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Yorùbá Movies and the Problem of Subtitling

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Abstract: Yorùbá movies producers seem to have devoted much attention to the visual quality and the thematic thrust of their works to the detriment of some seemingly unimportant aspect of their products. One of these neglected or underestimated aspects is the issue of subtitles, the written translations of the dialogues in English Language. This paper selects seven Yorùbá movies for a detailed evaluation. Errors in concord, spelling, tense, aspect and wrong selection of words are very rampant in these movies such that one wonders why such neglect and carelessness should be allowed in such movies that are very rich in thematic thrusts and excellent in visual quality. These errors are not only highlighted, they are discussed, analysed and attempts have been made to propose what should have been the correct versions of the wrong translations that are pointed out. This paper throws a big challenge to films producers to pay attention to this important issue and allow specialists in different areas so that their products will not be lacking in quality.

1. Introduction

Subtitles are textual versions of the dialogues in films and television programmes, usually displayed at the bottom of the screen. They can take the form of written translation of a dialogue in a foreign language, or a written rendering of the dialogue in the same language, with or without added information to help viewers who are deaf or hard of hearing to follow the dialogue, or people who cannot understand the spoken dialogue or who have accent recognition problems. In the South-Western Zone of Nigeria, where Yorùbá is the predominant language, there is a need to do proper subtitling of movies produced, since these movies have audiences across and beyond the nation. This paper takes a look at some of these movies with the aim of identifying the errors committed in the process of subtitling them and proposing what ought to be the correct expressions. The paper also calls all stakeholders, especially, Yorùbá film producers, the Association of Nigerian Theatre Practitioners (ANTP) as well as the Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board to ensure quality production.

II. Methodology

Seven Yorùbá movies were selected for examination. These are: Bámitádé, Ayò, Kùléndé, Ìgbéraga, Àárín Òtá, Ògidì Qmọ and Ilé Qkọ. These movies were carefully watched in order to sort out the faulty subtitles. Having identified and analysed the errors that were contained in them, the researcher proposed what he thought should be the correct translations of the expression. Errors identified are concord, spelling, tense/aspect and wrong selection of words.

III. Research Problem

The Nigerian movie industry has come a long way in cinematographic transformation Okome, O. 1997; Olusola, S. 1981; Oyewo, G.B. 1998. It is without doubt occupying a centre stage as it has, over the years, taken different dimensions of showcasing what the industry knows how best to do. Ekwuazi, 1991; Ogunbiyi, Y. 1981; Dasylyva, A.O. 2004. However, many of these movies are produced without any iota of professionalism in the business of the theatre. It is commonly observed that there is no clearly defined space for specialisation. An individual actor can be a producer, director and scriptwriter. This is done in order to reduce the unavoidable cost of production. The negative consequence of this is that Nigerian audience is fed with a body of junks. The most embarrassing aspect is the attempt made at subtitling these movies. These subtitles are marred with grammatical blunders that could be avoided if specialists in translation are allowed to handle the job Sunday, 2009.

IV. Data Presentation

Table 1: Concord

	Movie	Utterance	Subtitle	Correct Version	Error Analysis
a.	Àárín Òtá	Ó yẹ kí a kúrò ní íbí báyí cos <u>our lives is in danger</u>	Our lives <u>is</u> in <u>gander</u>	Our lives <u>are</u> in <u>danger</u>	Lives is in plural so the linking verb 'is' should be 'are'. The word 'danger' is wrongly spelt as gander.
b.	Bamitalé	Ìrònú ò san gbèsè	Thinking <u>don't</u> pay	Thinking does not pay debts	'Thinking' is singular, it attracts singular 'do'

			debts		verb, which is 'does'.
c.	Ayò	Nnkan ti ní bàjé	Things <u>is</u> getting bad.	Things <u>are</u> getting bad	The subject 'things' is plural, it attracts a plural verb 'are'.
d.	Ilé Ọkọ	Bí ó ẹ̀ se máa ní ẹ̀ niyẹn.	That is how she <u>behave</u> .	That is how she <u>behaves</u> .	She attracts a singular verb 'behaves' and not 'behave'.
e.	Ayò	Ọ̀rọ̀ ti bọ̀ sórí.	Things <u>is</u> getting out of hand.	Things <u>are</u> getting out of hand.	'Things' is plural. It attracts 'are' and not 'is'.
f.	Kúléndé	Lọ̀wọ̀lọ̀wọ̀, a ní pulọ̀tí ilẹ̀ méjì.	Presently, we <u>has</u> two plots of land.	At present, we <u>have</u> two plots of land.	'We' attracts 'have' and not 'has'. Also, presently is wrongly used. 'At present' is better.

The word concord refers to 'agreement' between the different components (words) used in a piece of writing. Mainly, it refers to agreement between the parts of a sentence in forms of number and person to ensure accuracy or correctness. Basically, there are four dimensions:

- (i) Subject-verb concord.
- (ii) Time reference concord
- (iii) Gender concord
- (iv) Pronoun-antecedent concord

The concord problem highlighted in the data above has to do with the relationship between the subject and the verb. The rule of concord states that a singular subject must attract a singular verb, while a plural subject must attract a plural verb. Items a, c, e and f have plural subjects – lives, things, things and we respectively, thus they should attract the linking verbs are, are, are and have respectively. On the other hand and, items so and d – thinking and she are singular, so they should attract the verb phrase of does not and the verb behaves respectively. So that we have (b) thinking does not pay debts. (d) that is how she behaves.

Table 2: Spelling

Movie	Utterance	Subtitle	Correct Version	Error Analysis
Áárín Ọ̀tá	Inú ní run mí.	I have stomarch <u>pain</u> .	I have <u>stomach</u> <u>pains</u> .	Stomach is wrongly spelt as 'stomarch'. Also, pains should also be used instead of pain.
Ayò	Máà bínúu	I'm <u>soory</u> .	I'm sorry.	The word 'sorry' is wrongly spelt as 'soory'
Ayò	Tó o bá kùrò lékòó, kò yẹ̀ kékòó kùrò lára ẹ̀.	If Lagos <u>deport</u> you, you should not <u>deport</u> Lagos.	If you depart from Lagos, Lagos should not depart from you.	The verb 'depart' is wrongly spelt as 'deport'.
Ìgbéraga	Máà kúnlẹ̀ mọ̀	Do not go on your <u>kneels</u> .	Do not go on your <u>knees</u> .	The word 'knees' was wrongly spelt as 'kneels'
Ayò	Ò bá ti sọ̀ fún dokita kí ó ba oyún náà jẹ̀.	You should have asked the doctor to <u>about</u> it.	You should have told the doctor to <u>abort</u> it.	The word 'abort' was wrongly spelt 'about'.
Ayò	Mó ní láti bẹ̀ ọ̀ pé kí o máà dà mí mọ̀.	I need to beg you not to <u>betroy</u> me.	I need to beg you not to <u>betray</u> me.	The word 'betray' was wrongly spelt as 'betroy'.
Kulende	Nígbà tí nkan bá ní dùn o ò ní kú.	May you not die when things are <u>rousy</u> .	May you not die when things are <u>rosy</u> .	The word 'rosy' was wrongly spelt as 'rousy'.
Ìgbéraga	O ti borí ìṣòro.	You have overcome the <u>obstance</u> .	You have overcome the <u>obstacle</u> .	The word 'obstacle' was wrongly spelt as 'obstance'.
Arín Ọ̀jà	Èyin gan an lẹ̀ gò jù.	You are a big <u>full</u>	You are a big <u>fool</u> .	The word 'fool' was wrongly spelt as 'full'.

Table 2 above highlights nine spelling errors. The words stomach, sorry, depart, knees, abort, betray, rosy, obstacle and fool are misspelt as stomarch, soory, deport, kneels, about, betroy, rousy, obstance and full respectively. These errors could have been prevented if the translators had made use of a simple dictionary. Every dictionary shows the correct spelling of every word in the very first column. Translators should therefore make good use of dictionaries as a good guide in spelling.

Table 3: Tense and Aspect

a.	Ìgbéraga	Èmi mọ̀ iyì rẹ̀, aṣọ iyì ẹ̀ kò dẹ̀ ní ya mọ̀ ẹ̀ lára.	I value you. May you not <u>lost</u> your value.	I appreciate you. May you not <u>lose</u> your value.	The form 'lose' should be used instead of lost.
b.	Ìgbéraga	Şèbí o sọ̀ fún mí pé ara rẹ̀ kò yá ní?	Didn't you <u>pretended as if</u> you were sick?	Didn't you <u>pretend that</u> you were sick?/ Didn't you tell me that you were sick?	The form 'pretend' should be used since the tense has been reflected on the 'do' verb. The phrase 'as if' is also redundant.
c.	Ìgbéraga	Bí òdodo bá yí ní ẹ̀wà obinrin tí ó bá di àkókò kan, òdodo ọ̀hún á wá di ohun tí a ní fi ẹ̀şẹ̀ tẹ̀	Beauty is like the flower in full bloom at a certain time, it <u>will withered</u> and become letters.	Beauty is like the flower in full bloom, at a certain time, it <u>will wither</u> and become useless.	Wrong use of tense 'withered' instead of wither. The modal auxiliary 'will' presupposes 'future.'
d.	Ìgbéraga	Ìrànlowọ̀ rẹ̀ tí mo fẹ̀ ní kí n sá kàn manage níbí.	The only help I want from you is to <u>be accommodate</u> for a short while here.	The only favour I need from you is to <u>be accommodated</u> for a while here.	'Accommodated' should be use instead of 'accommodate'.
e.	Ìgbéraga	To rí ẹ̀ náà la şe wá láti wá bẹ̀ yín.	That's why <u>we decides</u> to come and apologise.	That's why <u>we decided</u> to come and apologise.	Wrong tense 'decides' instead of 'decided'.
f.	Ayọ̀	Şe o sọ̀ fún me pé o fẹ̀ rẹ̀nti ilé?	<u>Did you told</u> me you <u>will</u> rent a house?	<u>Did you tell</u> me you <u>would</u> rent a house?	'Tell' should replace 'told' since the 'do' verb takes the past form. Also 'would' should replace 'will'.
g.	Ayọ̀	Kíni o sọ̀ yẹn?	What <u>did you just said</u> ?	What did you just <u>say</u> ?	'Say' should replace 'said'.
h.	Ayọ̀	Mo ti şàlàyé fún un.	I've <u>explain</u> to her.	I've <u>explained</u> to her.	'Explained' should replace 'explain'.
i.	Ayọ̀	Kí ló dé tí gbogbo eléyí fi şeşẹ̀ lááárín wa ?	Why <u>did</u> all these <u>happened</u> between us?	Why <u>did</u> all these <u>happen</u> between us?	The form 'happen' should replace 'happened'.
j.	Ayọ̀	Ó bá mọ̀ tí sá jáde.	You ought not to have <u>ran</u> outside.	You ought not to have <u>run</u> away/ You should not have run away.	The form 'run' should replace 'ran' since it is preceded by 'have'.

Table 3 highlights ten errors connected with tense and aspect. Tense and aspect are very important to correct expressions in English language. In item 'a' lost which is the past tense of lose is selected instead of lose. The whole expression is a wish or prayer – "May you not lose your value. So the selection of lost is wrong, in the context. In item b, the verb 'pretended' is selected instead of 'pretend'. Already tense has been reflected on the auxiliary verb 'did'. Once the auxiliary verb has been inflected for past, the main verb should be left in the present form, so we should have "didn't you pretend" instead of "didn't you pretended." Apart from that, the expression, 'as if' is already incorporated in the word 'pretend', so the use of 'pretended as if sounds tautologeous. It should be 'pretend' alone. In item 'c' the modal auxiliary 'will' is in the future tense, so joining a verb in the past tense 'withered' makes the expression wrong, so we should have 'will wither' and not 'will withered'.

In item 'd', the word 'accommodate' is wrong because it is preceded by the verb 'be'. Once a verb is preceded by 'be' it must attract the past rticiple and not the simple present again. Therefore it should be rendered as 'be accommodate' 'd' and not 'be accommodate' as we have it. Item 'e' talks about an action which took place in the past so it should be in the past tense "we decided", and not "we decides." Item 'f', involves the problem of marking tense twice that is on the auxiliary verbs and the main verb. We have discussed this in item be above. The expressions should read as follows:

f. 'did you tell, not 'did you told'

g. 'did' you just say', not 'did you just said.'

h. 'why did these happen., not 'why did these happened. Item 'h' is a problem of aspect. The expression should be rendered. I've explained' and not 'I've explain'. Item 'j' is also connected with aspect. The expression should be rendered 'have run' and not 'have ran'.

Table 4: Wrong Selection of Words

Ayò	Mo ti lóyún oṣù méjì	I'm too month pregnant.	I'm two months pregnant.	'Too' was wrongly selected instead of 'two'. Months should replace 'month.'
Ayò	O fẹ da gbogbo nnkan rú.	You want to <u>middle</u> things up.	You want to muddle up things.	'Middle' was wrongly used instead of 'muddle'.
Ogidi Omo	O fẹ fi ẹmí wọn ṣòfò.	You want to waste <u>there</u> lives.	You want to waste <u>their</u> lives.	'There' was wrongly selected instead of 'their'.
Ayò	Kò yẹ kí ó tún pò jù	It shouldn't be two much.	It shouldn't be <u>too</u> much.	'Two' was wrongly selected instead of 'too'.
Bámitá lé	O ò gbòdò fowó kàn-án.	You <u>don't dare</u> touch her.	You <u>dare not</u> touch her.	The verb 'dare' does not co-occur with 'do'.
Áárín Òtá	Ó dá mi lójú	I am <u>cork</u> sure.	I am cock sure.	'Cork' is wrongly selected instead of 'cock'.
Áárín Òtá	Abùrò ẹ?	Your <u>junior</u> sister?	Your <u>younger</u> sister?	'Junior' is wrongly selected instead of 'younger'.
Áárín Òtá	Máà jẹ kí wọn ó mú ẹ.	Avoid being <u>cut</u> .	Avoid being caught.	'Cut' was wrongly selected instead of 'caught'.

Table 4 highlights eight cases of wrong selection of words. The expressions month, middle there, two, don't dare, cork sure, junior sister and cut are wrongly selected instead of months, muddle, their, too, dare not, cock sure, younger sister and caught.

The Implication of the Findings

The implication of the above findings is that Yorùbá film makers are contributing negatively to lowering the standard of English language in Nigeria. Their products are watched daily by children, young adults, adults, and males and females throughout the South Western Zone of Nigeria and across the nation. Instead of contributing their quota towards uplifting the standard of the English language in the country, they are doing otherwise. In so doing, they are misleading millions of people who daily watch their products many of whom have mistaken them for models. To reverse this trend, movies producers should henceforth ensure that specialists are involved in subtitling their words. They should go an extra mile by allowing linguists to do proper editing of such subtitles, even though, this may involve more costs, "the end will justify the means" as the economists would say. Many of their fans would not mind spending more to purchase their products once they are sure that they are rich in quality in terms of visual output, thematic thrust, language and standard translations.

Conclusion

A very careful look at the errors identified in these subtitles suggests that Yorùbá film producers only pay attention to the visual quality and the thematic thrust of the movies. It is not enough for the industry to be concerned only with the visual quality and the thematic thrust, attention should equally be given to the grammaticality and accuracy of the subtitles for the benefit of audience who do not speak Yorùbá Wilmeth, 2006. This poses a challenge to the Association of Nigerian Theater Art Practitioners (ANTP) to wake up to its responsibilities. The Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board usually have a role to play in ensuring that these film producers improve the quality of the work in all ramifications. Film producers also should allow professionalism and specialisation of processes. Specialists in different aspects of the profession should be employed to handle the different areas of the work, not minding the cost. The end would no doubt justify the means if quality is improved.

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