

## **The cultural aspects of non literary translation: Igbo health challenge terms in perspective**

Olivia Ezeafulukwe

### ***Abstract***

*Inasmuch as it is generally believed that non literary translation is characterized by its exactitude and also not prone to manipulations and cultural distortions, it is still true that non literary translation is not devoid of cultural influences. This paper, through a comparative study of some Igbo health terms and their translations, refutes the information that literary translation is the only form of translation where culture plays an important role. It was discovered that some health conditions are peculiar to certain localities and so cannot find equivalent expressions outside their cultural contexts. Even the health conditions that are universally experienced can be named differently by different races and cultures using some entirely different equivalents chosen from the phraseological repertoire of the target culture.*

**Keywords:** Culture, Translation, Non-literary, Health Terms.

### **Introduction**

Translation, which implies the transfer of meaning from one language to the other has been in practice over the years but has also evolved to delve, not only on literary works but into every aspect of human life. With the world turning into a global village, the quest to know and the need to share information; literary,

scientific, technical and technological have become paramount. Translation, both literary and non literary, removes the blockade that language diversity places between information and the person trying to access it. The translator does this by employing his linguistic and extra linguistic knowledge. While the linguistic knowledge concerns the language of the text, the extra linguistic knowledge connotes other variables that are not specified in the text but which the presence of the text evokes. Both the linguistic and extra linguistic knowledge of the text are culture laden.

### **Texts and their cultural attributes**

There are many types of texts that can be translated. They include literary texts: texts that border on poetry, drama and prose, and the non literary texts. Some translation theorists prefer the term “non literary texts” to technical translation. Non- literary texts can further be subdivided into other forms; technical, technological, scientific and pragmatic. Whichever form of text one is translating, the translator’s tool is language. It should also be noted that the meaning of a word is derived from the culture of the people who speak the language. Language and culture are so interwoven that one cannot be extricated from the other. This being the case, every type of text is embedded in culture; including the non literary texts. This goes to justify Ajunwa’s assertion that translation is “a means of communication born of cultural contacts and interactions between the speakers of different languages” (22)

So no matter the type of text involved in the translation, cultural considerations and exchanges and transfers are inevitable. After all, the objective of every translation according to Nida, is to produce “in the receptor language the closest natural

equivalent to the message of the source language, first in meaning, and secondly in style.” (12) Communication is the end point of every translation.

While comparing non literary translation and literary translation with a view to discovering the differences between them, Peter Newmark cited by Jean Delisle informs us that:

The basic difference between the artistic [that is literary translation] and the non-literary is that the first is symbolic or allegorical and the second representational in intention; the difference in translation is that more attention is paid to connotation and emotion in imaginative literature. (31)

To shed more light on the aforementioned opinion, a well translated literary work is known for its perfection and beauty in its renewed form whereas the non literary translation carries or passes an accurate or faithful message.

On the other hand, a non literary text is by nature didactic, which means it is instructive or has an intention to teach or to demonstrate aspects in a particular field of study like in the case of science or/and technology documents. Non literary translation includes manuals of instructions, reports and other documents aimed at a particular audience hence the need to use the correct terms and jargons of the field of the text in translating the correct meaning. The non literary translator therefore needs to have a good knowledge of the area he is translating to be able to give correct information or instruction, which if not well done would frustrate the end users, who rely on the translator’s information to operate.

A non literary translator needs to first go through the general training of a translator, which includes linguistic and methodological training, and yet another training in a particular area of specialisation where he is made to acquaint himself with the language registry so as to be abreast with the various technical terms associated with his field of interest.

Jean Delisle summarizes the distinction between non literary texts: also referred to as technical texts and literary texts in these words.

Le texte {technique} se distingue du littéraire par les traits suivants : il est plus dénotatif que connotatif, il renvoie à une réalité plus ou moins objectivée, il a pour but principal de communiquer une information, il donne lieu généralement à une seule interprétation, il se formule parfois dans un « langage codifié, il a une utilité immédiate et souvent éphémère et, enfin, il est plus ou moins didactique.... (32 – 33).

The {non literary} text differs from the literary in the following ways: it is more denotative than connotative, it refers to a more or less objectified reality, its main purpose is to communicate information, it generally gives rise to a single interpretation, it is sometimes expressed in a "codified language, it has an immediate and often ephemeral utility and, finally, it is

more or less didactic .... (32 - 33).Our  
translation

At the beginning of this work, it was clearly stated that the meaning of a word is derived from the culture of the people who speak the language and that translation can be regarded as passage or transfer of the same message from a source language to a target language. The text to be translated is made up of sentences and words of a given language. Even the translated text is also formulated in the target language. Both the source and the target languages are rooted in culture. It would be sheer ignorance not to accept that non literary translation, which is made up of words and terminologies and has language as a tool can be devoid of cultural attributes.

### **The cultural nature of technical translation**

Cultural problems are not peculiar to literary translation but also to non literary translation. In order to pinpoint the cultural connotations in non literary translation, Jean Delisle stressed on the most important things a translator should note while translating. *Le traducteur pour sa part doit tenir compte de l'origine du texte à réexprimer, de sa nature, et du public visé (les futurs lecteurs)* (23) “ *The translator must take into account the origin of the text to be re-expressed, its nature, and the target audience (future readers)*” Our translation.

In this way, he does not limit himself to linguistic components of the text but also “includes in the analysis of the process of translation, the cognitive and situational complements not manifest in the linguistic signs” (Delisle 24) These cognitive and situational complements which compliment verbal utterances include the axioms and world views of the target culture which

must be considered by the translator while trying to deduce the message of the text as well as in the process of reformulating and conveying the message.

Shastri further reiterates this fact where she explains that *“Though Translation is in itself a linguistic activity, linguistic knowledge is never enough for a translator. Extra linguistic knowledge is essential for the translator”* (6)

A good translator transcends culture to convey the message of the text to the receiver. This can only be possible if he understands the source and target languages and this implies understanding the two cultures. For it is only when he is conversant with these that he will know the things he needs to say and how to say them so they can carry his intended message across to the target audience. Take for instance the word “week”. This word has two equivalents in Igbo “*izu* and *izu uka*” This is because the traditional Igbo society distinguishes between the traditional week made up of four days namely *Eke, Oye, Afor Nkwo* and the universal week, which is called *izu uka*, literally meaning “church week”)

Language, which is the major tool of the translator, is a cultural system used to convey meanings in particular societies. A non literary text is denotative. It communicates information expressed in a codified language and it is of immediate and often ephemeral utility. A non literary text is didactic in nature. All these attributes are culture bound. Different cultures have different ways of expressing things based on their world views. This, the translator must not lose sight of, not even a non literary translator.

### **Igbo health challenge terms**

Health matters form an important part of discourse. Since the human bodies function in similar ways, irrespective of colour, culture or race, one would have expected all humans to experience the same kind of illnesses and consequently sicknesses will be described in like manners in different cultures. But this is far from the fact as some sicknesses are universally experienced but described differently by different races and cultures. Some health conditions are also peculiar to particular people and cultures and can only find words to describe them in the cultures where they are prevalent.

An attempt has been made below to translate a number of Igbo health challenge terms. Also the cultural considerations made in the course of their translations are discussed thereafter.

**Fig. 1: Table showing some health conditions and their English translations**

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Igbo</b>	<b>English</b>
1.	Ọnyá	Sore
2.	Ọrià nwányị	Veneral disease
3.	Ọrià shùgà	Diabetes
4.	Ọnyá nwádíàlà	Leg ulcer
5.	Ọnyá áfō	Stomach ulcer
6.	Ọrià m̀m̀m̀nẁẁ /Ọrià obiri n' aja ọcha	AIDS
7.	Ọjé m̀m̀m̀nẁẁ	HIV
8.	Ụkwára	Cough
9.	Ụkwára òtá	Tuberculosis
10.	Ụkwára ọkpọ tìkòtìkò	Whooping cough
11.	Àhụ ọkū	Fever

12.	Íchī́ ntị́	Deafness
13.	Ọ̀rià m̀kp̀onwụ́ áhụ́	Stroke
14.	Ọ̀kpụ́ ísì éríngó	Ringworm
15.	Ọ̀kpó òmìrì	Arthritis
16.	Èkpèntá (ọ̀rià ọ́chá)	Leprosy
17.	Àkwúkwù	Epilepsy
18.	Ngwọ́	Eczema
19.	Ọ̀bàrà m̀gbáńlì éńlū	High BP
20.	Ọ̀kírí m̀gbáwá ísì	Migraine
21.	Ísì m̀gbáká	Mental disorder
22.	Ọ́chá n'ányá	Hepatitis
23.	Áfọ́ ọ́sísá	Diarrhoea
24.	Ọ̀tòrò	Cholera
25.	Ọ̀nyúnyú ọ̀bàrà	Dysentery
26.	Kítíkpa	Small pox
27.	Àgbà íkpèrè	Rheumatism
28.	Ótútó	Boil
29.	Ntị́ íkē	Partial hearing disorder
30.	Ógbī	Dumbness
31.	Ìsì	Blindness
32.	Ngwūrọ́	Lame
33.	Óyí b́ará áhụ́	Pneumonia
34.	Kwàshì ọ̀kọ́	Kwashiorkor
35.	ìbà	Malaria
36.	Ọ̀gbúgbọ́	Vomiting
37.	Áfọ́ ntùgháńlì	Stomach upset
38.	Àhụ́ ńfụ́	Body pain
39.	Ákpúkpa	Rashes
40.	Ụ́kwára úmé ọ̀kụ́	Asthma

41.	Ñrọkwólū	Meningitis
42.	Ñsí nwányị	Gonorrhea
43.	Ọkpā ọmá jìjìjì	Shaky legs
44.	Àtụ èrè	No equivalent
45.	Ñtụtū	No equivalent
46.	Íbì	Hernia
47	Ísí ọwụwā	Headache

### **Analysis of the translated health challenge terms**

From the list above one can notice that some health conditions seem to be universal and as such are not culture bound. They are therefore common to every culture and so easily find their equivalents in every language.

Some however, cannot find equivalent expressions in other languages. However this should not discourage the translator as there is always a way out in such situations. According to Vinay and Darbelnet

*... il est possible que deux textes rendent compte d'une même situation en mettant en œuvre des moyens stylistiques et structuraux entièrement différent..... il en résulte que la plupart des équivalences,... sont figes et font partie d'un répertoire phraséologique... (52)*

...It is possible that two texts account for the same situation by implementing entirely different stylistic and structural means ..... as a result, most equivalents... are part of a

phraseological repertoire ... (Our translation).

Terms like *ichi nti*/deafness and *agba Ikpere*/Rheumatism, are good examples of equivalents in the linguistic translation process. The way these sicknesses are named has a lot of cultural undertone. The translation of the aforementioned health conditions are rather descriptive and bring out even the way the sicknesses are conceived in the receiving culture. Other examples include *Ọnya nwadiala*/Leg ulcer *Nsi nwanyị*/ Gonorrhoea, *Ọrịa nwanyị* /Venereal disease.

Thus some of the health conditions are expressed in ways different from the source culture, hence exposing the world views of the target culture. Below is an explanation of how the equivalents of these words were arrived at.

<b>Igbo word</b>	<b>Derived meaning</b>	<b>Equivalent word</b>
<i>Nti ike</i>	Literally translated as “hard ear” This is an ear that would require an extra shout to hear.	Partial hearing disorder
<i>Ọnya nwadiala</i>	<i>Nwadiala</i> means an offspring of a female member of the family that was married out. Such offspring enjoys a lot of liberty whenever he is in his maternal	Leg ulcer

<p><i>Nsi nwan yi and Orja nwan yi</i></p>	<p>family and is free to stay as long as he wants in the maternal family. <i>Onya</i> on its part means “sore” <i>Onya nwadiala</i> therefore connotes a sore that takes liberty on its prey and stays as long as it wishes.</p> <p><i>Nsi nwan yi</i>, literally translated as woman poison and sickness from woman respectively, go a long way to portray the Igbo culture and its conception of women as necessary evils. A spoilt child in the Igbo culture is said to resemble the mother and not the father.</p>	<p>Gonorrhoea and Venereal disease</p>
--	--	--

Among the techniques that a translator can have recourse to if he does not find a proper equivalent to a health term he wishes to translate are the following;

(a) Borrowing :

According to Vinay and Darbelnet, *“il est à remarquer que souvent les emprunts entrent dans une langue par le canal d’une traduction, ainsi que les emprunts sémantiques ou faux-amis..... (47)./* "It is worthy of note that often loanwords enter into a language through a translation, so also do semantic transfers and false-friends ..... (Our translation)

Words like Kwashiokor and Ebola, both of Ghanaian and Congolese origins respectively, were borrowed from their original languages into English and other languages, just like most games that retain the names given to them by the originators. Football, tennis and basket ball still retain their English names even when used in many other languages of the world, though they might undergo some phonological or structural adaptations into the target languages.

Borrowing covers up a linguistic lacuna in the target language. It is therefore borrowed from where it exists: which is in another culture, to cover up in another culture. Borrowing in translation is also used to add local colour. Each word in a language is engrossed in culture so borrowing a word is borrowing a little bit of the culture from which it originated: hence it is an intercultural and interlinguistic implant.

(b) Adaptation:

Another important translation technique used to translate the Igbo health conditions is the adaptation technique. The technique of adaptation comes to play when the situation described is absent in the target culture. So the translator now finds a way of rendering the inexistent situation.

The following Igbo health terms cannot find exact expressions in any language outside the Igbo language;

*Ntutu*: A sickness in which iron pins are spiritually implanted into the body of an individual, thus causing very high fever, discomfort and eventual death. The sickness can only be cured by someone that knows about it. An unsuspecting sufferer who goes to seek western medical attention once given an injection cannot be rescued. For a translator without knowledge of the Igbo culture *high fever* comes handy. A translator might decide to use *High fever* to translate this sickness. These two sicknesses; High fever and *Ntutu* though with similar manifestations are entirely different and require very different cures.

*Nkechi*: A condition in which one is spiritually prevented from doing what one is naturally expected to do. *Nkechi afọ nwanyị* prevents a woman from conceiving. *Nkechi ike* prevents the person from moving the bowels. Both can be translated as infertility and constipation respectively but the knowledge of the Igbo people's world view and way of life could furnish the translator with more information that would bring out the subtle differences between the source language sickness and when is prevalent in the target culture.

*Atuere*: A sickness sent spiritually, causing the decay of a person's legs. To translate *Atuere* to an Anglophone could mean substituting *Atuere* with Elephantiasis which though a sickness that swells the leg like the former, is not the same as it. But being the closest sickness that could give the receiver an idea of this

native Igbo ailment, it could be adapted. A sickness that exists in the cultural environment is adapted to create semantic similitude.

These sicknesses can only be translated with these adaptations since their equivalents do not exist elsewhere.

(a) Description or explanation:

As a proof of the influence of culture in non literary translation, some health conditions, though in existence in some cultures do not have corresponding terms to express them in another. In such a situation even to find an equivalent would be impossible. The translator faced with this type of problems is left with no other option than to describe or explain out the lacuna.

Some health conditions can only be described as seen in the examples below.

<b>Igbo health term</b>	<b>Description from which term is derived</b>	<b>Equivalent English term</b>
Oyi bara ahụ	Cold that permeated the body	Pneumonia
Ọrịa shuga	Sugar disease	Diabetes
Ọnyūnyū ọbara	Passing out blood	Dysentery
Ọrịa mminwu	Disease that dries someone to death	AIDS
Afọ ọsịsa	Washing of the stomach	Diarrhoea
Ụkwara/Ụkwara nta	Cough/Small cough	Cough/Tuberculosis whooping cough
Ụkwara ọkpọ	Ụkwara means “cough” and	
tịkọtikọ	tịkọtikọ describes the sound produced	

	<p>by a sufferer in this health condition. The onomatopoeic name therefore comes from the sound of the cough of a sufferer of this type of cough.</p>	
--	---	--

Another example of the import of culture in non literary translation is the way some cultures name sicknesses by comparing them with the ones that seem similar to them.

- i. *Onya* which could be literarily translated as “sore”, is used in describing more health conditions in Igbo. The following could serve as examples;

*Onya* / Sore

*Onya nwadiana* /Leg ulcer (Literarily called “liberty sore” in Igbo because of the belief that ulcer is the sore that takes liberty with the sufferer.)

*Onya afo*/ Stomach ulcer (Literarily called “stomach sore” in Igbo)

- ii. *Orĩa* means sickness. The names of some other sicknesses are derived from *orĩa*;

*Orĩa mmìnwu*/ AIDS (Sickness that dries the sufferer to death)

*Orĩa mkpònwu*/ Stroke /Cardiac arrest (Sickness that withers up the sufferer)

The cultural aspect of non literary translation can be noticed in these Igbo sicknesses called *Atũere and Ntũtu*. How would one be able to possibly and faithfully translate these sicknesses to a foreigner when it does not exist in his own culture and without

explaining their cultural implications or at least relating them to the cultural realities of the receiver of the translation?

No wonder Jean-Claude Margot emphasizes that  
...un message quelconque est étroitement  
lié à la culture dans laquelle son auteur est  
enraciné. Lorsqu'on traduit ce message  
dans une autre langue, il faut tenir compte  
des différences entre culture source et  
culture réceptrice. (52)

...any message is closely related to the  
culture in which its author is rooted. When  
translating this message into another  
language, the differences between source  
and recipient cultures must be taken into  
account. (Our translation)

It is not only literary texts that are rooted in culture but non literary texts as well, though in varying degrees. Non literary translation can as well contain local terminologies when it comes to certain fields like health (eg. *atūere*), gastronomy (eg. *Ọtūnke, ngwongwo*), architecture (eg. *nkpuke*) and government (eg. *Otu ogbọ*) where the words used are coined from the culture of the language.

## **Conclusion**

Language is rooted in culture and also transmits culture. Both the literary and the non literary translators use language as a tool and so no translation is devoid of cultural blends. Language is the major tool of translation and not even non literal translation can rule this out. Non literary texts contain terms which cannot be

translated without recourse to language and sometimes to the cultural area of the text or that of the receivers of the text.

It is said that every language is as developed as the society which it serves and from where it originated. This being the case, only the realities of the particular societies find expression in their languages. Even a non literary translator can only use what is available in the language of the target culture to convey messages to it. Target cultures that are not scientifically and technologically developed will be morphologically deficient in such areas.

Each language system connotes the culture of a people. It is culture that shapes world views, which could in turn be noticed in the expressions available in language. Native sicknesses have native names and so do not lend themselves easily to translation. Some of these native sicknesses include *atụ ure*, *ntụtu*, *nkechi akaraka madu*, *nkechi afo nwanyi*.

Borrowing, adaptation, description or explanation are translation techniques that can help a non literary translator to transfer meaning effectively in texts which do not find direct equivalents in the target languages due to divergences in world view and of language structures.

Cultural knowledge is an important part of the linguistic and extra linguistic baggage that a every translator needs to translate every kind of text: non literary texts inclusive.

### **Works Cited**

- Ajunwa, E. *A Translation Textbook: Theory and Practice*, Onitsha: Enovic Ltd, 2014
- Delisle, Jean. *L'analyse du discours comme méthode de traduction*. Canada: Edition de L'Université d'Ottawa, 1984.

- Delisle, Jean. *Translation: An Interpretive Approach*. Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press, 1981.
- Jean-Claude Margot. *Traduire sans trahir*, Lausanne/Suisse, Editions l'Age d'Homme, 1979.
- Newmark Peter *A textbook of translation*, London: Prentice hall, 1988.
- Nida, E. *Towards a Science of Translating*, Leiden; E.J. Brill, 1964.
- Shastri Pratima Dave *Fundamental Aspects of translation*, New Delhi: PHI Learning Private Limited", 2012.
- Vinay, J.P. et Darbelnet, J. *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais, méthode de traduction*. Paris : Didier Érudition, 1977.

*Olivia Ezeafulukwe is a senior lecturer in the Department of Modern European Languages, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.*