

## Linguistic Challenges in Translating Song of Lawino From English To Kiswahili

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### ABSTRACT

Poetry texts are amongst many texts that are said to be difficult to translate. Literary works are the most challenging to translate. This is because each poet has a different way of using words or figures of speech. It is difficult to conform to these specific words, thoughts or emotions of the poet. Moreover, each language has its own syntactic structure, sounds, metaphorical expressions and poetic structure different from another. There are words that have no literal translation to another language. This is the reason as to why many people feel that poetry texts are the most difficult to translate. It is due to this that this paper aimed at looking at the deviations in poems. This paper analysed linguistic challenges in translating poetry. The objective of this paper was to find out the reasons behind the linguistic challenges when translating poetry in the above named book from the source text in English (Song of Lawino) to the target text in Kiswahili (Wimbo wa Lawino). The theory used was the theory of stylistics by leech (1969). This article looked at the extent at which deviations affect translation.

### INTRODUCTION

What is poetry? There is no one definitive answer to it. Wordsworth defined poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,” Emily Dickinson said, “If I read a book and it makes my body so cold no fire can warm me, I know that is poetry,” and Dylan Thomas defined poetry this way: “poetry is what makes me laugh or cry or yawn, what makes my toe nails twinkle, what makes me want to do this or that or nothing.” (Kandoro, 1983). Poets carefully select their words by looking at their emotive quality and its musical value and spacing. In general poetry is the artistic use of words to evoke emotion to a listener or a reader. Language in poetry tends to draw the reader’s attention to the uses of language in a poem that contributes to the creation of meaning. Poetry uses language in many different ways. These language techniques and devices are used to emphasize themes, ideas or images. Poetry is a special language, a special way of saying, both physical and metaphysical in its register; its content, frame of reference and applications. It is musical and possesses a lasting resonance.

Given the importance of a text’s formal aspects, poetry presents special challenges to translators in addition to its content. According to Frost (1969),

the main characteristic of poetic discourse that distinguishes it from common discourse is that form

and content cannot be separated in poetry. Content is highly language bound and this is what makes translation of poetry more difficult than other types of translations. Newmark (1988) believes “the translation of poetry is the field where most emphasis is normally put on the creation of a new independent poem, and where literal translation is condemned.” (p.70). Venuti (2004) says that most of the time form is usually sacrificed for the sake of content. A translator ensures that he doesn’t lose the original meaning in the target language though the original poetical touches of colour cannot be transposed and they must be arranged and the new arrangement may be more luminous than the original one. According to Nida (1964) the most important element in translation is not only the understanding the intended message but also to evoke similar feelings or emotions just as the poet in the source text intended.

Thus a good translation discovers the “dynamics” if not necessarily its “mechanics” (Kopp, 1998). The point to be noted as Newmark (1988) states, literary translation is ‘... the most testing type of translation...’ There are many English poems that have been translated and thus new versions of

poems have been created. A good example is a pice poetry by Sadi's "Oneness of Mankind"

According to Kadkani (2001), good poetry is one which would sediment totally or partially in the memory of serious readers of poetry..." (page 23). Leech (1969) applied the concept of foregrounding to poetry. He considers the foregrounded figure as "linguistic deviation", while the background is the language itself (p. 57). In his opinion it is a very general principle of artistic communication that " a work of art in some way deviates from norms which we as members of society have learnt to expect in the medium used " (1969, p. 56 ). He argues that the artistic deviation 'sticks out' from its background, the automatic system, like a figure in the foreground of a visual field. In poetry "the foregrounded figure is the linguistic deviation, and the background is the language- the system taken for granted in any talk of deviation." (p. 57).

According to Leech (1969), linguistic deviations are the ones that make poetry. He argues that the poet manipulates the linguistic deviation and hence a means for poetic creation. According to him, a linguistic deviation is artistically significant when it communicates something, it communicates what was intended by the author and is judged or felt by the reader to be significant (p. 59). He came up with eight different types of linguistic deviations: lexical deviation, grammatical deviation, phonological deviation, graphological deviation, semantical deviation, dialectal deviation, deviation of register and deviation of historical period. Lexical deviations occurs when a poet invents new words therefore expounding and developing the language. Grammatical deviation involves a poet disregarding the rules of sentence or syntactic features. Phonological deviation is a deviation in sound or pronunciation which is done deliberately in regard to preserving the rhyme. Graphological deviation is a type of deviation that is related to the poet's disregard of the rules of writing. It is a line to line arrangement of the poem on the page with irregular margins. Semantic deviation is related to the irrational element of meaning in poetry. Here the literal meaning gets absurd.

Dialectical deviation involves the poet borrowing features of socially or regionally defined dialects. This includes words or structures which are from a dialect different from that of a standard language. In deviation of historical period the poet uses archaic words or structures which are no longer used in the standard language. Here are examples of these

deviations from English to Kiswahili extracted from the poem Song of agony /Wimbo wa Uchungu from the book: When the Bullets Begin to Flower/ Risazi zianzapu Kuchanuka)

<b>English</b>	<b>Kiswahili</b>
I put on a clean shirt	Shati langu navaa safi
And go to work my contract	Nenda kibaruaani Nani kati yetu
Which of us	ishirini na minne miezi
Which of us will come back	Bila mwanamke
Four and twenty moons	Bila ng'ombe wangu - nchi yangu
Not seeing women	Nani kati yetu
Not seeing my ox	Nani kati yetu atakufa
Not seeing my land	Nani kati yetu atarudi?
Which of us	
Which of us will die?	

In this poem there are three types of linguistic deviations: graphological deviation, semantic and grammatical deviation. Graphological deviation occurred when some stanzas have different structures from the others in terms of spacing left at the beginning of some lines. Semantic deviation occurred in the line, 'four and twenty moons.' Also, the Kiswahili translation had semantic deviation, 'ishirini na minne miezi'. Grammatical deviation occurred when there was repetition in the third stanza where three lines were repeated 'Not seeing...' Here the Kiswahili translation has not adhered completely to the same structure of the English version because the poet wanted to simplify the poem in order to communicate to the target audience. Instead of having three lines in the translation there were two. The second word 'seeing' wasn't translated in the Kiswahili version. To some extent the intended message was affected the emphasis that was in the original poem was to some extent reduced. The structure of the original poem was also affected.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research adopted what was proposed by Leech (1969) that what makes poetry is the linguistic deviation. But deviations are subject to some restrictions. Not all of them are subject to creating poetry. The materials for research include the English

poem: Song of Lawino by Okot P'Bitek (1972) and its translation : Wimbo wa Lawino by Paul Sozigwa (1975).

This study looked at the linguistic deviations from English to Kiswahili. The research questions include:

1. Which types of linguistic challenges occur in the poem of Song of Lawino?
2. To what extent has the Kiswahili translation been successful in conveying the linguistic deviations of the poem?

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Four different poems have been studied with the aim of showing the different types of linguistic deviation used and the effect in the Kiswahili translation. In the poem: *My husband's tongue is bitter/ Ulimi wa mume wangu ni mkali*:

<i>English</i>	<i>Kiswahili</i>
Husband, now you despise me	Mume wangu
Now you treat me with spite	Sasa unanidharau.
And say I have inherited the Stupidity of my aunt; Son of the Chief,	Sasa unanipuza kabisa Ukisema nimerithi upumbavu Wa shangazi yangu.
Now you compare me With the rubbish in the rubbish Pit.	Ewe mwana wa chifu, Sasa unanilinganisha na Takataka za jaani.
You say you no longer want me Because I am like the things left Behind	Unasema huna haja nami tena Kwa sababu nafanana na ghasia Zilizoachwa mahameni.
In the deserted homestead.	Unanitukana; unanicheka
You insult me	Unasema sijui hata kusoma ali
You laugh at me	Kwa sababu sikuwahi kwenda s
You say I do not know the letter A	Wala sikubatzwa!
Because I have not been to school	
And I have not been baptised	

In this poem, there are linguistic deviations such as graphological and grammatical deviation. Graphological deviation is evident in the lines which are not similar to others whereby the poet left some spaces in front of those lines hence the margins were irregular. For instance in the fourth, seventh and tenth line of the English poem graphological deviation is evident. However in the Kiswahili version all the lines have regular margins therefore the poem lost the graphological deviation. The graphological deviation in the original poem was important for the poet wanted to emphasize the important messages. Though the message was retained, emphasis was lost in the Kiswahili translation. The aesthetic value of leaving those spaces was also lost. Therefore in the translation the original structure of the poem was not maintained. Syntactical deviation occurred when there was repetition of the word 'You' in the three lines of the English poem:

<i>English</i>	<i>Kiswahili</i>
You insult me	Unanitukana; unanicheka
You laugh at me	Unasema sijui hata kusoma alifu
You say I do not know the letter	

However, in the Kiswahili version, the same structure was followed for the poet wanted to simplify communication; instead of repeating 'you' in three lines it was done in two lines. Here the emphasis, the aesthetic value and the original structure of the poem was lost. There was also the semantical deviation in the 15th line:

<i>English</i>	<i>Kiswahili</i>
You say I do not know the letter hata kusoma	Unajua sijui

A

The Kiswahili version tried to remove the absurdity of the literal meaning by using the verb 'kusoma' which means to read. Here the semantical deviation was lost. Phonological deviation occurred when there was repetition of sounds: /y/, /o/, /u/, /m/ and /e/ in

the English poem. These sounds weren't repeated in the Kiswahili version because different languages have different structures. Here the rhyme and the emphasis was affected. Therefore the reader in the target text did not put much emphasis as compared to the reader in the original text.

In the poem: I am ignorant of the good word in the clean book /Silijui neno jema lililomo katika kitabu kitakatifu :

<i>English</i>	<i>Kiswahili</i>
Maria the Clean Woman	Maria mtakatifu
Mother of the *Hunchback	Mama wa Mungu
Pray for us who spoil things	tuombee
Full of graciya	Sisi wakosefu
	Uliyejaa neema

There are some linguistic deviations. Grammatical deviation occurred in the first line of the English poem whereby the words 'Clean' and 'Woman' have started with capital letters yet they are not proper nouns. Here the poet was referring to the mother of Jesus in the prayer 'Hail Mary' recited by catholic faithfuls. In the Kiswahili translation the grammatical deviation was lost. The poet wanted the target readers to understand the term 'Clean' to mean 'holy' by using the word 'mtakatifu' Semantical and dialectical deviation occurred in the second line, 'Mother of the \*Hunchback.' This poem was originally written in the Acholi / Lwo language later translated into English. The poet used footnotes to explain the meaning of "Hunchback": The name of the christian God in Lwo is Rubanga . This is also the name of the ghost that causes tuberculosis of the spine, hence Hunchback. However, in the English translation, the poet didn't use the term 'Hunchback' but the term 'God'. He wanted the target reader to easily get the message. In the English version the poet wanted to satirise christianity by referring to God as 'Hunchback.' In the Kiswahili version, satire was lost hence the aesthetic value of the poem was also lost.

In the third line, ' Pray for us who spoil things' there was semantic deviation whereby the literal meaning was absurd. In the Kiswahili version the semantic

deviation was lost as the poet wanted the target readers to understand the poem better by changing it into 'Pray for us f sinners'- 'Utuombee sisi wakosefu' in the third and fourth line. In the fourth line of the English translation 'Full of graciya' there was dialectical deviation whereby the poet used the term 'graciya' instead of the standard word 'grace'. He wanted to have that regional touch in his poem. On the other hand the dialectical deviation was lost in the Kiswahili version whereby the poet used the standard word 'grace'- 'neema.' Here the aesthetic value of the poem was lost.

In the poem: Bufalloes of poverty knock the people down / Mbogo wa umaskini huwangusha watu

<i>English</i>	<i>Kiswahili</i>
Ocol says	Ocol anasema wanakataa
They reject the famine relief	Msaada wa kutengenezea maghala
Granaries	Ya chakula cha njaa,
And the forced labour system.	Wanakataa mpango wa manamba.

There was historical deviation in the fourth line whereby the term 'forced labour system was popular in the colonial period. This system is no longer used as african countries got independence. In the Kiswahili translation the historical deviation was maintained 'mpango wa manamba'. Also in the third line of the Kiswahili poem there was semantic deviation 'Ya chakula cha njaa' to mean 'famine relief'. This deviation wasn't in the English version. Also there was grammatical deviation in the first and last line of the Kiswahili poem whereby the word 'wanakataa' to mean 'reject' was repeated. Here the poet wanted to emphasize the message and also to maintain the rhyme. This wasn't the . In normal circumstances the term 'manamba' is a slang to mean 'tout'. Here the Kiswahili poet tried to add the aesthetic value by the choice of words used.

In the poem: The mother stone has a hollow stomach / Jiwe- mama lina shimo tumboni:

<i>English</i>	<i>Kiswahili</i>
The electric fire kills people	Jiko la umeme huua watu,
They say	Wanasema umeme ni radi
It is lightning,	Wamesema wazungu wametega
They say	Na kumnasa *jogoo wa mvua
The white man has trapped	Kumfungia katika nyumba
And caught the Rain-cock*	Ya chuma kigumu .
And imprisoned it	
In a heavy steel house.	

Here there were semantical deviation, grammatical deviation and lexical deviation. Semantical deviation occurred in the title whereby the poet used imagery derived from the Acholi language. In the Kiswahili translation the deviation was still maintained. Semantical deviation and lexical deviation also occurred in the sixth line, 'And caught the Rain-cock'. Here the poet used foot notes to explain the meaning that in the Acholi culture it is believed that lightning and thunder are caused by a giant reddish- brown bird that is almost identical with the domestic fowl. When it opens its wings lightning flashes and thunder is caused when it strikes with its powerful bolt. In the Kiswahili translation footnotes were also used to interpret the meaning of 'Rain-cock.' Therefore, the semantic deviation was maintained.

Grammatical deviation occurred in the second, fourth, sixth and seventh lines of the English poem:

They say	Wanasema
They say	Wamesema...
And...	Na...
And...	—

However in the Kiswahili poem the repetition occurred in the second fourth and sixth lines. There was repetition in the seventh line therefore the grammatical deviation wasn't completely retained. The poet wanted to simplify the message in order to communicate to the target audience. Here the emphasis and rhythm of the poem was affected.

## CONCLUSION

This paper looked at the linguistic challenges that occurred translating the poem Song of Lawino from English to Kiswahili. The linguistic deviations that occurred in the four poems included: Grammatical, ssemantical, lexical, dialectical, historical and graphological deviations. It is evident that most of these deviations are very important in creating poems. These deviations are used deliberately in order for the poet to pass his message in a unique way to his audience. In translating the poems the poet to some extent was successful in using these deviations except for a few instances where grammatical deviation in terms of repetition wasn't fully translated. At some point the poet added some deviations which weren't in the original poem. Therefore these deviations are also important in translating poems. Also style was a very important issue in poetry. It is necessary for the poet to pay close attention to the stylistic features used by the poet of the original poem.

Some stylistic features translated didn't make sense in the translation and hence affected the quality of the translated poem. The use of footnotes played a major role in understanding some words and beliefs derived from the Acholi language. These deviations are an artistic way of creating aesthetics, rhyme, knowing the style of the poet or show the belonging of a poem to a special geographical place and emphasizing the message of the poet. In conclusion the poet was able to communicate to the target audience in as much as some elements of emphasis, aesthetics through style were lost in the translation.

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