

**A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF YORUBA NAMES IN
FAGUNWA'S *IGBO OLODUMARE* AND ITS TWO ENGLISH
TRANSLATIONS BY AJADI AND ŞOYINKA**

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Abstract

Translation, as the interpretation of meanings from one language to another, is crucial for intercultural exchange in multilingual societies, despite its inherent complexities due to language characteristics. This study addresses the challenges of translating culture-specific expressions (CSEs), which often pose significant hurdles for translators because of fundamental differences in cultural contexts. The paper specifically examines the concept of equivalence in two English translations of Daniel Olòrúnfémi Fágúnwà's classic Yorùbá novel, *Igbó Olódùmarè*, Wole Şoyinka's *In the Forest of Olódùmarè* and Gabriel Ajàdí's *The Forest of God*. The research utilizes a qualitative methodology, employing the Translation Equivalence Assessment (TEA) model proposed by Abubakre (2020) as its theoretical framework. This model integrates Newmark's (1981; 1988) categorization of names, Pederson's (2007) taxonomy of translation strategies, and Baker's (1992/2011) outline of translation equivalence comparison. The findings indicate a considerable degree of equivalence between the Source Text (ST) and the Target Texts (TTs). The study also identifies that the translators predominantly used retention, substitution, direct translation, explicitation, and calque strategies to convey the intended meanings of the names. However, it concludes that "perfect" equivalence between Yorùbá and English is really not easy but can be achievable with more efforts put into it.

Keywords: Translation, Translation strategies, Equivalence, Culture-specific expressions, Yorùbá, *Igbó Olódùmarè*.

Introduction

Translation, an art as old as language or writing, involves converting text, speech, or other forms of communication from one language to another while maintaining the original message, meaning, and context. It is seen as a negotiation process between two cultures, two languages, and two texts. Different types of translation exist based on context, purpose, and audience. These include literal translation (word-for-word), which can result in awkward phrasing, and free translation (sense-for-sense), which prioritizes clarity, readability, and cultural relevance. Dynamic equivalence balances fidelity to the original text with the need for natural, idiomatic language in the target language, aiming to capture the essence of the message while accounting for linguistic and cultural differences. The choice of approach depends on the project's requirements, target audience, and purpose.

Yorùbá, part of the Niger-Congo language family, is a rich, tonal language spoken by approximately 40 million people, primarily in Nigeria, Benin, and Togo. It features a complex system of prefixes and suffixes and various dialects with distinct variations in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Its linguistic characteristics include a Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) word order and a strong emphasis on tone, which conveys different meanings. The language's vocabulary reflects its culture's spiritual traditions and connection to nature. Despite dialectal variations, Yorùbá remains vital to the culture's identity and heritage.

Naming is a universal cultural practice, with all human societies naming individuals, animals, objects, places, and events for identification and referencing. In Yorùbá culture, names are profoundly significant, often reflecting family values, birth circumstances, or spiritual aspirations. They are more than labels; they carry cultural, historical, and social importance essential to understanding Yorùbá identity. The Yorùbá believe names can shape a person's destiny, making name selection a deliberate process. For example, Adé (crown) and Olúwa (God) are given to children from royal or spiritual families. Place names, like Ìlẹ̀-ìfẹ̀ (home of the Ife people), describe geographical features or historical events. The translation of Yorùbá names is complex due to cultural nuances, linguistic differences, and potential loss of meaning.

Review of Literature

Translation is widely understood as rendering text from a source language to a target language. Venutti (1995, p.17) defines translation as the replacement of signifiers from a source text with signifiers in a target text based on interpretation. It is a means of making verbal or written codes available in another language, aiming to produce an equivalent text that transfers the original message, meaning, and context. Catford (1988) similarly defines it as replacing textual material in one language with equivalent material in another. Translation can be categorized into general (everyday language) and specialized (e.g., medical, legal, literary).

The concept of "equivalence" is central to translation theory, although it has sparked considerable debate. Equivalence generally means expressing terms using their equivalents in the target language. Halliday (2001, p.17) asserts that a "good" translation is one that is equivalent in valued linguistic features and in the assigned value to the source text. While some theorists (Jakobson, Bel, Baker) favor a linguistic approach, focusing on differences between linguistic systems as the main source of translation problems, others (Culier, Hervey, Higgins) believe translation involves a transfer from one culture to another, acknowledging potential "translation loss" due to cultural gaps. Despite controversies, theorists emphasize establishing equivalent relations between the source text and its translations and the need for translators to apply strategies to overcome problems.

Translation strategies are "procedures conscious or unconscious, verbal or nonverbal used by the translator to solve problems that emerge". They are crucial for solving translation problems and for comprehension and reformulation. Various scholars have proposed different strategies for translating culture-specific expressions (CSEs), leading to terminological confusion. Studies, such as Rashid Ali (2008) on Malay-English translation and Huang (2014) on Chinese-English children's literature, have investigated these strategies, but findings often struggle to establish a clear relationship between CSEs and specific techniques. In Nigeria, critical studies of Yorùbá - to-English literary translations have been limited, often focusing on religious texts rather than equivalence of meaning in CSEs and their translation strategies. The difficulty in establishing appropriate criteria for evaluating

creative translation remains a significant issue, highlighting the need for evaluations that go beyond simplistic judgments.

Naming is a universal cultural practice, with names serving as identifiers for humans, animals, objects, places, and events. In Africa, particularly among the Yorùbá, names are not mere labels; they express experiences, values, hopes, and beliefs. The symbolic significance of names is evident in works like D.O. Fágúnwà's, which are rich in cultural references and mythological symbolism. Fágúnwà's use of proper names, especially for deities, spirits, and moral lessons, reflects his engagement with Yorùbá cosmology and oral traditions. These names deepen the mythological aspect and educate readers about Yorùbá values and belief systems.

One of the main difficulties in translating names arises from linguistic differences. When languages are similar, finding equivalent lexical items is easier. However, when cultures are very different, finding equivalents becomes challenging. Hervey and Higgins (1986) proposed two strategies for translating proper names in literary works:

1. **Exotism:** The name is taken over unchanged from the source text.

2. **Transliteration:** The name is adapted to conform to the phonetic or graphic conventions of the target language. They also suggested cultural transplantation, where source language names are replaced by indigenous target names with similar cultural connotations, not literal equivalents. Newmark (1988, p.214) states that first and surnames are normally transferred, assuming no connotations. However, if connotations and implied meanings are relevant, Newmark (1988a, p.215) suggests translating the underlying word of the source language proper name into the target language, then naturalizing it back into a new name.

Translating names from Yorùbá to English is a complex task requiring careful consideration of cultural and linguistic challenges. A key cultural challenge is the difference in cultural contexts, as Yorùbá names often carry cultural and historical significance not immediately apparent to non-Yorùbá speakers. Translators must be aware of these nuances to convey meaning in the target language. Cultural equivalence, which refers to the degree to which the

translated text conveys the same cultural meaning as the original, is crucial in Yorùbá -English name translation.

Linguistically, the Yorùbá language's complex system of prefixes and suffixes poses a challenge. Scholars have proposed various strategies to address these challenges, including:

1. Cultural adaptation: Adapting the name to the target language's cultural context.
2. Linguistic borrowing: Borrowing words or phrases from the source language.
3. Explication: Adding explanatory notes or comments to clarify meaning. There's growing interest in these challenges, with scholars exploring complexities and strategies. A key debate is how to balance fidelity to the original text with the need to adapt the name to the target culture.

The comparative study of literary translations is vital for understanding linguistic and cultural nuances. (Abubakre and Abdussalam 2019), in an article titled "Analysis of Strategies for Translating Culture-Specific Expressions in Soyinka's *In the Forest of Olodumare*", focuses on translating culture-specific expressions (CSEs). It emphasizes that translation is essential in multilingual societies for knowledge sharing and overcoming communication challenges, recognizing the intricate link between language and culture. This study specifically investigates translation strategies in Wole Soyinka's English translation of D.O. Fágúnwà's *Igbó Olódùmarè* titled *In the Forest of Olódùmarè*.

The theoretical framework for this analysis is the Translation Equivalence Assessment (TEA) model, which integrates insights from Newmark's Culture Categorization and Pederson's taxonomy of translation strategies, supported by Newmark's Seven Approaches to Metaphor Translation. This framework assesses equivalent relations at word, phrase, and pragmatic levels within Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) and was adopted for the current study. The Abubakre and Abdussalam study effectively defines the problem and theoretical framework, and its choice of Soyinka's translation is apt given the original text's cultural roots and Soyinka's prominence. The detailed

methodology and novel synopsis contribute to its comprehensiveness and academic rigor.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques, and is grounded in Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS). The researcher's bilingual expertise in Yorùbá and English aids in identifying key culture-specific expressions (CSEs) that pose translation challenges. Data for analysis is purposefully drawn from the source text (ST) and the target texts (TTs). Evaluating translations is a complex task due to the challenge of determining suitable criteria for analysis and judgment. Therefore, there is a need for evaluations that go beyond simplistic judgments and avoid dismissing a translator's work based on isolated errors.

The central theoretical framework for this study is the Translation Equivalence Assessment (TEA) model, proposed by Abubakre (2020). This model was developed by integrating a modified version of Newmark's (1981; 1988) Culture Categorization, Pederson's (2007) taxonomy of translation strategies, and Baker's (1992/2011) Levels of Equivalence.

The TEA model's first component focuses on delineating aspects of the ST for comparative analysis. It begins with the identification and classification of the ST CSEs relevant to the study. The model focuses on two broad categories of ST CSEs:

1. Conventional CSEs: These include proper names, ecological features (and other artifacts), and social organizations.
2. Metaphorical CSEs: These encompass rhetorical features such as similes, idioms, and proverbs, used for stylistic and didactic effects in the ST.

Newmark (1981; 1988) provides a systematic approach for classifying cultures into categories like proper names, ecology, material cultures, social cultures, social organizations, gestures, and habits, and suggests appropriate translation strategies for each. This study, however, broadens Newmark's categorization to adequately account for rhetorical features and other aspects of Yorùbá Oral literature present in the ST. This categorization is crucial for

establishing connections between the focused CSEs and their translation strategies in the TTs.

The translation strategies used in the TTs are identified and analyzed based on Pedersen's (2007) taxonomy of translation strategies, which are divided into Source-oriented and Target-oriented strategies. The method used in the collection of data for this study involved a meticulous and systematic extraction of relevant information from the selected literary text, with a specific focus on names. This targeted approach enabled a straightforward and efficient data collection process. The literary text serves as the primary source of data, providing a rich repository of names that were carefully extracted and documented.

Given the distinct nature of names, the extraction process was relatively direct, allowing for accurate and reliable data collection. The extracted names were then reviewed and verified to ensure accuracy and completeness, forming a comprehensive dataset that would serve as the foundation for further analysis and comparison.

Data Presentation

Here we present the data gathered from the comparative analysis of names in D.O. Fágúnwà's *Igbó Olódùmarè* and its two English translations by Gabriel Ajadi and Wole Şoyinka. The data analysis employed a qualitative approach focusing on the semantic equivalence of names, categorized into human, fictional, super-human, and non-human names. Names were extracted from the first chapter of the Source Text (ST) and its corresponding translations in the two Target Texts (TTs) and then categorized. A comparative analysis was conducted to identify similarities and differences, and translation strategies used by the authors were identified and classified into categories such as retention, substitution, explication, and calque. Tables were utilized to facilitate comparison and analysis.

Personal Names

Source Text	Gabriel Ajadi's TT	Wole Soyinka's TT
Ọmọtúndé	Ọmọtúndé	Ọmọtúndé
Adéyẹmí	Adéyẹmí	Adéyẹmí
Ojúọlápé	Ojúọlápé	Ojúọlápé
Résẹ̀ẹ̀lì Ọ̀súnnyọmí	Résẹ̀ẹ̀lì Ọ̀súnnyọmí	Racheal Ọ̀súnnyọmí

For personal names, both authors used the retention strategy for three out of four names (75%), while Gabriel Ajadi used retention for all personal names (100%), and Wole Soyinka employed a substitution strategy for one name.

Super-Human Names

Super-Human names refer to expressions or attributes belonging to the Yoruba religious cosmos, Christian doctrine, and Islamic religion portrayed in the ST.

Original Text	Gabriel Ajadi's TT	Wole Soyinka's TT
Olódùmarè	God	Their maker/ The good lord/ God/ Olódùmarè
Ẹ̀lédàá	Creator/ God	The Almighty/ He
Ọ̀lórún	Lord	God
Àjẹ	Witch	Witch
Ẹ̀bọ̀ra	Apparition	Ghommid
Irúnmalẹ	Demons	Demons
Ọ̀ṣó	Wizard	Sorcerers

Gabriel Ajadi consistently translated *Olódùmarè* as God. In contrast, Wole Soyinka used various translations for *Olódùmarè*, including 'their maker', 'the good lord', 'God', and retaining '*Olódùmarè*' itself, indicating inconsistency. For *Ẹ̀lédàá*, Ajadi used 'creator' (direct translation) and 'God' (substitution), while Soyinka used 'Almighty' and the pronoun 'He'.

Fictional Names

ST	TT(AJADI'S)	STRATEGIES USED	TT (Şoyinka's)	STRATEGIES USED
Olówó-ayé	Olówó-ayé	Retention	Olówó-ayé	Retention
Àkàrà òògùn	Àkàrà òògùn	Retention	Àkàrà òògùn	Retention
Àgbákò	Àgbákò	Retention	Àgbákò	Retention
A-bá-lóunje kú	He-who-cares-not-to-die-for-a-food owner	Direct Translation	He with a life and death commitment to his stomach	Direct Translation

For fictional names, three out of four names were retained using the complete retention strategy. The last name was literally translated or paraphrased to convey its metaphors and intended messages.

Non-Human Names

ST	TT(AJADI'S)	STRATEGIES USED	TT (Şoyinka's)	STRATEGIES USED
Tábìlì	Table	Direct Translation	Desk	Explication
Àpáta	Rock	Substitution	Rock	Substitution
Ìşáná	Matches	Substitution	Matches	Substitution

For non-human names, both authors used the substitution strategy for two out of three names (66.67%). 'Àpata' was translated similarly by both using substitution, while 'Tábìlì' (a loanword) was translated by Ajadi using direct translation and by Şoyinka using explication. 'Ìşáná' was translated similarly by both using substitution.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis, this study reveals that both Gabriel Ajadi and Wole Soyinka, as translators of D.O. Fágúnwà's *Igbó Olódùmarè* largely achieved equivalence between the Source Text (ST) and the Target Texts (TTs). They employed various strategies to convey the intended meaning of the names, including retention, substitution, direct translation, explicitation, and calque. However, the careful analysis also indicates that a "perfect" equivalence between Yorùbá and English is really not easy but can be achievable with more efforts put into it. Therefore, translators should strive to approximate meanings of culturally specific expressions (CSEs) as closely as possible, using strategies that best convey the intended meaning. The study recommends that competent and professional translators in Nigeria should continue to translate works of notable creative writers in indigenous languages, particularly Yorùbá, into English. This effort will expand readership and broaden scholarship on Yorùbá literary texts.

The analysis of the translated texts reveals distinct patterns and strategies employed by Gabriel Ajadi and Wole Soyinka. Both authors utilized various translation strategies to convey the intended messages and cultural nuances of the source text. For **personal names**, both translators primarily used the retention strategy, with Ajadi maintaining a consistent approach. Soyinka, however, occasionally used a substitution strategy, possibly to make the names more relatable to the target readers. In translating **Super-Human names**, the approaches significantly diverged. Ajadi consistently translated 'Olódùmarè' as 'God' throughout his version, even after revisions. Soyinka, on the other hand, employed a variety of terms such as 'their maker,' 'the good lord,' and 'God,' which the study attributes to his attempt to showcase the diverse attributes and competence of *Olódùmarè*. This variation, however, can be seen as an inconsistency. For *Èlédàá*, Ajadi primarily used 'creator' (direct translation) and 'God' (substitution), while Soyinka opted for 'Almighty' and 'He'. For **fictional names**, the study found that a majority were rendered using the complete retention strategy, while some were literally translated or paraphrased to convey their underlying metaphors and messages. In the case of **non-human names**, common strategies included substitution for terms like

apáta (rock) and *íṣáná* (matches) *tábìlì* (table), a Yorùbá loanword, was translated directly by Ajadi and through explication by Soyinka.

Overall, the findings suggest that both authors were mindful of the cultural context in their translations. Ajadi demonstrated consistency, particularly with religious terms, while Soyinka adopted more varied and creative approaches, including "inventive naming ceremony" which reflects his creative translation style.

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