

TRANSLATING WOLE SOYINKA'S WORKS: A MUST KNOW

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Introduction

It takes the translation of the literature of a minority language into the languages of majority speakers, such as the European languages, for that minority language to produce a Nobel Prize Winner. This was the situation concerning Wole Soyinka, Nigeria's William Shakespeare, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986. That prize, in short, marked the crowning moment for negro-African literature. Let's say that that crowning of Africa as a country to be reckoned with in literature on 16 October 1986 by the Swedish Academy is significant in many respects.

We are at last witnessing the recognition of the literature of a language of limited speakers, the African literature, by the literary nations of the West. It is important to also recognize the fact that Wole Soyinka, who in 1986, was the President of the UNESCO's International Theatre Institute, has won other literary prizes in literature for the dissemination of the culture and the vision of the African world.

This Nobel Prize facilitates a wide transmission of African arts through translations in foreign languages as these works have attracted the attention of the public worldwide. Thus, the works of Wole Soyinka epitomize great successes adorning various bookshops, both for English speakers and in other translations. Many theatre groups of the world need them. That is to say, that Soyinka's works are now performed all around the world in English and in other translations, in theatres in Europe, Asia, Russia, USA, South America, China, Japan, etc. The mass-media is not left out - the radio, the television, the cinema, are all involved in showing his works. Universities worldwide are undertaking studies on his works as well as several term papers, projects, dissertations and articles in specialized reviews. Soyinka is thus a living legend with his works attracting the attention of the whole world.

In this study, our intention pedagogically, is to propose an investigative, clarifying and interpretative method of Soyinka's writings, their nature and the sense they portray. For it goes without saying that a knowledge of the linguistic comportment of African and European personalities is essential for proper analysis of the oral elements of African literature.

This investigative method of the stylistics of Wole Soyinka's works brings to the fore the differences between local languages and the language of translation, and in this case, the European languages.

Wole Soyinka in Translation

Several of Wole Soyinka's works have been translated into foreign languages, such as French, German, Russian, Chinese, etc. But for the purpose of this write up, we would be concentrating on the following works: *The Lion and the Jewel*, published in 1963 by Oxford University Press, translated into French in 1968 by J. Chuto and Laburthe-Tobra with the title *Le lion et la perle*

and published by Cle, Yaounde, Cameroun; *A Dance of the Forest*, published in London in 1965 by Oxford University Press, and translated by Elizabeth Janvier in 1971 by P.J. Oswald under the title *La danse de laforet*; *The Swamp Dwellers*, published in London by Oxford University Press in 1965 and translated by Elizabeth Janvier X; in 1971 with the title *Les gens de marais*, published in Honfleur by P.J. Oswald; *The Strong Breed* was published in London by Oxford University Press in 1965 and translated by Elizabeth Janvier in 1971 with the title *Un sang fort*, published in Honfleur by P.J. Oswald in 1971. Same as *The Trials of Brother Jero*, published in London in 1965 by OUP. It was titled in French *Les tribulations du frere Jero*, and published in Honfleur in 1971 and translated by Elizabeth Janvier. *The Interpreters* published in 1965 in Ibadan by Heinemann and translated by G. Laudre in 1979 but published in Paris by Présence Africaine, titled *Les intèrpretes*.

The Language and Style of Wole Soyinka

We have titled this portion of our study: “The Language and Style of Wole Soyinka” because it contains certain specialized words and terminologies whose different applications constitute some constraints which must be overcome to fully understand the message of the author. It is thus a question of “proper application”. It is more of what to know in order to understand the works of Wole Soyinka before effecting the translation. For there are several codes and varieties of English in the works of Wole Soyinka.

There is the Standard English.
There is Americanism.

There is the Pidgin “Creole”
There is the German English.

There are some terms copied from the Bible, from official languages of some known personalities, to give a better understanding to the writings of Wole Soyinka. It is the need for lucidity, the desire for exactness and the nuances encountered in the interpretation of Soyinka's writings and the need to uncover the various facets of his works that led us to want to explore the diverse levels of language usage in his works. The multiplicity of images embodied in Soyinka's works easily justify their usages.

Making a write up or a novel, means assisting others (the reader) to understand our thoughts. It means showing him the way. So, for us, the concept of the abstract and general arts exercise the function of clarification and proper interpretation. This study provides an investigative, clarifying and interpretative method of Soyinka's writings, their nature and the sense they portray. For it goes without saying that a knowledge of the linguistic comportment of African and European personalities is essential for proper analysis of the oral elements of African literature.

This investigative method of the stylistics of Wole Soyinka's works brings to the fore the differences between local languages and the language of translation, and in this case, the European languages: Americanism, Standard English, English, German and Creole.

The main interest of this method is the following — it enables the transmission to the reader, of the French versions of Soyinka's works; familiarization with the archaic language of the Yoruba of past centuries.

This method clarifies the different values of a word and the interplay of the diversity of meanings that it portrays. Hence the need to acknowledge the diverse language registers of Wole Soyinka and the appreciation of their usages.

In a word, one has to be somewhat a polyglot in one's language. Which goes to restate that this approach would involve an analysis of Soyinka's writings in relation to the society. And this entails the study of the diverse forms of speeches: stories, riddles, maxims, legends, talking drum language, symbols, images, metaphors, Creole, pidgin, names, festivals, religious ceremonies, etc. which represent the true negro-African thought; while taking into consideration the problems of translation.

Linguistic and Cultural Traits in Wole Soyinka's Works.

Tens of studies, dissertations, theses, have been made on the works of Wole Soyinka. We do not intend to take an inventory of these studies neither do we intend to make a synthesis nor a critical analysis of the same.

Abiola Irele, Elizabeth Isichei, O.R. Dathorne, Eldred D. Jones, Frances Katamba, Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike, Roderiot Wilson, Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, M.J. Salt, Stanley Macebuh, Niyi Osundare, Femi Osunfison, Dan Izevbaye, Margaret Laurence, Laurence Lerner, have all written on the man and his works.

Majority of these writers have raised the issue of the complexity of the images system and the various levels of language of Wole Soyinka. Wole Soyinka is noted for the abundant use of neologisms derived from Latin and Greek languages.

Tanure Ojaide, in his *The Poetry of Wole Soyinka* wrote:

“The poet uses elevated language to match the comprehensiveness of the theme and reference and the heroic stature of *Ogun*. His vocabulary derives from science and ancient Western languages among other sources (...) The use of scientific words is appropriate in *Idanre*, since “Sango” and “Ogun” are themselves ‘Scientists’ (Prometheus) who are relevant to the modern technological age. There is the assimilation of Sango, the traditional god of lightning, to modern technology as god of electricity (...) The other kind of words is the intellectual and foreign-derived. Words derived from Latin, Greek, Italian and French (...) The mainly Latinate and Greek-derived words are ancient, and fit the mythic subject of ‘Idanre’, a poem in which Soyinka blends the traditional with the modern”

It is the Latinized or Greco-Latin vocabulary which epitomizes the richness and the strength of Wole Soyinka's works and stands in his defense. For these elements of Latinity must need to be

translated by the non-initiated into the compliment of images and metaphors which adorn the author's writings. The various references to Greek and negro-African myths, are enough obstacles to be surmounted by a lazy and idle translator in order to grasp an immediate understanding of Soyinka's works. These are the walls which guard the strongholds and the poisonous thorns and striking snakes that prevent penetration into this virgin forest.

Wole Soyinka, son of a teacher, has imbibed a phenomenally great dose of the Greek, Latin, Yoruba and English cultures since his childhood.

It would take a polyglot translator to discern Soyinka's writings first before launching into more exhaustive interpretation. Nelson O. Fashina alluded to this complexity in Soyinka's language in his article "Deification or assassination of Language: The Linguistic Alienation in Wole Soyinka's *The Road*, published in *Obitun*, Vol. 1, No. 1, October 1995, p.54:

The sheer linguistic complexity for which Chinweizu, Jones, Ogundare, Izevbaye and Margaret Laurence have often accused Soyinka of obscurantism, has made him a linguistic expatriate from both his society and the entire intellectual world".³

Soyinka is an inventor, who invents word-images very difficult to decode. According to the words of N.O. Fashina "Perhaps a basic linguistic problem of interpreting, understanding and comprehending Soyinka's plays lies in his chaotic confusion of images, symbols, stage iconographies, etc."⁴ In one word, there is a linguistic, mental, spiritual alienation in Soyinka's works. It is believed that he enjoys the myth surrounding the personality of Nnamdi Azikiwe in the 30s and 40s, that of an inventor of English words. Wole Soyinka who knows that Yoruba myths are unknown to the non-initiated, has to consult footnotes in order to explain the images, metaphors, the precisions and other supplementary information.

It must be added that not every Yoruba-speaking person will detect these allusions, but only the person in the myth, who could also be an outsider. The allusions give a traditional African character to the voice and viewpoint of the poet."

Among the university scholars who had undertaken studies on the diverse levels of the language of Wole Soyinka, is Professor Oluwale Adejare of the Lagos State University, Ojo, who has given a deeper and more researched interpretation of the language use of Wole Soyinka. He did this in his work entitled *Language and Style in Soyinka*, published in Lagos by Heinemann in 1992. In that work, Professor Adejare did a systematic study through a linguistic text analysis of the literary idiolects in the works of Wole Soyinka. It emphasizes that it is a literary myth surrounding the personality of Wole Soyinka: that of a writer whose works are difficult to comprehend, even to decode.

We would like to cite, among others, the critique made to his works by the following literary personalities: Chinweizu refers to Soyinka's syntax as Shakespearian, that is 'archaic'. Palmer, on his part, is uncomfortable with the language *The interpreters*. For Gerald Moore, he avers that many readers abandon Soyinka's works just after reading the very first pages. It is to be noted

that semiotic differences influence the interpretation of a text which is rooted in a given area. For example, coming across the following text in standard English: "Ojuowo shaved his head", it could be interpreted to mean "Ojuowo is a rebel." But for a Nigerian reader who is averse with the national cultural heritage, it could be interpreted that Ojuowo had lost a close relative. This is the semiotic signification of the Nigerian cultural phenomena of shaving the head.

Let's look at another example. The sign of the Cross signifies salvation among the Christians but for the Yorubas, it signifies 'damnation'. Wole Soyinka's bilingualism presupposes biculturalism. This then means that whoever wishes to translate Soyinka's works must take into account these linguistic and cultural accompaniments.

Wole Soyinka is himself multilingual, or even a polyglot. He understands French, Swahili, Yoruba and English. But the language used in *The Trials of Brother Jero* is, for instance, simpler than that used in *Madmen and Specialists* and that used in *The Interpreters* is very difficult. "Its language is difficult, so difficult that it is gradually acquiring the status of a literary Curio."⁶

Names

We would begin this study by examining the names, as this throws fresh light on Wole Soyinka's works, and render them more comprehensible. Besides, this method is objective and verifiable, and the use of names in the context of Soyinka's writings, requires that the translator interprets the significance of such names. Thus, Soyinka's works became incomprehensible being mainly rooted in his Yoruba background. Yoruba names could represent an ideology, even a philosophy or mores, a testimony of an overwhelmingly stressed destiny. Among the Yorubas, the name of an individual sometimes has an influence on his destiny or his future. But for the Europeans, a name such as Artful Dodger reminds us of the deceitful attitude of this character in Charles Dickens play. In *The Interpreters*, there is Derinola, Kola, Bamidele, Dehinwa, Sekoni, and Lasunwon, which are proper nouns in Yoruba. In addition, there are nicknames such as: "The Morgue" (Sir Derinola), "Queen Bee" (Simi the prostitute), "Sheikh" (Sekoni), "Pontius Pilate" (Traffic Police Officer), "Barabbas" (Noah), and "Pinkshawl" (Pinkshove). All these nicknames have diverse Biblical meanings that one should not overlook when translating the text.

Songs, Fairy-tale Songs

There exist some symbolic expressions, sayings and even proverbs whose meanings have to be explained by the reader, even the foreign translator of Wole Soyinka's works. ,,

For example, in *Kongi 's Harvest*, the song "Ema (ko) gun yan oba kere" refers to the decline of "Your Majesty, the King" after *The Suns of Independence* in Africa when a new breed of negro-African leaders with dictatorial tendencies took over power and made life difficult for the former traditional rulers. In *The Road*, there is another song "Ona orun jin" which is a warning to the reckless drivers who are involved in dangerous driving and speeding.

2.3 Allusions to Sacred Texts

Allusions are made to sacred texts, events and unpopular ancient myths, unknown or little known today, which infer that there is a difference in mentality between our ancestors and the people of

today where there are traits of deformation in the works of Wole Soyinka. In *Death and the King's Horseman*, Wole Soyinka incorporated texts with ontological myths of Orunmila, the Yoruba god of wisdom, with all his sacred linguistic connotations which are incomprehensible to the non-initiated to the Yoruba divination heritage.

There are quasi-perpetual reminders of the appurtenance of the works of Soyinka to the magico-religious inclinations of the Yorubas by their references to the Yoruba god of war and accident. Soyinka makes allusion to this Manichean angle of the god in his writings. Thus, the creative, destructive, cold-blood-thirsty, killer-saviour of orphans divinity appears at its best in *The Interpreters*, *The Road*, *Season of Anomy*, *A Dance of the Forest* and even in his collection of poems *Idanre*. But it must be emphasized that the word “Ogun” with a double heavy accent, signifies the river that traverses the Abeokuta villa in Nigeria. Non-Yoruba speaking translators must pay particular attention to the usage of the accents by Yoruba linguists.

Usage of English Dialects in His Works

In *The Interpreters*, for example, there are three types of dialects in use. The dialogue between the British invitees during the evening get-together organized by Oguazor is a good example. Peter, the journalist, spoke Americanism with a German accent.

In *The Lion and the Jewel*, the teacher Lakunle spoke in standard English.

Lakunle: “On my head, let fall their scorn.”

Baroka: “Sadiku, Thou art the queen of them all.”

Sidi: “I will none of him.”

Sadiku: “Any woman, shall abide here.”

In the play *The Road*, there was the usage of American dialect.

“Hey, wair a minute waira minute.” Shurru, wharre hell you mean? I tell you I found their hide-out. We gorra pay them a surprise visit tonight whether you lak it or don't.”

Pidgin

Wole Soyinka uses a language belonging to a culture quite different from his. He is only interpreting Yoruba sentiments in English. But for the purpose of humour, he applies the Creole language known as Pidgin English. In *The Road*, *The Interpreters* and even in *Season of Anomy*, he uses the pidgin language to confound people.

In *The Road*

Salubi: First, I will marry ten wives.

Samson: Why ten?

Salubi: Because I no fit count pas ten.

In *The Trials of Brother Jero* also, Chuma, Amope's husband, played the role of a prophet when a woman was possessed and in a trance. He used Pidgin English:

Those who dey sweep street today give them their own big office tomorrow. I say those who dey waka today, given them their own bicycle tomorrow.⁷

Intercultural References: Interferences

This kind of interference is determined by the level of education of the speaker. Thus, a camera becomes “one-eyed box” in *The Lion and the Jewel*; a bicycle becomes “new horse”; a sheet of paper becomes “leave”, *ewe* in Yoruba, and lipstick “red paint”, *odapupa* in Yoruba.

Neologisms

Wole Soyinka often uses neologisms which are more or less strange. In *The Interpreters*, for example, we have the following examples: matterdom, in-lawfulness, violante, optimistology and in *Season of Anomy*, golden slice, intellectual quota.

Yoruba Linguistic Habits and Proverbs

For the African, writing in an European language poses enormous problems. He is expected to describe situations and thoughts which do not have corresponding interpretations in the European way of life. It becomes difficult therefore to try to express on paper one's proper ideas in an intelligible manner.

As a matter of fact, the real danger with translation is the issue of contradictory sense, false translation.

Wole Soyinka's plays offer numerous examples of automatic translation of the linguistic habits of the Yorubas. This is a literary approach used by Soyinka for esthetic purposes. But this is not captured properly by the non-Yoruba biased reader. Let's cite a few examples: The scene about a tribunal in *Kongi's Harvest*; the Ogun deity in *Idanre* and the Yoruba village in *The Lion and the Jewel* present neo-Yoruba scenarios which Soyinka needs to explain. Soyinka's understanding of

Yoruba and English helped him in his auto-translation. Bilingualism is one of the prerequisites in translation.

Let's look at another example in *Death and the King's Horseman*:

Praise singer: Elesin Oba, do you hear me?

Elesin: I hear your voice, Olohan iyo.

This dialogue depicts a transposition of the Yoruba linguistic norm as follows:

Praise singer: Elesin Oba, se o gbo mi?

Elesin: Mo gbo ohun Olohun i yo.

The verb *Gbo* in Yoruba means “to hear” and “to understand”. Unfortunately “hear” was not the intended word. For according to the Yoruba speech system, praise singer wanted to know if Elesin understood what he said. And Elesin responded in the affirmative. According to Professor Adejare, the most plausible order of speech in standard English would have been thus:

Praise singer: Elesin Oba, do you understand me?

Elesin: I understand you, Olohun Iyo.

This translation shows us that the two individuals had their dialogue in Yoruba and not in English language. The fact that Soyinka maintained the original name of Praise Singer, Olohun-iyo and not to translate it as "Voice of flavours" as he did in *The Forest of a Thousand Demons*, gives credence to this assertion.

Another example, this time from the *Trial of Brother Jew*, further confirms our hypothesis of auto-translation by Soyinka of his Yoruba characters.

“Don't ruin my trade with ill-luck of the morning (157).

is translated in Yoruba as “Ma ba oja mi pelu ori buruku laaro”.

In the world vision of the Yorubas, a buyer who debates prices of goods “early in the morning” is considered as a distributor of ill-luck. Everything must be done to avoid such a customer. So, the most appropriate translation in standard English would be: “Do not ruin my trade with ill-luck of the morning”.

When Soyinka translated the Yoruba word *Ofo*, that is a poetry of incantation in *Death and the King's Horseman* (43), he applied a variation. Thus we have:

The night is not so dark that the albino fails to find his way.

While in the original Yoruba version, we have: “Ookunn kukun ka mo mafin”.

Translation of Yoruba proverbs is part of the auto-translation approaches of Wole Soyinka. These proverbs present specific Yoruba registers which underline part of the people's conscience. But the transposition of these thoughts pose enormous problems for dramatists as this calls for sound reasoning, intelligence, sensibility and the imagination of the spectators.

In *The Lion and the Jewel*, Soyinka transposed:

“Obo nlagan, iran eyin re ni ko je kaye mo”

a proverb which the author translates as « The monkey sweats, it is only the hair upon its back that still deceives the world », but in standard English, it signifies : « It takes time for good deeds to be recognized ».

In *Death and the King's Horseman*, Wole Soyinka translated: "Emi ko nibe ebo mi koja Mosalasi" as "I will not bear the offering past the entrance of the mosque", a saying which advises moderation and wisdom in all that we do.

In *A Dance of the Forests*, Soyinka translated “Afa jona, a mbere irunagbon re” as “The Priest was burnt and you ask what became of his beard”, which signifies ‘an accomplished event’, describing a hopeless case where nothing could be done to remedy.

In the collection of poems “Death in the Dawn”, Soyinka applied a Yoruba translation “Ma rin ni jo ebi n'pa ona” “May you never walk when the road waits famished”. This is a metaphor used in wishing ‘safe journey’ to someone. “Let the god of the roads protect you”. Another example is: “The squirrel ran up the iroko tree”. And the hunter's chase was ended in “Idanre”. Originally this translates in Yoruba “Okere gori kiroko oju ode da” which means "the futility in waiting for a hunter”.

Soyinka and Ethnologies

Certainly, there are cultural ethnologies which inhibit the flow of thoughts of readers and spectators of Wole Soyinka's works. An example is the musicality of the Yoruba language which is falsely translated in the English language. Despite Soyinka's efforts in effecting a mix in language use, his works are strongly rooted in the Yoruba tradition. It is these traditional elements which constitute obstacles in understanding his works.

Proverbs, fairy-tale songs, songs, dances, festivals, sacrifices, meanings given by artists, supernatural beings - these are most of the obstacles encountered in Soyinka's works and which need explanation.

For example, Emman in *The Strong Breed* is the symbol of the Yoruba divinity for accident and war, Ogun. Emman is therefore considered an epic hero of Ogun.

The Strong Breed with its existentialistic message and its messianic sensibilities does not have any resemblance with *The Trials of Brother Jero*. In *The Swamp Dwellers*, toads, snails, rainfall and other noisy elements served as music for the play. All these are unknown to the readers and the spectators. Martin Banhan, in his Preface to *African Theatre Today*, published in London by Pitman in 1976 wrote:

“In Soyinka's case, as reviews of presentation of his plays in London will show, critics have found his work inaccessible. Their general line of the criticism has been: it sounds fine, but what does it mean? Even to his own audience, some of Soyinka's plays are found to be obscure”⁹

Here is what it is: inaccessibility, incomprehension - they constitute the main problem of all the translators of Wole Soyinka's works. The translators need to ask themselves the following question: What is a theatre text.

A theatre text is composed of two distinct but indissociable parts, the dialogue and the auditioning (scenic orientation). "The textual report, dialogue-scenic auditioning varies as per the period in history of the theatre production: sometimes null or quasi-null, the scenic audition may occupy a major portion in contemporary theatre, such as in the works of Adamov, Genet where the scenic orientation is regarded as important, as beautiful, as of extreme significance; in *Action without Words* of Samuel Beckett, the text is composed uniquely of much scenic orientation". ° These are scenic indications which emanate from the Yoruba tradition, which a neophyte translator is expected to translate.

Decidedly, the dramatist in Soyinka is a victim of excessive literary stylization which results in incomprehension of his language. But Soyinka himself endeavours to overwhelm his American spectators, as revealed in his thoughts as follows:

American audiences suffer from idiom closure. They are unable to break out and relate to something out of the ordinary. Even the Black Americans”.¹¹

Soyinka's theatrical method alienates his spectators by his frenetic usage of Yoruba terms and norms. Before undertaking a study of the ethnologisms which inhibit the translation of *The Strong Breed* (*Le sang fort*) and *The Swamp Dwellers* (*Les gens des marais*), let's present a summary of the two plays.

The Strong Breed

Emman, a young school teacher in a village has as his assistant a young lady Sunma who begins by trying to persuade Emman to leave the village before the festival which was approaching. She was concerned about the safety of her friend, Emman. Emman stubbornly refused to yield and remained in the village during the rites and as the festival commenced, idiotic Ifada was designated as the carrier for the new year, but he decides to seek shelter in Emman's house. He now becomes the escape-goat who must shoulder the sins of the village by being lashed, thrashed and inflicted with curses. Ordinarily, the carrier is chased out of the village after conducting the

rites and the village is cleansed, rendered sound, safe and purified. Emman refused to partake in the rites and refuses to receive the young idiot.

Emman is born into the heritage of those who are consecrated carriers. He thus has a proper understanding of the occasion. His father and grand father used to play that role in the past. But Emman flatly refused the role though it is a role he had agreed to do by presenting himself in the place of the idiot.

Even when his father warned him in a dream of the danger that awaits him, he said he was ready to join him in paradise.

Emman was ambushed by some elders and hanged. This is a reminder of the passion of Jesus Christ and that of the traditional religion of great people.

The Swamp Dwellers

This play depicts a scenario where the Ijaw people of the delta and their involvement in voodoo worship dedicated to a serpent is revived by the priest Kadiye in order to arrest the flooding which could destroy the plants.

Igwezu, a young man who returned recently from the city where he went to search for his twin brother, who missed his way. He found his brother, a changed person, a traitor and a crook who plotted to deprive him of his wife. On his return to his village, Igwezu was informed that their plants have been destroyed by the deluvian rain. Disillusioned and frustrated, Igwezu attacks the priest of the serpent of the swamp, Kadiye, who feeds well even in times of hardship.

Meanwhile, a Northern Muslim emerges on the scene looking for pasture and land where he could use as a farmer. He was tired of the drought of the North.

Ethnologism in The Strong Breed

Some ethnologisms affects adversely the translation of *The Strong Breed*. The concept of 'Arugba' is the most important concept for proper understanding and interpretation of the play. For the Arugba concept which advances the word 'carrier' in the text is rooted in the politico-religious vision of the world of the Yoruba people of Nigeria. And there is provision for explanation as a footnote which is not the same procedure adopted by Elizabeth Janvier in translating *The Strong Breed*. There are other concepts, such as: buba, raffia, sack, ayo board, in this study. But let us begin with the Arugba concept 'carrier'

It is on page 128 of *The Strong Breed* that the 'carrier' concept is more concrete. For, according to Jaguna:

In fact, it may be too late already. A carrier should end up in the bush, not in a house. Anyone who doesn't guard his door when the carrier goes by has himself to blame. A contaminated house should be burnt down. (128)

Jaguna:

Il est peut être même déjà trop tard. Le porteur du mal doit finir dans la brousse, pas dans une maison. Celui qui ne défend pas sa porte quand il passe, tant pis pour lui. Une case contaminée doit être brûlée.

Curiously, Elizabeth Janvier uses “Carrier” in this passage and “model” on page 65.

Emman: Why are you not moving with your friends. They have already produced a model.

“Won't you share the carrier with your playmates?”(118)

Girl: It just to let it go. with my sickness. My mother says the new year will take it away. I am ill.

Here is the ambiguity which could result from such ethnological inadequacies; an ambiguity which prevents the reader of the said translation to understand the play. Thus the importance of more detailed information on this wise: But let us say that "Arugba" does not portray the same sense as "Alura" in Yoruba.

Arugba

The concept of “Arugba” (The Carrier) is very complex in the Yoruba cosmogony. For the Arugba, in the Yoruba religious belief, belongs to the festival of the Osun River deity.

In the town of Oshogbo in Osun State, the deity of virginity, fertility, fecundity, stood against enemy attacks on the inhabitants of Oshogbo town.

Etymologically the Arugba is the carrier of the calabash of filth, healthiness, of the community to the sacred venue of the Oshun ritual. The Arugba, in this context is not a living being, but the incarnation of the New Year spirit which is being expected. The Arugba is an upright and sincere virgin, even a privileged representation of holiness, purity, which shoulders her burden before Oshun. This symbolic burden is captured with agility by the faithful adherents of the Oshun deity. These are mainly elderly women who regularly participate in the Oshun festival and other young women who also participate do so mostly to solicit the blessing of Oshun. Barren women request for the fruit of the womb from Oshun and others request for long life. And the king of Oshogbo, Ataoja, asks from Oshun prosperity, peace and good health for members of his community.

Alaru

In the ancient town of He Ife in Oshun State, the concept of Arugba is quite different from that of the town of Oshogbo. Besides, here, the equivalent of Arugba is Alaru or Teele - two words that signify “the carrier”. Ordinarily, the carrier in the town of He Ife is an idiot or someone who is a 'dengue' or a 'simple spirit'. He is the carrier of the filth of the previous year for the purification of the community. The Alaru is always selected among the strangers. Against the practice in Oshogbo where the Arugba is an indigene, in He Ife, it is to the stranger that the role of Alaru is assigned to.

Other Ethnological Traits

In the African traditional or tribal set up, leisurely activities are integrated in a harmonious package (songs, dances, legends, fables, rites, costumes and so on). The negro-African theatre is in communion with the cosmic nature. In this wise, the negro-African theatre tries to interpret the human manifestations of life. As a projector of myth, the theatre is an expression of life. It reflects community life and its ethics. Proverbs, costumes, sayings, all reflect negro-African wisdom and they express the rules and precepts of life. They are avenues of interpreting concepts other than the Arugba, the Alaru, the habits and the customs of the Yorubas to the non-initiated. Thus, in the exposition page, it is said that Emman is wearing “light buba”(115), which was translated by Elizabeth Janvier as “boubou”(59), a bigger dress than the “buba” worn by the Yorubas of Nigeria. Boubou is a rather longer dress worn in West Africa. This dress has no equivalent in France where the English “Suit” is more in vogue. But the word “boubou” as it is called in Soudan, is already integrated in the French language. Even for the metropolitan French people, the word “boubou” may be difficult to comprehend.

The word “raffia sack”, translated with the sentence “the man is carrying a small raffia sack” does not give an adequate image of the dress of which it is referred to in the play. For, the raffia sack representing “knickers” does not match the normal preferred wear of players of the Yoruba “masquerade”. This cultural practice is alluded to by Emman to Ifada, when he said “I am trying to persuade him to join the young maskers”(116), a sentence which Elizabeth Janvier translates as: “I am trying to persuade her to join the young masquerade dancers”.(60)

When the girl wore a doll called ‘effigy’ with boubou, Janvier translated ‘effigy’ as ‘dummy’ used in modeling shops(66), even as ‘effigy’ in this case, has a magico-ritualistic connotation in Yoruba religious belief. In this wise, the doll could be used to evacuate refuse and the filth of the preceding year for the faithfuls and believers.

On page 124 in the scenic review, we are told that Emman “was pacing the room”, stops by a shelf and toys with the seeds in an *ayo* board.” This was rendered by Elizabeth Janvier as “Emman arpente la piece, s’arrete devant une etagere et joue avec les grains d’un jeu de wori ».(74)

In the fullest culture of the English game of “Chess” (with all proportions observed), there is a West African equivalent known as “Ayo”, the “Wori”, a game practiced by Emperor Soundiata with Mansa Konkou of Badou Djeiba in *Le maitre de la parole* by Camara Laye, author of *The African Child* (1953). In page 182 of the Plon Edition (1978) of that novel, Camara Laye noted: “The Wori game”, trunk of a tree cubically modeled by a clever artisan through a carefully dug hole of wori. Thereafter, he puts four stones in each hole and starts by distributing the stones in the various holes.” This is the cultural procedure that we should follow in translating the *Ayo* game of the Yorubas.

On page 131 where a woman replies: “Oh my head, what have I done? Forgive me neighbour... Eh it's the carrier”, Elizabeth Janvier, in her translation, wanted to omit the key word “head”:

Woman: Oh!, What have I done, Sorry neighbour. But
 it is the carrier!

In the Yoruba cosmogony, the word 'ori' "head" has a magico-religious significance. The concept of Ori is close to the tragedy of the ancient Greeks. For every individual chooses a destiny or "ori" at the dawn of God's creation, and once an *ori* or destiny is chosen, it cannot be changed. It is a question of distribution. It is about this tragic encounter that the woman was referring to when she said "Oh my head". She is quite conscious of the consequences which is not fortuitous. But Elizabeth, not being a Yoruba, thus a neophyte to the concept of the discernable tragedy in the level of language mastery of the characters, did not find it necessary to translate the word *ori* "head", the key word in that passage. Concerning the word "danski", Elizabeth Janvier did not find it necessary to make a footnote to explain its meaning. For 'danski' and 'buba' are words of the same parents. These are some of the intercultural lapses which the attention of Elizabeth Janvier did not quite capture in *The Strong Breed*.

The Swamp Dwellers

Several intercultural references were also noticed in Wole Soyinka's *The Swamp Dwellers* (Les gens de marais). The words "Parlour", "Agbada", "Adire" catch our attention at the exposition page.(81) For the word "parlour", which is an English word domesticated in "Broken English", Elizabeth Janvier gave no French equivalent. It is true that the use of English in Nigeria takes into cognizance the country's linguistic history and the national interest. There exist therefore a variety of English language in use. The word "parlour" is the response to the architectural exigencies of Nigerians. To the Francophones, the word "parlour" represents "the sitting room". Concerning the words "Agbada" and "Adire" which are derivatives of the Yoruba make-up culture, they refer to two dresses much in vogue in the Yoruba fashion tradition. "Agbada" is the equivalent of the Senegalese "boubou", but with embroidery made by a talented Yoruba tailor. An "Agbada" is costly while an "Adire" is an attire worn by most of the ordinary men, thus not very costly. /

The word "kraw-kraw"(82), which is a popular term, was translated by Elizabeth Janvier as "croupe" (rump) on page 9. On page 84, Soyinka used the word "fly" which was translated by Elizabeth Janvier as "moustique" (mosquito) on page 12. On page 85, Makuri said: "You turned their heads like a pot of cane brew". "Cane brew" is the knick-name of the *agbakara* drink, also called *ogogoro*, *apeteshi*, *kinkana*, *kainkain*, by the people of the mangrove region of the Delta of South Nigeria. Elizabeth Janvier translated this portion as follows: "Tu leur tournais la tete comme une cruche de vin de canne."¹³ « Crane brew » is the equivalent of « rum », and for the Caribbean people (rhum).

It is interesting to note that the words of Beggar: "Allah grant everlasting peace to this house."(88), translated thus: "Que Allah accorde la paix eternellement sur cette maison". (19) , Thus, the 'Allah' is retained and not replaced by the French translation, 'Dieu'. This translation takes into account the regional diversity of language. Here, Soyinka, respects the regional exigency of the character of the beggar, of Northern Nigeria, a very Islamized region which adheres to the linguistic disposition as outlined by Islam.

The drum is mentioned on page 24, but without any specific message. Elizabeth Janvier replaced the word 'hoe' with 'daba' and the word 'cocoyams' with 'ignames' (yams) (25). We feel it is appropriate to retain the English word 'coco-yam' which carries a description of the plant. There are two types of cocoyam: macabo (*xanthosoma sagittifol*) and taro (*colocasia esculentia*).

Strange enough, the Kadiye states: "He is followed by a servant, who brushes the flies off him with a horse-tail flic".(38) The word "mouche" (fly) is the right word when Kadiye refers to stupid businessmen as follows: "Us sont done si betes que ?a, ces businessmen que tu connais?"(48) The phrase 'ageless iroko trees' used by Soyinka was retained by Elizabeth Janvier as "des arbres iroko"(26), without any biological inferences.

Conclusion

From the abovementioned analysis it is succinctly clear that a serious minded translator of Soyinka's works need to be initiated into the Yoruba language and more importantly into its rich cultural myths as well as its magico-religious inclinations. In fact, one observes that proper usage of stories, riddles, maxims, legends, symbols, images, metaphors, names, festivals, religions ceremonies, etc run through his works.

Allusions to the latter interspersing his numerous works give a traditional African character to the voice and viewpoint of Wole Soyinka, the writer and poet. In addition to these, is the fact that the translator should be well grounded in Anglo- Nigerian pidgin, German, English, standard English as well as Americanism. In his use of these dialects of English are embedded certain specialized words and terminologies begging for "proper application".

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4. Ibid., p. 55.
5. Tanure, Ojaide, op. cit., p. 7.
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