

**The translation of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* into  
isiXhosa *Lwadilik'udonga*: A critical analysis**

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**Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Philosophy at the University of  
Stellenbosch**



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**December 2005**

## **DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university for a degree.

T. Ntwana

## ABSTRACT

*Things Fall Apart* is an unsentimental novel which appeared in 1958 as Chinua Achebe's first novel. It is regarded as a classic of world literature. It is deemed vital that such rich literature as the one of Achebe, be made accessible to readers in as many language communities as possible. It is through the vehicle of translation that a multitude of readers are endowed with the power to make some form of contact with much of the world's great writings.

But translation of literature is a very complex process, which poses some difficult yet interesting problems that demand particular notice and specific attention. In translation of literature one is not just dealing with words written in a certain time, space and sociopolitical situation, most importantly it is the cultural aspect of the text that should be taken into account. Therefore, translation of literature is not just the transfer of information between languages, but the transfer of one culture to another. Literary texts in isiXhosa and English, which are not only written in different languages but also represent different cultures, differ greatly in terms of linguistic, literary and cultural-social conventions. Challenges such as these make it difficult for a translator, in this case K.S. Bongela, to render the source language text flawlessly in the target language.

This study thus investigates how Bongela coped with transmitting the cultural issues in *Things Fall Apart* into *Lwadiilik'udonga*. It will highlight the various problems the translator encountered in search for equivalence and adequacy, and also analyse the strategies he has employed in this transference of cultural elements to the target text. As will be seen, it is possible to relate the translation of this text to the six general rules mentioned by Bassnett-MacGuire (1988: 116-117) for the translator.



## OPSOMMING

*Things Fall Apart* is 'n onsentimentele roman wat in 1958 as Chinua Achebe se eerste roman verskyn het. Dit word beskou as 'n klassieke werk in die wêreld van letterkunde. Dit is ook belangrik dat letterkunde wat so ryk is soos dié van Achebe aan soveel verskillende taalgemeenskappe as moontlik bekend gestel word. Dit is as gevolg van vertaling dat 'n verskeidenheid lesers die geleentheid het om kontak te maak met die wêreld se beste geskrewe werke.

Letterkundige vertaling is 'n baie komplekse proses waar uitdagende maar interessante probleme voorkom, en dit verg besondere en spesifieke aandag. Met die vertaling van letterkunde word daar nie net gebruik gemaak van woorde in 'n sekere tyd, plek en sosio-politieke situasie nie, maar belangriker is die kulturele aspek van die teks waarmee rekening gehou moet word. Daarom is vertaling van letterkunde nie net 'n oordra van informasie tussen tale nie, maar 'n verplasing van een kultuur na 'n ander. Letterkundige teks in isiXhosa en Engels is nie net in verskillende tale geskryf nie, maar verteenwoordig ook verskillende kulture wat baie verskil in terme van taalkunde, letterkunde en kultureel-sosiale gebruike. Sulke uitdagings maak dit baie moeilik vir die vertaler, in hierdie geval K.S. Bongela, om die brontaal foutloos in die teikentaal te vertaal.

Die studie gaan oor hoe Bongela met die vertaling van *Things Fall Apart* na *Lwadilik'udonga*, die kulturele uitdagings gehanteer het. Die verskillende probleme waarmee 'n vertaler met die soeke na gelykwaardigheid en geskiktheid in aanraking kom, asook die analise van strategieë wat gebruik word in die oorskakeling van die kulturele elemente in die teikenteks, word aan die lig gebring. In die studie sal daar aan die lig gebring word dat dit moontlik is om 'n verband tussen die vertaling van die teks en die ses algemene reëls wat deur Bassnett-MacGuire (1988:116-117) aangegee word, te sien.



## **ISISHWANKATHELO**

Le ncwadi ithi *Things Fall Apart* yinoveleli engavangwanga, eyavela ngowe-1958 njengenoveleli yokuqala kaChinua Achebe. Ibonwa njengenkqenqeza phambili kuncwadi lwehlabathi. Kubalulekile ke ukuba ubuncwane boncwadi olutyebe njengolu lukaChinua Achebe lwenziwe lufikeleleke kubantu ngabantu abalwimi zahlukeneneyo. Sisixhobo soguqulo ke esenza ukuba intlaninge yabantu ibenako ukufikelela incinde kubuncwane bencindi yolwazi obuqulethwe kokubhalwe ziingqanga zababhali behlabathi.

Ukuguqula uncwadi asindlwan'iyanele. Ngumsebenzi oxakathe iingxaki ezinzima kodwa ezinika umdla, nezingafuni kubethwa ngoyaba. Xa kuguqulwa uncwadi akujongwa nje kuphela amagama abhalwe ngaxesha lithile, kwindawo ethile nemeko-mbuso yoluntu. Okona kubalulekileyo yinkalo yenkcubeko nekufuneka ithathelwe ingqalelo. Ngoko ke, uguqulo loncwadi ayikokudlulisa nje umyalezo phakathi kweelwimi, koko kukudluliselwa kwenkcubeko kwenye inkcubeko. Uncwadi lwesiXhosa nolwesiNgesi alwanelanga kwahluka nje ngokweelwimi olubhalwe ngazo, koko lwahluke nangokweenkcubeko, lwaza lwahluka mpela ke ngokwemigaqo yolwimi, eyoncwadi kwaneyenkcubeko ngokwentlalo. Imingeni enjengale inyusa umnqantsa umguquleli (uKS Bongela kule incwadi) ekuguquleleni ngempumelelo.

Lo msebenzi wophando uphendla iindlela uBongela aphumelele ngazo ekudluliseleni imiba yenkcubeko ekwincwadi ethi *Things Fall Apart* eyidlulisela kwincwadi ethi *Lwadiilik'udonga*. Kuza kubekwa umnwe kwiingxaki ezahlukeneyo aqubisene nazo umguquleli lo ekuzameni kwakhe ukukhupha umsebenzi owanelisayo. Kwakhona kuza kuhlalutywa iindlela azisebenzisileyo ekudluliseleni imiba yenkcubeko kolu lwimi kuguqulelwa kulo. Njengoko kuya kuphuhla kulo msebenzi, uguqulelo lwale ncwadi lunako ukungqanyaniswa nemigaqo emithandathu yomguquleli ekhankanywe nguBassnett-McGuire (1988: 116-117).

## **DEDICATION**

In memory of my late twin-sister Lungiswa Felicia Ntwana and my late father  
Governor Golvet Ntwana.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Scholarly work is not possible without the academic assistance and moral support of several persons. Therefore, in the final stage of this thesis my sincere gratitude goes above all to the Almighty for giving me the strength and wisdom to undertake and complete this work.

I want to express my deep gratitude and appreciation to my supervisors, Professor Ilse Feinauer and Mr Mhlobo Jadezweni for their guidance, support and profound ideas during this research. I also wish to record my gratefulness to Professor Knobel Sakhiwo Bongela for his valuable suggestions and insight, and also for allowing me to dissect and examine his work so freely. My gratitude also goes to Professor Samson-Akpan for his priceless ideas particularly on the Igbo culture.

My special thanks go to the *National Research Foundation* which offered me financial assistance that has strongly contributed to the success of my research.

Finally, I thank my husband Zolile, my son Siseko and my two daughters Zenande and Zikisani (Ziyabukwa), for giving me maximum support, love and understanding. My special thanks also go to my brothers and sisters, Lulama (male), Zolisa (female), Mangaliso, Mzingisi, Feziwe, Nontuthuzelo and Makhuze for their unwavering love and support.



## **BIOGRAPHIES**

### **K.S. Bongela's abridged biography**

Knobel Sakhiwo Bongela was born on October 26, 1936 in Bawa village, Butterworth. He received a B.A. from the University of Fort Hare in 1961. He worked as teacher at Blythwood from 1962 to 1969. In 1970 he became a Principal of Ezizweni in Ngqamakhwe which is a school he founded himself. In 1977 he established yet another High School at eMsobomvu in Butterworth. He served the then Department of Education and Training as an examiner, and also on various isiXhosa language organizations in the former Transkei.

This prominent isiXhosa writer and competent translator, has played a huge role in the development of Xhosa literature. He has authored many isiXhosa books, which include the following: *Imizabalazo* (1969), *Umzi Omtsha* (1970), *Alitshoni lingenandaba* (1971), *Iphulo* (1977), *The Silent People* (1983), *Inkaba* (1983), *Inxili* (1985), *Kusa Kusihlwa* (1991), *Amagontsi* (1991), *Ingalo* (1991), *Alitshoni lingenandaba* (1992), *Hlomla amathunzi anabile* (1999), *Iimbali zikaMpahleni* (this book won the Via Afrika Literary Award). He translated a Grade 6 (Std 4) book 'God is Love' into isiXhosa 'UTHixo Uluthando'. He also translated *Things Fall Apart* into isiXhosa 'Lwadilik'udonga' (1993).

He obtained the Doctor of Literature and Philosophy at the University of South Africa in 2002.

## **Chinua Achebe's abridged biography**

Albert Chinualumogu Achebe was born on November 16, 1930 in the large village of Ogidi, Eastern Nigeria. His religious Christian parents, though they installed in him many of the values of their traditional Igbo culture, were devout evangelical Protestants and christened him Albert after Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria. He attended Government College in Umuahia from 1944 to 1947. Like other major Nigerian writers including Wole Soyinka, Elechi Amadi, John Okigbo, John Pepper Clark, and Cole Omotso, he was educated at the University College of Ibadan. This is where he rejected his British name and took his indigenous name Chinua. He then received a B.A. from London University in 1953 and studied broadcasting at the British Broadcasting Corp. in London in 1956.

Achebe is the author of many novels, short stories, essays and children's books. His first work, *Things Fall Apart*, is regarded as a classic of world literature and has been translated into over 50 languages. This novel was published in 1958, and has sold over twelve million copies. It was followed by *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), *A Man of the People* (1966), *Beware, Soul Brother* (1971), and *Anthills of the Savanna* (1987), just to name a few.

Chinua Achebe has received more than twenty honorary doctorates and several international literary prizes. He lives in the United States of America, teaching at Bard College. He is married and has four children.



### **Things Fall Apart – Story in short**

This is a story of a traditional Igbo (pronounced as E'BO and formerly spelled Ibo) village of the late 1800's and one of its great men Okonkwo. This is when missionaries and colonial government made its intrusion into Igbo society. This unsentimental novel depicts the life of this ambitious and powerful leader of an Igbo community, who counts on physical strength and courage. Okonkwo's life is good; he is a husband to three wives, his compound is large, he is a wealthy farmer, a title-holder among his people, a champion wrestler, a member of the select *egwugwu* whose members impersonate ancestral spirits at tribal rituals, and he is respected by his fellow villagers. When Okonkwo accidentally kills a clansman, he is banished from his village for seven years. But the vehicle for his downfall is his blindness to circumstances and missionary church, which brings with it the new authority of the British District Commissioner. In this process Okonkwo is destroyed, because his unwillingness to change set him apart from the community and he is fighting alone against colonialism.

In this novel Achebe shows how the impact of Western influences on traditional Igbo African society was by no means beneficial. Without romanticizing Igbo society, Achebe describes a well-ordered and self-sufficient world where "things" only begin to "fall apart" with the arrival of Europeans.



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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1 Background**

The translation of literary prose is a delicate task. The process fundamentally requires the translator to be as accurate as possible in simple term and phrase translations from the source language to the target language, but at the same time to remain loyal to the spirit of the original text as well as the message. An original literary prose text will have a certain flair indicative of the author's writing style, and therefore the translator must be careful and attentive enough to strike a harmonious balance between remaining completely loyal to his original spirit but also be able to render it idiomatically in the target language and cultural context through his or her own innovations, without overshadowing or altering the original message too drastically.

As one translator once wrote; "Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light; that breaketh the shell, that we may eat the kernel; that putteth aside the curtain, that we may look into the most holy place; that removeth the cover of the well, that we may come by the water" (Lumbi 1971).

How many great works of the world literature would remain unknown to a multitude of people had it not been for translation? Works such as Chinua Achebe's 'Things Fall Apart'. Just to think of it, if it was not for translation, how would readers from other language communities, like isiXhosa, access such rich literature as the one of Chinua Achebe? The ambition of the writer, any writer is to be read. The purists may insist that they ought to be read in the original languages, but we know that such an ideal is impractical. Literature is to be read. We must translate in order to



endow the reader with the power to make some form of contact with much of the world's great writing.

As the name 'translation' suggests, during the process a substance is carried across from one place to another, while at the same time undergoing a material change. Supporting this, Reinfank-Clark (1981: 2) says, in translation our material is the word, our substance is meaning, or if you wish, our vehicle is the language; the cargo is information, culture, and art. During the transport, our material, the vehicle, changes texture and shape, so as to adapt to different climate and road conditions. The more negligible the loss in substantial value, the higher the accomplishment, as the message should come through unaltered, while the language changes.

It is generally accepted that translating literature is a complex process subject to the influence of numerous variable factors, such as whether the translation should be source-language or target-language oriented, or whether a given original should be adapted for certain pragmatic purposes.

IsiXhosa literature and English literature, which are not only written in different languages but also represent different cultures, differ greatly in terms of linguistic, literary and cultural-social conventions.

One of the most interesting aspects of translation, requiring careful and skilful handling is that translation is not just a transfer of information between languages, but the transfer of one culture to another. It necessarily involves the treatment of cultural issues, though their relative importance will vary depending on the text genre as well as on the intended reader and functions of the translated text, among other considerations.

Translating literary prose poses some difficult but interesting problems. It is often hard to render a source language text flawlessly in the target language. Problems

and questions arise that demand particular notice and specific attention. After coming to a basic understanding of the text, the translator must focus on the individual elements of the piece; he or she needs to take into account the style and the tone of the author, the poetics and general aesthetics of the work, the capabilities and expectations of the target audience, and the maintenance of colloquialisms and idioms. The translator must do these things while remaining true to the words and ideas of original texts and the author's intent. But as a translator myself I can honestly say, this is easier said than done.

Therefore, in translating literature we are not just dealing with words written in a certain time, space and sociopolitical situation; most importantly it is the cultural aspect of the text that we should take into account. This is further confirmed by Bassnett and Lefevere (1990:4) who regard culture as the unit of translation, and not the word or even the text.

## **1.2 Aim**

The translation of literary works is generally of great interest to literary scholars. The central aim of this thesis is to focus on the most salient problems encountered when translating an African novel written in English, namely Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* into isiXhosa. Therefore, it is to highlight various problems encountered by the translator in the search for equivalence and adequacy, and also to analyse the manner in which the Igbo culture as reflected in administrative and religious terms in "Things Fall Apart", the source text (ST) has been transferred to "Lwadilik'udonga" (Knobel S Bongela, 1993) the target text (TT).

This will be accomplished, by carrying out a descriptive and comparative analysis in which the translator's strategies are investigated. Meaning that, amongst others, the research will explore the manner in which the Igbo culture has been transferred to



the target text (TT), and that will be achieved by describing and also analyzing some of the strategies that the translator has employed in the transferring of the cultural elements to the target text. It should be stressed, from the outset, that the point at issue is not to evaluate the translation as such. This study is also aimed at contributing to the broader world of literary translation.

### **1.3 Problem statement**

It is the specific problems posed by the translation of novels, taking into account the various problems encountered in the search for equivalence or adequacy. Why is culture an issue in the translation of this book? Is it realistic to expect great literature of one language to be represented artistically intact in another language?

### **1.4 Research hypothesis**

The hypothesis for this thesis is that translation is not just transfer of information between languages, but the transfer of one culture to another. IsiXhosa literature and English literature, which are not only written in different languages but also represent different cultures, differ greatly in terms of linguistic, literary and cultural-social conventions. This study seeks to prove that translating a literary text poses some difficult challenges. It also investigates how the translator in question has tackled these problem areas. The study will also try to verify the hypothesis.

### **1.5 Methodology**

This research will be pursued by first comparing both texts, that is, the source text and the target text. The problems encountered by the translator while translating will be highlighted. Then an analysis of the translated text will be done, in order to investigate the manner in which the cultural issues in the source text have been transferred into the target text.



The study will mainly be based on the following procedures, which will assist the researcher in gathering as much information as possible, that is, empirical research and also bibliographical research. Thus, a qualitative method is intended, where an open-ended interview with the translator Knobel Bongela will be conducted, as a way of soliciting some information from him regarding the strategies he used and the problems he encountered in his translation of Chinua Achebe's book, *'Things Fall Apart'* into isiXhosa *'Lwadilik'udonga'*. The bibliographical research or contextual literature review will in turn help as a theoretical basis of the study. The study will be concluded by the viewpoint of the researcher on what have been gathered.

## **1.6 Outline of Chapters**

**The first chapter** is an introductory chapter which gives a brief introduction to translation. It is in this chapter where the aim of embarking on this kind of study is declared, and the problems that come with literary translation are highlighted. The statement of the problem is spelt out, and the hypothesis is stated. The methodology that will be used in pursuing the study is also explained.

**The second chapter** will be the literature review. This section or chapter is crucial to formulating the framework of my research. It is crucial in that in this section the context within which this research project is located will be indicated. It will look at what the researcher intends to do in relation to the current knowledge, as reflected in the literature. This chapter or this section of work is an academic conversation. It basically deals with what other people or scholars in this field say about the issue at hand.

**The third chapter:** Besides establishing the necessary theoretical underpinnings for the study, the paper will deal in a systematic way with challenges experienced by

the isiXhosa translator. This chapter will highlight the problems encountered during the translation process, and also discuss the analysis of the strategies used in the translation of this work.

**The fourth chapter** will contain the empirical research. The interview with the translator will be dealt with and included in this chapter. Some important issues which are also the essence of this work will also be dealt with in this Chapter.

**Chapter five** will be the conclusion. This is where my research questions will be answered and the hypothesis revisited. This Chapter is the destination, a retrospective look at what I did, and a prospective look at what could still be done to this topic.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **2. Literature review**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the aim of this study is to show how the translator coped with transmitting the message to the new target audience. This will be done bearing in mind Hilaire Belloc's six rules for the translator of a prose text, as reflected in Bassnett-McGuire (1988: 116-117) which could be summarized as "translating the sense of the original, translating idiom by idiom, intention by intention, avoiding false friends, aiming at the resurrection of an alien thing in a native body, and not to embellish". These and many other principles will form the general background against which the current translation will be viewed.

The text I have chosen to analyse and consider particularly the culture-specific issues in it, is the translated version of Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* published in 1958, which I have read several times in the last few years. The text has several references to many "cultural" items and has therefore been considered suitable for the present analysis. Again the text is full of particular difficulties for the translator.

As will be seen, it is possible to relate the translation of this text to the six general rules mentioned by Bassnett-McGuire (1988: 116-117) for the translator. At this point only those that are considered most relevant to this study will be mentioned. They are translating the sense of the original that the translator should render idiom by idiom, the translator must render intention by intention, and finally, the translator should never embellish. These general principles are regarded as both practical and productive. Why? It is because they allow the translator some flexibility and

creativity. By 'idiom by idiom' Bassnett-MacGuire does not recommend rigid compartmentalization into identical categories, whereby an idiom in English would have an equivalent idiom in isiXhosa. By this 'idiom by idiom' Bassnett-MacGuire means an appropriate form in the target language as long as the sense of the original is conveyed. The same applies to intention. This means that a translator should bear in mind the intended meaning of the source language and render it by means of target language words, which does not sound strange to target language readers.

## **2.2 Translation equivalence**

The notion of equivalence is undoubtedly one of the most problematic and controversial areas in the field of translation theory. Catford says, translation equivalence occurs when a source language and a target language text or item are relatable to (at least some of) the same features of substances (Catford 1965:5). The decisive condition in this definition is that of relatability of features. Toury (1980:39) extends Catford's definition to a simple relation between a target and a source text, thus turning it into a (sub theory of the) theory of intertextuality. Equivalence as a theoretical construct denotes an ideal relation between two texts. On the other hand, equivalence as a descriptive term denotes a relation between two concrete texts.

Nida (1964:159) distinguishes between two types of equivalence that is 'formal' and 'dynamic'.

### **2.2.1 Formal equivalence**

In the second edition by him, Nida and Taber (1982), formal equivalence is referred to as 'formal correspondence'. He states that formal equivalence focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content. In such a translation one is



concerned with such correspondences as poetry-to-poetry, sentence-to-sentence, and concept-to-concept. He calls this type of translation, a gloss translation, which aims to allow the reader to understand as much of the Source Language context as possible. We can thus say formal correspondence consists of a Target Language item, which represents the closest equivalent of a Source Language word or phrase. Nida and Taber make it clear that there are not always formal equivalents between language pairs. They therefore suggest that these formal equivalents should be used wherever possible if the translation aims at achieving formal rather than dynamic equivalence.

The use of formal equivalents might at times have serious implications in the Target Text, since the translation will not be easily understood by the target audience (Fawcett, 1977). This is exactly the case with Bongela's translation of *Things Fall Apart*. It is not so easy for the target readers to understand the target text, to an extent that, for one to clearly get the message, one has to read the source text first. And you ask yourself what is the point of a translation if it is not going to transfer the source text message to the intended target readers. It is clear that Bongela indeed did not follow any particular translation strategy or approach. For example, although in his translation he has largely adopted the formal equivalence route, but there are also visible traces of dynamic equivalence. Just to give an example, let's look at this passage;

### **Example 1: Formal Equivalence**

#### Original Text:

*He grew rapidly like a yam tendril in the rainy season, and was full of the sap of life.*

#### The translation:

*Wakhawuleza ukukhula njengomlibo weyem ngexesha lemvula  
kwada kwadloba igazi lobomi nempilo emzimbeni wakhe.*

Back translation

*He grew up quickly like a yam shoot during the season of rain,  
until the blood of life and health ran in his body.*

**Example 2: Dynamic equivalence**

Original text:

*He was tall but very thin and had a slight stoop. He wore a  
haggard and mournful look except when he was drinking or  
playing on his flute. (Achebe, 1958:4)*

The translation:

*Wayengumfo osukileyo egadeni kodwa eswazeke  
okwengcongolo, etyingoza de wangathi unendawo yokufuna  
ukugoba. Wayesoloko enentsobi yoxhwaleko, ngaphandle  
kwamaxa azithe nti ngodlomdlayo okanye xa adlala umfiyo.  
(Bongela, 1993:2)*

Back translation

*He was a tall man but thin like a reed, so much it seemed he  
was bending forward. He always had a sorrowful look, except  
for when he was drunk or playing the flute.*

One of the problems with formal correspondence is that, despite being a useful tool to employ in the comparative linguistics, it seems that it is not really relevant in terms of assessing translation equivalence between source text and target text.



### **2.2.2 Dynamic equivalence**

Nida (1982:200) then goes on to explain what he calls dynamic equivalence. He says it is based on the principle of 'equivalent effect', i.e. that the relationship between the target receivers and the target language message should aim at being the same as that between the original receivers and the source language message. It can thus be defined as a translation principle according to which a translator seeks to translate the meaning of the original in such a way that the target language wording will trigger the same impact on the target language audience as the original did upon the source text audience. Nida and Taber (1982:200) argue that, frequently the form of the original text is changed; but as long as the change follows the rules of back transformation in the receptor language, the message is preserved and the translation is faithful. Giving an example of this type of equivalence Nida quotes J.B. Phillips' rendering of Romans 16:16, where the idea of 'greeting each other with a Holy kiss', is translated as, 'give one another a hearty handshake all round'. With this example of what seems to be a piece of inadequate translation in poor state, the weakness of Nida's loosely defined types can clearly be seen. An example of this kind of equivalence from the texts in question has been given above (Page 10).

### **2.2.3 Equivalent effect**

It has sometimes been said that the overriding purpose of any translation should be to achieve the equivalent effect, that is, to produce the same effect or one as close as possible, on the readership of the translation as was obtained on the readership of the original. This, as mentioned earlier, is called 'equivalent response principle'. As I see it, equivalent effect is the desirable result rather than the aim of any translation, bearing in mind that it is an unlikely result in two cases: (a) if the purpose of the source language text is to affect and the target language translation is to inform – or vice versa; (b) if there is a pronounced cultural gap between the



source language and the target language text. However, in the communicative translation of vocative texts, equivalent effect is not only desirable, it is essential. I also support the view that translators should strive to make sure that the message of the source text remains clear in the target text.

According to Vinay and Darbelnet (1995:342), equivalence is an ideal method when the translator has to deal with proverbs, idioms, clichés, nominal or adjectival phrases and the onomatopoeia of animal sounds.

As stated earlier, one of the most interesting aspects of translation, requiring careful and skilful handling is that, translation is "not just a transfer of information between languages, but a transfer from one culture to another" (Hervey, et al 1995: 20). It necessarily involves the treatment of cultural issues, though their relative importance will vary depending on text genre as well as on the intended reader and functions of the translated text, amongst other considerations. A first language speaker of the target language in this case, is the translator of the target text 'Lwadiilik'udonga'. He is translating this book not for a foreign audience but the intended readers are his own people. That is, the translator is translating into his language and his culture, which are different from the author's. This, I feel presents an entirely new perspective on the principle of 'equal effect' as espoused by Bassnett-MacGuire (1988: 26) where she says that "the relationship between the receiver and message should aim at being the same as that between the original receivers and source language (SL) message". The reason why I feel this presents a new perspective on the principle of equal effect is that, unlike with many other translators, Bongela is translating into his own culture, into his own language and for his own people. It thus should not be a challenge for him to achieve the principle of equal effect. She (Bassnett-MacGuire *ibid*: 27) later extended the definition as follows:



*In trying to solve the problem of translation equivalence, Neubert postulates that from the point of view of a theory of texts, translation equivalence must be considered a semiotic category, comprising a syntactic, semantic and pragmatic component, following Pierce's categories. These components are arranged in a hierarchical relationship, where semantic equivalence takes priority over syntactic equivalence, and pragmatic equivalence conditions and modifies both the other elements.*

The greater precision concerning the target text's (TT) intended reader may be achieved by resorting to Coulthard (1992: 9):

*...when an author produces a text...he constructs an **ideal reader** in his mind to whom he attributes knowledge of certain facts, memory of certain experiences, accurate recall of certain parts of certain other texts, plus certain opinions, preferences and prejudices and a certain level of linguistic competence.*

Although the source text (ST) is not a contemporary novel as such, the target text (TT) has been prepared with an educated generalist reader in mind as defined by Newmark (1988: 102), that is, a person who would read a translated version of *Things Fall Apart* for pleasure and educational purposes, and who, if he/she buys a translation work by an African novelist, is expected to be interested in and basically familiar with traditional African culture.

The contribution made by many translation theorists offers a great deal of assistance to literary translation students in particular, and translators at large. Descriptive translation theorists like Bassnett (1980), Toury (1980), Hermans (1985), Lambert and Van Gorp (1985), and Lefevere (1992) amongst others,



suggest that the socio-cultural context in which translations take place should be considered in the study of translations. They argue that translations are never produced in a vacuum, but they are part of a larger system and therefore should be described in terms of the target system (Lambert and Van Gorp, 1985:44). This approach is in contrast with the approach of earlier translation theorists who believed in the abstract ideal of exact equivalence between the source text (ST) and the target text (TT). Catford (1965:2) illustrates this ideal concept of equivalence when he defines translation as 'the replacement of textual material in another language'.

Still on the issue of equivalence, one interesting question especially in literary translations and particularly in the translation of prose or novel would be; can there be exact equivalents, does true or exact equivalence exist? One can clearly see that the notion of equivalence is undoubtedly one of the most problematic and controversial areas in the field of translation theory. The term has caused, and it seems quite probable that it will continue to cause heated debates within the field of translation studies. And since *equivalence* is a term that is also broadly used outside the field enquiry at hand, that is translation; it may be useful to conclude with more general definitions of the concept before mentioning more specific ones. *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* (1992:289) defines it as being equal in value, amount, meaning, etc. *The Collins Dictionary of the English Language* (1991:526) defines it as the state of being equal or interchangeable in value, quality, significance, etc; or having the same or similar effect or meaning. *The Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (1991:421) similarly defines the concept as the state of being 'equal in force, amount or value', or 'like in significance or import'.

Considering these dictionary definitions, it becomes immediately clear that there are three main components to both; which are, a pair (at least) between which the relationship exists, a concept of likeness/sameness/similarity/equality, and a set of



equalities (Halverson 1997:209). Thus, a more specific definition of equivalence would be the relationship existing between two or more entities, and the relationship is described as one of likeness/sameness/similarity/equality in terms of any of a number of potential qualities. Catford says, translation equivalence occurs when a source language (SL) and a target language (TL) text or item are relatable to (at least some of) the same features of substances (Catford 1965:50). The decisive condition in this definition is that of reliability of features. Toury extends Catford's definition to a simple relation between a target and source text, thus turning it into a (sub theory of the) theory of intertextuality (Toury 1980:39). Equivalence as a theoretical construct denotes an ideal relation between two texts. On the other hand, equivalence as a descriptive term denotes a relation between two concrete texts.

The descriptive translation theorists are of the opinion that translations can never be exact equivalents of their originals because every translation involves a certain amount of manipulation for a certain purpose (Hermans 1985:13). This view means that equivalence is not an abstract theoretical concept, but is simply seen as the existing relationship between two texts.

Vinay and Darbelnet (1995:32) have a different view: they view equivalence-orientated translation as a procedure, which replicates the same situation as in the original, whilst using completely different wording. They also suggest that, if this procedure is applied during the translation process, it can maintain the stylistic impact of the source language text in the target language text. According to them, equivalence is therefore the ideal method when the translator has to deal with proverbs, idioms, clichés, nominal or adjectival phrases and the onomatopoeia of animal sounds.

I have dealt at length with the equivalent effect principle because it is an important translation concept, especially in literary translation. And this equivalent effect



principle has a degree of application to any type of text, although it does not have the same degree of importance.

### **2.3 Translation strategies**

This brings into mind what Newmark named 'transparent' or 'opaque' terms. By 'transparent' terms he means those terms of which the meaning is easily detectable. In contrast, 'opaque' terms refer to those terms of which the meaning is not easily detectable on the surface (Newmark 1988:99). An example of this would be the term 'kotma' which appears both in the source and the target texts. The meaning of this term is not easily detectable to the target text readers. This term was used by the Igbos to refer to the court messengers who were greatly hated in Umuofia. They were hated because they were foreigners, arrogant and also high-handed. Because of their ash-colored shorts they earned the additional name of Ashy-Buttocks. Although the nickname basically describes the ash-colored shorts these people wore, it nevertheless shows disrespect and contempt because 'kotma' did not approve of it. Obviously, Igbos used the term to humiliate the 'kotma'. In an attempt to capture the same spirit of the source text, Bongela translates the term as *ooMpundwana ziluthuthu* (Bongela 1993: 108). The intention of this literal translation appears to be that the translator wants the Xhosa readership to relate to 'kotma' in the same negative way as the source text readership. At the same time, this literal translation makes the term 'transparent', that is, more meaningful.

It is obvious therefore that if terms are not 'transparent' the translator faces a serious challenge in making terms accessible and meaningful to the target readership. Even in cases where terms seem to be 'transparent' the translator still has to make their meaning relevant and comprehensible to the target readership.

While Bill's rules, (as cited by Neethling 1997: 20) of 'fidelity' and 'naturalness' are the most important principles in translation, the following strategy by Nida (as cited



by Bassnett-MacGuire 1980: 26) is a useful tool and has been in a way followed in Bongela's translation:

*Dynamic equivalence is based on the principle of equivalent effect, i.e. that the relationship between the receiver and the message should aim at being the same as that between receivers and Source Language (SL) message. As an example of this type of equivalence, he quotes J.B. Phillip's rendering of Romans 16:16, where the idea of "greeting with a holy kiss" is translated as "give one another a hearty handshake all round.*

According to Baker (1992:31), this strategy involves replacing a culture-specific item with an item, which does not have the same propositional meaning but which is likely to have a similar impact on the target reader. The main advantage of using this strategy is that it gives target text readers a familiar concept with which they can identify.

In this research paper as many terms as possible, amongst others, which indicate administration of the traditional Igbo society will be discussed. These will include terms like, titled men, *egwugwu*, elders, District Commissioner, *kotma*, etc. The manner in which K.S. Bongela (1993) translated these terms will be investigated.

## **2.4 Translational norms**

One would notice a link between Baker's views and the view of translational norms proposed by Toury (1995:56-58). He (Toury) states that there are three kinds of norms in translation that can be distinguished, namely preliminary, operational and initial norms. According to him, preliminary norms deal with factors that determine the selection of texts for translation as well as the overall translation strategy used. About operational norms he says they determine the actual decisions made in the



translation process itself. He says that such decisions may include strategies like addition, omission, substitution, etc. And this is where there is a noticeable link between his view and that of Baker about transparent terms and opaque terms. Regarding initial norms, he argues that these norms indicate the translator's choice between a source-oriented or a target-oriented approach. In the former the translator subjects himself or herself to the textual structure and norms of the source text, whereas in the latter the translator expresses the literary and cultural norms of the target readership. However it is important to note that there is no clear-cut distinction between the two approaches; translators may decide to adopt an approach, which is situated at some point between these two extremes, pending on what they want to achieve. In Bongela's translation '**Lwadilik'udonga**' one would notice that he didn't make any clear choice between the two approaches, his choice is somewhat between the two, although there is much evidence of the source-oriented approach. This is because he has subjected himself mostly to the textual structure and norms of the source text.

## **2.5 Cultural norms / Translation as Intercultural communicator**

Anthony Pym emphasizes the importance of translators as members of intercultural groups also that, translation studies could become intercultural studies, and translation history a part of intercultural history. The term intercultural means overlapping or intersecting, and should not be confused with cross-culturality. He assures us that translation history does not have to point only to the past. In this way he makes translation history a practical instrument for today's translation studies (Pym 2001: 2).

As could be expected, some cultural terms are very difficult to translate. Bill (1982:109) identifies a problematic area that she calls Cultural Diversity – language as the expression of the culture of its speakers. In few cases the Igbo language terms were retained, such as *kola*, *egwuwgu*, *isa-ifi*, *ogbanje*, *iyi-uwa*, *obi*, *ozo*, *chi*,



*etc.* Let us take for example the Igbo terms like the ones mentioned above and others. Bongela, instead of translating these terms he transfers them unchanged throughout the text. Transference, according to Newmark (1988: 81), is the process of transferring a source language term or word to a target language text unchanged. Such a term could then become a loan in the target text. The following extracts illustrate the appearance of a term as a loan word in the target text:

Original text: *He could hear in his mind's ear the blood-stirring and the intricate rhythms of the **ekwe** and the **udu** and the **ogene**, and he could hear his own flute weaving in and out them, decorating them with a colorful and plaintive tune (Achebe, 1958:5).*

Translation

*Kaloku wasuka weva ngendlebe yengqondo isingqi sezixhobo zomculo ezinjenge**ekwe**, **iudu**, neeogene. Watsho wanga uyawuva umtyingo wakhe untyiloza phakathi kwezo zixhobo zomculo uzivanga ngolo ncuthu lomculo uqaqambileyo nobongoza kalusizi (Bongela, 1993: 3).*

Translation, which is the meeting of different cultures and civilizations, introduces nations to various perspectives on their paths to modernization and intellectual advancement. In 1935, the Turkish philosopher Hilmi Ziya Ulken stated that opening up to civilization involves opening the doors to all the influences of cultural, scientific and intellectual activities abroad. Hence, a deliberate selection of those influences, considering also the potential and cultural treasures within a country, will guide the nation on the way of civilization and modernization. Ulken went on to say that all nations' awakening periods, which constitute turning points in the progress towards civilization, the greatness of words of art could only be judged in terms of the doors of influences they open up; no doubt, translation is the primary influence among them.



In other words, translation is the power behind the awakening periods of nations. The ancient Greek awakening took place through translations from Anatolia, Phoenicia and Egypt; the Turk-Uighur awakening took its power from Indian, Persian, and Nestorian translations; the Islamic awakening was influenced by the Greek (Nestorian, Jacobites) and Indian translations; and the European Renaissance was only possible due to the translations from Islamic, Jewish, and Greek sources (Ulken 1935: 11-33). A thorough study of the history of translation uncovers the civilization power throughout the centuries and shows how translation has guided nations towards westernization and modernization.

Anthony Pym is one of many theorists who believe in the importance of the history of translation. His immeasurable contribution to Translation Studies is no doubt translation history. He follows translators across cultures, seeking large-scale historical relations, and is particularly interested in the study of debates about translation.

According to him, his interest is not in translation as such, but rather in the relations and histories of intercultural. Although he has written various books on translation history, such as *Method in Translation History* and *Studies in Hispanic Translation History*, he does not regard himself as being an authority on the history of translations. He does however, see translators as members of intercultural, and he is also aware of the fact that translators have cross-cultural influence (Pym 2001:2).

It is clear that Pym looks beyond translation. As mentioned above, his interest is geared towards social and cross-cultural relations. To him the sociological and collective subject is of more importance: "The people who are able to use and develop complex codes, in whatever field, in whatever set of languages, are the ones most likely to influence the destinies of our cultures" (Pym 2001: 2). Pym makes it quite clear that anyone can write a register of all the literary works that



have been translated or not translated, but for him that would only describe the 'target-language culture' for which one does not need translation history (Pym 2001: 3).

In his opinion, an important principle is for a translator to have intercultural abilities. These abilities, according to him, will enable the translator to understand both the source and target culture differences (Pym 1998: 10). After all, translation is not done for the translator's benefit only; it concerns people in various cultures. He is also of the opinion that history is an excellent way for developing intercultural understanding to obtain sense of identity, which is one of the reasons why we should be studying translation history.

Pym's personal interests and his subjectivity provided answers to many of his questions and reasoning about translation history, and specifically about translators. Subjectivity in translation history creates awareness and insight into historical aspects that allows us to understand translations, which include linguistic and cultural aspects today (Pym, 1998:36, 37).

Pym emphasizes the importance of translators as members of intercultural groups also that, translation studies could become intercultural studies, and translation history a part of intercultural history. He assures us that translation history does not have to point only to the past. In this way he makes translation history a practical instrument for today's translation studies.

## **2.6 Translation history**

The history of translation helps those who are interested in translation, literature, and cultural studies to better understand the contribution of translation civilization and to the development of cultural and intellectual life.



After all, neither translation nor its history is done for the translator's benefit only. It concerns people in various cultures. The history of translation needs not be an obscure sub-discipline. If studied intelligently and critically, it can trace the past of countless suppressed intermediaries whose work might change our ideas of what cultures are, of how linguistic borders operate, and of what kind of future we can expect from globalization. Starting from the critical notion that we should be asking questions of contemporary importance – and that 'importance' itself must be defined - Anthony Pym sets about undoing many of the currently dominant models of translation history, positing, among much else, that the object of this history should be translators as people, that researchers are subjectively involved in their object, that cultural systems are based on social will, that translators work in intercultural spaces, and that a model of cooperation through negotiation may be applied to the translators' (and researchers') work between cultures.

If we start with general considerations it might be relevant to point out how amazing it is that translation has, in the course of time been given a number of various definitions, ranging from well-researched, scholarly arguments to a variety of cosmic misunderstandings of what the process is. The following one which is succinct but to the point, seems to give in a simple way a fair account of what the whole exercise is taken to be. Seguinot (1989a) says it is the replacement of textual material in one language (source language) by equivalent textual material in another language (target language). But my most simple, most straightforward and most understandable definition would be that, translation turns communication in one language into a correct and understandable version of that communication in another language. But within these definitions, or any other definition of translation, is a sea full of hidden icebergs designed to sink the ship of the translation activity.

On the other hand, Brower (1966:25) elaborates on the aforementioned definitions when he says, if translation laws could be drawn up, one would agree that:



- (i) Translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work.
- (ii) That the style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original.
- (iii) That the translation should have all the ease of original composition.

In other words the translator's task is not only to convey the writer's ideas, but also to render his style in such a way as to make the translation read naturally to a native speaker of the target language, which in this case is isiXhosa while the source language is English.

As has been mentioned earlier, the sea of translation is full of icebergs. This means, in his/her attempt to transfer meaning from one language (source language) to another language (target language) by means of this universally known practice of translation, the translator faces a plethora of linguistic, stylistic and even cultural problems. In this regard, Popovic (1970:79) confirms that "this transfer is not performed directly and is not without its difficulties."

As for these difficulties, problems or shortcomings which are often inherent in translation, Goethe (1921) had this pertinent remark to make as early as 1827:

*Say what one will of the inadequacy of translation, it remains one of the most important and worthiest concerns in the totality of world affairs.*

Based on the translation definitions, and what has been cited above, one can see that the task of translation is indeed full of icebergs or challenges which, are designed to sink the ship of translation activity.

Before dealing with the various challenges encountered during the course of the translation of Achebe's novel into isiXhosa, I need to give some background on issues pertaining to the translation activity.

## **2.7 Claim to fidelity**

Every translation activity has one or more specific purposes and whichever they may be; the main aim of translation is to serve as a cross-cultural bilingual communication vehicle among peoples. In the past few decades, this activity has developed because of the rising international trade, increasing migration, globalization, the recognition of linguistic minorities, and the expansion of the mass media and technology (Kelly 1999:3). For this reason, the translator plays an important role as a bilingual or multilingual cross-cultural transmitter of culture and truths by attempting to interpret concepts and speech in a variety of texts as faithfully and as accurately as possible. Accuracy refers to preserving the meaning of the original text. The term "accuracy" is essentially synonymous with the term "faithfulness", but some translation theoreticians differentiate between the two terms. A translation which is accurate is faithful to the intended meaning of the original author. As Goethe observes:

*There are two principles of translation. The translator can bring to his fellow countrymen a true and clear picture of the foreign author and foreign circumstances, keeping strictly to the original; but he can also treat the foreign work as a writer treats his material, altering it after his own tastes and convictions, so that it is brought closer to his fellow countrymen, who can then accept it as if it were an original work (Goethe, 1921:11).*

The best translations have thorough accuracy, that is, accuracy at all levels of language. A translation can be accurate, at least in the commonly used sense of the



term, at the word level, but not at higher levels of language, for instance, a single word or an idiom (an idiom itself is typically composed of several words) may be accurately translated, but if the meaning of the whole idiom is not communicated adequately in the translation, the translation is not accurate for that idiom. What is important here is that, faithfulness (which is in this case used synonymous to accuracy) should look both directions, toward the source and toward the target, and should be considered as the first requirement of any translation. This means that the translation must convey the meaning of the original writing as closely as possible, especially regarding literary texts.

Bassnett and Lefevere (1990: 8) comment that:

*Faithfulness'...does not enter into translation in the guise of 'equivalence' between words or texts but, if at all, in the guise of an attempt to make the target text function in the target culture the way the source text functioned in the source culture...*

At the word "faithfulness" further metaphors which have become classical immediately suggest themselves; the now proverbial expression of the 'beautiful unfaithful': the most beautiful translations, like the most beautiful women, are not supposed to be the most faithful (Levy 1969:84). Faithfulness towards the original text is the cardinal problem in the theory and practice. What a faithful translation should be like, how the translator should proceed, was set out by Horace and then thereafter by Hieronymus in an expression which has become classical: a translation should not be from word to word, but from sense to sense (Koller 1972: 115). Nowadays 'faithful' is often replaced with other concepts. For example, one speaks of 'simple response' or of the most common one 'equivalence', whereby the demand for 'equivalence' affects both the semantic as well as the stylistic and the functional area. For instance Jakobson characterizes the original message and the translation

message as two equivalent messages in two different codes. Nida and Taber (1982) define translation as:

*Translation consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style.*

The effect of the text, which should be the same in the original and the translation, is also occasionally clothed in metaphor: the 'fragrance', the 'taste', the 'aroma' of a work must be saved.

## **2.8 Communication and accommodation**

### **2.8.1 Communication**

The overall translation activity is a kind of communication behaviour between the source text author and the target text reader via the translator (McEldowney, 1990). In most cases, translation is to be understood as a process whereby a message expressed in a specific source language is linguistically transformed in order to be understood by readers of the target language. Therefore, no particular adapting work is usually required from the translator, whose work essentially consists of conveying the meaning expressed by the original writer. What is important in a translation of a novel is that the end reader needs a translated text that is faithful to the source text in meaning, regardless of stylistic prowess from the translator. This makes the translator an active link in the communication chain, and the translation, a communicative activity.

This communicative activity is, of course, not merely a matter of the linguistic code changing from the source text into the target text. Rather, it must involve



negotiating a certain message with the target text readers, so that the closest meaning of the source text to its readers can be realized by the target readership.

When the literary translator's communication skills are called upon to enhance the effect of the original message, the first wise step is to detect potential discrepancies and flaws in the original text and understand the meaning they intend to convey. To do this, the translator often needs to contact the writer of the text to be translated (or any other person who is familiar with the contents of the text) in order to clarify the ambiguities he has come across (Beaugrande, 1980: 43).

In this respect Mtuze (2003:2) has this supporting view regarding the translation of Mandela's autobiography:

*As soon as I received a copy of the book, I realized that there were some several problem areas, culture-specific collocations that needed sorting out with Madiba, i.e. Mr. Mandela. The publisher promptly organized a meeting between Madiba, the publisher and the four translators, Antjie Krog for Afrikaans, Bheki Ntuli for IsiZulu, Maje Serudu of Sepedi, and myself for IsiXhosa...The consultation was necessitated by the fact that IsiXhosa and [Western] English kinship terms differ radically at times.*

Once this part of work is over, the translator will undo the syntactic structure of the original text and then formulate the corresponding message in the target language, thus giving the original text added value in terms of both wording and impact. It is important to stress that this work will always be carried out in cooperation with the original writer, so that the translator can make sure the translated message corresponds to the meaning the writer originally intended to convey. From reading Bongela's translation, it is evident that he did not get the opportunity of getting into

contact or rather work hand-in-hand with the author. I think this is one of the major reasons of the problems he encountered.

Remember, the translator is essentially a message conveyor, not an author, and that an ideal translation is a communicative translation, in which one is expressing all aspects of meaning in a way that is readily understandable to the intended audience.

Finally, it is very important to know that translation is the key to international understanding. So in the vast world of communication and information overload, we need competent translators who have both the theoretical knowledge and practical skills to do their jobs well.

### **2.8.2 Accommodation**

The idiom of any given language often presents a translator with particular difficulties. Accommodation in this work is considered a synonym of adaptation which means changes are made so the target text produced is in line with the spirit of the original. Accommodation is also translation, a free, rather than literal translation, kind of translation. Moreover, it is inevitable in practice to decide whether the translation is to maintain the source message's essence, impact, and effect.

### **2.9 Literary translation**

Literary translation is one of the major categories a translator's work falls into. This category involves translating both classical and contemporary works in any of the three main genres: fiction, drama and poetry. It is also used by the film industry with dubbed or subtitled films intended for foreign audiences (Clancy, 1971:311).



A literary translator's main task is to provide the most accurate translation of the original. This involves not so much a word-for-word translation of the source text, rather an attempt to convey the author's original message, and evoke the same flavour of the story and sentiments of a foreign readership and audience. In the case of contemporary literary works, the translator normally works closely with the author.

Like any translator, a literary translator is required to have a very good knowledge of two or more languages and cultures. Different from other translators, s/he is expected to be an expert in literature, have a flair for creative writing, and be aware of existing translations of one and the same literary work. One of the early French translators by the name of Etienne Dolet, made attempts to establish a set of major rules or principles to be referred to in literary translation. It was in 1540 when he formulated the following fundamental principles of translation, usually regarded as providing rules for the practicing translator:

- The translator should understand perfectly the content and intention of the author whom he is translating
- The translator should have perfect knowledge of the language from which he is translating and equally excellent knowledge of the language into which he is translating
- The translator should avoid the tendency to translate word-for-word, for to do so is to destroy the meaning of the original and to ruin the beauty of the expression
- The translation should employ the forms of speech in common usage
- The translator should – through his/her choice and order of words produce a total overall effect with appropriate tone (Dolet 1540: 43).

This translator's task is to create conditions under which the source language author and the target language reader can interact with one another (Lotfipour, 1977). The

translator uses the core meaning present in the source text to create a new whole, namely, the target text (Farahzad, 1998).



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **3. Qualitative analysis**

The researcher will now sensitize you to the nature of the icebergs or challenges in literary translation. This will be done by highlighting the problems the translator K.S. Bongela encountered in his translation of Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" into isiXhosa "Lwadilik'udonga".

#### **3.1 Introduction**

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this study is not to scorn or ridicule the attempts of the translator, nor is it to exhaust the myriads of problems that appear in this kind of translation, but to highlight in a systematic way, the various challenges encountered by the isiXhosa translator in search for equivalence and adequacy while translating Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Bongela, could not and did not avoid all the pitfalls of literary translation, he fell into many. As Neethling (1997:19) correctly puts it, 'the pitfalls regarding any translation are many and I am sure I did not avoid them all. On the contrary, I am sure that I have fallen into many'. This work thus seeks to show how the isiXhosa translator coped with transmitting the message to the new target audience bearing in mind Hilaire Belloc's six general rules for the translator of a prose text, as reflected in Bassnett-McGuire (1988:116-117).

This aim will also be accomplished by describing and analysing strategies employed by the translator in transferring cultural issues to the target text. This is because translation is more than converting words from one language into another. It is a complex process of cultural transfer, and the translator bears the responsibility for

the accuracy of this transfer. Thus, a number of cultural issues will be raised and analysed alongside various culture-bound expressions and terms.

In 1993 K.S Bongela was commissioned by Heinemann South Africa to translate Chinua Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart*, into isiXhosa. This was his first literary translation work, and he had no background whatsoever of any translation theory. But when one looks closely at his translation of *Things Fall Apart*, one observes that he is more inclined towards the functionalist approach.

### **3.1.1 Functionalism approach**

The functionalist approach brings forth the opinion that the translation process starts with the initiator who may be a client. The client will approach the translator with a brief and then the translator will analyse the brief. Thereafter the translator will analyse the source text with the brief and source text features in mind.

Functionalists like Reiss and Vermeer (1984) concur with text-linguists, who argue that translators are always dealing with a text in a situation and in a culture, and for that reason; the texts have to fulfill a specific function. However, the functionalists lay emphasis on the target culture. They argue that translation is transfer between cultures. They state that a translation is a translation when it functions as a text in the target culture. This is the case with the translation in question.

The functionalist view that during the translation process some aspects of the source text will be kept and others disregarded, and that the target text may be the same, or may differ completely from the source text; is manifest in Bongela's translation. Hence he is observed as being more inclined towards the functionalist approach.



The first challenge the translator was confronted with was the very differences which exist between isiXhosa and English. While it is easier to render adequate translation equivalence at the syntactic level, there is always difficulty in doing so at the lexical level. It is for this reason that a number of problem areas in this regard will be highlighted. It is important at this stage to point out that the translator was actually translating the novel not for a foreign audience, but was translating it into his own language and culture. As Baker (1992) puts it,

*A translator shall work only into the language (in exceptional cases this may include a second language) of which he has native knowledge. 'Native knowledge' is defined as the ability to speak and write language so fluently that the expression of thought is structurally, grammatically and 'idiomatically' correct.*

This will sustain and support the principle of 'equal effect' as espoused by Bassnett-McGuire (1988:26) when she says,

*...that the relationship between receiver and the message should aim at being the same as that between original receivers and the Source Language message.*

As mentioned earlier (page 17), Eugene Nida exemplifies this type of equivalence by quoting J.B. Phillips rendering of Romans 16:6, where the idea of 'greeting with a holy kiss' is translated as 'give one another a hearty handshake all around.' Bassnett-McGuire (1980: 27) later extended the definition when she adds:

*In trying to solve the problem of translation equivalence, Neubert postulates that from the point of view of a theory of texts, translation equivalence must be considered a semiotic category, comprising a syntactic, semantic and pragmatic*

*component, following Pierce's categories. These components are arranged in a hierarchical relationship, where semantic equivalence takes priority over syntactic equivalence, and pragmatic equivalence conditions and modifies both the other elements.*

## **3.2 Outline of Problems/Challenges**

### **3.2.1 Belloc's six general rules for the translator**

Having begun by stating that the intention is not to scorn or ridicule the isiXhosa translator, but the intention is that of spending some time studying the specific problems of translating literary prose, specifically K.S. Bongela's 'Lwadilik'udonga.'

Susan Bassnett-McGuire (1988:116-117) reflects on six general rules which are laid down by Hilaire Belloc for the translator. These general principles are regarded as both practical and productive. They allow the translator some flexibility and creativity (Mtuze 2003:2). I will now use these rules to show how K.S. Bongela coped with transmitting the message to the target audience, the isiXhosa readers.

#### **3.2.1.1 Rule 1:**

***The translator should not 'plod on', word by word or sentence by sentence, but should 'always "block out" his work'.*** By 'block out', Belloc means that the translator should consider the work as an integral unit and eligible to translate in sections, asking himself 'before each what the whole sense is he has to render' (Bassnett-McGuire 1980: 116).

My interpretation of this rule would be: Faced with a passage in the original language, the translator must ask him/herself,



1. What does the author say?
2. What does he/she mean?
3. How does he/she say it?

As House (1977:38) points out, the translator must have a macroscopic point of view, namely, a view of the whole, and should always remember what he/she is working on is a literary work written by somebody else and try his/her utmost to turn the translation into a work of art which is in conformity with the thought, feelings, and style of the original. Thus, the translation will be as moving and vivid as the original work and the reader may be aesthetically entertained as well.

The stubborn inclination of some literary translators toward word-for-word, verbatim translation indicates little or no concern at all for semantics, logic or context. One comes across this type of mistake when reading Bongela's translation of *Things Fall Apart*. Obviously this approach generates most of the problems, especially between languages like the two in question, with different grammatical and syntactical properties. For an example, let us consider the following passage:

### **Example 1:**

#### **Source Text:**

*They sang songs as they went, and on their way they paid short courtesy visits to prominent men like Okonkwo, before they finally left for their village. **Okonkwo made a present of two cocks to them.** (Achebe, 1958:85)*

#### **Target text:**

*Babecula ukuphuma kwabo beza endleleni egodukayo behamba betyelela amadoda aziwayo anjengooOkonkwo, phambi kokuba bagodukele elalini yabo. **U-Okonkwo wenza isipho seenkunzi ezimbini kubo.** (Bongela, 1993: 77)*

### **Example 2:**

Source text: *I have cleared a farm but have no yams to sow. I know what it is to ask a man to trust another with his yams, especially these days when young men are afraid of hard work. (Achebe 1958:15)*

Target text: *Ndigityule ndayilima ifama yam kodwa andinazo iiyem zokuhlwayela. Ndiyayazi ingxaki yokucela umntu ukuba makamthembe omnye ngokumboleka iiyem zakhe ngakumbi kule mihla apho abafana boyika ukusebenza nzima. (Bongela 1993:14)*

The glaring shortfall in the above translations is that they fail to capture the vitality of the original, let alone being literal and lacking lucidity. The translator tried to retain the forms of the original text as much as possible, even though these forms are not the most natural forms to preserve the original meaning. He seeks to translate or rather match an original word by the same target word.

A word-for-word or a literal translation frequently does not accurately transfer the meaning of the original to the target language. This is because it focuses on the forms of language, and so it misses some of the meaning of those forms, since meaning is found not only in forms of individual words, but also in relationships among words, phrases, idiomatic uses of words, and influences of speaker-hearer, cultural and historical contexts. As Owens (1996: 326) puts it, words often have different meanings in different contexts, but literal or word-for-word translation often does not account for these differences. The example cited above, is not a good translation, since a good translation allows the user of the translation to understand the original meaning, just as the users of the original text did. The target readers including myself couldn't understand the exact meaning of the text.



The translator here seems to have completely missed the point, thus effecting a change in focus and nuance.

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 B.C.), Roman statesman, orator and writer, translated many Greek works into Latin. Cicero's approach to translation was sense-for-sense and not word-for-word. That means a translator should bear in mind the intended meaning of the source language and render it by means of target language words, which does not sound strange to target language readers.

Each language is full of its own properties and carries its own peculiar meaning and in lexical meanings words acquire various overtones and associations that are not shared by the nearest corresponding words in another language. The English and the isiXhosa do not apprehend the world in the same manner, and as a result marked differences exist not only linguistically but also culturally between the two languages. Intuitively, we all actually understand that meaning is more than just the meaning of individual words. For instance, we can understand all the words of the following utterance, even though the sequence or order of the words has been changed,

*Okonkwo patience had with father his no*

We can even make sense out of the utterance. But we can't accurately understand what this utterance means until we hear the words in their original order:

*Okonkwo had no patience with his father.*

Meaning is composed of the meanings of the words, including any non-literal meaning of those words, as they relate to each other, within a social context. Meaning is not simply the meaning of individual words, strung together one after the other.

Again and again translators of novels take pains in creating readable Target Language texts, avoiding the stilted effect that can follow from adhering too closely to Source Language syntactical structures, but fail to consider the way in which individual sentences form part of the total structure. And in pointing out this failure, which is first and foremost a deficiency in reading, I believe that I am not so much passing judgement on the work of this particular individual as pointing towards a whole area of translation that needs to be looked at more closely.

Bassnett-McGuire (1980: 117) says that this rule raises what is perhaps the central problem for the novel or prose translator, the difficulty of determining translation units. It must be clear that the text, understood to be in a dialectical relationship with other texts and located within a specific historical context, is the prime unit. But whereas the poet translator can more easily break the prime text down into translatable units, e.g. lines, verses and stanzas, the prose translator has a more complex task. Certainly, many novels are broken down into chapters or sections, but as Barthes has shown with his methodology of five reading codes (as discussed by Hawkes, 1977: 117) the structuring of a prose text is by no means as linear as the chapter divisions might indicate. Yet, if the translator takes each sentence or paragraph as a minimum unit and translates it without relating it to the overall work, he runs the risk of ending up with a target language text like those quoted above, where the paraphrasable content of the passages has been translated at the cost of everything else.

Bassnett-McGuire (ibid: 118) goes on to suggest a way around this dilemma, which she says must be sought through considering the function both of the text and of the devices within the text itself. This simply means that what the translator must do is to first determine the function of the source language system, and then find a target language system that will adequately render the function.



### 3.2.1.2 Rule 2

***The translator should render idiom by idiom 'and idioms of their nature demand translation into another form from that of the original'.***

An idiom is an expression which is unique to a language and cannot be understood simply from the meaning of its individual words. In other words, the actual meaning of an idiom is not the total of the meaning of its individual parts. An idiom is a figure of speech. And it is probably the case that every human language has idioms, and very many of them. There are, in fact, no known languages that do not have some form of idiom.

All those who have been involved in translation will agree with me when I say, translation of idioms is one of the most difficult tasks for translators. The main problems consist in recognizing an idiom and in distinguishing idiomatic from non-idiomatic usage. Recognition is difficult since many idioms can be modified and others can be discontinuously spread over a clause. Generally speaking, the more difficult an expression is to understand and the less sense it makes in a given context, the more likely a translator will recognize it as an idiom. The very fact that a translator cannot make sense of an expression in a particular context will alert him/her to the presence of an idiom of some sort.

Ling Chi (1954: 3-4) distinguishes between different classes of idioms; lexemic idioms, phraseological idioms, proverbial idioms, and one-word idioms:

- Lexemic Idioms – An interesting fact about idioms is that they can easily be identified with the familiar parts of speech. Thus some idioms are clearly verbal in nature, such as *get away with*, *get up*, *work out*, *turn in*. An equally large number are nominal in nature. Thus hot dog (frankfurter) serves as a noun. Many serve as adjectives, as in *salt and pepper*, meaning

black hair mixed with gray. Many are adverbial, as the examples *like a breeze*, and *hammer and tongs*.

- Phraseological Idioms – This group of idioms often consists of an entire phrase. Some famous ones are: *to fly off the handle*, *to blow one's stack*, *to kick the bucket*, *to be up the creek without a paddle*, *to be caught between the devil and the deep blue sea*, and *to seize the bull by the horns*. What they have in common is that they do not really correlate with a given grammatical part of speech and usually require a paraphrase longer than a word. The form of these phrase-length idioms is set and only a limited number of them can be said in any other way without destroying the meaning.
- Proverbial Idioms – Well-established sayings and proverbs comprise the largest class of idioms. These include the famous *don't count the chickens before they're hatched*, and *don't wash your dirty linen in public*. Many of these originate from some well known literary sources or come from the earliest speakers of a language.
- One-word Idioms – Interestingly, there are also one-word idioms, which occur when a single word is used with a surprisingly different meaning from the original one. Examples include *lemon* (my car is a lemon), and *dog* (my math exam is a dog).

Baker (1992) too distinguishes between these different types of idioms, although she does not necessarily categorize them as Ling Chi does. Baker goes on to notify translators about some idioms which she says are misleading. These idioms seem transparent because they offer a reasonable literal interpretation and their idiomatic meanings are not necessarily signaled in the surrounding text. A large number of idioms in English, and probably all languages, have both literal and an idiomatic



meaning, for example lexemic idioms: *go out with* ('have a romantic or sexual relationship with someone'). She says such idioms lend themselves easily to manipulation by speakers and writers who will sometimes play on both their literal and idiomatic meanings. In this case, a translator who is not familiar with the idiom in question may easily accept the literal interpretation and miss the play on the idiom. The following example is taken from Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and the translation is taken from Bongela's *Lwadilik'udonga*. These illustrate how easy it is to accept a literal interpretation that seems plausible in a given context:

Source text:            *Ezinma was an only child and the center of her mother's world.*

Target text:            *UEzinma kwakukuphela komntwana kunina nto leyo eyenza ukuba afane nehlabathi lonke liphela kuye.*

Back translation:    *Ezinma was the only child her mother had, and that made her to be like the whole world to her.*

### **3.2.1.2.1    On Translation of idioms**

One of the most complicated issues in translation is idioms. These idioms fall under the most important particular problem in translation, which is the problem of translating metaphor. According to Newmark (1988), all polysemous words (a 'heavy' heart) and most English phrasal verbs ('put off', *dissuader*, *troubler*, etc.) are potentially metaphorical. He goes on to explain that metaphors may be one word, or they may be 'extended' (a collocation, an idiom, a sentence, a proverb, an allegory, a complete imaginative text). The problem with idioms is that they often carry meanings which cannot be deduced from their individual components.

The translation of idioms takes us a stage further in considering the question of meaning and translation, for idioms are culture bound. Translated literally the sentence,

*'Ubuhle bekhiwane ziimpethu'.*

Becomes,

*'The beauty of a fig is maggots'.*

The image conjured up by this sentence is somewhat startling and, unless the context referred quite specifically to such a picture, the sentence would seem obscure and virtually meaningless. The English idiom that most closely corresponds to the isiXhosa idiom is, *'beauty is but/only skin deep'*, also obscure unless used idiomatically.

Both these languages, that is, IsiXhosa and English have corresponding idiomatic expressions that render the idea of prevarication, and so in the process of interlingual translation one idiom is substituted for another. That substitution is made not on the basis of the linguistic elements in the phrase, nor on the basis of a corresponding or similar image contained in the phrase, but on the meaning carried by the idiom. This means, the source language phrase is replaced by a target language phrase that serves the same purpose in the target language culture, and the process here involves the substitution of a source language sign for a target language sign.

Belloc in Bassnett-McGuire (1980: 116) cites the case of Greek exclamation 'By the Dog!' which, if rendered literally, becomes merely comic in English, and suggests that a phrase 'By God!' is a much closer translation. Likewise, he points out that the French historic present must be translated into the English narrative tense, which is past, and the French system of defining a proposition by putting it into the form of a



rhetoric question cannot be transposed into English where the same system does not apply.

By 'idiom by idiom' Bassnett-McGuire as cited by Mtuze (2003) does not recommend rigid compartmentalization into identical categories, whereby an idiom in English would have an equivalent idiom in isiXhosa. By 'idiom by idiom' she means an appropriate form in the other language as long as the sense of the original is conveyed. For example, let us look at the following idiom in the source text.

Source Text:

*The first voice gets to Chukwu, or God's house.  
(Achebe, 1958: 43)*

Target Text:

*Ilizwi lokuqala lilo eliye kuChuku okanye indlu kaThixo.  
(Bongela, 1993: 40)*

Back translation: *The first voice is the one that went to Chuku or the house of God.*

For the text to give more sense and have the same impact for the target text readers as it had for the source text readers, the idiom should have been substituted with an isiXhosa idiom that holds the same meaning. The translator for example could have used,

*'Ukubamba elentulo' (literally translated as, 'to take the word of the lizard' – meaning 'to believe/consider the first thing or word that has been said')*

Professor Samson-Akpan, a colleague I met at the ALASA Conference 2005 is originally from Nigeria. He told me a tale which is believed to be the origin of the above mentioned Igbo saying. He says, once Chukwu sent a dog messenger to men advising them that, should anyone die they should be laid on the ground and strewn with ashes, after which they would return to life. The dog, however, was tired and delayed. So Chukwu sent a sheep with the same message. It too got tired, stopping to eat on the way, and on arriving had forgotten the wording of the message it had brought. Guessing, the sheep told men that they should bury a corpse in the earth. When the dog arrived later with the correct message, it was not believed, and so death was established on the earth.

Interestingly enough, there's a similar tale about the origin of the isiXhosa saying, '*ukubambel'entulo*'.

All idioms have an underlying meaning, so they cannot be interpreted literally. Even when using seemingly common phrases, we may think we are saying one thing, but another person who is unfamiliar with the language might think we are saying something else. For these reasons, when idioms are translated word-for-word from one language to another, they often do not make any sense. To exemplify this, let us consider the translation of the following idioms into isiXhosa by Bongela (1993: 10);

Source Text:

*If a child washed his hands he could eat with kings. (Achebe 1958:6)*

Target Text:

*Ukuba umntwana uhlamba izandla angatya kunye neekumkani.*  
(Bongela 1993:5)



Because the idiom used in the source text has been translated literally, it has lost sense; it has lost its flavor. The meaning has been destroyed. The translator in his translation could have substituted the idiom with an idiom that serves the same purpose in isiXhosa, which is;

*Imazi ebotshwa neenkabi'* (lit. 'a cow that pulls with the bulls')

The intention here is to use the strategy of using an idiom of similar meaning and form which Baker (1992: 73) explains as follows:

*The strategy involves using an idiom in the target language which conveys roughly the same meaning as that of the source-language idiom and, in addition, consists of equivalent lexical items. This kind of match can only occasionally be achieved.*

According to Zhongying (2003:97), there are also other idioms, known as idiomatically combining expressions, of which the idiomatic meanings are compositional, in that it is possible to determine which part of the idiom carries which part of the idiomatic meaning. An example of this is where Achebe writes,

*As the elders said, if a child washed his hands he could eat with kings. (Achebe 1958: 6)*

The true linguistic idioms, however, are a unique kind of figurative language of which the words alone do not let us know what the meaning of the entire idiom is. Example, Okwonkwo when talking to Nwakibie says,

*The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground to the ground said he would praise himself if no one else did. (Achebe 1958: 16)*

In other words, this meaning is not compositional. It is just the nature of figurative language, unlike some other figures of speech of which the meaning can sometimes be determined contextually.

Lastly, it needs to be mentioned that as with single words, an idiom may sometimes be omitted altogether in the target text. This may be because it has no close match in the target language, its meaning cannot be easily paraphrased, or for stylistic reasons. Here is an example from *Things Fall Apart*:

Source Text: *The same thought also came to Okonkwo's mind. But he has learnt how to lay that ghost. Whenever the thought of his father's weakness and failure troubled him he expelled it by thinking about his own strength and success. (Achebe 1958: 47)*

Target Text: *Naloo ngcingane iye yafika engqondweni kaOkonkwo. Ngalo lonke ixesha acinga ngobundongolo bukayise neziphoso zakhe wayekhathazeka kodwa azigxothe ezo ngcinga ngokukhokelisa amandla nempumelelo yakhe. (Bongela 1993: 44)*

Back Translation: *That thought too came to Okonkwo's mind. Whenever he thought about his father's weaknesses and failures he would be troubled but he'd brush-off those thoughts by thinking about his own strengths and successes.*



Therefore, in translation, if we want people to understand the meaning of the original idiom in the source language, we have to find an accurate way to state that meaning in the target language. It is usually not difficult to do so, except in those cases where we do not know for sure what the original idiom meant – which I suppose was the case with Bongela, hence his literal translation of the idioms.

Sometimes, translators feel it is better to provide a simple translation for an idiom, and leave the job of determining the intent and meaning of the idiom to the reader, rather than handing the reader what is essentially the translator's interpretation.

### **3.2.1.3 Rule 3**

***The translator must render 'intention by intention', bearing in mind that the 'intention of a phrase in one language may be less emphatic than the form of the phrase, or may be more emphatic'.***

By 'intention', Belloc seems to be talking about the weight a given expression may have in a particular context in the source language that would be disproportionate if translated literally into the target language. He quotes several examples where the weighting of the phrase in the source language is clearly much stronger or much weaker than the literal target language translation, and points out that in the translation of 'intention', it is often necessary to add words not in the original 'to conform to the idiom of one's own tongue'.

Belloc here refers to the transfer of an intended message. As Neethling (1997:3) puts it,

*The idiom of any given language often presents a translator with particular difficulties...*

This is the approach Bongela has followed, which was to supply suitable equivalent isiXhosa phrases or even words. For example Achebe (1958: 4) when he is talking about Unoka, he says,

*They would go to such hosts for as long as three or four markets, making music and feasting.*

Bongela has opted for

*Belidla ngokuhambahamba ke lihamba lihlala kwabo bantu balimemileyo kude kudlule nokuba zizivuno zeentengiso ezintathu nokuba zine, ufike oonkabi bedlala iingoma, besidla, bonwabile kusegege. (Bongela, 1993:2).*

In this case the translator has added words like 'oonkabi' and 'kusegege'. The intention of these target language terms is more emphatic than the source language terms. 'Oonkabi' is an isiXhosa term used to show sarcasm in a positive or in a negative way. But in this sense it is used negatively to ridicule Unoka's undesirable nature. The translator has chosen to use these terms to put more emphasis on what the source text author is saying about this man Unoka. He is highlighting, stressing the tedious nature of Unoka. He again uses 'kusegege'. This isiXhosa term is a term that one uses sarcastically. It is used to show that he had no conscience at all. He enjoyed and loved to entertain himself to the fullest rather than being a man and take up the responsibilities that go with that. So, it is used in a negative sense to ridicule or mock this man. Another example is where Bongela in his translation of the following sentence

*Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten, from Umuofia to Mbaino.*



He added some words that accentuate the author's intention, and translated it as,

*UAmalinze wayeyingwanyalala **yesixhinga** somlwi  
**owayengumshwaqazi nomngquli** owahlala nolo dumo  
engoyiswa mntu de kwayiminyaka esixhenxe, egeqa amadoda  
ukususela kwingingqi yaseUmuofia ukuya kutsho eMbaino.*

These additional words (highlighted in the above example) elucidate the meaning.

Again Bongela has used some phrases that are less emphatic than the forms of the source text phrases. For example, the source text phrase that goes like:

*Our elders say that the sun will shine on those who stand  
before it shines on those who kneel under them. (Achebe,  
1958:6)*

Is translated literally as,

*Abantu abadala bathi ilanga liya kukhanya kwabo bemi  
ngeenyawo phambi kokuba likhanye kwabo bague phantsi  
kwabo. (Bongela, 1993:4)*

Although the target readers would not have much problems in understanding this translation, it wouldn't have exactly the same effect as the source text phrase for the source text audience. It is less emphatic. For it to have the same impact the translator could have used an equivalent that will emphasize the author's intention and have the same impact in the target audience as it had on the source text audience. Here the translator could have used an isiXhosa equivalent that will impact the target group as the phrase in the source text did. A phrase that is more familiar and more understandable to the target readers would be, for example,

*Yesondele eziko ev'ubushushu kuqala*

Another example here would be the Igbo saying:

*...an old woman is always uneasy when dry bones are mentioned in a proverb. (Achebe, 1958: 15)*

Rendered in the translation as:

*...ixhegwazana alonwabi xa kuthe kwachatshazelwa amathambo kwiqhalo. (Bongela, 1993: 14)*

This has been translated literally and it does not make much sense to someone outside of the source language culture since it is deeply embedded in the Igbo history and metaphor. Nonetheless, it could be translated by giving an equivalent in isiXhosa that would give the same sense to the target readers. For example,

*Isazela siyakwazi kowaso / Isihlangu sitya umniniso. (Literally translated as, 'the shoe pinches the one who is wearing it')*

Remember Bassnett-McGuire quoted above, interprets this rule 3 as saying it means using an appropriate form in the other language, that is, the target language, as long as the sense of the original is conveyed. The sense imparted in this translation shifts slightly from that of the source text. The Ibo expression is sacrificed in the process.

One of the skills a translator must have is being aware of the purpose of the translation. The translator being first of all the recipient of a source text to be translated has to understand the intention of the author. A translation therefore



starts from the translator's understanding of the source text, and target recipients understand the understanding of a translator. Therefore, the translator having a thorough knowledge of the language idiom of the target audience must try to translate the source text in such a way that, as much as possible if not all of the original text and author is preserved for whoever the intended recipient is.

#### **3.2.1.4 Rule 4**

***Belloc warns against les faux amis***, those words or structures that may appear to correspond in both the source language and target language but actually do not. Bassnett-McGuire goes on to give an example of the French word *demander* – to ask, translated wrongly as to demand. One clear example of this from the texts in question is *grandees – dignitaries/ VIPs* (Achebe 1958:67) wrongly translated as *grandchildren 'abazukulwana'* (Bongela 1993:61). Words like these can be referred to as 'false friends'. They appear to mean this, while in actual fact they mean something else. There's an isiXhosa idiom that gives a clear picture of these false friends. It talks about '*ingcuka eyambethe ufele lwegusha*' (literally translated as 'a wolf in a sheep skin').

There are quite a few of these false friends in Bongela's translation. Below I've listed some examples:

- The word *flutes (iimfiyo)*, translated wrongly as *iimpempe – whistles* (Achebe 1958:3), (Bongela 1993:1)
- The word *bushy (afukufuku)*, translated wrongly as *afukuzela – clumsy* (Achebe 1958:3), (Bongela 1993:1)
- The word *faggot* (which is an offensive word used to refer to a homosexual man), is mistaken for *maggot* and thus translated as *iimpethu*. (Achebe 1958:67), (Bongela 1993:62)

Making use of these false friends may affect the quality of the target text, and also the understanding of the target audience. Translators should be aware of them and they should be avoided at all cost.

### **3.2.1.5     Rule 5**

***The translator is advised to 'transmute boldly'*** and Belloc suggests that the essence of translating is the resurrection of an alien thing in a native body'.

If this principle that Belloc recommends is to be upheld, then the translator has to constantly ensure that the native body is rid of all parts that will make it grotesque and unacceptable to the native readers or viewers, to continue with this metaphor. Belloc accepts that there is a moral responsibility to the original, but he feels that the translator has the right to significantly alter the text in the translation process in order to provide the target language reader with a text that conforms to target language stylistic and idiomatic forms.

The interpretation of this rule is that translators, especially of prose or novels, are at liberty to recreate, so to speak, the original text and come out with a document that could be relatively independent of the original. Be that as it may, the text should be translated in such a way that its language and expression would be understandable to the target audience without distorting the original message and devaluing the integrity of the original. For example, where it became impossible for Bongela to find a suitable equivalent or an approximation and where even a paraphrase was not warranted, he simply resorted to deliberate omission as explained by Baker (1992:77),

*As with single words, an idiom may sometimes be omitted altogether in the target text. This may be because it has no*



*close match in the target language, its meaning cannot be easily paraphrased, or for stylistic reasons.*

There are such examples in Bongela's translation. In Chapter 7, page 40 (Achebe 1958:42) he left out all the lyrics of the song that the boy Ikemefuna sang in his mind when he was trying to brush away the thoughts that his mother might be dead. During my interview with him I asked about this omission and he said, he decided to leave it out because it is written in the original language of the author (Achebe), a language he (Bongela) is not familiar with, which he could not translate. Remember, the translator needs to have a full command of both the languages he is translating from and the language he is translating into.

There's another omission in Chapter 8, page 47, where Bongela has left out a sentence which is more of an idiomatic expression. The sentence goes like:

*But he had long learnt how to lay that ghost. (Achebe 1958: 47)*

He could not remember why he made the omission, because he couldn't have left it out for the reasons stated by Baker (1992:77) mentioned above, which are,

- it may not have a close match in the target language
- inability to paraphrase its meaning easily, and
- for stylistic reasons.

As an immediate example, there is an equivalent of this idiom in isiXhosa. He could have used,

*Ukuphanda idlaka*

The expression then could have read,

*Wayengafun'ukuphanda idlaka' (literally translated as. 'He did not want to dig the grave.)*

Another example where the source text is altered and other parts of the text omitted in the target text is the following,

*Her husband and his family were already becoming highly critical of such a woman and were not unduly perturbed when they found she had fled to join the Christians. It was a good riddance. (Achebe 1958: 109).*

In the translation it is rendered as,

*Umyeni wakhe nosapho lwakhe babesebeqala ukumnyemba nokumhleba nto leyo eyenza ukuba bangakhathali bakuva ukuba ubalekile waya kuzibandakanya namaKristu. (Bongela 1993: 94)*

Back Translation: *Her husband and his family were beginning to be critical of her, and so they were not disturbed when they heard that she has left to join the Christians.*

There are quite a number of these alterations or deliberate omissions in Bongela's translation, effected in order to provide the target text reader with a text that conforms to target language stylistic and idiomatic norms.

This fifth rule manages to satisfy two principles of transparency and equivalent effects laid down by Pinchuck (1977: 44) when he says;



*Within this framework, the relation of text to text (SL text to TL text) should not be one of replication but a dynamic one in which the existence of two texts should offer no obstacles to communication between sender and reader. The translation should be transparent in the sense that the intention of the original is clearly evident through it. The use of language – the establishment of linguistic parallels, is subordinate to the creation of the equivalent effects.*

### 3.2.1.6 **Rule 6**

***The translator should never embellish.*** By this Belloc means the translator must not heighten the narrative with fictitious additions.

Sometimes a translator needs to take the liberty to explain an issue a little more in the translation, to avoid confusion or misunderstanding. This ideal should always be kept in mind, while, at the same time, the essence of the original should not be lost. He/she must not make unnecessary additions that may even result in semantic distortion of the original author's intended message. Respect for the individual voice of the author is the most important mark in literary translation. There should always be a healthy balance between the source text and the target text.

An example of what Belloc is warning against here, is where Bongela translates the sentence,

*Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten, from Umuofia to Mbaino.*

as,

*UAmalinze wayeyingwanyalala **yesixhinga** somlwi  
owayengumshwaqazi nomngquli owahlala nolo dumo*

*engoyiswa mntu de kwayiminyaka esixhenxe, **egeqa amadoda**  
ukususela kwingingqi yaseUmuofia ukuya kutsho eMbaino.*

Bongela has added these words (highlighted in the above example) to elucidate and to decorate the narrative. This is somewhat unnecessary. But despite his innovations on the target text, he has remained true to the words and ideas of the original text and the author's intent.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

By using the typical phraseology of the target language; its natural collocations, its own fixed and semi-fixed expressions, the right level of idiomaticity, and so on – will greatly enhance the readability of the translation. Getting this level right means that your target text will feel less foreign and, other factors being equal, may even pass for an original. But naturalness and readability are also affected by other linguistic features; and these like culture, will be discussed in the following chapter.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **4. Cultural substitution and transference**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

Cultural issues by their very nature are unique to each particular cultural group. This renders them difficult to translate into a different culture.

In substitution, an item (or items) is replaced by another item (or items). When talking about cultural substitution we talk about an approximate translation where a source language cultural word is translated by a target language cultural word. Transference (loan word, transcription) can be defined as the process of transferring a source language word to a target language text as a translation procedure. The word then becomes a loan word.

Translation, Lefevere contends, has been a major shaping force in the development of world culture (Bassnett & Lefevere 1990:12). It is one of the most important processes whereby a literary work is transferred from one culture to another, often in a much changed form. The needs and tastes of the target culture are largely responsible for the changes made to the original text.

Newmark's (1988:94) definition implies that culture reflects the way in which a particular cultural group perceives and interprets meaning. This implication highlights the fact that different cultural groups do not necessarily attach the same meaning to reality. Each constructs its own way of expressing its values and beliefs. Tomaselli (1985), a distinguished scholar on cultural issues in the media, agrees with this opinion. Tomaselli (1985:8) regards culture as 'the process which informs

the way meanings and definition are socially constructed by social actors themselves’.

In translation, especially in literary translation, the recognition of different cultures is very important because it facilitates a better understanding of a translation and its original. Therefore, translation should not only be about transferring messages from one language to another, but it should also involve transferring certain cultural elements from source language to target language. This is further confirmed by Bassnett and Lefevere (1990:4) who regard culture as the unit of translation, and not the word or even the text.

Newmark’s and Tomaselli’s views of culture indicate that cultural differences and similarities between different cultural groups need to be taken into account in order to attain a meaningful understanding of different groups. These cultural differences may cause difficulties for the literary translator, but s/he can overcome such problems if s/he is aware of the differing cultures.

In the interview with Bongela on the issue of the transference of the Igbo culture into isiXhosa, he observes that the source text and the target text have different cultural backgrounds. The source text for example, is set way back in 1958 in Western Nigeria, and it is about the Igbo people and their culture. In contrast, the target text was translated in 1993 for isiXhosa readership which has its own culture. Obviously, cultural differences between the source text and the target text pose serious challenges to the translator. The translator has the task of making choices and decisions concerning various procedures and strategies to be employed in making the translation meaningful and accessible to isiXhosa readership.

It is very important at this juncture to explain or highlight that the source text is written in the Igbo idiom. The author Chinua Achebe in this novel is using English to express an African experience. He has said in unequivocal terms that,



*The African writer... should aim at fashioning out English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience. (Achebe, 1975:62)*

And he has also said, and proved it too in a masterful way,

*...I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings. (Achebe, 1975: 62)*

Because he is a talented writer, Achebe has succeeded in twisting the English language so as to suit his own purpose. But the question of dealing with English *per se* as a medium is irrelevant for the purposes of this thesis. Rather, our concern here is to investigate the mediation of Igbo culture into the target text in so far as it is presented in non-English English.

Some findings based on an informal interview with the translator K.S Bongela will also be referred to in the course of the discussion in this chapter.

## **4.2 Culture-specific issues**

Any concept which is peculiar to a particular culture is referred to as culture-specific. It can be a religious belief, a type of food, dress, a social custom or a behaviour pattern which is not known in the other culture. The focus here will be on these culture-specific issues because this is the main focus of this research and also because this is the area where Bongela experienced most problems. According to Mtuze (1990:30) there are certain cultural issues that are very difficult to put across in the other language especially if that language is a 'non-African language'. The

discussion in this chapter will sensitize us to the challenges that literary translators are faced with.

#### 4.2.1 Translation of the title

Translating the title of a literary text is the very first challenge that the translator is faced with. Therefore, the first issue that Bongela had to contend with was the translation of the title, **Things Fall Apart**. One does not need to translate any title directly. A cursory glance at e.g. the English titles of translated isiXhosa works exemplifies this quite well. Chinua Achebe's **No Longer At Ease** was rendered by Hlumela Mothlabane as **Akusekho konwaba** (There's no more joy), and Andre P. Brink's **A dry white season** became **Umqwebedu** (dry land). By contrast direct translations also appear quite often. Again using Andre Brink's as an example, one finds that his Afrikaans book, **'n Droë wit seisoen** became **A dry white season**. Peter T. Mtuzi translated Nelson Mandela's **Long Walk To Freedom** as **Indlela ende eya enkululekweni**. The Afrikaans translator Antjie Krog translated it as **Lang pad na vryheid** and in isiZulu it was translated as **Uhambo olude oluya enkululekweni**. In Sepedi it became **Leetotelele go ya tokologong**. The Jordans when translating A.C. Jordan's **Ingqumbo Yeminyanya** opted for a more or less direct translation by calling the English version, **The wrath of the ancestors**. And the Afrikaans translator called the Afrikaans version of this same novel, **Die toorn van die voorvaders**, which is also a more or less direct translation.

Bongela too is of the opinion that when translating the title of a literary text, one does not need to translate directly. One can easily see that in this regard, Bongela is in favour of the application of dynamic equivalence as the more effective translation procedure. He feels that the target language wording should trigger the same impact on the target text audience as the original wording did upon the source text audience, and he achieved that. He concurs with Nida and Taber (1982:200) in that



he is also of the view that the original message should be preserved, and the translation should be faithful. Hence when translating the title of Achebe's '**Things Fall Apart**' he opted for '**Lwadielik'udonga**' (literally translated as 'The wall falls down'). It is evident from his translation that he is much more interested in the message of the text (which is the title in this case), or in other words, in the semantic quality. He therefore strived to make sure that this message remains clear in the target text. He was successful in capturing the intention or the imagery of the author.

Bongela has outdone himself in his translation of the title. The title of this novel may also be considered as having cultural connotations and that this is one of the author's aims. According to Newmark (1988: 56), in literary translation 'the title should sound attractive, allusive, suggestive...and should usually bear some relation to the original'. This can be seen as relevant here, the aim being to portray culturally bound aspects; thus the title may be seen as conveying aspects of the narrative and deserves further attention.

Starting with the original title 'Things Fall Apart', one asks oneself, what is the meaning of this title? Which 'things' fall apart, and why?

According to Simon Gikandi (1998:14) Achebe's novel takes its title from the opening verses of "The Second Coming" a poem by W.B. Yeats (1889), an Irish poet, essayist and dramatist:

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot bear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.*



This poem captures Yeats's sense of crumbling of civilization of his time. It contributes exceptionally well to our understanding of the historical moment Achebe describes in his novel. This is a novel which puts traditional African Society against the changes brought by colonialism. In this novel a Nigerian man Okonkwo, confronts the English colonial powers. He is the central character of *Things Fall Apart*, a leader of the African Igbo community of Umuofia. He is deeply dedicated to the traditions of social hierarchies of his people. What Okonkwo cannot accept, is the coming of the white man to their land. He cannot understand how his countrymen could be destroyed rather than defend themselves. Achebe here is presenting a tragic universe in which exceptional individuals are crushed by larger social forces. We observe that at the end of Achebe's novel, many of Okonkwo's fears have been realized, and the social order of the clan is **falling apart**. The fear of the new religion and government, which causes Okonkwo to take the life of a white official, also causes him to take his own life. So it is despair or hopelessness that pushes Okonkwo to commit the most horrendous of all offenses against the earth goddess, suicide. He kills himself so that he will not be executed under the white man's law and partly because he is grieving for the death of his people. Thus he ends in disgrace with the community whose preservation obsessed him. Hence this title **Things Fall Apart**.

Bongela too comes up with a very allusive and suggestive title, which captures the sense of the story precisely. He based his choice of the title on his understanding of the message in Achebe's title and the story itself. But his choice carries a cultural notion of a 'wall', something equally common in African cultures. A wall is built to protect one's territory, and to any African culture it is a symbol of safety and security, and also a symbol of unity because it is there to keep things together. Way back in the day, a community or tribe would be surrounded by a tall strong wall. It was there to protect that particular clan or community from enemies, and would keep the people together. If one reads this novel carefully one will notice that, that is exactly how Okonkwo saw himself. In fact that is how he and other man of status



are portrayed. He being born of an effeminate and a lazy father Unoka, Okonkwo decides to be the absolute antipodes of his father. He strives to stand for manliness. As mentioned earlier, he was deeply addicted to the traditions of social hierarchies of his people. He worked hard and fought well to gain a reputation of high status and influence in his clan. He becomes excessive in his adherence to the values of his society. He becomes protective of his family, his countrymen and the values they stand for. With the advent of the white man, he sees imminent danger and thus fights to keep his people together. The wall began to fall when he went to exile, and the enemy (in this case the white man) penetrated with the intention of destroying their traditions and values. He returns and becomes violently defiant, and resists the attempts of the white colonizers to impose on his clan a new religion and social order.

This wall tumbles down when he eventually couldn't stand to see what he stands for being destroyed by the white man, and the other so called strong man of his tribe, the clansmen are doing nothing to prevent it. This compels him to take his life. This act of committing suicide marks the actual falling of the wall.

The translation of the title is one part of the book that the researcher truly feels has been excellently translated.

This brings us to the next challenge Bongela had to face in his translation of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. In the following sub-sections a number of cultural issues will be raised and analysed alongside various culture-bound expressions and terms.

#### **4.2.2 Kinship or administrative terms**

We will first look at terms which may indicate that a nation is organized in either a traditional or a modern way. As pointed out earlier, Newmark (1988:99) distinguishes two categories of these administrative terms, that is, those that are

opaque and those that are transparent. The transparent ones are those terms of which the meaning is easily detectable, whereas the opaque ones are those of which the meaning is not detectable on the surface. These terms are those that are not easy to convey in isiXhosa. These opaque terms present very serious challenges for the translator, because he has to make them accessible and meaningful to the target readership.

It is noticeable that Achebe uses quite a number of Igbo words, but he does so in a self-explanatory way because he cleverly explains them in the course of the narrative. For instance, during the time when Umuofia waged war against the neighbouring Mbaino village, it is said that all the neighbouring clans feared Umuofia because of its most potent war-medicine. The author explains,

*...But on one point there was general agreement – the active principle in that medicine had been an old woman with one leg. In fact, the medicine itself was called agadi-nwayi, or an old woman. (Achebe, 1958:9)*

Another example is where Achebe uses the terms *agbala* and *ilo*. He says as he explains how and why Okonkwo was ashamed and resentful of his father Unoka,

*...and even now he still remembered how he had suffered when a playmate had told him that his father was agbala.' That was how Okonkwo first came to know that agbala was not only another name for a woman, it could also mean a man who had taken no title. (Achebe, 1958:10)*

And also on page 30 Achebe says,



*Just then the distant beating of drums began to reach them. It came from the direction of the ilo, the village playground (Achebe, 1958:30).*

From the above examples, we thus know that the *agadi-nwayi* means an old woman, the *agbala* a woman, and that *ilo* stands for a village playground.

Sometimes the explanation of the Igbo words is more direct, as in the case with *agadi-nwayi* mentioned in the example above, and *obi*.

*Where do you sleep with your wife, in your obi or in her own hut? (Achebe, 1958:56)*

Bongela in his translation deals with this exactly in the same manner as Achebe. In translation he also uses the Igbo words in a self-explanatory manner. If for example we look at two of the above examples.

### **Example 1**

Source text: ***His own hut, or obi, stood immediately behind the only gate in the red walls. (Achebe, 1958: 10)***

Target text: ***Inqugwala lakhe okanye iobi, lalithe zinzi emva kwesango ekuphela kwalo kolu donga lubomvu. (Bongela, 1993: 9)***

### **Example 2**

Source text: ***In fact, the medicine itself was called *agadi-nwayi*, or old woman.***

Target text: ***Eneneni ikhubalo lalibizwa ngokuba yi-*agadi-nwayi okanye ixhegwazana.****

In some cases, even with those seemingly transparent or self-explanatory terms the translator still has a task of making their meaning relevant and comprehensible to the target readership. A good example of this is that on page 9 of the original, reference is made to elders as being the '*ndichie*' (Achebe 1958:9).

Original text:

The elders, or *ndichie*, met to hear a report of Okonkwo's mission.

Translation:

*Iimpobole zamaxhego alapha zaqokelelana ukuza kuva ingxelo kaOkonkwo njengesithunywa.*

When faced with this challenge of translating opaque terms, translators make use of a commonly used strategy of cultural substitution. This is a strategy which according to Baker (1992:31) involves replacing a culture-specific item with an item which does not have the same propositional meaning but which is likely to have a similar impact on the target readership. The main advantage of using this strategy is that it gives target text readers a familiar concept with which they can identify.

The first term we need to look at is the name given or used to refer to some people in the administrative structure of the Igbo people. These people are known as *egwugwu*. Gikandi (1998) describes the *egwugwu* as,

*a masquerader who impersonates one of the ancestral spirits of the village.*



Onuh (1992:42) explains that *egwugwu* were part of "The masquerade...a social but secret association...a closed association surrounded by mysterious beliefs and activities, with a restricted membership only to males initiated into it." He also points out that *egwugwu* like other masquerade members, functioned "as means of social control, compelling individuals in the society to comply with traditional standards and way of life, as well as guarding community property against intruders" (1992: 42). From the foregoing explanation it is clear that *egwugwu* were working in close cooperation with policy makers, like elders and title men. These terms will also be dealt with later in this work.

The *egwugwu* were in fact an extension of the judiciary, the executive arm of Igbo law and norms. In the source text, Achebe makes mention of *egwugwu* a number of times (Achebe 1958:64-66), and Bongela also on pages 59 to page 62.

From the target text we observe that instead of translating the word *egwugwu*, Bongela transfers the word unchanged throughout the text. However, in ensuring that the target readership understands the meaning of *egwugwu*, he supplies readers with some kind of explanation of the term when he says,

*'Ngamanye amaxesha yayikhe enye ilali icele uUnoka neqela lakhe leemvumi elihamba nenkxentsi yalo engumshologu (egwugwu) ukuba lize kuhlala nabantu baloo lali libafundise iingoma zalo'. (Bongela, 1993:2)*

Source text:

*Sometimes another village would ask Unoka's band and their dancing egwugwu to come and stay with them and teach them their tunes. (Achebe, 1958: 4)*

The researcher here does not quite agree with the explanation he has given for this term, and the disagreement is based on Achebe and Gikandi's explanations of the terms, cited above. But the translator is also commended for the paraphrase. Paraphrasing is explained as follows by Baker (1992:38):

*If the concept expressed by the source item is not lexicalized at all in the target language, the paraphrase strategy can still be used in some contexts. Instead of a related word, the paraphrase may be on modifying a superordinate or simply on unpacking the meaning of the source item, particularly if the item in question is semantically complex.*

This strategy of paraphrasing tends to be used when the concept expressed by the source language item is not lexicalised in the target language.

In the interview Bongela explains that it was this difficulty in finding appropriate equivalents that he retained, right through the book many of the Igbo terms. This practice of retaining words in their original form in the translation is explained as follows by Neethling (1997:19),

*As could be expected, some cultural terms were difficult to translate. Bill (1982:109) identifies a problematic area that she calls Cultural Diversity-language as the expression of the culture of its speakers. In a few cases the isiXhosa terms were retained, such as a lala of beer, the **inkwakhwa** snake, the **nqwebeba** tree, the **imbongi**.*

The transference, according to Newmark (1988:81), is the process of transferring a source language word to a target language text unchanged. Such a word becomes a loan in the target text. About this Mtuze (2003:14) notes,



*...one very significant expression in its original form: Defiance Campaign I could have coined, like I did in the explanatory glossary at the end of the book, any postulate equivalent or explanation, but the fact is, many people call it **iDefiance Campaign**.*

'Defiance Campaign' here is used as a loan word. The following extracts illustrate how the term *egwugwu* appears as a loan word in the target text:

*'Okonkwo's wives, and perhaps other women as well, might have noticed that the second **egwugwu** had the springy walk of Okonkwo. And they might have noticed that Okonkwo was not among the titled men and elders who sat behind the row of egwugwu.'* (Achebe, 1958:65)

*Abafazi bakaOkonkwo nabanye ke mhlawumbi, baqaphela into yokuba **iegwugwu** yesibini yayixhumaxhuma ukuhamba oku kanye ngoku kuka Okonkwo. Kwakhona bamele ukuba uOkonkwo wayengekho wayengekho phakathi kwala madoda anamagama neengwevu ezazihleli emva kwezitulo zee-**egwugwu**.* (Bongela, 1993:59)

We have earlier on mentioned the fact that there are various reasons for the transference of words from the target text to the source text. The reason for the transference of the word *egwugwu* could be that the translator had difficulty in finding an isiXhosa cultural substitution for this word since there is no institution like the Masquerade of which the *egwugwu* is a member. Based on my experience of reading the target text in question, this transference of source text words to the target text may in some cases obscure the understanding of the text. For such

instances the researcher feels the translator should have at least paraphrased these words if he couldn't find the cultural substitutes for them. But at the same time the researcher feels this transference makes things easier for the translator in that he/she doesn't have to coin or give lengthy explanations.

Let us move our focus briefly to another point of interest, which is the way the Igbo term 'titled men' in the source text has been translated into the target text.

These 'titled men' were men of high status in the Igbo culture. As Achebe attests,

*Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things. He was still young but he had won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages... To crown it all he had taken two titles and had shown incredible prowess in two inter-tribal wars. And so although Okonkwo was still young, he was already one of the greatest men of his time. (Achebe 1958:6)*

According to Onuh (1992:41) as cited in Mkhize (1999:196), title-taking in Igbo was the highest form of excellence which was acknowledged by giving titled men authority to participate actively in the governance of the community. In fact, the titled men were regarded as the judiciary of the traditional Igbo community.

In isiXhosa culture there are traditional leaders like Kings (Chiefs) '*Iinkosi*' and perhaps also Headmen '*Izibonda*', who can be said to have the same status as the Igbo titled men. Bryant (1967:461) explains that '*iinkosi*' and Headman functioned as members of the Council and executive bodies. What is of interest here is that most of these men were elders. These are the men in isiXhosa culture who are responsible for running the affairs of the nation. They wore in their head gear an *Indwe* (bluecrane) feather. This is a significant kind of bird to isiXhosa speaking people. Wearing a feather of this bird *Indwe* was not just for decoration, but it signified high status and honour. It was awarded only to men who had gone to war



and had made a name for themselves by distinguishing themselves as excellent warriors. Hence the isiXhosa term '*Isithwala-ndwe*' (Literally translated as the one who wears the *Indwe* on his head), which is used to refer to these men with names (men who were well known) or men of great honour. The Chiefs and the Headmen performed duties similar to those performed by the 'titled men' in the Igbo culture.

Due to this similarity in the position and duty between Igbo title-taking and Xhosa *Indwe* feather-wearing, Bongela found it appropriate to translate the phrase title-taking as '*amadoda anamagama*' (lit. Men with names) (1993:58). This translation may be regarded as Bongela's strategy of emphasizing distinction and excellence as prerequisites for wearing the *Indwe* feather, like it is the case with title-taking in the Igbo culture. Cultural substitutes as this one are significant in the text because they help the isiXhosa readership understand the institution of Igbo title-taking better since they are given an example from their own cultural practice.

Still on the issue of cultural substitution let us consider the manner in which the term 'elders' has been substituted by an isiXhosa term, and why the particular term was preferred.

It goes without saying that in any and in every traditional African society, elders are the most significant representatives of authority in running the society. When there are serious matters to be discussed and resolved, elders take an active and indispensable role. S.E.K Mqhayi's isiXhosa novella '*Ityala Lamawele*' (Lawsuit of the twins) which is regarded as a classic, portrays this view very well. In this story Mqhayi recreates legal proceedings he observed at the traditional court ran by his great uncle who was a chief. The significant role of the elders in resolving the conflict between the twins in the story is clearly demonstrated. To substantiate this Mqhayi says,

*But what affected me most was listening to the chief's councilor, hearing and debating a law-suit...These experiences gave me material for my story, Ityala Lamawele... (Mqhayi, 1931: 14)*

Achebe also illustrates the active participation of elders in the affairs of the Igbo community. He demonstrates this by the settlement of a crucial dispute between the Igbo tribe and the Mbaino tribe (Achebe 1958:9). There are numerous other instances in the story that indicate the inextricable role of the elders in the Igbo society.

In his translation of this term Bongela chooses to use the term '*iingwevu*' (literary translated: people with iron-grey hair) (Bongela 1993:55). There are many other terms in isiXhosa which Bongela could have used, like '*iinkonde*', '*abadala*', '*amaxhego*', '*iinkothovu*', etc. But he preferred to use '*iingwevu*'. The choice that Bongela has made is artistically literary because it is a figurative or a metaphoric term of respect (*hlonipha*), i.e. a euphemistic word referring to old people with grey hair. Generally, a person with grey hair is symbolic of experience and maturity. Men who participated in the administration of the nation in traditional African societies were those who had gone through various stages, like fighting in the wars while they were still young and establishing big families as adults. So by translating the source text word 'elders' as '*iingwevu*', Bongela gives the target readership a picture of the kind of people who were responsible for the running of Igbo society. This type of cultural substitution therefore makes the text accessible to the new readership.

One other phrase that will be dealt with very briefly is a term that evokes some curiosity and interest to some of the target text readers. This is because Bongela used two translations of this term interchangeable in the target text. This term is 'District Commissioner'. This was used to refer to the head of the western structures



that replaced the traditional administrative structures, after the arrival of the white men. They ruled on behalf of the queen of England. In all instances where Achebe makes mention of the District Commissioner, he shows how the British undermined the traditional Igbo administrative structures.

At first Bongela retained the term 'District Commissioner' he only transferred it unchanged from the source text to the target text. The following extracts illustrate how 'District commissioner' has been used as a loan word:

Source text:

*Mr. Smith would have sent for the District Commissioner and his court messengers, but they had gone on tour on the previous day. (Achebe 1958:134)*

Target text:

*UMnu. Smith wayefuna ukubiza iDistrict Commissioner noonothimba bakhe, kodwa ngelishwa babengekho beye kukhenketho ngosuku olungaphambili. (Bongela 1993:117)*

Bongela then uses '*Ikhomishina yesithili*' as another equivalent for 'District Commissioner' in his translation. Here the word 'Commissioner' has been transliterated as '*ikhomishina*' largely because it is now relatively common in isiXhosa everyday discourse. Examples of these are:

*When the District Commissioner arrived at Okonkwo's compound at the head of an armed band of soldiers and court messengers he found a small crowd of men sitting wearily in the **obi**. (Achebe 1958:148)*

*The Commissioner went away, taking three or four of the soldiers with him. (Achebe 1993:149)*

*Yathi ikhomishina yesithili yakufika kumzi kaOkwonko ikhokele iqela lamajoni nezithunywa zenkundla, yafika kukho igcuntswana lamadoda ahleli ngokudiniweyo endlwini. (Bongela 1993:129)*

*Ikhomishina yathi gwiqi isimka namajoni amathathu namane. (Bongela 1993:130)*

In the interview with Bongela, he explained that it was the difficulty of finding appropriate equivalents that he decided to retain terms like these and others like 'kotma' in their original form.

Also to be pointed out here is Bongela's translation of the phrase 'court messengers'. He refers to them as 'oonothimba' (people who are sent to confiscate or repossess debtor's / non payer's assets, or sheriffs). The examples have been cited above. People have a very negative attitude towards 'oonothimba' because of the kind of work they do. And the fact that people are of the perception that these court messengers do the dirty work for the 'white people'. So they are hated with a passion. Thus the reason for this kind of substitution is that Bongela felt that in order to preserve the negative attitude which the Igbo had towards the court messengers, he had to use 'oonothimba'. Another reason is that Bongela thought that the use of a different word other than 'oonothimba' would probably compromise the meaning by being less negative and thus fail to convey the original intended negative meaning.

#### **4.2.3 Religious terms**



The Igbo are profoundly religious people who believe in a benevolent creator, usually known as *Chukwu*, who created the visible universe (*Uwa*). The Igbo believe all good comes from Him, and He brings the rain that makes the plants grow. Certain trees are dedicated to Him, and in the bushes and under the trees sacrifices are made to Him. The sun is His symbol. Opposing this force for good is *agbara*, meaning spirit or supernatural being. In some situations people are referred to as *agbara* in describing an almost impossible feat performed by them.

The following observations have been made regarding the entries of religious terms. The religion of the traditional Igbo society is based on the belief of the existence of *Chukwu*. *Chukwu* is believed to be supreme deity of the Igbo.

Throughout the source text, Achebe preserves the term *Chukwu* as well as the concept of incomparability of *Chukwu*. This supremacy of *Chukwu* is confirmed in the following extract;

*There are no other gods, said Mr. Brown. Chukwu is the only God and all others are false. (Achebe 1958: 129)*

It is noticeable that throughout his translation, Bongela just like Achebe, transfers the term *Chukwu* unchanged. This is not as a result of lack of an equivalent term in isiXhosa, because there is an equivalent in isiXhosa cosmology like the term *uQamata*. By retaining the term in the target text Bongela wants his readership to understand God from an Igbo point of view. In the following example we see how the term has been retained in the target text;

Source text:

*Our fathers knew that Chukwu was the Overlord and that is why many of them gave their children the name Chukwuka "Chukwu is Supreme". (Achebe 1958: 129)*

Target text:

*Oobawo babesazi ukuba uChukwu yeyona ngqonyela, yiyo le nto abantu abaninzi bathiya abantwana babo ngamagama athi "Chukwuka" – uChukwu yingangalala. (Bongela 1993: 112)*

Apart from the Supreme Chukwu and the natural level of the universe, the traditional Igbo also believe in the existence of other spiritual forces, the *alusi*. The *alusi* are minor deities, and are forces for blessing or destruction, depending on circumstances. They punish social offences and those who unwittingly infringe their privileges. The role of the diviner is to interpret the wishes of the *alusi*, and the role of the priest is to placate them with sacrifices. See the following extracts:

Extract 1:

*And that was also the year Okonkwo broke the peace, and was punished, as was the custom, by Ezeani, the priest of the goddess of earth. (Achebe 1958:21)*

Extract 2:

*Before it was dusk Ezeani, who was the priest of the goddess, Ani, called Okonkwo in his obi... 'You will bring to the shrine of Ani tomorrow one she-goat, one hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries. (Achebe 1958:22)*

Each person has a personalised providence which comes from Chukwu, and returns to Him at the time of death, a *chi*. This *chi* may be good or bad. See the following extracts from the source text:

Extract 1:

*At the most one could say that his **chi** or personal god **was***



**good.** (Achebe 1958:19)

Extract 2:

*Unoka was an ill-fated man. He had a **bad chi** or personal god, and the evil fortune followed him to the grave, or rather to his death, for he had no grave. (Achebe 1958:13)*

According to Achebe (1975:93) a *chi* is an integral part of traditional Igbo religion as Igbos perceive it as the guardian of each and every person.

Bongela translates this term *chi* with an isiXhosa cultural substitute, namely *isinyanya* (1993:11). AmaXhosa are traditionally ancestor (*izinyanya*) worshippers but also believe in a creator who cares for them in the greater things in life and who protects them in extreme danger. The ancestral fathers, on the other hand, watch over the everyday lives of their descendants, their crops and their cattle. The ancestral fathers are also believed to communicate with their families in dreams. The difference between the *chi* and *isinyanya* is that *isinyanya* unlike the *chi* is not only a personal spirit, as already indicated, *isinyanya* is also collective in the sense that one spirit looks after the entire family. Despite this difference though, the target readership should find the translation of a *chi* as *isinyanya* meaningful and acceptable since *isinyanya* is a well-known concept in the isiXhosa religious system. In some instances Bongela retains the term *chi* (Bongela 1993:13). The reason for this transference is not clear as he mainly uses the term *isinyanya* in his translation. However, the researcher speculates that the inconsistent translation of this term is meant to keep the Igbo idiom intact since it embodies the traditional Igbo religion which the translator also wants to present from an Igbo perspective.

These minor deities claimed an enormous part of the daily lives of the Igbo. There was a belief that these gods could be manipulated in order to protect them and serve their interests. These minor deities include the *Goddess of the Earth* called

*Ani*, which is the central deity (Achebe 1958:22), the *God of the Sky* and the *Goddess of the thunderbolt*, Amadiora (Achebe 1958:102).

All these Igbo terms have been left unchanged in the source text. This could also owe to the fact that the target culture does not subscribe to the belief in gods. When translating the terms '*god*' and '*goddess*' (Achebe 1958:26) Bongela uses the words '*isithixo*' and '*isithixokazi*' respectively (Bongela 1993:25). These are derived from *Thixo*, isiXhosa Christian coinage for *uQamata*, a traditional isiXhosa name for God. As mentioned earlier, amaXhosa do not believe in polytheism, but the coinage of *isithixo* helps to accommodate the existence of the other gods which were also worshipped. Therefore, by translating the two goddesses as *isithixokazi somhlaba nomvelisi wobutyebi* and *isithixo seendudumo* (Bongela 1958:25), Bongela acculturated these culture-specific items of the source text.

The above examination of religious terms demonstrates that Bongela considered and tried to accommodate both cultures.

#### **4.2.4 Food**

When translating food, Bongela used mainly transference although in some instances he used cultural substitution. In the Igbo culture there is no cultural symbol that has received equal attention as the kola nut. It is considered a symbol of life. They believe that the sacredness of the kola is by nature. For example, the dry wood of the tree is not used as fire wood. In *Things Fall Apart* it has been demonstrated that the kola nut had special significance in Nigeria, amongst the Igbo. It was used as a gesture of peace, friendship and hospitality. It was offered to guests when they entered a house. The use of *kola* nuts symbolized everything that was civilized and peaceful in their world.

Extract:



*Unoka went into an inner room and soon returned with a small wooded disc containing a kola nut... 'I have kola,' he announced when he sat down, and passed the disc over to his guest.  
(Achebe 1958:5)*

Bongela transferred this term unchanged throughout the source text. The researcher is of the opinion that he has done so in order to preserve the Igbo idiom, especially because of the sacredness of the kola in the Igbo culture.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

As we have observed in the above discussion, translation is basically designed to fulfill (what is assumed to be) the needs of the culture which would eventually host it. It does so by introducing into that culture (target culture) a version of something which has already been in existence in another culture (source culture), making use of a different language which for one reason or another is deemed worthy of introduction into it. The introduced entity itself, the way it is incorporated into the recipient culture, is never completely new, never alien to that culture on all possible accords. After all, much as translation entails the retention of aspects of the source text, it also involves certain adjustments to the requirements of the target system. At the same time, a translation is always something which hasn't been there before: even in the case of retranslation, the resulting entity, that which actually enters the recipient culture, will definitely not have been there before.

In this discussion it has been demonstrated how the translator has used many strategies to achieve different purposes. The cultural substitution strategy facilitates the accessibility and enhances the meaningfulness of the terms. A strategy such as transference or loan words, help the translator to preserve and present traditional Igbo terms as they were in the Igbo community. Again the terms discussed above illustrate clearly that Bongela has taken the cultural contexts of both the source text

and the target text into consideration. These observations are a clear indication that Bongela has tried to accommodate both cultures.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

The translation of a text, especially a literary text from one language into another is indeed possibly the most vexing art. Few writers and even fewer critics, claim translation as equal to the creation of something entirely original. One feels it is important at this point to reiterate and emphasize what has already been mentioned by saying, when a translator is faced with a text, he or she should take into account that the product of his translation is directed at people that come from a background which is different from that of the original audience. When we talk of a different background, we refer to people with a different history, participating in different social practices and speaking a different language.

In my interview with the translator in question, that is, K.S. Bongela, I asked him to tell me about how he worked on the translation in as much detail as possible. How much leeway did he allow himself in going from English into isiXhosa? "I tried to keep every word and even the order in which it appears," he said, "so that the sentence may unfold the way the original author wanted it to, to end on the word or phrase or image he intended." As much as this may feel particularly crucial in some cases, it is tricky in the case of long, complex sentences.

Also noteworthy from reading the target text is that Bongela is very faithful to the word order and syntactical structure of the original and sometimes has good solutions to the puzzle of how to keep the word order and yet produce a natural isiXhosa sentence. He feels it is important to keep the rhythm of the original text in mind, which means sometimes sentences need to be broken up or spliced together. Sometimes paragraphs need to be rearranged. "In this sense, translating is like writing a new text altogether," he said.



Recently the researcher had an informal chat with some literary translators and casually asked them how they go about their work. Not surprisingly, they all had different approaches to the original text, different methods of working, and different beliefs and ideas about the art as a whole. It was surprising to learn that some normally do not read the whole text before they start translating. One of them qualified this by saying that he wants the text to be fresh to him, and this makes translation fresher, too, which is what he wants. He said if he knows too much about the book, he'll begin interpreting instead of translating. Then I asked for Bongela's point of view on this point of view. He said that he believes in reading the whole text before translating, and that is what he does in practice. He reads through the text at least once and sometimes a good many times before starting work. I fully agree with Bongela's method of reading the whole text before translating. I suppose the translator needs to establish if he likes the book before he embarks on a translation, and should then decide if he really thinks he can live with those characters and that story, and that atmosphere long enough to finish the translation.

Translators who just begin translating without having read the book first are also interesting. This method could be ideal because in any case it is how the book was written, and the spontaneity it allows is crucial to the creation of the target text. So a suggestion would be that the best thing to do is to read the book and then try to forget it.

### **5.1 Revision and reworking**

Bongela says the bigger challenge was that of revision and reworking. He says he felt the first draft was somewhat odd, and then he had to fiddle with the syntax and moved things around just a little in order to produce a good isiXhosa sentence. But unfortunately when reading the target text, the target readers can't help but feel that he sometimes raced along full speed ahead, without looking back even to check



whether he has misunderstood something. As an immediate example, let's look at the following extracts:

### **Example 1**

*Umuofia kwenu! Roared Evil Forest, facing the elders and **grandees** of the clan.*

*Umuofia kwenu! Wabharhumla uMahlathangcolile ejonge kwiingwevu **nakubazukulwana** besizwe.*

### **Example 2**

*It was this man that Okonkwo threw in a fight which the **old men** agreed was one of the fiercest since the founder of their town engaged in a spirit of the wild seven days and seven nights.*

*Yile ndoda ke le awathi uOkonkwo wayingqula phantsi wayoyisa, nto leyo elathi **eli gqala** langqina ukuba lo yayingowona mlo wakha wahambisa umzimba ukususela oko wathi umseki wale dolophu yabo wavuselela umoya wenkenkqe nokulwa iintsuku ezisixhenxe nobusuku bazo.*

In the first example he mistranslated 'grandees' (public figures) for 'grandchildren'. In the next example, the author has used plural 'old men' (amagqala), and the translator has singularized the 'old men' to 'eli gqala' (this old man). This somewhat confuses the true meaning and the sense of the sentence. In the translation it sounds like it is Amalinze 'The Cat' that agreed that this fight was the fiercest. In fact, the whole sentence has lost the essence of the original. For example, the back translation of the target sentence would read:

*It is this man that Okonkwo threw in a fight, and which **this old man agreed** was one of the fiercest since the founder of their town engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights.*

Literary translation (in this case between English and isiXhosa), is an attempt to produce a work in isiXhosa that touches me in nearly the same way as the original work.

## 5.2 Language and culture

We have earlier on made a point about the interaction of language and culture. The complexity of the problem is due to the fact that within the source language two cultures are involved: the English culture, since English is the linguistic medium of the novel, and the African culture seen through an Igbo world-view. To solve this problem Achebe has "devised an African vernacular style which simulates the idiom of Igbo, his native tongue". That is why apart from the choice of words and the specific way he arranges them, Achebe profusely uses proverbs, metaphors and similes which describe the cultural atmosphere in which actions unfold and the cultural milieu in which characters evolve. The following is an example to illustrate this:

### Source text:

*No my friend, he is not too young. A chick that will grow into a cock can be spotted the very day it hatches.  
...But he had to learn how to lay that ghost. (Achebe 1958: 47).  
A child's fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam which its mother puts into its palm. (Achebe 1958: 48)*

### Target text:



*Hayi khona mhlobo wam, akamncinci kangako. Intshontsho eliza kukhula libe ngumqhagi libonakala mhla laqanduselwa. ...Iminwe yomntwana ayinakutshiswa liqhekeza leyem eshushu, elibekwe esandleni sakhe ngunina wakhe. (Bongela 1993: 44)*

Since, as he put it himself "proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten" (Bernth 1968:4), Achebe makes use of them to explain, to illustrate speech. Sometimes however, proverbs are used in an esoteric manner, and these potent words can only be rendered in the same esoteric manner in IsiXhosa:

*...Masiwadudule la manzi ngoku asesemaqatheni! (Bongela, 1993: 127)*

*...We must bale this water now that it is only ankle-deep. (Achebe, 1958: 146)*

Indeed culture and language are closely interrelated, because as it has been demonstrated above, languages do not operate in isolation but within and as part of cultures, and cultures differ from each other in different ways. It is through language that culture is expressed and, on the other hand culture nourishes the language that carries it, and that is why new cultural experiences often make it necessary to enlarge the resources of language. Linguistically English and isiXhosa differ in many ways. For instance, although English is lexically richer, it is a much more concise language than isiXhosa, which is rather diffuse. Syntactically, English constructions can often be exactly matched in isiXhosa but this is not always so. Since no writer writes in a haphazard way, there is always a conscious choice of words, of structural devices, of stylistic subtleties and of figures of speech; therefore a thorough stylistic analysis of a text is an indispensable starting point when a translation is to be carried out. For a translator transferring a literary text, it is not enough to grasp the internal structure of the text. Bassnet-McGuire (1980:37)

believes that a translator needs to understand the internal and external structures operating within and around a work of art.

It is also evident from this work that there are many thorns that can mortify literary translators during the translation process, whatever the nature and type of literary text they are faced with, and they should be aware of them. The very first of these is related to reading and comprehension ability in the source language. Once the literary translator has coped with this obstacle, the most frequent translation difficulties are of a semantic and cultural nature.

As Tymoczko (1999:248) explains, "Linguistic untranslatability" can be said to be referring to true and false friends, calque, and other forms of interference; institutional and standardized terms, neologisms, aphorisms, etc., and "cultural untranslatability," as referring to idioms, sayings, proverbs, jokes, puns, etc. One should adopt a very cautious attitude toward these words or expressions so as to avoid interference and/or language misuse. About the many Igbo words in the target text which are not readily understandable, perhaps a glossary would have been an asset, but we cannot blame the translator for this because Achebe himself did not provide the reader with one in the original. It may have been a deliberate choice to kindle the reader's curiosity and thus impel him/her to find out more about the cultural background of the novel.

Translators quite often run into those painful 'not found' terms, for which not even the best dictionary, an expert in the topic or a native speaker of the source language can provide them with a solution to convey an accurate meaning. In such instances, they should always bear in mind that one of the greatest virtues of a good translator is what Kussmaul (1995: 131) called 'contextualized intuition', that is, the ability to find the nearest common sense interpretation of the 'not found' element within its context.



A further difficulty for the literary translator is to avoid imposing his or her own interpretation on the work. Bongela is certainly clear of this sin. He has managed also to allow the source text author to remain in the forefront while he is operating backstage, because the translator, as pointed out by Van der Merwe (1958:213), should always be self-effacing and subordinate to the original author, as he/she tries to convey the meaning and the contents of the original document to the target audience. In doing so, it is hoped that he managed to satisfy Nida's basic requirements of a translation, as propounded by Hatim and Mason (1990: 16), which are "making sense, conveying the spirit and manner of the original, having a natural and easy form of expressing, and producing a similar response."

Apart from the previously mentioned challenges and other aspects of literary translation, it is relevant to emphasize once again the necessity for sound linguistic knowledge of both the source language and the target language. Nida (1964:241) stresses this as follows:

*In general it is assumed that the translator will have a complete command of the source and the receptor languages, as a bilingual and possibly bicultural participant in the receptive speech communities. Unfortunately, such comprehensive knowledge is more often the ideal than the actuality.*

### **5.3 Translator training**

However, neither knowing languages nor being efficiently bilingual is enough to become a translator. Therefore, although this thorough knowledge of both source and target languages is an essential condition, it is not the only one, to begin swimming up the stream of professional translation. The tendency though is to treat translation as an unimportant exercise that can be undertaken by any Tom, Dick and Harry without proper training or sensitivity for the use of language. Translation

theorists have for many years been pointing this out, and yet many people believe and claim that knowing two or more languages is identical to knowing how to translate properly. This idea should be banished. Delisle (1980) states it clearly:

*Linguistic competence is a necessary condition, but not yet sufficient for the professional practice of translation.*

To conclude, translators like all 'professional professionals' must undergo training. It is important to know that it takes much more than a dictionary to be a good translator, and translators are not made overnight. To be a good translator requires a sizeable investment in both source and target languages. It is one of the most challenging tasks to switch safely and faithfully between two universes of discourse.

Concerning the shortcomings which are inherent in translation, what Goethe said should always be remembered. He had this pertinent remark to make as early as 1921:

*Say what one will of the inadequacy of translation; it remains one of the most important and worthiest concerns in the totality of world affairs.*

It must be emphasized at this point that no literary work is tasteless like a glass of distilled water, it has its peculiar aroma, or consistency, or texture, which the translator must try to submit.

In all fairness towards the translator of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, it must be emphasized that the lack of equivalent terms in the two languages led to some of the difficulties experienced. One could go on *ad infinitum* with such terminological problems but suffice it to say that only training and sensitivity to the use of language can help overcome some of the obstacles.



Wilss (1982:44) compared the task of the translator with that of a sailor. The latter mans a ship, directs it with full sails to the opposite shore, but then has to land 'where there is a different earth and where different air plays'. It is this different earth (target readers) and the alien air (target culture) that constitute the problem on which the greater part if not all of the discussion focused. Numerous are the metaphors with which the relationship between the original and the translation is illustrated.

This work has proved that translating a literary text means facing most of the difficulties encountered in translating any other text type, considering semantic as well as cultural, historical and socio-political aspects.

This kind of study will be useful to those who train translators, researchers and translators between isiXhosa and English; because of the insights it gives with regards to the things that are usually taken for granted by translators.

Finally, based on the central aim of this study, I would recommend that similar investigations be conducted regarding the manner in which terms as well as other cultural elements have been dealt with in other translations of African novels and other types of literary texts from English into isiXhosa. And also the strategies employed by the literary translators translating between these two languages. Such investigations may bring Africans together by promoting cross-cultural understanding and tolerance amongst themselves.

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