

## TRANSLATION, A PANCEA FOR THE SUSTENANCE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN ACHEBE'S THINGS FALL APART

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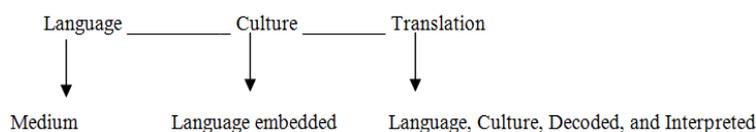
### ABSTRACT

The translation of *Things Fall Apart* into so many languages has helped in revitalizing the Igbo culture. Some of the cultural practices customs and traditions which the Igbos of our time scornfully frowned at would have gone into extinction if not for the translation of *Things Fall Apart* into different languages. This work intends to show how the translation of *Things Fall Apart* has gone a long way towards encouraging the Igbo culture to contribute to the world culture. It intends to look at the belief system of the Igbos with special emphasis on reincarnation, ogbanje, the spirit world, the igbo proverbs or rhetoric and ozo title taken. The analysis of all the above will expose how translation has contributed to the preservation of Igbo culture. Some of the igbo elders especially the king makers will be interviewed and their contributions will also be incorporated if need be because the text book itself is a maser piece and has sufficient information for this research.

**KEYWORDS:** Centuries, People Believed in the Relation between Translation and the Story of the Tower of Babel in the Book of Genesis13

### INTRODUCTION

The origin of translation has been as old as the creation because it all started while constructing the tower of Babel. Supporting this Abdessalam said < for centuries, people believed in the relation between translation and the story of the tower of Babel in the book of Genesis13>. Translation is a daily activity which makes life easy and gloomy without which the world would have been in conflicts, between an individual versus individual community versus individual or nation versus nation because of lack of communication. It also helps in preserving cultures, thus the thrust of this paper. Language and culture are interwoven, inseparable, inextricably interrelated, two sides to a coin as have been said by Swande. Hence language is a medium through which culture is expressed while translation is an agent for cultural dissemination and intergration. The relationship between language, translation and culture can be schematised thus:



### The Igbo People

The Igbo speaking communities are found in the South East of Nigeria. It covers five states out of thirty six states of Nigeria which are Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and also a large part of Delta state. Igbo language is one of the eight major languages spoken in Benue Congo or group kwa. It is one of the three major languages in Nigeria (<http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/igbos>)

### According to Onwuejeogwu

*The igbo culture area is an area running outside the settlements of Agbor, Kwale, Obiarukwu, Ebu (West niger area) Ahoda, Diobu, Umuagbaya, (Port Harcourt Area) and Enugu Ezike (Nsukka area) and Nzam. The imaginary line encloses an area in which the people not only speak the igbo language but share typical and significant culture traits and patterns up to or above 50%.*

### Religious Beliefs

The Igbos believe in the existence and influence of supreme beings, gods and deities according to the gods who control what happens in metaphysical world or atmosphere and others who live with them on earth, directing and controlling the earthly affairs of Igbo man.

### According to Ogbukagu

*These supernatural forces can be broadly categorized into two groups: those primordial divinities that occupy and control the heavens and led by the supreme Divinity and those that occupy and manage our mother Earth. The igbo interact with beings outside the three dimensions (the earth) and obeisance in accordance with the dictates of particular divinities<sup>353</sup>.*

In this book Unoka the father of Okonkwo had a bad chi or personal god, the book described him as an ill fated man (.13) because he always had a miserable harvest he had consulted the oracles called Agbala on several occasion to know why the ill-luck befell him. The igbo World strongly believes that someone's Chi is his/her guardian angel, also Ifejioku is the god of yam with responsibility of producing good harvest especially Yam, the King of all crops. They also believe in Living a good life on earth so that when they die they can be accepted by their ancestors and continue their life beyond.

### According to Ogbukagu

*Death is not the end of man, but according to the belief in igbo traditional religion, is a mutation from one form of existence (life) to another form (spirit). The belief of this changes solidly confirmed from cosmological argument, supports the concept that the igbo-world is essentially divided into 2- the invisible (uwa mmuo) and the visible worlds (uwa mmadu) <sup>354</sup>.*

That is why in the book whenever a man dies of swelling he is thrown to an evil forest without burial so that his spirit will not terrorize the living nor be regarded as an ancestor. This was buttressed in the book when Ezeudu was narrating the punishment meant for someone who broke the week of peace in Obodani, he said thus: "they have that custom in Obodoani if a man dies at this time he is not buried but cast into the Evil forest. Then clan is full of the evil spirits of these unburied dead, hungry to do harm to the living. P.23

Unoka the Father of Okonkwo was thrown to an evil forest because he died with swelling stomach which is an abomination in Igbo land even till today. The ancestors are believed to be upright with good legacies worthy of emulation when they were alive. According to Mbiti. "They are the guardians of family affairs, tradition, ethnics and activities"<sup>4</sup>.

The Igbos also believes in reincarnation (ogbanje), which was found in Ezinma. Ogbanje is a situation whereby a dead child comes back again to be born. Ekwefi suffered plenty of these before eventually Ezinma came. The first to die was Onwumbiko- Death I implore you" followed by Ozoemena – May it not happen again; Onwuma – Death may please

himself (154).

All the above go to portray the belief system of the Igbo people which Achebe took time to explain in his work. Thanks to the translation of this belief system the Igbo man's actions, inactions and reasoning can better be understood by the cultures that have seen these translated in their various languages. This has gone a long way towards establishing interpersonal relationships and promoting better understanding of the people involved. World unity could be achieved through this.

### **The Translations of *Things Fall Apart***

The cultural heritage which the translation of *Things Fall Apart* helped to preserve is the intangible cultural heritage such as religious belief. Rhetorics or proverbs and titles taking in Igbo land. Translation has helped in the preservation of Igbo man's culture. The book *Things Fall Apart* was written in 1958, it was just recently that this book was translated into Igbo language after being translated into fifty languages in the world. The book would have been forgotten by now if not for its translation. The translation of the book has helped to maintain and expose to different generations of people and cultures. Translation helps to renew old things so that it will be very fresh. In Igbo version the events are current after forty five years. Its theme, character and settings are real based on Igbo culture. Okonkwo represents the ideal Igbo man, He could not live to see or accept a white man's religion into his community which still remains a taboo in so many Igbo communities. Paganism has persisted despite Pentecostalism, modernization, industrialization and globalization. Okonkwo defended his religious beliefs but found out lately that things have fallen apart, the centre has been destabilised by the arrival of the white men and their religion in Umuofia, he tried to stop them but he could not, he went and committed suicide. Over fifty languages have known the Igbo culture and their beliefs through translation. The importance of translation cannot be over emphasised. The translation of *Things Fall Apart* has made the book the most widely read and the author the most widely appreciated. The translation of the this book has led to preservation of the book for many generations, because other works of Achebe which he wrote after *Things Fall Apart* like *No Longer At Ease*, *Arrows Of The God's (1964)* have not been so popular because they have not been translated into so many languages. Furthermore the book has gone into films, television and theatrical adaptations thanks to translation. It has gone into entertainment industry to be enjoyed by different people and cultures in different locations.

### **According to Ohaeto**

*A dramatic radio program called Okonkwo was made of the novel in April 1961 by the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. It featured Wole Soyinka in a supporting role. In 1987 the book was made into a very successful ministries directed by David Orere and Broadcast on Nigerian Television Authority. It starred several established film actors including Pete Edochie, Nkem Owoh and Sam Loco 30.*

Earlier some cultures were considered barbaric especially by the colonial masters due to the fact that they were misunderstood or simply not understood. But thanks to translation, societies and cultures have come to understand each other better and with globalization the world has turned into a global village. Thus cultures have grown to be more accommodating and intercultural exchange has become common as human beings through intercommunication which translation has afforded; they can now assess themselves using other people's cultures and also learn to borrow where theirs are lacking.

### Use of Proverbs

Wang asserts that idioms, proverbs, story lines and so on are the structures of language. It was in *Things Fall Apart* that Achebe defines proverbs as the palm oil with which words are eaten<sup>5</sup>. In Igbo language we use to say that <Nwata atuoro ilu, kowaara, mara n'ego eji wee luu nne ya lara n'iyi>, which means that an Igbo man who does not understand a proverb said to him, should know that her mother's bride price is useless, that is why every Igbo man talks proverbially, and imbibes the culture of using proverbs while discussing important issues. Throughout the book proverbs are used for examples in pg.14 when Okonkwo brought present to Nwakibie a very rich man who has taken his highest title taken and also has many barns of yam so that he could bless Okonkwo because Okonkwo's father Unoka was a lazy man and could not farm, consequently left nothing for Okonkwo to inherit, when Nwakibie received Okonkwo's gift and started to pray he used this proverbs in p.14 Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other, let his wings break. This means that everybody is free to progress but if anyone says otherwise let him or her stumble and fail. In Igbo custom, a wealthy man is known or measured by the amount of yams in his barns, plus domestic animals, that is why Okonkwo came to Nwakibie so that he can lend him some yam seedlings because there is an Igbo adage that says, "Nwata kwuo aka o soro ogaranya racha aka". In English it is when a child washes his hands properly that he will eat with the elders. Onye fee eze, eze eruo ya it means if a person respects a king, he will have the opportunity of becoming a king himself. So Nwakibie obliged Okonkwo his request that was how Okonkwo started making it because the Igbo believe that in order for one to be successful in life one needs to associate with a successful person. Some of the Igbo proverbs used in *Things Fall Apart* are:

- Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other, let his wing break(p.14) (live and let live)
- A toad does not run in the daytime for nothing (p.15) there is never a smoke without fire.
- The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if no one else did. (p.16)
- An old woman i is always uneasy when dry bones are mentioned(p.15)
- Eneke the bird says that since men have learnt to shoot without missing, he has learnt to fly without perching(p.16)
- When a man says yes his chi says yes also(p.19)
- Those whose palm kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget making it for himself(p.68)
- If you threw up a grain of sand it would not find a way to fall to earth again (p.79) plenty of people.
- I cannot live on the bank of a river and wash my hands with spittle(p.117)
- A baby on it's mother's back does not know that the way is long.(p.71)
- Whenever you see a toad jumping in broad daylight, then know that something is after its life.(p.143) (there is no smoke without fire)

Proverbs are very integral part of oral culture and therefore very outstanding in *Things Fall Apart*. Every work of

an African is a double translation. Achebe thought in Igbo and worked in English. He transliterated the proverbs from Igbo to English exactly the way they are in Igbo. He would have looked for their English Equivalents but he did not because he wants to show that Igbo language is complete when compared to English.

## CONCLUSIONS

This work shows how translation has helped to show to the world that the negroes or the blacks have culture before the advent of European. They love their culture and cherished it. The Africans have culture, a way of life that governs them. The Igbos have their philosophy communal education and religion. Achebe was the first African that challenged the Whites through this book that African is every thing good while the White every thing bad because their was peace, orderliness in Umuofia before the white man came to disintegrate this community through their religion. People in whose languages this book was translated will not have known these facts if not for translation.

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