

Culture, Meaning and Language in Intercultural Political-Postcolonial Translation Communication

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Abstract

This study contextualises translation as intercultural political textual communication and relations within the Postcolony. The Postcolony is a politically active space in which ex-coloniser and ex-colonised cultures negotiate their differentiated meanings, identities and humanities in asymmetrical relations using various communicative media including textual, oral and symbolic. Translation is both textual and symbolic communication mediated through translator-manipulable language and embossed with the potency of cultural knowledge, meaning, and identity representations, and of creating understanding or exacerbating conflict. Designed on qualitative and interpretive research and deploying postcolonial translation theory to account for inequality and contestation of knowledge and meanings in textual cultural encounters and to interrogate neocolonial forms of representation, this study heuristically reviewed the bondedness of culture, meaning and language. It further explored with illustrations from purposively selected translation text units the underlayered texture of a dialogic discourse in a postcolonial translation communication that insists on retaining and legitimizing in the target text remnants of the negative 'otherness' inscribed on African cultures in primordial European narratives on and attitudes towards Africa(ns). The study concluded on the critical positioning of the translator to mediate unbiased textual representation of cultural realities and identities in international cultural political communication and thus contribute to intercultural understanding and, perhaps, to intercultural cooperation.

Key Words: Cultural knowledge and identity representation, German translation, Intercultural political translation, Meaning in intercultural translation, Postcolonial textual relations, *Things Fall Apart*

Introduction: The Political-Postcolonial Context and the Postcolonial Theory Framework

Political-Postcolonial intercultural translation is translation that mediates the conflict or contestations of cultural knowledge, meanings and identity claims between interlocutors inhabiting the Postcolony - the

'former' colonisers and colonised. Achille Mbembe (1999) identifies the Postcolony, though emphasizing the African Postcolony, from a given historical trajectory as "societies recently emerging from the experience of colonisation" imprinted with a distinctive regime of violence and excess "which the colonial relationship, par excellence, involves" (p.3). Jensen, Suárez-Krabbe, Groes, and Pecic (2017) see the European Postcolony to consist of European "imperial states whose structures rest on the exploitation of colonial territories in the non-European world" and of the more or less non-coloniser European countries who, nevertheless, "benefitted from the power position Europe held for centuries where enormous profits were siphoned off from the colonial world and injected into Europe"(p. 1, 2), and whose contemporary forms of racism, hostility and continued exploitative stance towards the non-European other are traceable to Europe's colonial roots. These European states, they pointed out, dominantly include Portugal, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Scotland, Norway, Denmark.

European imperial states are in the Postcolony with African states, though they are no more physically in control of African territories. Their loss of these valuable or profitable African societies and resources after extended period of contacts deeply affected the course of the imperial states' economic and cultural development. Furthermore, because through the continued entanglement of these European states' with Africa by which they still supervise, directly or through their subaltern surrogates, the tangible and intangible structures and institutions of political control, economic exploitation and cultural erasure left behind or transplanted afterwards to former colonies, they remain the exploitative order in the Postcolony and perpetuate continuing conflictual and asymmetrical relations with their African other in the symbolic, discursive-dialogic and concrete spaces. Intercultural political translation text relations take place within this context of asymmetry and conflict in the Postcolony.

This study leverages on the nuanced quality of culture to heuristically and modestly review the mutual inclusiveness of culture, meaning and language and their entanglement in the hugely consequential postcolonial intercultural politics of cultural knowledge and cultural identity representations in translation communication. Purposively selected translation text units have been descriptively examined to discover the conscious or unconscious positioning of the translator in the politics. The study contextualises intercultural political-postcolonial translation within discursive-dialogic textual relations and deployed postcolonial theory as its explanatory and analytical framework. Discursive-dialogue here qualifies dialogic communicative exchanges between cultural interlocutors which evolve in intentionally questioned and negotiated discursive positions shot through with the power politics of cultural identity representation and the contestation of voice and meanings. Language use in

this dialogue is so structured to produce a particular knowledge and meaning about a culture in time and space, restraining or subordinating other knowledge and meaning and/or other ways of knowing the culture within relations of ideology, identity and power (c.f. Hall, 1997, 44-49 on discourse).

Postcolonial theory is grounded on the theorem that the unequal and conflictual relations in the colonies subsist beyond the territorial or “flag independence” (c.f. Arukwe, 2024, p. 432) granted the ‘former’ colonies. These relations continue today in the geographically undemarcated space of the Postcolony and are marked variously by domination and subservience, exploitation, expropriation, and cultural erasure; displacement, exclusion, and exile; alterity, sub-alterity, hybridity and silence, and as well by defiance, resistance and violence carried over from the era of geographically marked imperial colonization (c.f. Mbembe 2001, 68, 76; Nausner, 2012, p.1; Eke, 2022, p.42). Postcolonial theory developed through the works of a host of theorists and literary writers including Frantz Fanon (*Black skin, White Masks*), Chinua Achebe (*Things Fall Apart*), Edward Said (*Orientalism*), Homi Bhabha (*The Location of culture*), Bill Ashcroft *et al.* (*The Empire writes Back*), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (*Can the Subaltern Speak*) and provides the broad framework for interrogating and contending with those forms of knowledge, meanings and cultural representations that legitimise colonialism, as well as neo-colonial forms of subjugation, domination and inequality by imperial powers, which are being realised through expanding capitalism and globalisation (c.f. Eke, 2011; Eke, 2016, p.350). Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin popularised the theory in literary and textual studies in asserting that the specific aim of literatures from former colonies is to use a variety of textual strategies to refute or subvert the dominant categories of representation and identity circulated from the imperial centre and to contest the dominance of the English language by creating creolised versions of the language (Ashcroft, *et al.*, 1989/2002, p.2; c.f. Eke, 2016, p.351). However, through the discriminatory selection of texts from ‘former’ colonies for translation into ‘former’ colonisers’ cultures and/or through the manipulation of meanings and representations using techniques and strategies for their translation, the ‘writings to empire’ can be counter-narrated and subverted (c.f. Bassnett and Trivedi, 1999, p.5; Niranjana, 1992, p.3)

Meaning in Culture

Among dominant and subsisting questions that foreground theories of meaning are what is meaning and where is meaning located? Is meaning to be found in words, languages, texts, neuronal patterns, brains, individuals, social interaction, or in the interplay between some (or all) of these factors? (Risku, 2020). Form and context-based meaning postulations appear to broadly underlie meaning inferences. Form based meaning posit that meaning is contained in the formal structures and relations of linguistic

constituents or elements, written or spoken. In other words, a word or words have no meaning of their own except within the linguistic structure of the text (Catford, 1965); while context-based meaning emphasises the circumstance or situations, human relationships and experiences within cultures outside the linguistic elements in which words occur as the basis of meaning (Ogden and Richards, 1923). In other words, a word/words mean what the sociocultural context say they mean or rather they mean the realities moulded in/by the sociocultural contexts. Azabdaftari (2013) suggests reconciling the contending postulations to arrive at a communicative conception of meaning suitable to translation. As he puts it,

Thus, it is reasonable to claim that in determining textual meaning the question is not that of content *or* form, referential *or* inferential meaning, reference *or* expression rules; rather, it is the appropriate balancing/compromising the forces exerted by language *knowledge* and language *behavior*. The translator needs to play attendance[sic] to the requirements of both centripetal as well as centrifugal forces of language in his mission of conveying meaning from one language to another (p.24).

Meaning is here regarded to be the idea/concept, thought, feeling/impact or object associated with a verbal or graphic representation whether written, spoken, gesticulated or performed in a given context within a particular people or culture. The cultural context is the space for the analysis of meaning in intercultural translation communication not only because it is the base for social relationships and experiences, the basis for the ideas/concepts, thoughts, feelings and objects associated with verbal and graphic representations but much more because it makes these meanings meaningful - bestowing worth, depth, purpose, connection and stability- in the practical life of the people. The cultural context is, however, articulated in the form and structure of linguistic codes.

Culture conception, Culture as Meaning

The earliest conception of culture from its Latin root term 'colere', translatable as 'to build on, 'to cultivate' 'to foster' was used to contrast nature. Culture was seen to be something constructed willingly by men, while 'nature' was given. In this conception, culture was seen as a process of cultivation and, thus, improvement associated with a range of practices in the arts "which are assumed to carry a set of ethical values superior to those of everyday experience" (Garnham, 2001, p.413). From the mid-

eighteenth centuries, the concept of culture included not only practices but also products that only human intelligence and human societies are capable of, and that are transmitted by non-hereditary means. Culture came to signify:

A set of attributes and products of human societies, and therewith of mankind, which are extrasomatic and transmissible by mechanisms other than biological hereditary, and are essentially lacking in sub-human species as they are characteristic of the human species as it is aggregated in the societies (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952, p.284).

This early progression in the conception of culture was, however, beset by what Eugene Halton calls the 'ethnocentric universalism' of Western enlightenment. That is Western enlightenment's conception of the 'unity of mankind' or 'universal reason' and its belief in progress. This progress was, however, seen in terms of the subsumption of human histories and diversities to the dominance of European culture (Halton, 1992, p.43).

In a critique of this universalist tendency of Western enlightenment particularly obvious in the French revolution, that is, the exporting of the French model of social organization and aspiration and its intellectual forms such as language, philosophy, art by force of arms (Garnham, 2001, p.416), J.G. Herder came up with a pluralistic notion of culture that points to 'equally valid and valuable different ways of life'. Herder considers it "the most ridiculous vanity for Europeans to believe that all people in the world must live like Europeans to achieve happiness. It was also highly insensitive to the material conditions obtaining to different eras" (Spencer, 2003, par. 4).

Williams Raymond (in Spencer, 2003, par. 5; Cf. Spencer, 1996, p. 258) observes that by employing the term 'culture' to refer to all human (creative) enterprises, "Herder used it for the first time in its modern anthropological sense to indicate the particular way of life of a period, people or group". This modern anthropological sense, which according to Payne (2010), brought some stability to the term 'culture' and clarity to its definition, was provided by Edward Burnett Tylor, to whom culture means "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor, 1871, p.1), and was expanded by O'Hear (1998, p.747) to include types of economy and technology, art and architecture, modes of entertainment, legal systems, religion, systems of education and upbringing, and much else besides; "everything, in other words, by virtue of which members of a group endow their activities with meaning

and significance”. Afigbo (2000), in a rather deepening of the Taylorian conception, summarizes culture to be “those mentifactual, sociofactual and artifactual aggregates which in turn define and constitute the way we are born, live, die and buried – our culture and civilization” (see also Eke, 2012).

Immanuel Wallerstein on his part, views culture as a “set of ideas that we utilize to analyse the world-system of knowledge, language, religion, and the arts. All these are models of organizing our collective life, which reflect and are reflected in other arenas.” (Kumar and Welz, 2001, pp. 221-222), While Geertz sees culture to be “a set of symbolic systems that serve not only to define and identify the culture and social structures, but also to articulate the synthesis of two essential parts of human culture, ethos and worldview.” (in Kluver, 2004, p.430). Mike Levy (2007) noted culture to be multiple and layered in nature but much more significantly, that it is contested - a terrain in which a number of different groups struggle to assert meaning at various levels including state, nation and individual levels (pp.109-110). This view of culture as contested has earlier been set out by Giroux when by culture he refers to:

The representation of lived experiences, material artefacts, and practices forged within the unequal and dialectical relations that different groups establish in a given society at a particular historical point. In this case, culture is closely related to the dynamics of power and produces asymmetries in the ability of individuals and groups to define and achieve goals. Furthermore, culture is also an arena of struggle and contradiction, and there is no one culture in the homogenous sense. On the contrary, there are dominant and subordinate cultures that express different interests and operate from different and unequal terrains of power. (Giroux, 1988, p.116-117, cited in Levy, 2007, p.110).

Inferring from the above views, the attributes of culture include its being the creation of humans only, its being non-natural and genetically non-hereditary, it is learned and shared, consists of practices, products and ideas, organizes social life, pluralistic and diverse, defines a society, changes, synthesizes ethos and worldviews, and contested.

There is, however, such a proliferation of definitions of culture to meet the need of various disciplines and departments of knowledge for cultural analysis that the term not only lacks a universally accepted definition, but also has, among others, been variously described as amorphous (Kluver, 2004), most complicated (Williams, 1988), elusive (Payne, 2010) and vague, so vague that Garnham (2001, pp.413, 420) argues that the term ‘culture’ has lost much relevance in scholarly enquiry so should be

jettisoned. However, he nevertheless acknowledges the near synonymy of culture to life, suggesting, therefore, that culture so permeates every facet of life and knowledge that at each point, it cannot but be confronted and clarified. This study conceives of culture as the body of organic and shared meanings by which a people or group or society is identified and differentiated and on the basis of which it orders behaviour and relations within itself and with others outside (cf. Eke, 2012). This conception of culture accommodates the all-encompassing anthropological list of customs, values, habits, norms, systems and institutions as symbolic manifestations of these shared meanings.

Culture as meaning(s) sums up how a people, group or society view the world, apprehend their temporal and spatial location in it and how and where they fit into that world. It also represents their responses to themselves within that world and to those outside of it. This world view and the symbolic manifestations that narrow it are the result of suffered or lived experiences, of relationships and the environment, and they are sustained by memory. In other words, this world view dissolves, practically, into the symbolic manifestations, which are the most visible, and which are described as ‘the (entire) way of life’. Simply and tacitly put, culture, the context of meaning, is meaning. Culture as meaning further comprises „historically transmitted patterns embodied in symbols [and signs], a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life” (Geertz, 1973, p.89). It is also seen to be conflictual and processual representing a site of contestation where meanings are constantly negotiated (Großberg, Nelson & Treichler. 1992, p.9, Sorrels, 2016, p.3).

In conceiving culture as ‘organic’, it refers first to the fact that culture manifests itself variously through habits, norms, customs, values, institutions, and so on, which form integral parts of the whole and much more to the understanding that culture is living and dynamic; it changes, grows or progresses, and it has its internal contradictions, strength and weakness. Rodriguez captured this point considerably when he states “cultures are organic systems. As with such systems, all cultures have points of homogeneity and diversity, continuity and discontinuity, stability and instability, meaning [clarity] and ambiguity, order and chaos” (2002, p.2). Herder earlier acknowledged these opposing dualities that characterize any culture by observing that “a nation may have the most sublime virtues in some respects and blemishes in others, show irregularities and reveal the most astonishing contradictions and incongruities” (in Spencer, 2003, par. 8). However, the diversities, seemingly chaos and ambiguities inherent in cultures do not necessarily lead to the death or extinction, total collapse or breakdown of such cultures. They constitute the dialectical and cumulative progression, which keeps cultures capable of

self-reflection, open and always in the process of becoming. Speaking of ambiguities in cultures in this regard, Rodriguez (2002, pp. 2-3) maintains that:

Ambiguity challenges us to look at the world anew. It expands our humanity by forcing us to develop new meanings, new ways of experiencing and being in the world. In this way ambiguity fosters diversity and evolution. It is a life catalyst. [...] Ambiguity, therefore, makes for open and vibrant systems – the only systems that evolve and strive.

Furthermore, the dynamism of cultures and the changes, which occur in them, are not completely detached from the past of these cultures. This means that though changes occur in cultures, though cultures may share and receive from other cultures, they are yet in steady relationship with their traditional past, the present and, even, the future such that there is always a point of stability and unity. This is made possible by the factor of memory. As Halton puts it:

We are left, it seems to me, with centering our investigation of the roots of culture in the most sophisticated techniques the world has yet known: Those of the human body. Through human memory we have a profound connection to the past; to historical, prehistorical and even transhuman memory as the incorporation of organic experience. Living human memory... makes it possible for collective and personal past experience to infuse its wisdom into the present and so generates new prospects for future conduct. (1992, pp.60-61)

Crucial to the understanding of cultural behaviour and to this study is this point from Halton here that there is possibly a core of culture that overtime and trans-generationally becomes embedded in the collective (sub) consciousness of a people or group, what Irele would call "... the accumulated heritage of the past ... compacted within the deep places of the individual being" (1996, p.25), so that it is possible for a member of that collective to spontaneously, without being aware of it, respond in a manner that reflects the world view and way of life – the meanings- of the collective. Furthermore, he stated that

though a culture has the dynamism to change and to accommodate new and varied perspectives, experiences and meanings, this core of culture runs from the past into the future. Robinson restates this fact and also notes the dialectical process of cultural change in his conception of culture as “a dynamic system of symbols and meanings” that involves ongoing dialectical processes “where past experience influences meanings, which in turn affect future experience, which in turn affects subsequent meaning, and so on” (1988, p.11). This knittedness of culture to the history and the (sub)consciousness of a people is instructive considering the insightful Wordsworthian ideological correlation of culture with and the regard of it as the “embodied spirit of a people” (William, 2015, p.80).

Some important points emerge here in the treatment of the cultural content of texts in intercultural translation communication. The first is that the translation of the cultural character and constitution of a people contained in their literature, especially their ‘heritage’ literature is ‘the translation of the people’ – the processing of the cultural individuality of the people, of the meanings that make their lives cognitively coherent and actionable and the transference and representation of these to others, thus influencing or even determining how these others may perceive and relate with this people. Secondly, a writer or an author of a literary cultural classic, for instance Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, can focus on the culture of a given society or people in a historical time that will still be relevant to the understanding of and relations with that society or people in the present so long as that society and culture have not altogether become extinct. The translation of such a text(s) will, therefore, still be relevant to the understanding of and relations with that culture and society.

The discussion on the organicity of culture allows the inference that exploiting the inherent or alleged contradictions of a culture to erase it or basing the pursuit of such cultural erasure on the charge that the culture does not fit the definition of the (self-) appointed culture-executioner is pernicious because each culture also has the inherent potency and self-reflectivity to deal with its own internal contradictions through the dialectical processes of cultural change and development. Furthermore, denouncing or denying the history of a people is cutting them off from that connectedness with their cultural past that gives their life meaning and stability in the present.

Culture, Cultural Identity and the Struggle of Meanings

Culture and cultural identity are discursively and dialogically deployed in translation because of their relevance to human understanding, relations and development. Two fundamental factors map out the necessity for translation namely - the exchange of knowledge and the sharing of culture across language and cultural differences and barriers. Knowledge and Culture are interlinked and are at the core of human

development and material progress. Culture, especially, largely determines, defines and mediates that quality of being and relations(ship) which are definable as ,human'. Human culture thus uniquely defines and differentiates humans from other species of living beings by its exclusively adaptive, cumulative or additive, institutional and transgenerational nature (cf. Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952, p.284; Geertz, 1973, p.38; Laland and Hoppit, 2003, pp.157-158; Sussman, 2012, p.185). The weighty implication of this is that any group of people that has no human culture or rather that is so judged not to have human culture, and thus to be less human, is more likely to be isolated, abused, dispossessed, exploited, enslaved, attacked, tortured and could even be annihilated. This was the case in the history of European slave trade and colonialism. Nineteenth century European anthropologists constructed a racio-cultural hierarchy between Europeans and ,others' and within these ,others'; those judged to be 'primitive', 'less civilised', 'barbaric' and/or ,lacking in culture' altogether were justified for enslavement and colonisation (Sorrells, 2016, p.3). It turns out that the people called black were placed at the lowest rung of that racio-cultural ladder (Fortin, 2006, p.21).

The above significance of human culture remains valid regardless of the innumerable conceptions and definitions of culture including in its essentialist or hybrid manifestations and specifically whether it is viewed in the sense of the full range of learned human behaviour patterns as was listed in Tylor(1920/1871, p.1) and O'Hear(1998, p.747) and encapsulated in Afigbo (2000) or whether it is exclusively viewed as meaning because it mediates knowledge and understanding in sociocultural interactions and in the perceptions of the self and the other thus serving as „a unique meaning and information system, shared by a group and transmitted across generations, that allows the group to meet basic needs of survival, coordinate socially to achieve a viable existence, transmit social behavior, pursue happiness and well-being, and derive meaning from life” (Matsumoto, 2007, p.1293).

Human culture is not only unique by its exclusivity to humans but also in the multi-heterogeneity of its composition among human groups diversely located geographically, spatially, temporally, historically and experientially. From its specific location, each culture possesses and processes its own historically and experientially developed ideas about the world, life, nature, its environment, self, others, family, health, illness and healing, relationships, governance and much more with all associated values, norms, customs, practices, rituals, taboos, priorities as well as the institutions and technologies these ideas engender. It equally evolves its own symbolic and coded system of communication lodged in the collective consciousness of its members for speaking of and relating with themselves, their world and among themselves and about/with others outside their world (cf. Haviland, Prins, McBride and Walrath, 2014, p.146.). The ensemble of these differentiated features of culture particular to a people marks out

their humanity, as it were, and identifies them from other cultural identity groups. It also constitutes the layered shared meanings and tool for internal organisation, cohesion and for undertaking initiatives to meet their challenges and needs; for the essence of culture is to solve diverse needs and challenges, guarantee the well-being, happiness and survival of the group and secure the dignity and worth of being human (cf. Matsumoto, 2007, p.1291; Haviland, Prins, McBride and Walrath, 2014, p.36).

The quest of cultures to preserve their differentiated identities, meanings and worth and to secure and expand resources for their survival, well-being and happiness bring them into contact and conflict with their differences and otherness to each other. Cultural identity, i.e. the identity of the individual or collective self rooted in a common culture from which it derives considerably its meaning and worth (Eke, 2012, p.24), is a critical and strategic factor in human interactions especially when in the real social world and the world of cultural relations and politics, it is often conflated and used interchangeably with such accidents of birth like race with ascribed values (Tittle, 2012). Physical attributes become imbued with cultural references such that being black, for example, could mean being African and both could mean being primitive, barbaric, backward, irrational, inferior and lacking culture; while being white could mean being European and both could mean being (post)modern, progressive, rational, superior, refined and cultured. These ascriptions thus represent descriptive and defining labels which reflect the value judgments, attitude and dispositions of the „other“ to either Black-African or White-European as a „racio-cultural“ identity (Eke, 2011).

Cultural belonging or identity then becomes a most critical criterion in the assignment of worth and significance and in the distribution of national and international economic, political and socio-cultural goods and privileges within the structural inequality that continues to characterize most societies and the international system in particular, Saaida notes that “Culture and identity can also shape power dynamics in international relations with dominant cultures and identities creating imbalances of power and privilege”(2023, p.50) and Moya sees beyond international state relations to include group and interpersonal spheres of intercultural social relations and life chances. As he avers:

The significance of identity depends partly on the fact that goods and resources are distributed according to identity categories. Who we are - that is, who we perceive ourselves or are perceived by others, will significantly affect our life chances: where we can live, whom we will marry (or whether we can marry), and what kinds of educational and employment opportunities will be available to us. (Moya, 2000, p.8; cf. Eke, 2012).

In intercultural contacts, cultures seek to assert their human dignities by affirming their cultural meanings and identities. They also grapple for international socio-cultural, political and economic goods and resources and privileges for the sustenance of their continuity and well-being. This struggles to assert their human dignity, the struggle for who gets what, where, when and how much based considerably on collective cultural identities predicate the deliberate efforts by people to construct or deconstruct cultural identities, to sustain or subvert cultural hegemonies and dominations through several means including (literary)writing and the translation of texts (Eke, 2012). In this struggle, the collective cultural self undertakes actions or measures that protects its meanings, valorize itself as deserving recognition and unequal worth and privileges (Cahoone, 1996, p.11), and ‘othering’ the other culture by distorting the image of the other’s cultural self or identity, excluding or estranging it and making it unworthy of similar recognition and privileges (Brons, 2014, p.105). Otherness is now transformed into a potent tool for the preservation of the Self. Schoepfling, also cited in Eke (2006, 2012), succinctly points to this in stating:

Collective identities protect their meanings. They do so by establishing boundary mechanisms and boundary filters, which ensure that ideas external to the community are never received in full, for if they were, they could devastate the sense of collective self by introducing a tidal wave of innovation which the receiving community had no cognitive means of ordering (2010, p.58).

However, an identity, including a cultural identity, is both what it is and what it is not, it is both self and the other such that the self cannot exist without the other that it estranges, distorts and excludes and holds in conflict (Hall, 1996, p.4). This mutual inclusion of the self and the other and the tension between them supposedly justifies the need for dialogue between the cultural self and the cultural other in order to possibly reach understanding (Crapanzano, 1990, p.277; Miller, 1994, pp.11-12). Furthermore, cultural identity, while an entity that emerges from the ensemble of differentiated cultural attributes or features, it is also constructed and contested in socio-cultural perceptions and interpretations of the self. It is “who we are – that is, who we perceive ourselves to be or are perceived by others to be ... Our conceptions of who we are as social beings” (Moya, 2000, p.8). This perception and conception of the „self” or the „other” is „voiced” in speech acts whether semiotically embedded or verbally expressed such that “Who

we are to each other, then, is accomplished, disputed, ascribed, resisted, managed and negotiated in discourse” (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006, p.4; cf. Ruelle and Peverelli, 2016, pp.14-15).

Culture and Language Use in Postcolonial Translation Communication

The application of this study’s conception of culture as the body of organic and shared meanings of a people or group or society to intercultural communication within postcolonial relations context will first be to the communication of meaning between or across people, groups or societies through the medium of language. It will also mean the effort to share and influence perceptions, attitude and behaviours between cultures, as well as the struggle among or between meanings, world views and ways of life for dominance, independence or recognition.

The connection between language, culture and meaning is in the primacy of culture to the expression of both language and meaning. Like culture, there has been a long-standing enquiry into the phenomenon of language and definitions as to what language is about. As Finegan (pp.5-6) notes “like other enquiries central to human experience, questions about language and its functioning were not new to the twentieth century. As old as speculation on any subject, inquiry into the nature of language occupied Plato and Aristotle, as well as Greek and Indian philosophers”.

Saussure, Sapir, Bloomfield, Catford, Quine, Chomsky, Halliday and a host of others before and after them have all reflected on the meaning and use of language. In this study, language refers to the structured system of speech and/or graphic symbols unique to a human community, which that community uses for meaningful social interaction, and for the expression of thought and feelings. Meaningful social interactions and expressions refer to interactions and expressions that are embedded in the culture of the human society or community; for language does not exist outside culture. Weber (1995) asserts in this regard that all languages are functional tools that change with cultural and technological demands, and that they cease to be living languages if they cease to adapt to culture and technology. He further maintains that:

One’s language is a model of his or her culture and of that culture’s adjustment to the world To deny that a people have a language to express its unique perspective of the world is to deny its humanity. Furthermore, the study of language is a study of the people who speak that language and of the way they bring order to the chaos of the world. (pp.30-31)

In the same vein, Babajide (172) citing Harrof (1962) also submits that language is the 'storehouse of culture' and a prerequisite to the development and transmission of culture. This agrees with Gode's (1964, p.23) claim that language and culture are neither 'opposable nor juxtaposable', for "language as an expressive manifestation of life is a component of culture". Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986, pp.14-15), however, helps us to understand what in culture is language, when in viewing culture as "... the set of spiritual eyeglasses through which a people view themselves and their place in the universe", states that "language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's collective experience in history". This restates the fact that every word is a piece of a people's collective memory; memory of their experiences, of their lives and relationships, and a part of their collective outlook and worldview. It is only within this cultural memory that a word, indeed all of language, has meaning, worth and significance.

It is within this apparent understanding of culture as the context of meaning and of language as a carrier of culture and meaning that meaning in communication within the context of intercultural postcolonial interaction could be viewed as the understanding that comes from the knowledge or awareness of a message. We point out that this understanding is rooted in the cultural background of those taking part in the communicative process, and it is negotiated between interlocutors in the communicative process. However, in the intercultural politics of postcolonial translation, meaning is very often covertly reimposed on the ex-colonised African culture, which through literary self-narrative activism and resistance rewrites the European held falsehoods and displacement of its cultural self in a literary reappropriation of cultural selfhood strikingly denoted by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989) as "The Empire Writes Back". This reimposition is achieved through the language choices of the translator and through translator-techniques that reinterpret source text cultural phenomena to suit target culture preferences in a process of continued enforcement and imposition of the self-acclaimed hierarchical superiority and worldviews of the dominant culture of the ex-colonizer, in this case Europe's. The reinterpretation is realised through the manipulation of language by a sometime ex-coloniser or naïve neo-ex-coloniser translator – a process of language and meaning displacement began in imperial colonisation as Ngugi succinctly avers:

In the history of conquest, the first thing the victorious conqueror does is to attack people's names and languages. The idea was to deny them the authority of naming self and the world, to delegitimize the history and the knowledge they already possessed, delegitimize their own

language as a credible source of knowledge and definition of the world, so that the conqueror's language can become the source of the very definition of being. (2018, p.124).

It is possible to think of a translator of African literary text from an imperial European culture with the good intention to make the source culture known to/in his culture without bias. Bandia (1993, p.62) citing Gadamer (1975), however, notes that "an understanding cannot be achieved that is completely free of the interpreter's own 'life-world'. The interpreter, or translator, is a 'victim' of his own concrete hermeneutic situation, and all interpretative understanding is necessarily bound to preconceptions and prejudgments." Such a translator from a European culture, besides having adequate and appropriate knowledge of the relevant African source language or of a culturally subverted European language like 'english(es)' rather than 'English' and an in-depth familiarity with its culture, must also unavoidably divest himself from past and contemporary European prejudices, from the determinism of his ethno-eurocentric rootedness in an imperial or neo-imperial culture that valorises itself as superior to the source text culture and judges itself to be deserving of unusual and unequal recognition and privileges in the global political allocation of resources.

When Richard Moering in 1959 translated Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" (published 1958) as "Okonkwo oder das Alte Stürzt" (Achebe 1959), and Dagmar Heusler and Evelin Petzold retranslated it with the same title in 1983 (Achebe 2007/1983), supposedly preserving the title of the earlier translation in order not to confuse readers (Kolb, 2011, p.181), the translators in both translations imposed the liberal individualism of Europe and the West on the source text culture as a superior and surpassing cultural value over the communal-spiritual ethos of that African culture (cf. Mayanja, 1999, p.349; Eke, 2012; Eke, 2022, p.54). As if to justify the imposition by Moering, Heusler & Petzold, Strätling translated the title as "Alles Zerfällt" [everything crumbles] (Achebe 2012), an overtranslation of "Things Fall Apart", suggesting that the entire Igbo culture has altogether crumbled or disintegrated and perhaps needs to be replaced; when evidently not "all things" fell Apart (Uwakwe 2019, Eke 2022). When Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe 2008/1958, p.66) takes the cultural context of a husband-wife 'quarrel' to proverbially state the gender relations approved in/by the Igbo-African source culture by which any man is disapproved of physically assaulting any woman "it is not bravery when a man fights a woman", Dagmar Heusler and Evelin Petzold (Achebe, 1983) provides a translation that suggests that the culture's restriction applies only to a man with his wife, "Es zeugt wahrlich nicht von Tapferkeit, wenn sich ein Mann mit seiner eigenen Frau schlägt" (p.106) [It does not show bravery at all, when a man fights with

his own wife], while Strätling (Achebe, 2012) disparagingly pointed to the precariousness of a wife's life in the source culture by ambiguously upgrading husband-wife 'quarrel' to 'warfare', "*Es ist kein Mannesmut, wenn ein Mann seine Frau bekriegt*" (p.110) [It is not manly bravery, when a man wars with his wife.] (cf. Eke, 2011, p.29; Eke, 2022, p.52). Furthermore, in a marriage scene, Achebe, using the dog-in-play animal proverb "If I fall down for you and you fall down for me, it is play" (Achebe, 2008/1958, p.58), shows how the ritually negotiated bride price is the blood bond that unites two families into one, establishes kinship between them and restrains any of them from hurting the other (c.f. Eke, 2011, pp.29-31; Eke, 2013, pp.64-65). Dagmar Heusler and Evelin Petzold (Achebe, 1983) replaced the source text proverb with a market place bargaining imagery which suggests to the German target readership that the Igbo sell their daughters in marriage for money, the bride price being the market cost, "*senkst du den Preis, dann will auch ich mich nicht lumpen lassen, denn dann ist's ein Spiel*" (p.83) [if you lower the price, then I will also be generous, for then it is a play"]. In the same way, Strätling (Achebe, 2012), after a comparatively well-improved and by far a more successful retranslation of *Things Fall Apart*, promotionally blurbed the Igbo culture to the German readership as "...*einer archaischen Kultur*" [... *an archaic culture*] (Eke, 2022, p.54). In one fell swoop, the living and dynamic Igbo-African culture, well connected to its past, present and its future, is archived into the oblivion of antiquity to be forgotten. Why? Possibly because it did not fit the German-European's designation of culture and, perhaps too, to prevent the German readership from taking it seriously. A pertinent question, however, is why the description of this African culture as *archaic* is considered attractive to the German-European mind for the translation to have market and reading worth or values? A contextually possible answer is that the Igbo-African culture is translated as the German-European inferior other, a comparison to what the European could had been but for the grace of God for which Germans and Europeans have to be grateful. The translation presumably serves to entertain the German target readership with the exotic, the non-belonging and the unfamiliar from former colonies - the strange other of Europe (c.f. Kolb, 2011, p.180); and to fend off the Germans from such African 'meanings'.

The above illustrations and similar ones in significant aspects of culture like gender relations, class structure, religion, value system and others subtly occurring, as if a coded collective, infused at various points in the translations and retranslations of *Things Fall Apart* into German demonise the African source culture. make it look inferior, remotely incomparable to Europe's and counter narrates the source text culture presented by Chinua Achebe. Evidence of such postcolonial textual relations in language translations can also be found in the translations into European languages & cultures of self-narrations of African cultures in classic African postcolonial literary texts. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall*

Apart has been illustratively used here because it is the first African postcolonial literary classic pointedly devoted to confront proto-European narratives of exclusion and negation that ascribe sub-humanity, lack of culture and irrationality on Africans. It is also one of the most widely translated African literary texts (translated into over 50 languages and cultures) and one of the most widely read and influential African novel ever written that forced attention to African cultures on the global cultural stage, and much more because it is arguably the only African literary text that has been (re)translated four times into German in 1959, 1976 (the 1959 translation was reedited into a translation for East Germany & Socialist states), 1983, and 2011. (c.f. Kolb, 2011, pp.179-180; Eke, 2022, p.41)

Chinua Achebe underlines a European imaginary of an Africa perpetually stagnated in backwardness and barbarism instantiating the extreme of otherness to Europe and providing it with the most formidable justification for an ascendant European cultural self-glory and grandeur. As Achebe puts it:

For reasons which can certainly use close psychological inquiry, the West seems to suffer deep anxieties about the precariousness of its civilization and to have a need for constant reassurance by comparison with Africa. If Europe, advancing in civilization, could cast a backward glance periodically at Africa trapped in primordial barbarity it could say with faith and feeling: There go I but for the grace of God. Africa is to Europe as the picture is to Dorian Gray — a carrier onto whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate. Consequently, Africa is something to be avoided just as the picture has to be hidden away to safeguard the man's jeopardous integrity. (2016, p.25)

Conclusion

Culture constitutes a people's perception of their humanity; it constitutes and guides their lived experiences. It is the meaning that weaves their lives together providing them with stability, coherence and action and forms the basis on which they negotiate relations with others outside the world of their culture. It provides them with the zest for collective struggle to preserve their human worth and to acquire the material and spiritual resources necessary for their continuity and well-being in a world shared with cultural others. Language is a culture's medium to express, communicate and also preserve its inherent

meanings. The world of the Postcolony, diffused by asymmetry and inequality, hegemony and subservience and the fights in-between, makes language the space for cultural struggle, the contestations of meanings, and for the inevitable entanglement of politics and culture. Platforms for healthy knowledge and cultural exchanges, and for the promotion of understanding and cooperation like (literary)translations can be and oftentimes are conscripted into the politics of cultural identity and power for the securance of unequal international goods, resources and privileges and dignity.

The translator, especially the literary translator, is an intercultural mediator in the Postcolony or presumably so – a mediator between the diverse expressions of a single humanity in the various peoples and cultures that are in subtle or covert conflict or asymmetrical relations within the Postcolony. The basic tools of the translator's critical assignment are language – a potent and delicate matrix in which is embedded the cultures between which he mediates, and his mind, which if unattended to, is capable of festering ethnocentric prejudice in the target text. If that happens, the translator exacerbates prejudice, resentment and animosity and becomes complicit in hegemonic oppression by the dominant culture – dominance, not with regard to superiority or inferiority of culture but with regard to the capacity to enforce its will and secure its material interests over the other.

However, the translator can also creatively manoeuvre through the delicate maze of cultures and meanings and politics and present authentic options for mutual understanding between former ex-colonisers and the former ex-colonised through genuine and unbiased textual representation of cultural realities and identities in international cultural political communication.

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