the South African Constitution, 1996 (Act 108 of 1996) declares them as equal official languages. If naturalness could be achieved in the translation process, thereby maintaining common idioms, grammar, lexicon, etc., the speakers of the isiNdebele language will be affirmed.

4.0. METHODOLOGY

A systematic literature review was done in this study. Five of Zakes Mda's selected plays, entitled, *Dead End, We Shall Sing for the Fatherland, Dark Voices Ring, The Hill,* and *The Road* were read with their respective isiNdebele translations*, Kwamgoduyagcina, Sizakubhinela Iphasi Labobamkhulu, Amezwi Ahlabako, Embundwini,* and *Indlela.* Related articles on translations, naturalness, accuracy, and research were also observed and analysed.

5.0. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following important concepts are discussed here to throw light on the above title:

5.1. Translation

Dlamini (2021) defines translation as a process of transferring a text from one language into another, for diverse purposes. Translation is therefore an exercise between two languages or more, and without hesitation, cultural traits are also embedded. Because culture comprises languages, translation therefore directly relates to power, ideology, as well as dominance. Intellectual colonisation is one important aspect that must be avoided, particularly for the languages that are dominated, such as the English language. Even though English is on the same level as all official languages in the Republic of South Africa, English remains dominant and this can be proven by the fact that most translations are still from English into the other eleven official languages, including the isiNdebele language in the Republic of South Africa. When the English language is used as a source text frequently, it acquires more power, and its culture becomes colossal – ultimately assuming the role of a coloniser.

Fallahshabrak & Salmani (2013) maintain that the translation of literature is the main reason for cultural change. Munday (2016, p. 225) cites Venuti as contending that translators are faced with a dilemma when translating literary texts such as between English and an indigenous African language like the isiNdebele language, where the translator must adopt either foreignisation or a domestication translation approach. In the case of foreignisation, the target text culture disappears in favour of the source text. The terminology or names of the source text such as Western Avenue, words of Charley mimicking Mr Koornhoof in Zakes Mda's play *Dead End*, in this case, in English is maintained as much as possible, and by doing so globalisation is entrenched (for example, 'A dog, eh? One of those marauding dogs that kill the sheep of the

farmer, eh?'). In domestication, conversely, the translator resists the powerful English language and its culture through a process of localisation.

According to Geng (2013, p. 977) culture refers to the total patterns of beliefs, customs, institutions, objects, and techniques that characterise the life of the human community. According to the same author (Geng , 2013), a good translation must stick to the criteria of faithfulness, expressiveness as well as elegance. Geng (2013) in support of many other scholars in translation further contends that if a translator is ignorant of the target language and its culture, there will be a failure in the communication of the message. Hatim and Munday (2004) highlight the importance of culture, by using the term, 'cultural turn.'

5.2. Accuracy

According to Saputra and Rini (2021) accuracy in translation implies no change, addition, or loss of the original message. Accuracy talks about the quality of translation as a whole in that a good translation will be termed good quality, while a bad quality translation, will be dubbed inaccurate. Low-quality translation has inaccuracies in its translation. The translator should be in a position to re-communicate the meaning of the original meaning as precisely as possible in the language into which he/she is translating. In summary, a text can be termed accurate if it doesn't digress from the context or information portrayed by the source text. Untranslated words can also be considered as inaccurate because in essence, translation is the transfer of meaning from one language to the other.

5.3. Naturalness

Naturalness in translation is usually not easy to attain because of the differences between the source language and culture and the recipient language and its culture. Naturalness implies the closest natural equivalent of the source language message in terms of meaning and style. Safei and Salija (2018) argue that the translation must be written in ordinary language, the common grammar, idioms, and words that meet that kind of situation portrayed in the source language. Putranti (2018, p. 99) argues that naturalness in translation is achieved when translators pay attention to the cultural background of the Target Language readers, the context of the text being translated as well as the text being translated, and the characteristics of the Target Language readers. The target reader should be in a position to accept the message easily and capture it without complications. The bottom line is that the translation should never sound like a translation, at all. There must be no interference from the source language text or any other language in the target language.

5.4. The isiNdebele language

The isiNdebele language is one of the 12 official languages in the Republic of South Africa in terms of the Amended Constitution, Act 108 of 1996. The isiNdebele language is amongst the youngest, and historically marginalised of all the official languages. The isiNdebele indigenous language was used for the first time in the education system in the erstwhile homeland of KwaNdebele, in 1985. Most of the literary works in this language is geared at satisfying the needs of the Department of Education, to be precise primary and high schools. Zakes Mda's Plays mentioned in this article, are one such type that deviated slightly from this trend and introduced work that could not be enjoyed by school children only, but by adults as well, as these plays include a plethora of themes such as prostitution, religion, life in the mines, life in the farms, politics, and so forth. The fact that these Plays by Mda took a different route from the usual school-level-based short stories, created a linguistic challenge, particularly terminology when translation from English into the isiNdebele language. Safei and Salija (2018) contend that translating literary work is more difficult than translating other text types such as financial or educational. This is because literary works like short stories, have specific characteristics embracing aesthetic and expressive values. To crown it, in this particular study, isiNdebele is a young language with a limited vocabulary. Therefore, the translator had to struggle to coin isiNdebele language equivalents for the English language terms and often had to battle to come up with terms that often do not have neat single-word term equivalents in the isiNdebele language, and quite frequently require some explanations to completely express certain concepts.

6.0. DISCUSSION

According to Baker (2018, p. 62), there is tension between accuracy and naturalness in translation. As a translator, one must walk a narrow path, separating accuracy on the one hand, and naturalness on the other. In the following illustration, Fig. 1, there are examples taken from the short stories (title and page), excerpts from the source text, target language translation (naturalness), how it could be translated accurately (accuracy of the source text), and translation strategies that have been used.

TITLE AND PAGE	SOURCE TEXT	TARGET TEXT (NATURALNESS)	ACCURACY (OF THE ST)	TRANSLATION STRATEGY
Dead End, p. 5, speaker 8	When I met her, she had never known a man before. Do you hear that? Never known a man before.	Ngesikhathi ngihlangana naye begade ayintombi nto. Ubangakhange athintwe libhrugu.	Nangihlangana naye ubangayazi indoda phambilini. Uyakuzwa lokho? Ubangayazi indoda phambilini.	Modulation
Dead End, p. 7, speaker, 20.	I took you out of shit there, my girl.	Ngakukhupha edakeni, mntazanami.	Ngakukhupha emanyaleni lapho, mntazanami.	Modulation
We Shall Sing for the Fatherland, p. 30, speaker, 21.	Only last week it was twenty cents, Ofisiri.	Iveke yona le ephelako sisithenge ngamatjheleni amabili, Ofisiri!	Iveke ephelako le yodwa besimatjheleni amabili, Ofisiri.	Literal translation:
Dead End, p. 11, speaker 13.	Father Joseph	UFather Joseph	UBaba u-Joseph	Borrowing/ loaning
Dead End, p. 16, speaker 8.	I told that manager he could stick his job up his ass.	Ngavele ngamtjela umenenjarana loyo bona umsebenzana loyo angayokufa nawo.	Ngatjela umenenja loyo bona umsebenzi loyo angawutjhovela emararhwenakhe.	Amplification:
We Shall Sing for the Fatherland, page 43, speaker 13.	We have been pushed around and shitted upon too much.	Sitjhoviwe kanengi, sasilingwa kanengi.	Sitjhoviwe kanengi begodu sabhabhelwa kanengi.	Modulation:
Dark Voices Ring, p. 58, speaker 9.	He shits too. That's a sign of life.	Uyazithuma godu. Lokhu litshwayo lepilo.	Uyabhabha godu. Lokhu litshwayo lepilo.	Modulation
Dark Voices Ring, p. 58, speaker 10.	The excrement comes out of its own accord.	Kuyaziphumela ngemvapha.	Amadede ayaziphumela ngokwawo.	Implication
The Hill, p. 72, speaker 3.	A heap. A heap as big as you would find in a kraal, child of my father.	Isitshula. Isitshula sobulongwe esilingana nesekomo, mntakamma.	Iqumbi yamadede. Iqumbi ekulu elingana nongayithola esibayeni, mntakababa.	Explicitation
The Road, p. 129, speaker 1.	I must say you are having it good. Fucking the Missis, and then fucking the servants on the sly.	Izinto zikukhambela kamnandi yi? Ngapha uphethe uMisisi kanti emsitheleni uberega iinsebenzi!	Ngingatjho bona izinto zikukhambela kuhle. Uberega uMisisi emsemeni bese uberega godu neensebenzi, ngemsitheleni.	Generalisation
The Hill, p. 106, speaker 5.	I hit the jackpot there.	Ngibambe iimpera lapho.	Ngibambe i-jackpot.	Equivalence
The Hill, p. 106, speaker 6	*Ke Letaliana joala ka a mang. E tla ba Lekhooa ha a khutla Khauteng.*	Lisiqhaka esinukako njengezinye. Lizakuba likhuwa ngelanga elibuya ngalo eemayini.	YiTariyana manje njengamanye. Uzakuba liKhuwa nakabuya eRhawudeni.	Amplification

Fig. 1. Source, target text, and strategy

The first item in the above illustration (Fig. 1) can be found in the English text on page 5. Speaker 8, in the story, *Dead End*. The source text is marked in green colour. The translation offered is marked in blue and is in the isiNdebele language. The yellow-marked slot carries the accurate translation equivalent that could be rendered. Finally, a translation strategy is offered in a grey-coloured slot. The translations provided in the isiNdebele translation of Zakes Mda's plays are those in blue (naturalness), as opposed to the yellow, which is the accurate translation of the source text (green colour). In other words, if the translator was strictly following accuracy, the yellow-coloured slot should have been the translation rendered for the green-coloured excerpt from the source language text. This trend follows the same in all source terms excerpts used in Fig. 1.

Dlamini (2021) seems to agree with Vinay and Darbelnet concerning the two strategies, and seven techniques used to classify in translation. But Dlamini (2021) further supplies additional techniques such as amplification, explication, simplification, substitution, omission, generalisation, implication, as well as loss, gain, and compensation. The translation between English and the isiNdebele language falls more on the oblique translation strategy, and not the direct translation strategy because the English and the isiNdebele languages do not fall under the same language family. The Direct translation strategy would be more prevalent if the translation was between isiNdebele, Siswati, isiXhosa or isiZulu languages because they belong to the same language family, which is Nguni.

From the few translation examples taken at random, between the source text and the target text identified, modulation appears to be more prevalent. Modulation is defined by Dlamini (2021, p. 89) as changing the form of the translated text in such a way that it cannot be traced back literally to the source language. The linguistic competence of the translator is crucial in this strategy as the translator takes into cognisance aspects such as the style, mood, tone, and context of the source text to present an acceptable translation in the target language. This strategy becomes prevalent, especially in instances where the two languages do not belong to the same language family, for example, the English and the isiNdebele languages. Modulation is important again, where the translator uses an appropriate expression in the target language, for example, replacing *shit* with *mud* in the isiNdebele translation. Hence naturalness seems to be used frequently compared to accuracy, especially in cases where there are linguistic and cultural differences.

7.0. CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, it could be argued that language and culture are very close, and almost inseparable. The translation of Zakes Mda's plays into the isiNdebele language takes a domestication rather than a foreignization approach. This means that the source language, in this case, English is adapted to the target language – isiNdebele language, making the translated text more familiar and easily understandable to the target readers. Naturalness, therefore, becomes a more prominent aspect compared to accuracy in the translation exercise, although naturalness and accuracy are both necessary to produce a quality translation.

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