

Evaluation of Fidelity in the translation of Nonverbal communication in Price's *God's bits of wood* (A Translation of Sembene Ousmane's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*)

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Received: December 02, 2019

Accepted: January 07, 2020

ABSTRACT: *This paper is an evaluation of the fidelity in the translation of nonverbal communication in Sembene Ousmane's Les bouts de bois de Dieu, a novel which has been translated into the English language as God's bits of wood by Francis Price. Since speech is not the only means of communication by man, this paper seeks out those instances where communication took place in the novel without the use of speech (as presented by the narrator.) communication is a venture with a specific purpose which is eliciting response. Adopting the Interpretive Method, this paper concludes that the translator has not been very faithful in his translation of nonverbal communication in the novel.*

Key Words: *Translation, Interpretive Method, Fidelity, Nonverbal Communication*

Introduction

The objective of translation is to impart the knowledge of the original to the foreign reader. *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* is an African novel the colonial era in an African society. It is a story based on the events of the strike of the Dakar-Niger railway line between October 10, 1947 and March 19, 1948. The black railway workers are demanding for better working conditions and for which, they are mowed down, beaten, their families incarcerated to break their spirit. They achieve victory in the end as a result of their solidarity and commitment to their goal. Sembene Ousmane is an African writer cum film producer who is well known for his commitment to the cause of the masses, especially the working class. Influenced by Marxist aesthetics, most of his works carry the message that nobody is going to fight for better conditions of service for workers except the workers themselves. It is a novel of action and counter –action between the Black workers and their European employers.

Therefore, nonverbal communication was very important for the Black workers as a means of communicating with one another without attracting the attention of the European rivals. However, nonverbal communication is not always a conscious effort. Most of the participants in a nonverbal communication event are not conscious of the messages they send across or even the fact that they are sending any messages. The only difference between man and other animals is simply the ability to speak, that is, language. In fact, one of the definitions of man in the Greek language is “the animal that speaks”. When it comes to communication, it is important to note here that speech is not the only means of communicating by man. Samovar, Porter & McDaniel (2007), define communication as “the process through which which symbols are transmitted for the purpose of eliciting a response”. This is to say that communication is not a purposeless venture.

Clarification of Terms

Translation: The phenomenon called “translation” has been defined in many ways by many scholars. According to Nida and Taber (1974:12), translation consists of reproducing in the receptor language, the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style. For Catford (1965:20), translation is the replacement of textual material in the Source Language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language, that is, an operation performed on language whereby a text is substituted in one language for a text in another. For Newmark (1991:27) translation is transferring the meaning of a stretch or a unit of language, the whole or a part of a text, from one language to another. Marianne Lederer (1994:11) defines it as a process which :

consiste à comprendre le texte original, à déverbaliser sa forme linguistique et à exprimer d'une autre langue les idées comprises et les sentiments ressentis.

(involves understanding the original text, deverbaling its linguistic form and expressing, in another language, the ideas it contains, and the sentiments felt). (*All translations in this paper except otherwise stated are ours*)

Interpretive Theory: The Interpretive theory of translation is a process that consists of the transfer of meaning or sense from the Source Language (SL) to the Target Language (TL) using the equivalent form. Most scholars refer to this theory as the "Interpretative Theory". The central point of this theory is that the translator does not concentrate on words or linguistic structures present in the SL, but rather on the meaning and the sense that these words carry. It sees translation process not as a direct conversion of the linguistic meaning of the source language meaning, but as a conversion from source language to sense, the intermediate link being non-verbal thought which, once consciously grasped, can then be expressed in any language regardless of the words being used in the original language.

Fidelity: Fidelity, which also means "faithfulness" is defined by Longman's Dictionary of Contemporary English (1995) as "The quality of not changing something when you are producing it again in a different form...by translating." Another definition is given by Ampero Hurtado and cited by Marianne Lederer (1994) and it says that faithfulness is defined on the basis of the intentions of the author, the text language and the reader. The three factors are inseparable. Wikipedia gives us the following definition of the term:

The extent to which a translator accurately renders the meaning of the source text without adding to or subtracting from it, without intensifying or weakening any part of the meaning and otherwise without distorting it.

Nonverbal Communication: Samovar, Porter and McDaniel (2007), provide a satisfactory definition of nonverbal communication as follows:

Nonverbal communication involves all those nonverbal stimuli in a communication setting that are generated by both the source and his or her use of the environment and that have potential message value for the source or receiver.

Emotions felt, how they are expressed and how they are understood are matters of culture (Rosenblath 1997:36). This tallies with the opinion of Vandenberg (2002) that non-verbal communication plays a crucial and necessary part in communication interactions between people from different cultures. In fact, Andersen (2000) submits that individuals are aware of little of their own behaviour which is enacted mindlessly, spontaneously and unconsciously. That is to say that cultures formulate display rules that dictate when, how and with what consequences nonverbal expressions will be exhibited (Macaronis 1998). In fact, Samovar, Porter, and McDaniel assert that from the moment of birth to the end of life nonverbal communication is an important symbol system. Nevertheless, Ekman & Friesen (1975) opine that because people are all from one specie, a general and common genetic inheritance produces universal facial expressions for most basic emotions like fear, happiness, anger, surprise, disgust and sadness.

Nonverbal communication often interacts with verbal messages. This interfacing of the verbal with the nonverbal carries over to the many uses and functions of nonverbal communication. These include repeating, complementing, substituting, regulating and contradicting. Nonverbal communication is influenced by a number of factors like cultural background, socio-economic background, education, gender, age, personal preferences and idiosyncrasies (Beamen & Varner, 2001).

Classes of Nonverbal Communication: Nonverbal communication is divided into the following classes: chronemics, proxemics, kinesics, gestures, haptics, oculosics and paralanguage.

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In this section we shall subdivide the work under these seven classes of nonverbal communication.

Translation of Proxemics:

Proxemics is the study of how people use and perceive the physical space around them. The space between the sender and the receiver of a message influences the way the message is interpreted. According to Samovar, Porter, McDaniel (2007), proxemics is concerned with such things as your personal space, seating and furniture arrangement. All these have an influence on intercultural communication. There are instances of these non-verbal events in *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, as we see in the following examples:

Pierrot était resté debout devant la table, gêné, Béatrice s'approcha de lui si près que sa poitrine frôla celle du jeune homme: - il fallait s'y attendre, dit-elle. Restez dîner avec nous, ... Nous ferons mieux connaissance (p. 263).

Pierrot was still standing beside the coffee table, embarrassed and not knowing quite what to do. Beatrice came over to him, standing so close that her breasts brushed against him... Stay and have dinner with us... We can get better acquainted (p. 169).

The scene of this nonverbal communicative event is Monsieur Isnard's residence in the European employees' district. Madame Beatrice Isnard had invited her husband's colleagues to dinner and also Pierre, a young employee who had just arrived from France. The moment Beatrice set eyes on him, she decided to woo him. When he expressed his desire to get to know a typical African family, Beatrice discouraged him vehemently. As Sembène puts it in the story:

Je ne vous le conseille pas! dit Béatrice, et son ton indiquant clairement qu'elle avait l'intention d'organiser elle-même la vie du nouveau venu (p. 257).

Well I don't advise you to do it. The tone of Beatrice's voice indicated clearly her intention of organizing the newcomer's life in her own fashion (pg 165).

Sembène Ousmane had already told us earlier in the story how Beatrice was waging war against old age. Her husband Isnard, like her, was old and she already had plans to become what we call in Nigeria "sugar-mummy" to young Pierre. Inviting Pierre to dinner was a ruse to begin to send messages (amorous messages) to him. Throughout the dinner she had been waiting for an opportunity to pass her message across. Fortunately for her Leblanc, the white drunkard, misbehaved. He was physically moved outside by the men present, leaving Beatrice and the young Pierrot alone in the sitting room. Not wasting an instant, Beatrice launched her subtle attack. This is the scene enacted in the French version by Sembène, the author. However, there is a shift of emphasis in Price's translation. The English translation is ambiguous. The demonstrative pronoun "*celle*" is not translated. Price says: "...her breasts brushed against *him*."

As we said earlier in our definition of proxemics the space between the sender and the receiver of a message influences the way the message is interpreted. Sembène said:

...sapoitrinefrôlacelle du jeune homme.

There is no ambiguity in this statement. It is clear that Beatrice stood face to face with Pierrot, thereby forcing him to look into her eyes as she talked. That was why her breasts brushed against his own breasts (or chest) as indicated by the pronoun "*celle*". The English translation does not indicate Beatrice's position clearly vis-à-vis the young man. "Him" could refer to his shirt, his arm, his shoulder, his back. It could mean that she approached him from behind yet the French version leaves no room for these suppositions. Besides, as she rubbed her breasts against his chest she said: "*Nous ferons mieux connaissance*" (*We can get better acquainted*). This shift of emphasis from Beatrice's desperate and brazen attempt to get a young lover to that of an old, motherly woman trying to make a young guest feel at home kills the message of the author. To the untrained eye the omission of this simple word "*celle*" might seem a slight discrepancy but it is not. According to Ojo-Ade (1989) a shift of emphasis usually results in change in meaning. This is the case here.

It is obvious that Beatrice succeeded in getting "better acquainted" with Pierrot as we see in the information below:

Pierre était venu de France avec une lettre de recommandation, et son contact avec les vétérans de la compagnie et le soutien de Mme Isnard facilitèrent son accession à la haute hiérarchie administrative qui ne tarda pas (p. 274).

This vital information about the influence of Mme Isnard in young Pierre's career, as contained in the above quotation, has been omitted in the English translation. This omission is very suggestive and suspicious. Pierre's rapid promotion was a contributory factor to the strike by the African employees who had been pushed aside. We are inclined to believe that the translator is anxious to salvage the rotten image of the white people in the novel. This is why he is unfaithful in his transmission of the message of the source text. Kolawole & Salawu (2008) assert that a translator may not be able to successfully translate a text if he does not set aside his own emotions. The emotion our translator cannot set aside here is sympathy, which translates into infidelity in his translation. The high ranks of the Dakar-Niger Company were characterized by corruption, injustice, nepotism, and favouritism. Sembène's message is that Pierre, the newcomer, was holding a post meant for some of the black employees who had been working in the company and understood the job long before Pierre's arrival from France. And this is the message which Francis Price, according to Ojo-Ade (1989), has "murdered".

The Translation of Chronemics

Chronemics is the study of how people use time in communication. It includes punctuality, lateness and willingness to wait. Being punctual to appointments indicates self- discipline and also that the individual considers the appointment important. Willingness or unwillingness to wait for someone when the need arises carries a speechless message as shown in the following example

Voudriez-vous avoir l'amabilité de nous attendre dehors, monsieur, nous avons encore quelques choses à nous dire. Le front rougi par la colère, l'inspecteur empoigna sa serviette et suivit le vieux Bakary...(p. 272).

Would you be so kind as to wait for us outside, monsieur. We still have a few things to discuss among ourselves. His forehead red with anger, the personnel director seized his briefcase and followed Bakary...

And shortly after this exchange we have the following:

Comme les délégués se levaient autour de la petite table, Bakary réapparut: - fils, le toubabou que tu m'avais dit de raccompagner est parti.(p. 273).

As they got up from their places around the table, Bakary reappeared. 'My son', the toubab you told me to accompany has left the building. (p. 176).

This nonverbal communication event took place during one of the meetings between the management and the strikers. The "monsieur" here is Edouard, the personnel director who has been sent from Dakar as mediator. When the negotiations ended in a deadlock, Bakayoko asked Edouard to excuse them briefly to enable them discuss among themselves in their native language wolof. Instead of Edouard to show courtesy and wait he left in anger. Without using words, Edouard told the men they were not important enough for him to waste his time waiting for them to finish their private discussion. In his translation, the translator has been faithful in translating the nonverbal message carried by Edouard's unwillingness to wait.

The Translation of Haptics

Haptics, which is the study of touch as a means of nonverbal communication, includes handshakes, back slapping, brushing an arm, embracing etc.

L'escalier était encombré de grévistes qui en obstruaient les marches jusqu' à la porte. Bakayoko se fraya un passage tout en serrant des mains. Sur la dernière marche, il s'arrêta devant la porte. Boubacar, le gros forgeron qui montait la garde, le prit par les épaules et l'embrassa (p. 267).

The staircase was crowded with strikers, obstructing the steps to the door, and Bakayoko's passage was interrupted again by the numbers of men who wanted to shake his hand. Finally, however, he reached the top and Boubacar, who was standing guard, seized him by the shoulders in a giant's embrace (pg. 172).

The scene here is the unexpected arrival of the long awaited Bakayoko, the leader of the strike at the union building where a meeting was already in progress. The delegates were already inside with Edouard, the personnel director. The other strikers waited outside. The citation above shows clearly that Bakayoko actually *shook hands*, willingly, with his colleagues. The translated version is not so clear on this point. It says: *...men who wanted to shake his hand*.

The above phrase leaves room for conjectures: perhaps, Bakayoko did not wait to shake hands with the men, perhaps he brushed them aside, perhaps he gestured to them that he was already late and therefore was in a hurry. These suppositions are as a result of a faulty translation. We propose three different translations as follows:

- i. Bakayoko fought his way through, all the while shaking hands with his colleagues.
- ii. Bakayoko fought his way through as he shook several hands extended to him.
- iii. Bakayoko fought his way through shaking hands on all sides as he moved along.

The shaking of hands among peers, colleagues, friends, etc, indicates acceptance, solidarity, friendliness and happiness. The arrival of Bakayoko was a timely relieve. He was their leader and the symbol of the true, bold, uncompromising, selfless African fighting for the good of his people. No matter how late he was, it would be unpardonable and a tactical error not to return the handshakes. That was why he took time to shake as many hands as he could. Failure to translate this incident properly does injustice to the message.

The Translation of Kinesics

Kinesics is the study of communication through posture, stance and movement. The way one stands, sits, moves, can communicate that one is relaxed, afraid, nervous, provoked, etc.

-Nous emploierons le français, dit-il en regardant Bakayoko...

-Ce fut Lahbib qui répondit :

-Il n'y a pas de langue intermédiaire, alors va pour le français.

Mais Edouard insista:

-Vous êtes d'accord, Monsieur Bakayoko?

Ce dernier avait pris la position nonchalante qui lui était habituelle, le dos bien appuyé sur le dossier de sa chaise, tout le corps légèrement déplacé sur un côté (p. 277).

"We will use French for this meeting", he said, looking at Bakayoko... It was Lahbib who answered. "Since there is no intermediary language, we will use French".

But Edouard insisted. "Do you agree, monsieur Bakayoko?" Bakayoko was sitting in the relaxed position which seemed to be his habit, leaning slightly to one side and far back in his chair.

The delegates have arrived at Dejean's office and the negotiations are about to begin. Edouard had already informed the other white men that in the earlier meeting at the union building, Bakayoko did not want French to be used in the deliberations. That was why he announced in this second meeting where his associates were present that they were going to use French. He goaded Bakayoko by asking him outright if he agreed. With Edouard's departure at the other meeting the white men obviously thought that the delegates would arrive quivering, and with unsure movements, afraid of reprisals for annoying the representative of the management. Instead, on arrival, the delegates took their seats without being invited and here was their leader, Bakayoko, in his usual relaxed and comfortable mood, despite the tension and enmity that filled the air. However, we notice something faulty in the English translation. The French version says: "...la position nonchalante qui lui *était* habituelle". That is to say that Bakayoko was not feigning nonchalance. He was not putting on airs to impress or even provoke the white men. He was just being himself. The English translation says: "...in the relaxed position which *seemed* to be his habit". The verb "*était*" used in the French version does not mean "seemed" in English. The correct translation should be: "...which *was* his habit".

The use of the wrong verb "seemed" results in a change in emphasis. The verb "*était*" clearly indicates that Bakayoko was a man of great self-control. The stifling atmosphere, the hostility exuding from the white men were of no consequence to him. That was why he sat as he always "*sat*", "relaxed, leaning to one side in his chair". "*Seemed*" here makes the reader wonder if Bakayoko was pretending to be calm. Perhaps he was jittery inside. This conjecture and ambiguity are however not present in the original text in French.

The Translation of Oculistics

Oculistics is the branch of nonverbal communication that deals with the use of eye contact in communication.

- Qu'est-ce que vous dites ? Je ne comprends plus.

- Si nous contents, nous parler français et toi comprendre, mais si nous pas contents, toi pas comprendre, dit Balla en rassemblant son meilleur français, et tout heureux de sa réplique il promena son regard autour de la table. Un léger sourire s'ébaucha sur les lèvres de Bakayoko... (p. 279).

-What are you saying? I can't understand you.

-If we are content we speak French and you understand. If we are not content, you can't understand; Balla said, summoning up his best French. Pleased with his answer, he looked around the table at his comrades, seeking their approval. Bakayoko's heavy lips sketched a smile (pg. 181).

This is the conference room in Dejean's office and negotiations are still on. Tempers are flying because a compromise has not been reached. Even Balla, the welder, is moved to talk. Bakayoko and Dejean are almost exchanging blows. Bakayoko's comrades, including Balla, have advised Bakayoko not to answer Dejean again so that the meeting would not be cancelled. Balla is illiterate and therefore talks to his comrades in Wolof. Pierre could not understand and asked, unwittingly, what they were saying in Wolof. And Balla comes up with the atrocious French cited above as a reply to Pierre.

Three things make Balla look around the table after his reply. First, he had spoken French, the white man's language, albeit incorrectly. Secondly, he had talked back at a white man in the white man's territory. Thirdly, he had said something at the negotiating table, contributed his quota in their demands for better conditions of service. Many of the delegates never opened their mouths. They felt awed by their unusual proximity to the white men. Balla, unlike them, now had something to boast about later. The look he cast around the table communicated these three messages. He was happy with and proud of himself. This was why Bakayoko smiled, in spite of the tension in the air. He got all the three messages.

The translator, obviously, failed to get these messages, that is why he added "...seeking their approval". The phrase "seeking their approval" changes the meaning here. It means that perhaps Balla felt he had spoken out of turn and was therefore afraid of a reprimand from his comrades. It means he was unhappy with himself. This is the stark opposite of what is in the source text. So this oculesics event has not been adequately translated.

Translation of Paralanguage

Paralanguage is the study of the use of nonverbal cues of the voice in communication. Most classifications divide paralanguage into three kinds of vocalizations as follows: (a) vocal qualifiers (volume, pitch, rhythm, tempo, resonance; (b) vocal characteristics (laughing, crying, yelling, moaning, belching, whining, yawning; (c) vocal segregates ("uh-huh", "shh", "uh", "oooh", "mmmh", "hmmm").

Lahbib ne put achever le petit discours qu'il préparait depuis si longtemps, Dejean s'était dressé et hurlait:

- Je connais ces mensonges, vous êtes menés par des bolchéviques et vous insultez une nation, une race qui vaut cent fois la vôtre (p. 280 - 281).

Lahbib never finished the little speech he has been preparing for so long. Dejean had stood up and was shouting at him. "I know that pack of lies. I've heard it all before! You are led by a bunch of Bolsheviks, and you are sitting there insulting a great nation and a great people! (pg. 182).

The scene is still the meeting place in Dejean's office. Dejean is no longer capable of controlling his temper. Bakayoko's caustic tongue does not help matters. He gives vent to his emotions as indicated by the volume, pitch and tone of his voice. The anger and frustration communicated through his voice have been satisfactorily translated. The translator has, nevertheless, omitted the insult hurled by Dejean at the whole Black race at the end of his speech: "*une race qui vaut cent fois la vôtre!*". This phrase "*a race that is one hundred times greater than yours*" has not been translated by Price.

The Translation of Gestures

Gesture is an action which is done to show one's feelings. It includes winking, nodding, rolling the eyes, head movements, raising the shoulders, hand movements, etc.

C'est à ce moment que le vieux gardien apparut. Etonnées, les trois femmes le fixèrent. Elles avaient complètement éliminé Sounkare de leurs préoccupations, elles avaient même oublié son existence. A sa vue, elles rectifièrent l'arrangement de leurs pagnes.

- Cette assemblée est-elle en paix? Demandal'homme (p. 209).

It was at this moment that the old watchman appeared. The three women stared at him in amazement. They had completely eliminated Sounkare from their thoughts; they had even forgotten his existence and at the sight of him now hastily rearranged their clothing. "Is this group at peace?", the old man asked (pg 131).

The scene here is the new abode of Dieynaba the widow. Before the strike Dieynaba used to sell food and had a home. However, on the first day of the strike, police destroyed many shops and stalls during the riot and the widow is now sheltering in a freight car as home, she and her household. In this scene, Dieynaba and two other women, surrounded by children are talking. Then old Sounkare, the watchman at the railway office workshop, appears.

African women usually wear wrappers and when they are busy in the kitchen or caring for children, the wrappers sometimes go askew. This is usually ignored by the women since men do not usually stay in the kitchen. The backyard is the domain of women and children in African culture. However, the moment a man appears all the women present rush to adjust their wrappers. The unexpected arrival of Sounkare takes the women unaware. They are embarrassed and startled. This is communicated in the way they rush to arrange their clothes. This nonverbal communication has been properly translated into the target

language. Traditional values are no longer respected in Africa, as observed by Somana (2017), as a result of the introduction of alien values from the Western world and Asia. Therefore, the old African values contained in African novels must be judiciously translated to show posterity that Africa was not always the way it is now. Nevertheless, there is a cultural problem here in the area of clothing. The source language uses *pagne* to indicate the clothes worn by the women. The translator translates *pagne* as *clothing* which is too general. Clothing is a collective noun whereas *pagne* is a specific item of clothing. Catford (1965:21) asserts that the central problem of translation practice is that of finding the target language equivalents. Brassnet (1996:76) suggests that the translator should not work with general precepts when determining what to preserve from the source language but rather work on each structure since each structure will lay emphasis on certain linguistic features. Translation consists of reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message (Nida & Taber, 1974:12). The closest natural equivalent of “*pagne*” in English, in the context given, is “wrapper”.

Recommendations

Having come this far in this evaluative exercise, we have the following recommendations to make:

- Translators should not allow their personal feelings influence their translations.
- Translators should have a firm grip of the culture of the origin of the text they want to translate, especially if such texts come from a culture that is different from that of the translator
- In order to avoid ambiguity, translators should avoid using a general to translate a given term when there are more specific options that can be used to translate the same term.

Conclusion

We have tried to evaluate how faithfully nonverbal messages have been translated into the target text. As we have seen, in many instances the translations have been adequately done. In translation, there is nothing more satisfying than finding the word that truly expresses the meaning in the source text. Evaluation constitutes an important aspect of literary translation. It is for this reason that his utterance must be a faithful representation of the original.

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