

**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE APPLICATION
OF FOREIGNIZATION TO CONTEMPORARY
POSTCOLONIAL TRANSLATION**

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Abstract

*This study examines the application of Venuti's (1995) foreignizing approach in the contemporary African postcolonial translations. The foreignization approach is an unconventional translation approach whose basic principles counter the need by equivalence theorists such as Catford (1965) and Nida (1982) to achieve basic target culture acceptable equivalent structures. As a progeny of the 'cultural turn' ideology of 1990, Venuti's foreignizing approach has been mostly accepted by the postcolonial translation scholars, since it concretises the major wishes of this group of thinkers. However, there have been heavy criticisms on its impracticability in translation as well as acceptability. To achieve its intended objectives, this research analyses three selected case studies of postcolonial African literary translations published between 2008 and 2017 to identify conformity with the foreignizing strategies, particularly in instances of syntactical strangeness and distinctions. These translations were selected considering the popularity and international recognition of their source texts. They include: *No home* by Yaa Gyasi, *L'autre moitié du soleil* and *Autour de ton cou* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Through a focused*

examination of translation choices used in these three cases, this research proves that the foreignization approach is still relevant in postcolonial translations.

Key words: Foreignisation, domestication, postcolonial translation, postcolonial translators, resistance

Introduction

This research measures the application of the foreignization translation strategy by contemporary postcolonial translators. The research will answer the following questions: i) Has foreignization been successfully applied in contemporary literary postcolonial translation and how is the success of such translations? iii) What are the categories of cultural traits that demanded foreignization? iv) Is there a future market for foreignized translations? This study is necessary not just to situate Venuti's approach in recent translation works but also to discover its level of relevance and to project its practicability in the nearest future. To achieve its objectives, this research employs the case study method of research. The case study kind of research studies and analyses selected observable or documented evidences (Lemos, 2012) to answer research questions and to validate a hypothesis. In this context, our case studies consist of published French translations of three successful novels from the postcolonial Anglophone West African context. These French translations are as follows: *No home* translated from *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi, *L'Autre Moitié du Soleil* translated from *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Autour de ton Cou* from *The Thing Around Your Neck*, both written by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. They have been selected due to the widespread fame and acceptability of their source texts, which invariably necessitated their coming to existence. For example: The novel *The thing around your neck* has been widely reviewed internationally with various nomination for international awards (4th Estate, n.d). *Half of a Yellow Sun*, on the other hand, was shortlisted for the Orange Fiction Prize (2004) and was awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best Book (Knopf, 2007) while *Homegoing* has been listed on the BBC Top 100 Novels chart. It is also an international Best Seller 2018 and winner of international awards (Amazon, n.d).

In the analysis, we shall determine the following: the general position of the translators towards the translations done as it relates to foreignization and domestication strategies, the foreignization or not of syntactic particularities and ‘untranslatable’ styles (code mixing, pidgins etc) found in the original texts and; compromises (standardization), which may have made for convenience or readability sake. Given the international recognition of the original texts, their translations would qualify as relevant and sought after in the target societies. Hence, this research would treat the outcome of the analysis as a possible occurrence in other postcolonial translations. The limitation of this study however, is that it does not incorporate examples from other postcolonial contexts other than Anglophone West Africa namely Nigeria and Ghana. However, we hope that there will be future research on translations from these areas to further prove the validity of the research.

The emergence of Cultural Turn in Translation studies in the second half of the 20th century constituted a redirection of focus from textual analysis into the importance of cultural distinctions between languages (Chouit, 2019). In essence, this turn implied a paradigm shift from textual equivalence to a need to incorporate cultural traits and influences in the translation discourse and process. Proposed for the first time by Bassnett and Lefevre in their book *Translation, History and Culture* (1990), the cultural turn sought to emphasize the functions of culture, social background, traditions as well as socially influenced subjectivity of the translator in the translation process (Yan and Huang, 2014). However, this meaning would spread to incorporate other dependent but more radical approaches such as feminist, cannibalistic and post colonialist perspectives to translation (Yan and Huang, 2014). Put differently, the ‘cultural turn’ brought attention to the marginalised aspects of translation.

The Postcolonial Translation Approach

The postcolonial translation approach differs from the conventional cultural perspective in that it already has a predetermined goal of addressing the asymmetrical power relations as well as resisting “the conceptual system based on Western philosophy and religion”(Jia 2007, p.135). In other words, there is a basic desire to adopt the reverse

strategy in translation, i.e the use of translation to counter ‘a false Western narrative of the colonized world’. Such false narrative includes the subjugation of indigenous traditional languages and the representation of minority cultures as barbaric and unacceptable to justify colonial invasion. Furthermore, the postcolonial approach criticises translations, recommends strategies and analyses target culture response based on decisive external factors such as racial power relations, imperialism, politics and ethnicity. (Jia, 2007)

The postcolonial translation approach heavily criticises translation strategies that contribute to the domination and suppression of minority and weaker languages during translations between hegemonic and weaker languages (Dai, 2016). Dai (2016) however suggests that the subjectivity that should be applied in the understanding of the terms ‘hegemonic’ and ‘minority’ would be a function of the comparison made in terms of colonial power relations between two given languages. For instance, English language could be considered hegemonic to any indigenous Nigerian language, since English was first a colonial language in Nigeria and is now an official language in same post-colonial society. Furthermore, the English language is more widely spread than any indigenous Nigerian language. We may categorise the proponents of the postcolonial perspective into two groups of translation scholars: the first group, being those who accuse translators from the colonial era of language and culture imposition through the dignifying representation of the colonialists’ culture in indigenous languages and the vilifying, negatively represented translations of indigenous material (Hui, 2009). Niranjana (1992), Tymoczko (1999) and Jacquemond (1992) are examples of such critics. Niranjana argues that translations during the colonial era were geared towards portraying the colonized culture as an ‘Other’, a strange and abnormal culture not worthy of history, in a bid to easily exert control and influence on them. Tymoczko (1999) point out that some of such translations were undertaken by indigenes of dominated societies, hence the need to first decolonise the mind and then discover strategies to weaken the colonizer and strengthen the colonized. Similarly, the second group of scholars seek to illuminate not just past but contemporary efforts by Western translators to uphold Western dominance through ethnocentric translations. These scholars also provide thought out poststructuralist strategies to combat

this literary colonisation. A renowned stakeholder of this approach is Lawrence Venuti (1995) whose theory we shall explore briefly.

Other contributions to the postcolonial approach include: the need to create a balance between cultures by creating a Third Space or a hybrid space, in other words. This school of thought opines that no language or culture is superior to the other and hence a hybrid translation will downplay the ‘purity’ of the so-called dominant languages. (Bhabba, 1994b, as cited in Hui, 2009). Homi Bhabba is an important proponent of this view. Bhabba calls for a balanced strategy in form of an “in-between space” or “Third Space” to accommodate the Other’s representation (Bassnett & Trivedi, 1999). This third space would be in form of inventions and manipulation of source language during translation, to retain culture peculiarities. Also, scholars like Spivak (1993, as cited in Simon, 1997) lend their voices to feminist translations of feminist works in minority cultures. Spivak, to be precise, condemns the ethnocentric translations of ‘Third world’ Feminist works by Western Feminist translators. By ‘ethnocentric’, Spivak implies that these western translators deliberately ignore the stylistics used by the Third World authors, by limiting their translation focus to the message only. Such strategy would therefore be an excuse to align the translations with the Western style. These and many more classical and recent facets form the postcolonial perspective of translation.

Venuti and the Binary Model

Evidently, the postcolonial approach to translation is centred on the power relations between dominant and minority cultures. Similarly, Venuti (1995) in his book *The Translator’s Invisibility* strongly advocates for the representation of ‘the Other’ through a foreignization strategy. The ‘Other’ here refers to the minority culture or a ‘distant culture’ from the West. Whilst drawing on Schleiermacher’s (1813) proposal of “alienating” and “naturalising” translation solutions (Munday, 2008) and Antoine Bermann’s (1985) ethical stance of “receiving the Foreign as Foreign”, Venuti created a binary model to differentiate two translation possibilities-Domestication and Foreignisation (Venuti, 1991). While domestication seeks to render a translation in fluent and error-free language, to the detriment of unique cultural traits of the source texts, foreignization is an approach that tends

to prioritise the representation of these cultural traits over a fluent translation, especially as pertaining to hegemonic target cultures. His original focus for this strategy was on translations into Anglo American languages. These languages, according to Venuti, were highly dominated by ethnocentric domesticated translations seeking to reproduce only in fluent and standard language. Venuti therefore fights for the reassertion of the already suppressed postcolonial cultures through a foreignizing translation. Venuti (2008) describes the conventional ethnocentric- Western focused translation culture as an act of violence on the translator and the source culture in that it forcefully rids the source culture of its deserved representation as well as compels the translator to shield their identity, personality and contributions to the text. However, through the foreignization approach, he ‘repays’ the classical translation with the same measure of violence as he introduces a directly controversial and opposing set of ingredients to what translation should be. Consequently, it is only logical to expect challenges at the point of reception of such works. Even Venuti himself attests to cases of rejection of his personal translation where he adopted the foreignizing strategy (Dai, 2016).

Foreignization: Widespread and Critiques

Here, we briefly delimit the provisions of foreignization according to Venuti as well as examine certain subsequent interpretations developed by translation scholars on this subject. The aim of foreignization is to resist the dominance in the receiving culture thereby revealing the linguistic and cultural distinctions of the foreign text (Venuti, 2008). To defend his course, Venuti (2008) also cites Lewis (1985) ‘concept of abusive fidelity’, which encourages manipulation of “phonological, syntactical and discursive structures, resulting in a translation that values experimentation, tampers with usage”, and seeks to echo the stresses of the source language by “producing its own” version (Lewis 1985, as cited in Venuti, 2008). In other words, translation will target at mirroring and being rather faithful to the source text to the detriment of the target language which risks being exploited arbitrarily to represent the particularity of the foreign source text. However, fluency and readability are not to be despised but are to be considered during the manipulation of language (Venuti, 2008). Venuti also recognised the imminent challenge in the acceptance of the foreignization strategy

where he cited reviews from 30 years earlier which all established fluency and naturalness as the acceptable and ideal features of a translated work (Myskja, 2013). However, he goes ahead to oppose this notion by opining that a good translation must be disruptive and must give off a sense of foreignness. This foreignness however, would stem from the unaccepted features as expressed by the reviews, which are : the use of archaic and obsolete terms, dialects, slang, “jargonisations”, “colloquialism, Pidgins, “Britishisms in American targeted translations” and vice-versa, unidiomatic syntax and mixture of language standards (Venuti, 2008). These marginalised features would be eventually put forward to form elements of disruption in the target culture. Thus, the fluency of the translation would be disturbed by the presence of marginal non-standard features of the same language. Venuti does not necessarily suggest loaning words directly from the foreign text. Instead he proposes a disruption in fluency by the application of ‘non-fluent’ usages of the target language such as slang, dialects, sociolects and pidgins in order to resist the superior stances of these powerful languages while simultaneously making the translator visible.

Venuti’s theoretical success has been measured in terms of the widespread fame of his book as well as the incorporation of his ideas in translation studies. Delabastita (2010) qualifies Venuti’s book *The Translator’s invisibility* as a ‘classic of translation studies’ with widespread translations and notable influence in translation studies. Another important accolade could be seen in Pym (1996) who describes Venuti’s theory as ‘legitimising an intellectual space’. Scholars have also attempted to expand and diversify the structure of foreignization as well as domestication. For example, Judickaitė (2009) categorises preservation of terms, addition of footnotes and literal translation under the foreignization approach, while cultural equivalence, omission of untranslatables, globalization into general terms and localization form the domestication approach. Wang (2014) sees foreignization as “an inevitable tendency in the 21st century” necessary to “foster cultural communication and mergence”.

Even though, Venuti denies that the two approaches are binary opposites, i.e. exclusively independent of each other (Yang, 2010), most of the arguments against Venuti’s theory claim that it promotes a purely

radical foreignizing approach and fights against any form of domestication. Baker (2010) sees the dichotomous approach of the theory as problematic since Venuti's description denies the reality that foreignization cannot be utterly employed without domestication. Similarly, the lack of familiarity, relatability of a foreignized translation is another recurrent excuse of the impracticability of the foreign strategy. Direct translation of culture specifics such as idioms "would seem childish, backward, primitive" (Robinson, 1999, as cited in Milton, 2008) Translation with inserted foreign neologisms and inventions are also considered awkward and difficult to read and comprehend.

The Scope of Postcolonial Literature

To ensure an adequate understanding of our research focus, we shall explain the concept of postcolonial literature. Postcolonialism as a concept deals with "the representation of race, ethnicity, culture and human identity" after the era of colonialism (Thamarana, 2015, p.537). Postcolonialism has also be used to describe the movement that reasserts identity and otherness, in most cases, in a bid to correct colonial narratives and cultural suppression suffered in time past. Geographically, we define postcolonial literature as any work of art produced in ex-colonies (Thamarana, 2015). Ashroft et al (2002) define this literature as "any writing affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" The focus is mostly on Third-World countries which still experience a significant level of exclusion from global recognition. However, more encompassing is the association of postcolonial literature with any literature that portrays Otherness, hybridity generated from colonial interference with indigenous culture as well as the need for a violent appropriation of the colonial language. Examples of this literature are Works from ex-colonies in West Africa, India, Ireland, the Afro America and the Caribbean written in Western languages such as English and French.

Analysis of Case Study Texts and their Translations

Here we present the analysis of the selected translations namely: *No home* translated from *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi , *L'autre moitié du soleil* translated from *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Autour de ton Cou* from *The Thing Around Your Neck* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

No home translated by Anne Damour

This French translation of *Homegoing* (2016) was published in 2017. Just like its original text, it has received reader attention, critiques, high ratings and recognition (Jbicrel,2017; Amazon,n.d; Babelio,n.d). The translation also won the Prix des lecteurs Littérature étrangère 2018 (Amazon, n.d). Set in precolonial and postcolonial Ghana and then the United States, the original text is a historical classic by Ghanaian American novelist, Yaa Gyasi about the generations of two half-sisters Effia and Esi who were separated from the onset, by tribal wars and the Atlantic slave trade. Unknown to each another, these generations would exist in two different worlds: as one suffers the direct impact of slavery in Europe and America and the other is on the brighter side of life (offsprings of marital union between Effia and a white slave trader in Ghana). However, there is a co-incidental reunion of the sixth generation: Majorie and Marcus who found a connection from their longing to discover their roots. Gyasi's (2016) narrates using Standard English generally with occasional loans from Ghanaian indigenous words such as *banku* and *Kente*. Nevertheless, some sentence structures depicted a slight departure from the conventional English usage. On the other hand, there are abundant representations of the vernacular African American English.

In her translation, Anne Damour did not need to deal with much strangeness in terms of the narration due to the author's sparing use of relexifying language. However, considering unique language usages such as "Big man", (Gyasi,2016, p.33), "I have gotten my blood" (Gyasi 2016, p.19)- signifying the beginning of menstrual flow" and "[...] and put gold in her ears" (Gyasi, 2016, p.19) [...] which meant wearing her gold earrings, in essence), Damour is able to re-echo the embedded 'foreignness' in French by the following translations: "Grand Homme" (Gyasi, 2016/2017, p.55), "J'ai eu mon sang" and "et mis de l'or à ses oreilles" Gyasi, 2016/2017, p.22) respectively. However, Damour also chose to domesticate certain other foreign English usages such as "her breasts arrived" (Gyasi, 2016, p.10) (she began to grow breasts) as "ses seins pointèrent" (Gyasi, 2016/2017,p. 15), "Don't worry me"(Gyasi, 2016/2017, p.13) as "Laisse-moi tranquille" (Gyasi,2016/2017, p.24) or "My son-o!, My son! My son-o!" (Gyasi, 2016, p.173) as "Mon fils! Oh mon fils! (Gyasi, 2016/2017, p.266). Damour's quest for balance and

readability becomes obvious as she only cautiously foreignizes the translations from vernacular Afro American discourses in the novel. For example: “She ain’t fit for da house” (Gyasi, 2016, p.70) was translated as “Elle va pas pour la maison ici” (Gyasi, 2016/2017, p.107). “Yessuh” (2016, p.70) becomes « Oui, missié » (2016/2017, p.107), “I ain’t done nothing” (2016, p.144) as “J’ai rien fait” (2016/2017, p.217), “Who say?” (2016, p.144) – “Qui dit ça” (2016/2017, p.218), “Tom Allan sho gon’ think so” (2016, p.72) as “Tom Allan y doit penser même chose” (2016/2017, p.109). In the above translations, the foreignization strategy could be seen in the omissions of preceding negating adverb ‘ne’ which is a practice in oral and familiar French but not written standard French. This choice agrees with Venuti’s suggestion on the use of relegated, non-standard forms of language to show foreignness (Venuti, 2008). The translator also invents the term “Missié” (meaning ‘Monsieur’) to give room for the phonological alteration of “yes Sir” as expressed in the original text. Finally, in the choice of “Qui dit ça?” for “Who say”, Damour tactfully mirrors the different language style with a non-intrusive equivalent for the target audience. In general, it can be said that the translator was conservative in her choice as the overall translation tilted towards domestication and adaptability. However, as has been discussed, the translator did not totally ignore the syntactic, semantic and phonological particularities in the text but carefully tried to represent them within the acceptable confines of the target language, French.

***L’Autre Moitié du Soleil* translated by Mona de Pracontal**

L’autre moitié du soleil is a 2008 French translation of Adichie’s (2008) international award-winning novel *Half of a Yellow sun*. The historical novel is set majorly in postcolonial Nigeria, Eastern Nigeria. The work is a depiction of the writer’s narrative of the events leading to the Nigerian Biafran war of 1960 as well as its direct consequences on the Igbo indigenes of the Eastern Nigeria. Adichie style of code-switching and code mixing in her narrative automatically imposes a foreignized translation on the target texts as there would be unavoidable presence of indigenous words such as “*osiso-osiso*” (Adichie, 2008a, p.16) and “*kedu*” (Adichie, 2008a, p.68). Sometimes, these words are code switched with accompanying English translations and a few other times, they are not. For example: “Kedu afa gi? What’s your name” (Adichie,

2008a, p.17). Of particular interest to this work is Adichie's use of both Nigerian English and Pidgin English, which the translator generally recognises in her translation, by means of inventing word forms and omitting determinants. For example: "Sah? Madam? You get luggage?" (Adichie, 2008a, p.42) is translated as "Missié? Ma'ame? Vous avez baggage?" (Adichie, 2008a/2008b, p.50) Also, "Ha, this place is for loading oh! loading only" (Adichie, 2008a, p.42) becomes " Hé, cet endroit, c'est pour chargement, oh! chargement seulement" (Adichie, 2008a/2008b, p.51). The use of some Nigerian English expressions is also recognized in the translation by a touch of foreignization. For instance: When asked about the wellbeing of Odinchezo and Ekene, Auntie Ifeka replies that: "They are there" (Adichie, 2008a, p.57) which is translated literally in French as "Ils sont là-bas" (Adichie, 2008a/2008b, p.69). In Standard English, the connotation could have been: 'They are just fine'. Consequently, the French interpretation could have simply been: 'Ils vont bien'. Similarly, when asked how Maiduguri is treating them, she replies: "They have not said they are dying of hunger" (Adichie, 2008a, p.56). This was also translated in the same sense as: "Ils n'ont pas dit qu'ils mourraient de faim" (Adichie, 2008a/2008b, p.70). Overall, De Pracontal stays true to the source text and tries as much as possible to retain its local effect in the French translation.

***Autour de ton cou* translated by Mona de Pracontal**

The novel is set both in Nigeria and America with varying themes of stereotype, racism, culture shock and exchange, colonialism, violence and political corruption/ inadequacy in postcolonial Nigeria. This 2014 French rendition of Adichie's (2009) short stories *The Thing Around Your Neck* was also subjected to foreignising styles of the author who once again uses code mixing and switching with indigenous words and sentences. Inferably, Adichie as a postcolonialist writer, uses these above mentioned writing styles as a resistant strategy to impose her indigenous culture on the readers. Once again, Mona de Pracontal wilfully plays according to the style of the writer. One method was through loaning and calquing Igbo or Nigerian words like "*oyibo people*" (Adichie, 2009, p.19) to mean "les oyibo" (Adichie, 2009/2014, Imitation, para. 11), "*Jollof rice*" (2009, p.11) as "riz jollof" (Adichie, 2009/2014, cellule 1, para. 24) and "*dried onugbu*" (2009, p.24) as

« des épinards ou de l'onugbu séché » (Adichie, 2009/2014, Imitation, para.35). Additionally, De Pracontal largely imitates the Nigerian dialect of English as represented by Adichie. For example: “I hope you understand the big-big English they speak, they are Americanah now oh” (Adichie, 2009, p.27) becomes “J’espère que vous allez comprendre l’anglais bien-bien qu’ils parlent, ce sont des Americanah, maintenant, oh” (Adichie, 2009/2014, Imitation, para. 52). The translator also captures the unique traits of the Pidgin English sentences in the following instances. “Close window” (Adichie, 2009, p.31) becomes “Ferme fenêtre” (Adichie, 2009/2014, Une expérience intime, para.6). “She is going safe place” (Adichie, 2009, p.32) is translated as “Elle va dans endroit sûr” (Adichie, 2009/2014, expérience intime, para. 10) and “Them not going to small-small shop, only big-big shop and market” (Adichie,2009, p.30) is translated as “Eux-là, ils vont pas dans petit magasin, ils vont seulement dans grand magasin et marché” (Adichie, 2009/2014, expérience intime, para. 3). Once again, the provisions of foreignization are respected here as marginal, non-standard versions of French (i.e absence of ‘ne’ in negation as in French informal register , omission of determinants such as le,la , un etc) are used to represent the uniqueness of the Nigerian Pidgin English expressed in the novel. One can infer that the translator here is generally favourable to foreignizing approach based on the majority of the choices made.

Outcome

Having examined the French translations of the three postcolonial works, we deduce that foreignization still plays a major role in the decision making of postcolonial translators, despite the scepticism of critics. Considering the popularity of the selected works and the assumed successful reception of the translations by the target audience, one would have expected totally fluent and adapted translations in order to avoid rejection from the market. However, the translators made the ethical decision to incorporate a decent level of ‘foreignness’ which could not be done away with, especially as it concerns two totally different linguistic cultures – West African Anglophone and European French. It was also observed that the translators sometimes hesitated between decisions to domesticate or foreignize certain linguistic characters like in the case of Damour’s choice of “Qui dit ça?” for “Who say” in *No home*. Similar to this is *Pracontal’s* domestication of the

word 'sah'(Sir) to 'patron' in *L'autre moitié du soleil* (Adichie, 2008a, p.27) instead of echoing the morphological alterations in the source word. One may wish to attribute these translation choices to the need to satisfy the market as would be suggested by critics of foreignization. Nevertheless, the works still upheld the tenets of foreignization by manipulating dialects, sociolects of French to send across bits of the foreign style from the source texts. It is also observed that syntactic distinctions like Pidgin English and Afro American vernacular induced a foreignising response from the translators. However, 'less violent' usages like Nigerian or Ghana versions of English were sometimes domesticated into Standard French.

Conclusion

This study examines translations of three postcolonial fictions: *No home* (2017) by Anne Damour, *L'autre moitié du soleil* (2008) and *Autour de ton Cou* (2014) by Mona de Pracontal. The aim of this research was to determine if Foreignisation is practiced in contemporary postcolonial translations, owing to the fact that there has been a general criticism surrounding the feasibility of the approach in terms of real life marketability. Through the analysis of translations of internationally celebrated West African postcolonial works, this study has shown that foreignization is in active use in literary translations between West African postcolonial languages and hegemonic languages. Hence, there is a future for Foreignization. This study however, also recommends similar research across other postcolonial contexts such as the East African, the Caribbean, South American, Asian and Irish contexts.

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