



OMISSIONS IN IGBO-ENGLISH FICTIONAL TRANSLATION: BELL-GAM TRANSLATED BY EZEH

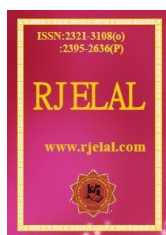
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Abstract

Translation is one of the media that **ensure** intercultural communication through written messages. Due to the imperfections of humans, no translation is ever perfect. This presupposes the evaluation of existing translations for revision and improvement. The writer has observed from careful reading of translated texts from and into English, French and Igbo, that there are cases of omissions in passing from the source text (ST) to the target text (TT). The study sets out to investigate omissions in Ezech's English translation of Bell-Gam's Igbo fiction *Ije Odumodu Jere* (1963) as *Odumodu's Odyssey* (2014) and its implications for translators. The theoretical framework for the work rests on Nida's dynamic and functional equivalence (2006) that emphasizes an equivalent effect in source and target readers and Newmark's (1981) view that there is a measure of loss in the attempt to reproduce the meaning and style of a message in one language, in another language. The methodology for the study is content analysis based on a comparison of excerpts from the source text and the target text in order to identify cases of omission in the target text. The study concludes that omissions are avoidable through careful revisions by the translator.

Keywords: Igbo, fiction, translation, English, omissions

Introduction

Literary translation sustains international or world literature. In Nigeria translation of literature follows different directions because literary texts are translated from a non-indigenous language into another non-indigenous language, from a non-indigenous language into an indigenous language and from an indigenous language into a non-indigenous language. The writer has benefited from

reading at least one literary work translated by a Nigerian in each of the above directions. Hope Okoye's *Narrow Escape* (1992) translated by Ireka into French as *Une belle échappée* (2012), is an example of a novel translated from English, a non-indigenous language into French, another non-indigenous language. Ibemesi's translation of Frantz Kafka's German fiction *Brief an Den Vater* (1954) into Igbo as *Soro Okwu M Na AkukondiQzq* (2005) is an example of a fiction translated from a non-

indigenous Nigerian language into an indigenous Nigerian language. Igbo-English translation is one of the popular directions of literary translation in Nigeria as represented by Obakhena's Igbo-English Anthology of poems *Olisa Amaka...* (2001), Pritchett's translation of Achara's Igbo fiction *Ala Bingo* (1933) into English as *The Land of Bingo* (2004) and Nwanjoku's translation of Achara's Igbo fiction *Ala Bingo* (1933) into English as *The Bingo Kingdom* (2008). The author's reading of some texts translated into English, French and Igbo reveals that omissions are common in those texts. Though studies by Baker (1992), Zubair (2022), Guo and Zou (2023), Mahmud, Bayusena and Ampera (2023) show that omission can sometimes be a translation strategy, this study focuses on omission as an act of forgetfulness due to human frailties. The thoughts expressed hereafter, dwell on omission as a result of human weakness and not as a translation strategy as shown in the studies of Saleh (2023) and Nkoro (2023).

Cambridge online dictionary defines omission as 'the act of not including something or someone that should have been included, or something or someone that has not been included that should have been included' (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/omission>). Furthermore, Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines omission as 'something neglected or left undone.' (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/omission>). Information retrieved from: The Writing Center of University of Wisconsin – Madison on 'Twelve Common Errors in writing' depict that omitted commas is one of such errors. Abdullatief (2020) indicates that omission can be a problem and a solution in literary translation. Writing on 'Treatment of Errors and Omissions when preparing Bank Reconciliation Statement', Tamplin (2023), notes that some examples of omissions in the banking sector are: check not sent to bank, issued check not recorded in cash book and deposited check not recorded in cash book. Hereafter, we will focus on omission in translation as a human weakness which features not only in translation but in most human endeavours in line with Emenanjo and Ojukwu's observation on the limits of language. According to them, 'human

language is a creation of man. It thus exhibits features of imperfection and limitations which make man different from the divine. Everything divine is infinite and digital. Human language is finite and analogue...' (Emenanjo and Ojukwu (2012:33-34). In his study 'Challenges of Conveying a Language-Specific Poetic Sensibility In Translation...' Malik (2023), notes that '...It would not be difficult for any critic to pick the lacunae in a particular translation but making adjustments or corrections to the translation is as difficult, if not more difficult, for the critic as it is for the translator....' I think Malik's view on conveying a language-specific sensibility in translation applies also to fictional translation. However, omissions as conceived in this paper do not relate to translation of a culture-specific sensibility but to lexical items or translation units that have natural and dynamic equivalents in the target language but are overlooked or forgotten by the translator as evidence of the translator's humanity.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

There are a number of theories or approaches that seek to explain what translators do. Hence, translation evaluation or criticism often has a theoretical basis. The study of omissions in Ezeh's translation of Bell-Gam's Igbo fiction *Ije Odumodu Jere* into English is guided by Nida's dynamic and functional equivalence (2006) as applied in Nkoro (2023). This approach to translation is essentially target reader oriented as it considers sociolinguistic factors in the target language that will help to produce in the target reader the same effect as the source language reader in terms of style and effect. The study also draws from Newmark's view that translation is an attempt that goes with a measure of loss (1981:7). The paper sets out from the perspective that Ezeh's translation is a good attempt but not perfect because the translator is human and not divine.

Method of Study

The method of study is comparative and analytical as in Nkoro's (2023) study on self-translation. The source text (ST) for the study-*Ije Odumodu Jere* and the target text (TT) for the study-*Odumodu's Odyssey* are compared from the

perspective of an Igbo-English target reader response with a view to identifying omissions that are considered to be avoidable as they do not constitute a strategy of translation.

Synopsis of Bell-Gam's *Ije Odumodu Jere* and its English Translation (*Odumodu's Odyssey*) by P.J. Ezeh

Nnabuihe (2005) shows that *Ije Odumodu Jere* is one of the earliest novels written in Igbo language by Leopold S. Bell-Gam, published in 1952 by Longman and Green, London. The study is based on the 1963-Official Orthography Edition, Ibadan: Longman Nigeria Ltd which is the edition P.J. Ezeh used for his English translation entitled *Odumodu's Odyssey* published in 2014 by ABIC Books & Equip. Ltd., Enugu. Ezeh's translation is the only English translation of *Ije Odumodu Jere* known to the writer. P.J. Ezeh is an Igbo-English bilingual. The writer's reading of the English translation from an Igbo-English bilingual's perspective shows that Ezeh's translation is highly communicative because his message is a dynamic and functional equivalent of the original message. Ezeh's English version has been chosen for the study as we consider it a good translation which satisfies Nida's (2006) principle of communicative translation that respects sociolinguistic norms of target readers. Yuschenko (2018) in her study on new fiction translations opines that it is possible for a fiction translator to create a translation which could be the adequate version of the original book. In my opinion, Ezeh's *Odumodu's Odyssey* agrees with Yuschenko's idea of 'an adequate version of the original book' as it captures adequately the original message of Bell-Gam's Igbo fiction *Ije Odumodu Jere*. Moreover, I think that the translator's notes at the end of the English version are very helpful as some Igbo loanwords and literal translations are explained in the notes. A thorough reading of the source and target texts depict that, on one hand, Bell-Gam through intercultural travels of Odumodu, the protagonist, draws attention to the inter relationships between humans, flora and fauna. On the other hand, he sensitizes humans on the need to respect one another irrespective of differences of colour, race or culture. In a captivating artistic manner, the author shares from an indigenous Igbo

perspective useful tips on Education, Engineering, Architecture, Agriculture and Fishery thereby establishing the kind of balance needed for the emergence of a knowledge society. In his attempt to reproduce Bell-Gam's message in Igbo in English, Ezeh manifested his humanness through some omissions which I intend to outline and discuss in what follows.

Data Presentation and Discussion

1) *Ije Odumodu Jere* (ST)

Isi 1, p.2: Ndi Fulani si na **Nupe**

Odumodu's Odyssey (TT)

Chapter One, p.18: Some Fulani slave raiders

Omission- The lexical item, '**Nupe**', is omitted.

Comments-I am of the view that the omission of the lexical item '**Nupe**' is not justifiable. Since Nupe society and people exist in Nigeria as shown by Yahaya (2003) and Olugbemi (2023), I think that the reproduction of **Nupe** in the target text will be as precise as in the source text.

Proposal- Some Fulani from **Nupe Land**.

2) *Ije Odumodu Jere* (ST).

Isi 3, p.9: ... Miri akuBekeebumai m mgbenamgbe m richaraihe. **Miri akuBekee ahu toro m utonkeukwu**. Aguenwekwaghiikeigbu m. *Odumodu's Odyssey* (TT)

Chapter Three, p.27-28: Coconut milk served as wine after each meal. **xxx** I couldn't possibly die from hunger anymore.

Omission: **Miri akuBekee ahu toro m utonkeukwu**

Comments-The sentence '**Miri akuBekee ahu toro m utonkeukwu**' which was omitted in the target text seems to be unjustifiable to me because there is no lexical item in the sentence that does not have a dynamic equivalent in English.

Proposal- **The Coconut milk was very sweet.**

3) *Ije Odumodu Jere* (ST)

Isi 5, P.14: Finda di n'eluugwu..Otu mgbidi gbara ala ahu gurugburu ka obodo Kano di n'ala Hausa si di. Mgbidi a nwere onu uzo iri na abuo ebe madu si aba

n'ime ya. Uzo nke kacha ibe ya mbara maa mma, bu uzo nke gara **otu** ihu n'ulo onye **nwe** ala.....

Odumodu's Odyssey (TT)

Chapter Five, p.36: Finda was on a hill... it was walled like Kano in the Hausa districts. **Xxx**. The broadest and prettiest of the streets was the one that passed through the palace of the king....

Omission- **Mgbidi a nwere onu uzo iri na abuo ebe madu si aba n'ime ya.**

Comments-I am of the view that the omission in the target text of the sentence '**Mgbidi a nwereonuuzoirinaabuoebemadusi aba n'imeya**' is not justifiable because the lexical items in the sentence have their natural and dynamic equivalents in English.

Proposal-The wall had twelve gates.

4) Ije Odumodu Jere (ST)

Isi 5, p.14: Mgbe anyi ruru n'onu uzo ahu ka m maara na ala Finda bu ala ukwu. O bu igwe ka ha jiri kpo ibo e jiri gbachie onuisionye ahu ma ha jikwara ola edo kuo out ulo elu di n'etiti obodo ahu igosi na o bu nga onye **nwe** ala bi. Onye ahu na-eche onuisionye ahu gbaghere anyi ibo ukwu ahu...

Odumodu's Odyssey (TT)

Chapter Five, p.36: xxx. The sentry opened that big gate for us...

Omission: **Mgbe anyi ruru n'onu uzo ahu ka m maara na ala Finda bu ala ukwu. O bu igwe ka ha jiri kpo ibo e jiri gbachie onuisionye ahu ma ha jikwara ola edo kuo otu ulo elu di n'etiti obodo ahu igosi na o bu nga onye new ala bi.**

Comments: The two sentences which represent two units of translation are omitted in the target text. In the original text, the omitted sentences give details about the palace of the king of Finda that distinguishes it from other buildings in Finda. To me, the omission of these details is not justifiable because all the lexical items in the original text have their natural and dynamic equivalents in English.

Proposal: It was when we got to the gate that it became clear to me that Finda was a great City. The gate was cast in iron but one storey building that

stood at the centre of the city was roofed in gold to show that it was the king's palace.

5) Ije Odumodu Jere (ST)

Isi 5,p.15: N'akuku aka nri oche ahu **otu** agu e jirinkumekpuo di. N'akaekpe, **otuenyiaakpukwaraakpu di...N'azu oche ahu ogundi agha nairiakpuputaranankumebuchaegbenamma di....**

Odumodu's Odyssey (TT)

Chapter Five,pp.37-38: To the right of the throne was a panther sculptured in stone. On the left was a sculptured elephant. Behind the throne were **thirty sculptured xxx soldiers** armed with swords and rifles....

Omission- ogu ndi agha na iri a kpuputara **na nkume**

Comments-In my opinion, the omission of the translation unit '**nankume**' in the target text is not justifiable because natural equivalents of the lexical items represented in that translation unit exist in English.

Proposal= thirty soldiers **sculptured in stone**

6) Ije Odumodu Jere (ST)

Isi 7, p.23:...Nna m bu eze; o buru na o bughi eze, o gaghi enwe ike luo ada Oba, eze Benin.

Odumodu's Odyssey (TT)

Chapter Seven,p.51= **xxx**

Omission- ...**xxx**

Comments- I am of the view that the omission of the sentence 'Nna m bueze; o buruna o bughieze, o gaghi enwe ike luo ada Oba, eze Benin' in the target text is not justifiable because the social status of Odumodu's father given in the source text is not captured in the target text.

Proposal- ... My father is a king, if he was not a king he would not have married the daughter of Oba, the king of Benin.

Conclusion

Humans are great but finite beings. Translation enables intercultural communication. Therefore, non-relativity of certain cultural phenomena and the difficulties encountered in

translating non-related cultural phenomena from one language into another, occupy so much space in theory and practice of translation. The study of omissions in Bell-Gam's *Ije Odumodu Jere* translated into English as *Odumodu's Odyssey* by P. J. Ezech shows that the translator's humanity manifests greatly in omissions which are not stylistic but cases of forgetfulness. Given that no human venture is void of imperfections, a translator should remember that omission is a common error in translation and try to guard against it by personal revision of every translation unit. It is hoped that the study will sensitize translators on the need for constant revision of their product in passing from a source text to a target text as well as contribute to new translations of fictional texts.

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