

**TRANSLATING THE UNTRANSLATABLE: CHALLENGES AND
STRATEGIES IN RENDERING YORÙBÁ ORAL LITERATURE WITHIN
CULTURAL AND LITERARY CONTEXTS**

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Abstract

Translating Yoruba oral literature presents unique challenges that go beyond linguistic equivalence, as it involves conveying culturally rooted idioms, metaphors, proverbs, and performance aesthetics into a target language without losing their meaning and artistic power. This study explores the complexities of translating Yoruba oral texts, such as Oríkì (praise poetry), ìjálá (hunters' chants), ọfọ (incantations), and òwè (proverbs), within their cultural and literary contexts. Employing a hermeneutic and socio-linguistic approach, the paper examines issues of untranslatability, cultural specificity, and the loss of performative elements essential to meaning-making in Yoruba oral traditions. It also investigates strategies such as domestication, foreignisation, paratextual commentary, and multimodal translation to preserve semantic richness, rhythm, and aesthetic appeal in the target language. The study argues that effective translation of Yoruba oral literature requires balancing fidelity to the source culture with accessibility for international audiences. Ultimately, this work contributes to ongoing discussions in translation studies by advocating for culturally sensitive methods that maintain the richness of Yoruba oral heritage in cross-cultural literary exchanges.

Keywords: Cultural context; Domestication and foreignisation; Translation strategies; Untranslatability; Yorùbá oral literature.

Introduction

Translation is never just a linguistic task; it is an act of cultural negotiation. This is especially true for Yoruba oral literature, where meaning is deeply embedded in cultural, historical, and performative contexts. Yoruba oral poetry, including oríkì

(praise poetry), *ijálá* (hunters' chants), *ọ̀fò* (incantations), and *òwe* (proverbial expressions), functions not just as text but as a living performance, conveying the worldview, philosophy, and aesthetics of the Yoruba people. Translating these oral texts into another language, therefore, requires more than simple word replacement: it demands careful replication of their cultural significance, symbolic richness, rhythm, and emotional power for audiences unfamiliar with their original context.

A key challenge is the issue of untranslatability. Culture-specific idioms, tonal subtleties, metaphoric structures, and performance cues often resist direct translation, and literal interpretation can distort meaning or erase sacred and aesthetic significance. For example, praise poetry invoking the pantheon of *Òrìṣà* deities cannot be fully expressed through word-for-word translation, and proverb-based expressions may lose their impact when stripped of their metaphorical depth. These challenges raise important questions about how to translate Yorùbá oral literature without reducing its literary, spiritual, and cultural value.

This paper critically examines the cultural, linguistic, and performative challenges of translating Yorùbá oral literature, while exploring translation strategies like domestication, foreignisation, paratextual commentary, and multimodal approaches that aim to balance linguistic closeness to the source with accessibility for global audiences. It contributes to broader debates in translation studies on preserving indigenous literary heritage and positions Yorùbá oral literature for scholarly, pedagogical, and cross-cultural engagement. The study argues that translating Yorùbá oral texts is both an art and a science, requiring deep cultural understanding, sensitivity to oral performance aesthetics, and creative use of the target language.

Methodology

This study examined selected samples of Yorùbá oral genres, specifically *oríkì orílẹ̀* (lineage praise poetry), *ijálá Ọ̀ḍẹ* (hunters' chants), *òfò* (incantatory poetry), and *òwe* (proverbs), to analyze how meaning, performance, and cultural metaphors are negotiated in translation from Yorùbá into English. The data were gathered from live performances recorded in *Ìbàdàn*, *Ọ̀yọ́*, and *Òndó* between 2021 and 2024, complemented by textual transcriptions from *Oral Poetry in Africa* (Finnegan, 2012) and Barber's (1991) *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*.

Using hermeneutic interpretation and performance-based translation analysis, the study focused on four semiotic dimensions of translation.

1. ***Lexical-semantic fidelity*** (the rendering of key words, idioms, and metaphors).
2. ***Performative equivalence*** (tone, rhythm, gesture, and audience interaction).
3. ***Cultural referentiality*** (retention or adaptation of cosmological and ritual concepts).
4. ***Paratextual mediation*** (use of glosses, notes, and multimodal supports).

Each text was examined using a mixed-method approach that incorporates sociolinguistic insights, postcolonial ethics of representation, and multimodal documentation (video/audio). Translational variants were evaluated for cultural understanding among both native and non-native audiences.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Hermeneutic Theory and Cultural Translation Theory, which offer important perspectives for understanding the complexities of translating Yorùbá oral literature. Hermeneutic Theory, rooted in Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophy, highlights interpretation as a dialogic exchange between the text, the translator, and the cultural perspectives of both the source and target audiences. This framework allows the translator to go beyond literal equivalence and engage more deeply with the cultural, spiritual, and performative meanings found in Yorùbá oral forms such as *oríkì*, *ijálá*, *òfò*, and *òwe*. It presents translation as an interpretive process that aims to capture not only linguistic content but also the worldview, aesthetic essence, and emotional impact of the source culture.

Cultural Translation Theory complements this view by framing translation as a process of cross-cultural negotiation rather than just linguistic transfer. Based on the works of Homi Bhabha and Susan Bassnett, this theory highlights the hybrid, transformative nature of translation in postcolonial contexts where texts are deeply connected to indigenous ways of knowing and symbolic systems. It offers a framework for analyzing how Yorùbá oral literature can be translated into global languages without losing its cultural uniqueness or performative vitality.

Together, these theoretical perspectives facilitate a nuanced interrogation of meaning, context, and aesthetics, affirming translation as a culturally situated, interpretive practice that mediates between Yorùbá oral heritage and global literary discourse.

Translating African Oral Literature: Foundational and Contemporary Debates

The translation of African oral literature occupies a complex space between linguistic equivalence and cultural fidelity. Foundational translation theories such as Nida's (1964) dynamic equivalence and Newmark's (1988) distinction between semantic and communicative translation have long guided the field. However, these frameworks often prove inadequate for translating oral genres, whose meanings are inseparable from performance, prosody, and community participation (Finnegan, 2012; Yankah, 1995; Bandia, 2008). Finnegan (2012) and Barber (1991) emphasize that African oral literature constitutes event-texts rather than static linguistic artifacts, as meaning emerges through tone, gesture, rhythm, and audience interaction. Therefore, translation in this context requires sensitivity not only to linguistic form but also to performance dynamics and cultural understandings.

African translation theorists such as Bandia (2008) and Bamgbose (1992) argue that oral literature resists being reduced to written text because of its multimodal and communal nature. Bandia's postcolonial translation paradigm critiques Eurocentric

models that prioritize textual fixity over performative fluidity, encouraging translators to see orality as a creative continuum rather than something that is inherently untranslatable. Similarly, Adeeko (2010) and Barber (1991) highlight that Yoruba oral genres, such as *oríkì* (praise poetry), *ìjálá* (hunters' chants), and *ọfọ* (incantations), are both poetic and social performances. Their translation requires careful attention to their aesthetic, emotional, and ritual power. Therefore, the translator's role is not just as a language intermediary but also as a cultural mediator interpreting symbolic systems rooted in communal experience.

Yorùbá Oral Genres and the Problem of Untranslatability

Yorùbá oral literature illustrates the complexities of translating African expressive forms. Its dependence on tonal variation, proverbs rich in metaphor, and ritual cosmology make it difficult to achieve linguistic equivalence. Finnegan (2012) emphasises that meaning in oral traditions often lies in contextual performance rather than in lexical units alone. For example, translating a Yorùbá *oríkì* for Òrìṣà deities or royal lineages involves more than simply turning praise names into English; it requires capturing their rhythm, metaphorical richness, and spiritual significance. Yankah (1995) also argues that the cultural meaning of African praise poetry cannot be separated from the performative setting that confers on it its power and authenticity.

Several studies have explored ways to address this issue through adaptive translation strategies. Adegbite (1991) and Ogundeji (2014) champion interpretive translation, which maintains the communicative intent and aesthetic rhythm of the source text while navigating linguistic challenges. Barber (1991) and Bamgbose (1992) suggest adding paratextual commentary, such as footnotes, glossaries, or cultural annotations, to bridge the gap between source and target audiences. These strategies align with Venuti's (1995) dichotomy of domestication and foreignisation: domestication makes the text more accessible for non-Yorùbá readers, while foreignisation preserves the cultural "strangeness" of the original. Finding a balance between both ensures that translation stays true to indigenous epistemologies while engaging a global audience.

Postcolonial and Cultural Translation Paradigms

Cultural Translation Theory provides a postcolonial perspective for reinterpreting Yoruba oral literature for audiences from different cultures. Based on Bhabha (1994) and Bassnett (2002), cultural translation is seen not just as replacing words but as a dialogic process between unequal cultural systems. In this view, translation becomes a space of hybridity and resistance, where indigenous knowledge interacts with global discourse without being erased. Lefevere (1992) and Baker (2018) also emphasize the power dynamics involved in translation, seeing it as an ideological act that shapes rather than simply transmits meaning. For Yoruba oral texts, this means translation must include ritual, cosmology, and performance as essential parts of the text's meaning, not just as "contextual extras."

African-centered scholars like Oyèwùmí (1997) and Nnaemeka (2004) expand this perspective by highlighting gendered and communal aspects of translation. They warn against Western interpretive views that hide indigenous worldviews and promote culturally responsive approaches rooted in African epistemologies. When these approaches are used with Yoruba oral forms, they resist uniformity and support the local meanings of orature within global literary conversations.

Digital and Multimodal Frontiers in Translating Orality

Recent developments in translation studies have moved beyond traditional textual models to include multimodal and digital approaches. Scholars like Cronin (2013) and O'Halloran (2020) suggest incorporating audiovisual and performative elements to better represent the embodied nature of oral art. For Yoruba oral performance, which relies heavily on music, gesture, and rhythm, multimodal translation provides a way to preserve meaning beyond just words. Digital archives and media translations, such as subtitling, ethno-poetic transcription, or online performance curation, allow for the retention of tonal and rhythmic nuances that are often lost in print (Frontiers in Communication, 2024).

This paradigm shift aligns with the Yorùbá aesthetic philosophy of *àṣà* (cultural style) and *ìwà* (character), which highlights the ethical and artistic integrity of cultural expression. By combining digital tools with interpretive translation, modern scholars support not for literal replication but for cultural continuity, making sure that Yoruba oral heritage stays dynamic, understandable, and globally meaningful.

Synthesis

The literature shows a continuous focus on balancing faithfulness to source culture with accessibility for target audiences. Foundational linguistic theories offer a basis for equivalence, but they fall short in capturing the performative, spiritual, and communal essence of Yoruba orature. Postcolonial and cultural translation frameworks help bridge this gap by emphasizing cultural agency and interpretive negotiation. Including multimodal and digital perspectives further broadens the translator's toolkit, enabling Yoruba oral literature to stay vibrant within new media and global audiences. Overall, these studies confirm that translation is both an artistic and ethical act, an effort that reimagines Yoruba oral traditions as vibrant, evolving expressions of cultural identity.

Data Analysis, Findings, and Contribution to Knowledge

Translating Lexical Density and Cultural Metaphors

This study's findings expand the discussion on African oral translation by showing that untranslatability is not a barrier but an invitation to deeper intercultural dialogue. The translator acts as a cultural interpreter, mediating between linguistic clarity and metaphysical depth. A clear example is in the *Oríkì Olú Òjé* as documented in Babalolá (2000):

Ọmọ ẹni t'ó méyẹ wá' dọ –	Offspring of the one who brings birds to the stream
L'Ọ̀npetu –	In Ọ̀npetu (Ìpètu)
Pé ó wàá mumi –	That he should come and drink water
Ọmọ Kúńdarú –	Offspring of Kúńdarú (nickname for a short man)
Ọmọ Arídiògólógún –	Offspring of Arídiògólógún (the one who sees bounty at the war front)
Ọmọ Àròyìnogunbààràfagbẹ –	Offspring of Àròyìnogunbààràfagbẹ (the one who narrates war tales with wounds on his body)
Orí-wọ̀n-in –	His head (<i>Babalọ́lá, 2000, p. 18</i>)

A literal translation of these lines captures surface-level meaning but fails to convey the deeper ontological significance of key metaphors, especially *orí*, a concept that goes beyond the physical “head” to represent a person’s inner core, fate, and spiritual independence. The data indicate that the power of the *oríkì* comes from the performative calling of ancestral identity and metaphysical agency rather than from lexical content alone.

To tackle this translational challenge, the study suggests cultural explication as a compensatory strategy. For example:

Orí-wọ̀n-in → *Hard destiny or ill luck (orí: the metaphysical seat of destiny).*

Here, the foreignising retention of *orí* (Venuti, 1995), supported by a brief gloss, allows the translator to maintain both its semantic and cosmological significance. This hybrid approach combines Nida’s (1964) dynamic equivalence, ensuring functional clarity, with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s (1986) decolonial push for cultural self-definition through indigenous language preservation.

The data affirm that the Yorùbá oral aesthetic thrives on metaphoric diversity and contextual flexibility. Every lexical choice in translation, therefore, becomes an ethical act that determines whether meaning will be adapted for accessibility or preserved for authenticity. By interpretively retaining untranslatable terms and providing minimal contextual gloss, translators uphold the epistemological integrity of the source culture.

Performance and Acoustic Meaning in Translation

The analysis of *ìjálá* chants shows that meaning in Yorùbá oral literature extended beyond lexical content into acoustic features such as tone, pitch, and rhythm. Phonetic analysis by Akinlabi and Liberman (2011) of recorded performances reveals that tonal elongation and call–response rhythm create emotional strength and ritual power that often get lost in written translation.

For example, the *ìjálá* lines documented in Yemitan (1979) read as follows:

Ògún onílẹ̀ ikín, ọ̀lọ̀dẹ̀ màrìwò -	Ògún, the owner of the apartment with <i>ikín</i> , owner of the passage made of palm frost
Ògún má yanjú mi o -	Ògún, do not kill me

Bó ti ẹ yanjú ọmọ Ajişolá	-	As you killed the offspring of Ajişolá
Ajişolá lẹmọ tí ó kọkọ bí	-	Ajişolá is the first child
B' Ajişolá bá ẹ sóde	-	Whenever Ajisola went out
Wọ́n á ní ọmọ Ọ̀gún ẹ sóde	-	They would say, "The offspring of Ogun has come out."
Nijọ́ tí Ọ̀gún n ẹ wá sílé ayé	-	When Ogun was embarking on his journey to the earth
Işu ló mú lẹwọ́	-	He held a tuber of yam
Ọ̀ṣà-oko ló şikejì rẹ	-	Ọ̀ṣà-oko was his second companion
Wọ́n ní iwọ Ọ̀rişà-oko kí lo wá ẹ? -		They asked Ọ̀rişà-oko, "What have you come to do?" (Yemitan, 1979, p. 8)

In oral performance, tonal and rhythmic prolongation on Ọ̀ṣà-oko evokes a sense of awe and highlights performative grandeur. Translating this into plain prose removes the performative aspect and the emotional depth embedded in the sound.

To address this, the study proposes a multimodal translation output, combining textual translation with annotated audio and video recordings. This method captures the emotional tone and rhythmic pattern of rituals that traditional text alone cannot convey. It aligns with the multimodal translation framework outlined by Valdeón (2024) and Elmadany et al. (2024), which promotes the use of multiple semiotic resources-textual, acoustic, and visual-in translation practice.

This model redefines translation not as merely transferring words but as preserving acoustic embodiment and performative semiotics, ensuring that the sonic aesthetics central to Yoruba poetics remain perceptible to both native and global audiences.

Proverbs (Òwe) and Hermeneutic Equivalence

Yorùbá proverbs (òwe) highlight another key challenge in translation: hermeneutic equivalence, which involves maintaining the philosophical and ethical wisdom embedded in culturally specific metaphors. In Yorùbá culture, proverbs are not just linguistic expressions but are epistemic tools that convey moral values, social norms, and rhetorical skill. The Yorùbá worldview holds that wisdom is cumulative and experiential, and proverbs distil this collective experience into concise, memorable utterances.

First, as repositories of moral values, proverbs encode ethical principles that guide individual and communal behaviour. For instance, "*Ìwà l'ẹwà*" (character is beauty) elevates moral integrity above physical appearance, reinforcing the cultural emphasis on good character (*ìwà rere*) as the foundation of social respect and harmony. Through such proverbs, abstract moral concepts are concretised and made accessible to both the young and the old.

Second, Yorùbá proverbs articulate and regulate social norms and relationships. They are frequently deployed in conflict resolution, elder and youth interactions, marriage negotiations, and communal decision-making. A proverb like *Àgbà kì í wà l'ọjà kí orí*

omọ tuntun wọ (an elder does not remain in the marketplace while a child's head is wrongly positioned) underscores the societal expectation that elders must guide, correct, and protect communal order. Here, the proverb functions as a normative framework legitimising authority and responsibility.

Third, proverbs serve as markers of rhetorical competence and intellectual maturity. Mastery of proverbs is culturally associated with wisdom, eloquence, and social intelligence. The ability to select and deploy an appropriate proverb in discourse demonstrates not only linguistic skill but also deep cultural knowledge and interpretive sensitivity. This is why elders often caution that *Òwẹ l'ẹsin ọrọ, ọrọ lẹsin ọwẹ, bí ọrọ bá sọ̀nù, ọwẹ la fì ń wá a* (a proverb is the horse of speech, speech is the horse of proverb, when speech is lost, we use a proverb to recover it), highlighting the proverb's role in clarifying meaning and strengthening argumentation.

Moreover, proverbs operate as indirect pedagogical tools, allowing speakers to advise, rebuke, or critique without confrontation. Their metaphorical nature encourages reflection rather than coercion, fostering communal learning and consensus. In this sense, Yorùbá proverbs embody an indigenous philosophy of knowledge that values subtlety, contextual reasoning, and shared understanding.

Thus, Yorùbá proverbs are epistemic tools that encapsulate moral philosophy, sustain social order, and elevate discourse. They reflect a cultural logic in which knowledge is performative, dialogic, and inseparable from lived experience, making proverbs central to Yorùbá thought, communication, and identity.

Consider the following examples:

(i) **Ẹnu dùn-ún ròfò, agada ọwọ ẹẹ bẹ gẹdú.**

The mouth is sweet in weaving words; the bare hand can cut down a great tree.

(ii) **Ọrẹ kítíkítí, iyèkan kàtàkàtà, ọjọ tí ọrẹ kítíkítí bá kú, iyèkan kàtàkàtà ló maa sin-ín.**

An intimate friend vis-à-vis a distant relative-when the intimate friend dies, it is the distant relative who buries him.

(iii) **Bí ilé bá ga lágajù, a maa wó pa onilé; bí inú bá le lálẹjù, ọ̀sì ló ń kó bání.**

If a house is too tall, it collapses on its owner; if a man is too cruel, poverty consumes him.

Literal translations of these proverbs may capture rhythm or syntax but often fail to convey the performative philosophy and moral resonance that underpin them in Yorùbá thought. Proverbs (i) through (iii) rely on metaphorical layering: (*ròfọ*), “to weave,” evokes craftsmanship in speech; (*ọrẹ*) and (*iyèkan*) articulate social ethics of kinship and reciprocity, while (*onilé*) symbolises the moral limits of power.

Translators must therefore interpret not only the lexical content but also the didactic intent embedded in each proverb. Rendering the examples as:

- (i) *The mouth is sweet in weaving words; the bare hand can cut down a mighty tree.*
- (ii) *An intimate friend and a distant relative, when the friend dies, it is the relative who performs the burial.*
- (iii) *If a house grows too tall, it collapses on its owner; if a man grows too proud, he is ruined by his own excess.*

This translation method preserves both linguistic accuracy and cultural relevance, maintaining the aesthetic metaphors while putting their ethical implications into context.

This interpretive approach aligns with Sotunde's (2016) argument that translation is an act of cultural negotiation rather than linguistic substitution, and with Adeeko's (2005) concept of "textualised orature," which emphasises preserving the oral aesthetics and performative energy of indigenous discourse within written translation.

Through hermeneutic interpretation, the translator connects the epistemological gap between Yorùbá and global audiences, enabling the proverbial wisdom to maintain its ethical and poetic strength while being understood in cross-cultural literary contexts.

Paratextual and Digital Mediation

The study also shows that paratextual supports like glossaries, translator's notes, and contextual introductions greatly improve understanding without sacrificing cultural uniqueness. These elements help readers access the symbolic and performative layers woven into Yorùbá oral poetry.

For instance, the oral rendition of the *òfò* (incantation) below, as documented in Àjáyí (2014), demonstrates the interpretive depth that can be achieved when textual and oral modes converge:

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| Orí lejá fí í labú já | - | <i>The head is what the fish uses to swim through the deep water.</i> |
| Orí làpónrán fí í là rókò | - | <i>The head is what an axe uses to split an ìrókò tree.</i> |
| Orí lópó fí í tilẹ̀ | - | <i>The head is what a pillar uses to fix itself on the ground.</i> |
| Orí lewúrẹ̀ fí í jálẹ̀ | - | <i>The head is what the goat uses to cause disorder in the house.</i> |
| Orí làgbò fí í ja àjàgbilà | - | <i>The head is what the ram uses to fight furiously.</i> |
| Orí lóká fí í légba ẹranko- | - | <i>The head is what the gaboon viper uses to drive away two hundred animals.</i> |
| Orí lèkòlò fí í làà rìn | - | <i>The head is what the earthworm uses to pave its way.</i> |
| Orí ni légbélẹ̀gbé fí í | - | <i>The head is what the tadpole mọ̀kúnkùn lálẹ̀ odò</i> |

uses to navigate the dark depths of the river.
(Àjáyí, 2014, p. 39).

The excerpt illustrates how paratextual and digital mediation enhances the accessibility and interpretation of Yorùbá oral poetry without diminishing its cultural depth. By providing glossaries, translator's notes, and contextual introductions, readers are better equipped to grasp the symbolic weight and performative texture embedded in oral forms such as *òfò* (incantations). The example from Àjáyí (2014) demonstrates how each line draws on metaphorical uses of the "head" to express power, agency, and the anchoring force of destiny-elements that may be lost without guided interpretation. Through the convergence of textual explanations and the oral rhythm of the incantation, paratextual supports help audiences appreciate both the linguistic artistry and cultural logic shaping Yorùbá verbal performance.

In digital environments, combining interlinear texts with synchronised audio or video annotations creates a more immersive interpretive experience. This model of digital orature, where human interpretation exists alongside technological mediation, protects both the aesthetic performance and the community context that define Yorùbá oral traditions.

Amid modernisation and changing communication methods, preserving Yorùbá oral poetry becomes increasingly important. As Adeigbe and Hamzat (2024) note, stakeholders involved in teaching and learning oral traditions must recognise that, while written literature plays an important role, technology must be embraced and adapted to keep oral heritage alive in modern society (p. 163).

Summary of Findings

First, linguistic equivalence alone is insufficient for translating Yorùbá oral genres; meaning exists not only in words but also in sound, rhythm, gesture, and cultural symbolism.

Second, foreignisation coupled with paratextual explanation effectively preserves cultural integrity while ensuring accessibility for non-Yorùbá audiences.

Third, performance-sensitive and multimodal translations that integrate audio-visual elements offer more authentic renditions of Yorùbá oral forms.

Fourth, community participation in the translation process enhances both cultural accuracy and ethical representation, ensuring that translation remains a communal rather than an individual act.

Finally, hermeneutic interpretation allows translators to go beyond word-for-word accuracy and achieve meaning that is faithful to context and culture.

Significantly, this study advances scholarships in the areas as follows:

1. Methodological Innovation

It advances an interdisciplinary translation model that combines hermeneutic theory, sociolinguistics, and digital multimodality for translating performative oral genres. This model offers a repeatable framework for translating other African languages with rich oral traditions.

2. Theoretical Advancement

By combining postcolonial translation ethics (Venuti, 1995; Ngũgĩ, 1986) with performance-focused translation analysis (Barber, 1991; Finnegan, 2012), the study redefines translation as a dialogic and collaborative process rather than a one-way transfer of meaning. It emphasizes indigenous epistemologies and community voices as central to the ethics and practice of translation.

3. Practical and Technological Contribution

The study proposes the creation of multimodal translation archives that document Yorùbá oral texts with synchronized text, audio, and visual elements, connecting traditional literary scholarship with digital humanities. This method helps preserve endangered oral traditions while making them accessible for global education, comparative literature, and translation technology training.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that translating Yorùbá oral literature is a profoundly complex task that extends well beyond the pursuit of lexical or grammatical equivalence. Because Yorùbá oral genres such as *oríkì*, *ìjálá*, *ọfọ̀*, and *òwe* are inseparable from their cultural, spiritual, and performative environments, any meaningful act of translation must be attentive to sound, spirit, and social meaning. The analysis underscores that tone, rhythm, metaphor, audience interaction, and embodied performance are not ornamental features but integral components through which meaning is generated and interpreted in Yorùbá oral creativity.

The paper has further shown that challenges of untranslatability arise not from linguistic deficiency but from cultural specificity and epistemic difference. Literal or text-bound translations risk erasing the symbolic depth, ritual authority, and rhetorical force embedded in oral performance. Consequently, effective translation requires a multidimensional approach that integrates hermeneutic interpretation, socio-linguistic awareness, and creative adaptation. Strategies such as foreignisation, domestication, paratextual annotation, and multimodal representation emerge not as competing methods but as complementary tools for mediating between source and target cultures while preserving aesthetic integrity.

By advocating an integrative and context-sensitive translation framework, this study contributes to the ongoing decolonisation of translation studies by challenging Eurocentric notions of textuality, authorship, and equivalence. It foregrounds indigenous African epistemologies and performance aesthetics as legitimate

theoretical resources rather than peripheral data. At the same time, the paper highlights the importance of translation as a means of safeguarding Yorùbá oral literature as part of Africa's intangible cultural heritage, particularly in an era of digital globalisation where oral forms risk marginalisation, misrepresentation, or loss.

Ultimately, translating Yorùbá oral literature should be understood not as the reproduction of a fixed original but as a culturally responsible act of re-creation; one that honours the source community's worldview while enabling meaningful cross-cultural dialogue. Such an approach ensures that Yorùbá oral traditions continue to speak, resonate, and evolve beyond their immediate cultural boundaries, reaffirming their relevance within global literary and scholarly landscapes.

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