

**A YORÙBÁ PERSPECTIVE ON W. V. O. QUINE'S INDETERMINACY OF  
TRANSLATION THESIS**

**BY**

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**B. A., M. A. Philosophy (Ibadan)**

**A Thesis in the Department of Philosophy,**

**submitted to the Faculty of Arts**

**in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**of the**

**UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN**

**DECEMBER 2021**

## CERTIFICATION

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## **DEDICATION**

To the glory of the Most High God, the Author and Finisher of our faith.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is to show my profound gratitude to all those who have contributed in one way or the other in making the writing of this thesis a reality.

I would like to express my appreciation to my articulate Supervisor, Prof. Christopher O. Agulanna for his unquantifiable supports and selfless input into this thesis. Thanks Sir for standing by me even when the road was rough. Your guidance, suggestions and corrections have tremendously enhanced the quality of this thesis. I also appreciate the H.O.D, Prof. (Mrs.) Lanre Abass and Prof. Isaac Ukpokolo for thier unwavering supports, I thank Prof. Francis Offor, Prof. Tunji Oyeshile, Prof. Shina Afolayan, Dr. Tade Adegbindin and all the dynamic, erudite academic staff of the Department of Philosophy, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, for their encouragements. I appreciate you all for your immense assistance towards shaping this thesis to an appreciable standard.

I appreciate the supports of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) Scholarship Board; the Primate, Most Rev. Henry Chukwudum Ndukuba, the former Primate, Most Revd Nicholas Okoh, the Archbishop, Ecclesiastical Province of Ibadan, Most Revd Dr. ‘Segun Okubadejo, the Rt. Revd D. K. Bello and the Most Revd M. O. Akinyemi (Rtd), for their immeasurable supports without which this project would not have seen the light of the day.

I am greatly indebted to my parents, late Chief Samson Oladejo Ojelakin and Mrs. Abigail O. Ojelakin whose interest and disposition in the education of their children have contributed greatly to my progress today. Special thanks also go to my sister Mrs. Lara Olofin and her husband, Prof. Bode Olofin for their unalloyed support, my brother, Mr. Femi Ojelakin and all my friends and parishioners who have shown interest in my completing the research programme. May you continue to increase in all that is good in Jesus mighty name. Amen.

Deserving of special mention is my loving and caring family, my inestimable wife, Mrs. Caroline Abimbola Ojelakin and my wonderful children, AanuOluwa, IyanuOluwa and IfeOluwa. I cherish the sacrifice you have made, the comfort you have been denied, to ensure the completion of this thesis. May you reap the fruits of your sacrifices in the mighty name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In completion, I bow before the Master of the Universe, the Alpha and Omega, the one who has given me abundant life. I am what I am because I am living. Thank you Lord Jesus Christ.

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## ABSTRACT

Indeterminacy, a condition of instability of meaning, uncertainty and variations in interpretations of grammatical forms and categories in any natural language, has generated both linguistic and philosophical challenges among scholars. Previous studies have examined the problem of translation using the theories of conceptual relativism and universalism. These theories however failed to provide enough bases for resolving the dilemma of cross-cultural understanding. This is due to the conflicting nature of the principles they articulate and their disregard for the skill of the translator and the purpose of the translation as important factors for providing purposeful action. This study, therefore, uses a Yoruba pragmatic perspective to interrogate the 'Indeterminacy Thesis,' with a view to determining the crucial role of the translator in translation.

Hans Josef Vermeer's Skopos Theory, which emphasises the communicative purpose in translation, was adopted as the framework, while the interpretive design was used. The texts used in Philosophy of Language included W. V. O. Quine's *Word and Object* (WO) and *Ontological Relativity* (OR), Donald Davidson's *On the Very Idea of Conceptual Scheme* (OVICS), Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (SSR) and George Steiner's *After Babel* (AB). The texts used in African Philosophy included Kwasi Wiredu's *Cultural Universal and Particular* (CUP), Isola Bewaji's *African Language and Critical Discourse* (ALCD) and Segun Gbadegesin's *African Philosophy* (AP). These texts deal extensively with the idea of culture, translation and cross-cultural understanding. The texts were subjected to the conceptual, critical and reconstructive tools of philosophy.

The WO and OR revealed that the totality of intrinsic and extrinsic approaches to translating from one language into another fails to determine a unique system of translation. These approaches are inadequate because of their disregard for the linguistic skill and cultural background of the translator as well as the purpose of the translation. Variations in socio-cultural contexts make it fundamental that what needed to be translated is meaning rather than language (OVICS and SSR). The CUP and AB demonstrated that in the translation process, contextual factors cannot be overlooked. A meaningful translation requires the translator to determine the purpose of translation and the most suitable method for achieving it. The AP and ALCD showed that in Yoruba linguistic philosophy, translation is not only a linguistic act but also a cultural one. It is the intricate relationship between language and culture that shapes reality. Critical intervention revealed that the Yoruba indigenous education system, which deployed pragmatic and functional means to denote the essence of concepts as a product of culture, bridges the gap in translation created by other linguistic approaches. This system enables the translator to factor context and culture into the translation process. It also readily absorbs necessary linguistic elements from other cultures.

The Yoruba linguistic philosophy provides a pragmatic understanding of translation which privileges the linguistic skill and cultural intelligence of the translator, and the objective of the translation. This provides one framework for undermining the indeterminacy thesis of W. V. O. Quine.

**Keywords:** Indeterminacy thesis, Meaning in translation, Yoruba linguistic philosophy

**Word count:** 487

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background to the Study

There has long been a reasoned inquiry into the origin of language and how language is related to reality, as well as how language refers to the real world. In the early Western tradition, this area of inquiry was covered by Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics of ancient Greece. Plato in general postulated that nature determines names of things. It is therefore the smallest structural unit that represents basic ideas or sentiments and that convention has only a small part to play. Plato's theory of names and universals is known as ultra or exaggerated realism. Aristotle asserted that the meaning of a predicate, that is, the way a subject is either described or modified in a sentence, is firmly grounded on an abstraction of the similarities between other different individual things. Aristotle's theory of names and meaning is known as moderate realism. This theory was later known as nominalism.

Scholars like Williams of Ockham (who is originally associated Nominalism) and John Duns Scotus anticipated some of the most fascinating problems of modern philosophy of language, such as the phenomena of vagueness and ambiguity, and the contextual interpretation of terms. Logical positivism, which is the philosophical association put forward by a group of thinkers who lived in the 1920s (The "Vienna Circle"), which has Moritz Schillick as its leader and also closely studied the writings of Wittgenstein, held that philosophy does not produce properties which are true or false.<sup>1</sup> What it does is just to clarify the meaning of statements in order to show that some are scientific, some are mathematical and some (including most-called philosophical statements) are shown to be nonsensical.<sup>2</sup> The attack that W. V. O. Quine made on the two dogmas of empiricism and the Indeterminacy of Translation has much influence today, as his idea gives impetus to relativism. He held that words in our language derive their meanings from the relationship those words have with all the other words in that language.

According to him, our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience, not individually, but only as corporate body.<sup>3</sup>

Translation, as a linguistic concept, has received attention from various scholars; anthropologists, linguists and philosophers alike. Even though translation is a concept that has existed for centuries and cuts across languages, yet it is still very pertinent in the modern day activities of people in education, politics, religion, media, literary and the entertainment world. Translation has various mythologies surrounding it.<sup>4</sup> Some scholars have traced its beginning to the Tower of Babel.<sup>5</sup> It has complications which are attached to it due to the elements involved, these elements include culture, language, the translator, and the doubt associated with the reality of translation itself.

One of the most dynamic paradigms in translation studies in the twentieth century is 'indeterminacy' which emphasizes that observation of meaning are not certain and, as a result, any attempt made towards translation of meaning would be fundamentally unstable. The thesis of Indeterminacy was formulated originally by W. V. O. Quine.<sup>6</sup> Both Thomas Kuhn<sup>7</sup> and Paul Feyerabend<sup>8</sup> developed their own theories of incommensurability by taking a leap from Quine's idea of radical translation and that of indeterminacy. The thesis of indeterminacy is a protest against the uncritical appeal to meaning and analyticity that characterised logical positivism.<sup>9</sup>

In literary and linguistic studies, the concept of indeterminacy is usually used to refer to the instability of meaning, the vagueness of reference and the variations involved in interpretations of grammatical forms and categories in any natural language. When a set of alternative theories and a set of observation sentences are given, we have a situation of indeterminacy if each of the given alternative theories is underdetermined by the set of observation sentences, and there could not be found to exist any independent fact of the matter, as to which of the available alternative theories is the true or correct one.<sup>10</sup>

Milton Munitz, summarises the idea of indeterminacy that no matter how careful a person is in controlling publicly observable stimuli, one cannot be certain that different linguistic responses will match one another completely in meaning and in reference. The probability for there to be elements of 'surplus' interpretation, which will likely lead to indeterminacy is always present. Even though, it may not be so easy to detect

and capture these elements of indeterminacy that result, when one makes effort to move from one linguistic response to another.<sup>11</sup>

## **Literature Review**

Despite the theoretical centrality of the issue of translation, there remain a lot of disagreements over the possibility of isomorphic semantic transfer between languages.<sup>12</sup> Scholars have postulated theories to bring out definition and the principle of determinacy and indeterminacy, some have applied an intra-lingual or intrinsic approach, while some have resorted to the extra-lingual or extrinsic approach. The intrinsic approach means a concentration on those features influencing determinacy or indeterminacy in a given language. The idea here is to scrutinize the inner composition of the text of the source language to find out its consequence on determinacy and/or indeterminacy. Some of the scholars who have taken to this perspective to look at the challenges pose by indeterminacy, taken an intrinsic approach include, Jacques Derrida<sup>13</sup> and Ferdinand de Saussure.<sup>14</sup>

Derrida stated that both words and language cannot stand alone because, on their own, they lack meaning and stability. Every word is closely related and interwoven with other words in a language and it is this relationship that affects the determination of meaning. Also, de Saussure emphasises that the relationship between words (signifier) and the referents (signified) in any language seems to be random and therefore leads to the vagueness of meaning. The randomness of the interrelatedness of words and objects leads to indeterminacy. Those things we believe that we know are really not certain. The elements of indeterminacy in language imply that there could be other alternatives. This shows that there is no objectivity in what we say is our observation. As Quine states, the indeterminacy of translation was always a supposition, even though it is a reasonable one.<sup>15</sup>

The extrinsic approach has to do with an external point of view, where correlation between two or more languages may be considerable enough to establish the determinacy or indeterminacy principle in translation. Scholars like W. V. O. Quine and Anthony Pym<sup>16</sup> represent this category.<sup>17</sup> Quine's view of facts of the matter are ontological, and facts of the matter determine the truth. The assertion of indeterminacy of translation would then boil down to a lack of possibility to achieve reality. There is

no fact of the matter that favours any of the competing behaviourally equivalent translation manual above the other. It can then be inferred that questions of truth (and falsity) in that context would not arise, for nothing will be available to determine truth, since manuals of translation are just mere correlations of the sentences, over the other. Quine claims that indeterminacy of translation is a point against the reification of meanings, that is, against the view that there are entities such as meanings about which manuals of translation could be said to be right or wrong. Some scholars have observed that words in a language are meaningful 'only if there is such thing as using them correctly'.<sup>18</sup> If words would have determinate meaning they must have application in some situations and not in others.

However, as observed by Patrick Yancey, the same argument for indeterminacy could be put forward for any word or sentence in the language of the native, which is not an observation sentence.<sup>19</sup> Any manual of translation that the linguist can generate for the native's language will have to put up with the same indeterminacy of meaning. This has implication for other languages as well. The reason being that at some points in history, this is the state of any given pair of languages.<sup>20</sup> Quine raised cultural doubt about the ability of the translator to infiltrate the abstract conceptual networks immanent in other languages. This view has also been expressed by some scholars. Ludwig Wittgenstein,<sup>21</sup> for instance, held that each society has a form of life distinct from others and that the limit of our language is the limit of our world.

Immanuel Kant also stated that the human mind has categories which make up conceptual schemes and which structure sense data into experiences. He held that there are no such things as 'pure experience' because our experiences are the results obtained from the way our minds have structured these data, so we never really see things in themselves, but just how they appear to us. We therefore need a conceptual scheme to experience things. It then means that conceptual schemes could not have come from experience. However, it is not innate idea either, because an idea is not a structure of the mind, but a conceptual scheme is a structure of the mind. It is simply an 'innate ability' (synthetic a priori), knowledge about the world without needing experience.<sup>22</sup> The concern to analyse those senses of meaning which are relevant to understanding language, communication and translation arises out of the barrier seemingly created by the idea scholars have about 'conceptual scheme', conceptual

category or framework. The differences in cultures are said to be due to the differences in conceptual schemes. These peculiarities in cultures and how to understand them have been the concern of philosophers in the last three to four decades.

Donald Davidson describes conceptual schemes as ways of organizing experience and points of view from which individuals, cultures or periods survey the passing scene.<sup>23</sup> He states further that what counts as real in one system may not be in another. Elucidating further, Davidson says languages that have evolved in distant times or places may differ extensively on their resources for dealing with one or another range of phenomena. What comes easily in one language may come hard in another, and the difference may echo significant dissimilarities in style and value.

As Barry Hallen<sup>24</sup> observes, the translator who is a bilingual is not exempted from these problem, even though he is perfectly fluent in each of the languages that are targeted by a particular bilingual translation, for when s/he (the bilingual translator) begins to affirm that a certain term 'extracted' from one language means precisely the same as a certain term in the other language, s/he is still imposing the meanings of the one language's conceptual network upon the other in hypothetical fashion. The response of many philosophers, as Richard Rorty<sup>25</sup> points out, was to grant that meaning could shift as a result of new discoveries and that the permanent neutral framework of meanings within which rational enquiry could be conducted was not as permanent as had been thought. There is the problem involved when one is to translate from one sentence to another, in which case the benefits, desires, hopes and bit of knowledge that characterise one person has no true counterparts for the subscriber of another scheme.

Thomas Kuhn observes that those brought up by differing exemplars will see the world from different perspectives and accordingly often use a concept in different senses and the resultant challenges of communication cannot be overcome by stipulating the definition of difficult terms.<sup>26</sup> As Richard Bell notes, the effort to see another's world "as it is" when one is alien to that culture poses several difficulties, the difficulty of "penetrating metaphoric" as opposed to "literal vocabularies".<sup>27</sup>

John Austin's Speech acts theory, which is a pragmatic reflection, postulates that the truth-conditional description of the use of language, as posited by the Logical

Positivists, is faulty.<sup>28</sup> This is due to the “descriptive illusion”<sup>29</sup> which leads to the supposition that the main objective of language is that it is generally directed at saying true things. Rather, language conveys definite piece of information concerning something, either about the world or the thought of the writer or speaker about the world. The pragmatic aspect of language was emphasised by Austin that discourse may lead to action. A speech act as an utterance serves a function in communication. Different types of “Speech acts” may be distinguished, these include: promises, declarations, statements and so on. Any of these has peculiar conditions of felicity which are determined conventionally and contextually and which do not have anything common with truth-conditions. Thus, a statement felicity would depend on certain conventions.<sup>30</sup>

Also, according to John Searle, a person may perform a speech act only if he/she shows the intention to act by using such a sentence and if one manifests such intention to carry out every obligation of the speech act he/she wants to perform. Therefore, Searle’s analysis brings together conventional and intentional characteristics in order to put up a fresh semantic account of speech. This new account claims that what is needed to perform a speech act is not just a certain procedure, but a definite cognitive content, which is, the intention. Thus, the speech act does not really modify the world any longer, but now has to do with the way the audience or listener perceives the intention of the presenter of the speech. It directs attention to a modification in concept ‘in the head’<sup>31</sup> of the speaker.

If a message is not adequately passed across to the targeted audience, it may lead to semantic noise. Semantic noise occurs when words, phrases or sentences are not easily understood. Speakers and writers sometimes produce semantic noise through the use of jargon or unnecessary technical language, often referred to as register. In summary, semantic noise arises when there is uncertainty about what the other person’s words, phrases, or sentences are supposed to mean.<sup>32</sup>

Grice puts forward four maxims that can help in effective communication. He called this, ‘the cooperative principles of conversation.’ It states that one should make one’s contribution in such a way as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which the person is engaged.



This is elaborated in four sub-principles called maxims, namely: Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner.<sup>33</sup>

Martin Heidegger uses the expression Dasein to refer to the experience of being that is peculiar to human beings. Heidegger's philosophical analytic focused on the human beings' existence in their world as individuals and within their social context. From this point of view, both world and being are seen as inseparable. Meaning from this viewpoint therefore represents the co-constituted ideal of being with others in the world, in shared humanness, and in shared interactions in the world. Heidegger, believes our understanding is always already there and cannot, nor should, be isolated from our thinking. Further, phenomena need to be scrutinised in their existence, in the living world where people find themselves in the midst of twists and tangles, hopes and dread, doors that open and others that slam shut. Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology states that reality reveals itself in perspectives or profiles: implying that truth and meaning are based on perspectives. To remove a story from its rich textual background is to remove meaning and hence, the possibility of understanding the experience as it is lived, for we can only ever live in a context of time, place and situational influences.<sup>34</sup>

Heidegger presented Dasein's capacity to have pre-understanding and demonstrated that any act of interpretation was never from a purely neutral stance. The point is rather that those words carry with them traces of connections of sense that are not only implicit for the writer and his or her contemporaries but also, even beyond that, are unavailable until the translation draws them out. The poetically and thoughtfully translated word can release possibilities of sense that were not explicit in the source text or in the translation itself. Translation is not so much a 'translating' and passing over into a foreign language with the help of one's own. Rather, translation is more an awakening, clarification, and unfolding of one's own language with the help of an encounter with the foreign language.<sup>35</sup>

Richard Rorty, on his own part, states that truth and meaning are products of our cultural needs.<sup>36</sup> They are our consensus values and communal ideas of what should count as true or meaningful. Thus, there may be no dependable means of translating from one universe of discourse to another. He maintains that communicating with the linguistically and culturally other that goes beyond assimilating her, is impossible.

Rorty claims that truth and meaning are best derived and derivable from within the confine of the denizens of a culture. The overall conclusion based on this is that, from this radically contextualist perspective, translation and understanding of the linguistic and cultural other are impossible, so that every attempt to inter-cultural understanding and dialogue results in assimilating the other in the light of our own standards. The consequence of this radical contextualism is that, it is impracticable to making a distinction between properly transferring the meaning of a text into a different language and manipulating this meaning ideologically, just as between a true and a distorted understanding of the other.<sup>37</sup>

Stanley Fish, the American critic, associated with a notion of literary interpretation, states that meaning does not reside in the text, but in the mind of the reader. The text functions only as an image onto which the reader projects whatever his or her reactions may be. The text is an origin of diverse thoughts, but does not present a reason for one interpretation rather than another. Fish does not believe in authorial intention and thinks the meaning of the text is co-created by the reader. He claims that in reading, the interpreter constitutes the text and that in reader's criticism; the interpreter's description constitutes the nature of the reading process according to his interpretive strategies. Fish moved from a phenomenological emphasis which illustrates the interrelatedness of reader and text, to a structuralist or even post-structuralist position which studies the underlying systems that determine the production of textual meaning and in which the individual reader and the constraining text lose their independent status.<sup>38</sup>

Oluwadoro notes that although speech communities may share mutual intelligibility, they may nonetheless perceive themselves as separate entities for political reasons. This is the case observed in the Rivers Readers Project. For instance the Okrika and the Kalabari share mutual intelligibility, yet they do not agree to be a singular speech community due to politics. On the contrary, there is a lesser degree of mutual intelligibility among the speakers of various dialects of Ikwere, yet they perceive themselves as a common entity.<sup>39</sup>

Babatunde Fafunwa conducted a research in instruction using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in schools. This was tagged "The Ife Six-Year Yorùbá Primary Project (SYYPP). Terms and concepts were translated into Yorùbá language for the

teaching of all subjects. The intention was to determine the effectiveness of communication in using Yorùbá language to teach the established subjects to the children.<sup>40</sup>

The word ‘Translation’ in Yorùbá language is ‘*ìtumò*’.<sup>41</sup> *Ìtumò* morphologically contains three morphemes. These are;

- i. ‘*ì*’ – *the act of*
- ii. ‘*tú*’ – *‘unwrap’*
- iii. ‘*ìmò*’ – *knowledge*

That is, the act of unwrapping knowledge. This suggests that the Yorùbá believe that knowledge is a difficult task to accomplish and it is not accessible to everybody but ‘wrapped’ and, for access to be gained into it, it has to be “unwrapped.” ‘*Ìmò*’ could also mean ‘know-how’ in Yorùbá, which shows that ‘*ìtumò*’ not only means unwrapping knowledge, but also expertise or skill in unwrapping knowledge. It shows that it is not everybody that could attain the feat of unwrapping knowledge, but the skillful ones. *Ìtumò* is broad and refers to every aspect of interpretation and translation. The interpretation of signs and symbols, religious actions, practices and rituals, ethical or moral behaviours, riddles and coded messages, nature, being and existence, all have to do with *ìtumò* in general.

By implication, translation, from the Yorùbá perspective, could be achieved only by those who are adequately skilled. Translation as an act, within the purview of traditional Yorùbá thought, evolved through cultural and religious practices.

The Yorùbá oral tradition of *Ifá*<sup>42</sup> describes the manifestations of translation in the traditional worship of *Egúngún* (Masquerade) and *Òsanyìn* (god of herbal medicine).<sup>43</sup> The language of *Egúngún* and *Òsanyìn* are not understood by all, and are therefore expected to be translated by a translator. This translator must translate in the way the client must understand. In these two instances of translation, that is, *Egúngún* and *Òsanyìn*, the Source Languages are not actual mother tongues (as the traditional Yorùbá believe ) neither are they regarded as foreign or alien, but the ‘voice of the gods,’ understood only by their assigned translators among their worshippers.<sup>44</sup>

Another form of translation among the traditional Yorùbá is found in drumming. The Yorùbá have the talking drum, *dùndún*. Its sound is expected to be understood by those who are skilled in it. They also have the *àgìdìgbó* drum. This elicits the proverbial saying in Yorùbá “*Bí òwe bí òwe là nlú ilù àgìdìgbó, ọlọgbón ló ngbó, ọmòràn ló n mọ*”. Translated, “The *àgìdìgbó* drum is beaten/drummed in proverbs, the clever ones hear it, and the intelligent ones understand it.” Different people are entrusted with message and the onus is on them to bear this responsibility and deliver the messages from person to person and community to community. Na’Allah states that any mistake in translation (not just transmitting speeches and conveying their proper meanings) may result in serious cultural consequences. The drum, the gong, and fire making in the bush or forest are all examples of traditional vehicles for conveying messages.<sup>45</sup>

These must be correctly interpreted and translated for the understanding of others within the community. Yorùbá do not bifurcate between the word “meaning” and “translation”. ‘*Ìtumò*’ is used for both meaning and translation, therefore, there is no real ontological problem of how to translate “meaning”, for once translation is done, “meaning” is automatically transferred.<sup>46</sup> The Yorùbá believe the translator who has acquired adequate skills for translation, could penetrate the conceptual network of the ‘other world.’

All these forms of translations enumerated above, however, are just the evolutionary trends of translation from the Yorùbá thought system. They are as such not on the same critical pedestal with the kind of translation Quine is suggesting in his indeterminacy thesis. However, there are values that have implications on indeterminacy of translation as posited by Quine. These are:

- i. The translator does not choose his own way of translation, he does not convey implied, implicit, inadequate or inconclusive information. (If he does any of this, there is the expectation of his being visited by the anger of the gods.)
- ii. The translator does not even consider the state of mind of the client. He must not hijack the message and turn it to his own.

- iii. The translator holds his office (as the translator) in trust for the community (and the gods). The translator could therefore not “deconstruct” society simply to cause disarray or to challenge the idea of society’s truth.
- iv. The translator is not permitted to speak in riddles during translation, but to convey the meaning intended by their deities in the clearest way possible to the receiver.
- v. The duties of these translators involve decoding the messages correctly and ensuring the receivers or targets understand and go away with the correct intended messages.

*Ìtumò-òrò* is the particular sense of *ìtumò* which encapsulates the linguistic acts of interpretation and translation in both oral and written texts. The complete expression is *ítú-ìmò-òrò*, which means ‘unwrapping’ the knowledge or wisdom concerning words.

When considering the perspective of the Yorùbá on translation as we have it at the level of Quine’s approach, there is a need to consider some of the earliest texts translated into Yoruba language, as well as other Yorùbá language texts translated into English. A comparative analysis of two translations of the same Yorùbá text, by two different authors, would show differences in translation. Each translates from his peculiar perspective. The differences in translation of D. O. Fagunwa’s novel *Igbó Olódùmarè*<sup>47</sup>, by the two translators became evident right from the title of the book. While Ajadi<sup>48</sup> translated *Igbó Olódùmarè* as ‘*The Forest of God*’, Soyinka<sup>49</sup> translates the same title as, *In the Forest of Olódùmarè*. As Gbadegesin notes, the differences in the translation reflect the goal each of the translators has in mind<sup>50</sup>. The targets of the two individuals diverge due to the fact that what they have as interests individually influenced the style each used and their translations of the intention of the author.<sup>51</sup> The title, *In the Forest of Olódùmarè* by Wole Soyinka is a fractional translation of the title of Fagunwa’s *Igbó Olódùmarè* a. Ajadi substitutes the word “*Olódùmarè* a” for ‘God’ who he, among others, believes to refer to the most powerful Deity in the Yorùbá cosmology. Soyinka retains the word *Olódùmarè* a for being not convinced that *Olódùmarè* and God are the same. This is indeterminacy as posited by Quine. Let us have a comparison of translations of Ajadi and Soyinka of Fagunwa’s novel *Igbó Olódùmarè*.

**Fagunwa:** *Lòsàngáangan Ìjósí, nígbàtí mo jẹun èkejì tán, mo kúrò ní ilé mi, mo bó sí èhìn odi...*<sup>52</sup>

**Ajadi:** It was on a sweltering afternoon, after I had eaten the second meal of the day, that I left my house and strolled to the outside of the city wall...<sup>53</sup>

**Soyinka:** One bright afternoon a long while past, after I had lunched, I left my home, strolled outside the fence of my compound...<sup>54</sup>

*Lòsàngáangan* was translated by Ajadi as ‘on a sweltering afternoon’ to indicate the unfavourable weather condition which made the author to remove his cap to allow fresh air to blow on his head. This was however translated by Soyinka as ‘one bright afternoon’. Soyinka’s translation would not justify the reason why the author had to be ‘forced to toss the covering’ of his skull. While Soyinka translated ‘*Jẹun èkejì*’ as ‘had lunched’, Gbadegesin notes that ‘*Jẹun èkejì*’ (*oúnjẹ èkejì*) is more than the second meal as Ajadi translated it. In the traditional culture of the Yorùbá, three major meals are eaten per day and each meal is attached to a particular period of the day. They divide a day into three parts of a continuum; morning, afternoon, and night or evening. Breakfast is the meal eaten in the morning; that of afternoon is the lunch. Dinner is eaten in the evening.

The author’s focus is not to emphasise taking some sequences of food at any unspecified period of the day. The word that starts the sentence, *Lòsàngáangan* (sunny afternoon) clears any confusion that may tend to come with ‘*Jẹun èkejì*’. The meal the author refers to is the one taken in the afternoon (lunch). In another culture where the people take four meals each day, “the second meal of the day” would be translated out of context of the meaning intended by the author.<sup>55</sup> This would not be due to the problem of language, but that of the inability of the translator to key into the correct understanding of the author’s cultural reference. Also, the way Soyinka translated ‘*èhìn odi*’ as ‘outside the fence of my compound’ distorts the original intention of the author. This has put aside the historical cultural tradition of erecting high fortifications round the city. In Yorùbá culture these strong walls are built as means of protecting the inhabitants against foreign aggressions and hostilities of the external armies. It is worthy of note that the traditional Yoruba lived communally. *Èhìn odi*’ therefore goes beyond a mere fence of a compound. What the author referred to was the city wall.<sup>56</sup>

Adebawo's translation compared with Soyinka's goes thus,

**Fagunwa:** *Ìbèrè Olówó aiyé.*

**Adebawo:** The beginning of *Olówó aiyé.*

**Soyinka:** Enter *Olówó aiyé.*<sup>57</sup>

In the translation of another of Fagunwa's novel, Fagunwa's *Àdìtú–Olódùmarè*, the translator, Olu Obafemi writes in the preface, his intention for translating the novel.<sup>58</sup> He informs the audience the motive for the translation, the approach he used in the translation, the type of recipients the translator aims to target at the time of taking up the translation exercise and the difficulties he came across during the translation exercise. As Obafemi stated, he was fascinated with Fagunwa's fictional novel and started developing interest in it right from his formative years. According to him, he had desired all through those years, when he was young and inexperienced, to present opportunities to people of other cultures, who do not share Fagunwa's world, in actuality and imagination, have access into the realm of his thoughts. However, he did not expect that the endeavour would result into a translation for a target recipient of native speakers.<sup>59</sup>

He emphasised the challenges he faced in translating the work of Fagunwa from Yorùbá language into English language, most especially because of the style in Fagunwa's work. Some of the challenges Obafemi encountered were majorly owing to the fact that he did not have the privilege to study Yoruba language, within a formal educational setting, as a Yorùbá child.<sup>60</sup> He also acknowledged the fact that he was not formally trained in the act of translation. He stated thus further that he did not receive any training, neither did he pass through any formal system in the art of translation. He emphasized that he was practically inexperienced in translation discipline. He sees translation as a complex discipline which has its nuances. It is an intricate subject of context and actions of grammar of two languages that are different from each other. He came to the conclusion that he did not have the proficiency to evade inter-linguistic spillage.<sup>61</sup>

This is an acknowledgement from a translator who knows the importance of adequate training in acquisition of skill in the art of translation. He therefore, prepares the mind



of his audience that his translation could not but be ‘a half-way house’. It stuck between an outcome of an inaccurate knowledge. He was operating within a circumstance in which there does not exist any act of exact equivalence from Yoruba to English and the result of being a bi-cultural individual. He considers himself as a personality struggling for an equilibrium between fidelity to the source text in Yorùbá and its plausible conception in English, as the language of the targeted readers.<sup>62</sup>

The inter-linguistic spillage which may be avoidable if adequate skill is acquired is not acknowledged by Quine as one of the major factors that may make different translations of the same text to have wide variations, rather than being indeterminate. The fact of the matter would then be that some translations would be far from the centre of the continuum whether on the positive side or on the negative. In *Igbó Olódùmarè*.

Fagunwa says

*...ètè mi gbẹ, itó ẹnu mí yi, ikùn mi ri pẹlẹbẹ, ojú mí rí kán-ndó, mo lé góngó lórí igi...*<sup>63</sup>

Soyinka translates as:

*...my lips parched, my mouth desiccated, my stomach flattened, my eyes bulging like eggs. I was suspended from the tree...*<sup>64</sup>

Ajadi’s version says

*...my lips dried, the saliva in my mouth became sticky, and my stomach was flat; my eyes saw a lot of trouble. I sat roundly on the tree...*<sup>65</sup>

There is the clear evidence of translation differences and contrariness in the two translations of the above text. Quine would want us to see this as an evidence of indeterminacy, whereas there is a vivid error of misjudgement of the meaning of the source text and malapropism on the part of one of the translators. It is observed that Ojú kán-dó (hollowing eyes) is not one and the same with ojú kàndò (large, stick-out, eyes) which is the meaning of “eyes bulging like egg” that has been translated by



Soyinka. This is a mistaken understanding of the author's sense of using the word. The word "kán-dó" is an adjective which illustrated the effect and discomfort on the eyes of the narrator, after battling with long hours of lack of food during the period he was on the top of a tall tree.<sup>66</sup> Ajadi's translation "my eyes saw a lot of trouble" is closer to the author's use of the words. In this case, Ajadi's translation can be adjudged better. In the two translations, the distortion in the meaning given to one of the translations of the word, "kán-dó, was not due to non-availability of equivalent words in the target language. It was due to the misunderstanding of the translator. However, to judge one of the translations as better, would be against the spirit of indeterminacy thesis of Quine, where there is no fact of the matter! Of course where there are competent individuals, facts of the matter will be available.

There are words or concepts that are not readily available in other languages. For instance in *Igbó Olódùmarè*, Fagunwa writes

.... *Bí ó ti nbò ni ẹ̀sẹ̀ rẹ̀ ndún jìnwinjìnwin nítorí  
 ọ̀pọ̀lopọ̀ ìkaraun ìgbín ni wón gé wéléwélé tí etí  
 ọ̀kọ̀kan wọ̀n sì rí kiribiti bí etí owó silè...*<sup>67</sup>

This was translated by two scholars,

**Adebawo:** As he was coming his legs were **tinkling** because they are made from broken snail shells...<sup>68</sup>

**Soyinka:** As he approached, his legs kept up a **tintinnabulation** from snail shells which had been broken into little pieces ...<sup>69</sup>

In the above text extracted, from *Igbó Olódùmarè*, the word "jìnwinjìnwin" is a Yorùbá word that derives its meaning from its sound. It is an idiophone. "Jìnwinjìnwin" is a jingling sound which is made when bits and pieces such as broken snail shells are tied together with strings and tinkled. The tone is a description of the outcome of the noisy cymbal sound created by the advancement of one of the mythological creatures which is a character in the novel. The objects tied to the legs of the creature consist of pieces of snail shells. In an effort to make his readers understand the meaning of this word in his target text, Soyinka imported and coined a word from Latin. The word is "tintinnabulum" (wind-chime), from this he derived the word "tintinnabulation".<sup>70</sup> By

translating “jinwinjinwin” as “tintinnabulation” Soyinka has been able to rigmarole a way out of the untranslatable feature of this sound, that does not have exact replacement in English language.

However, the distorting predisposition which manifested in the translation of the extract has led to what could be considered as impoverishment of quality. The reason being that, the expression “tintinnabulation” seems to be deficient in the sonority or iconic richness and the cultural connotation intrinsic in the original word, “jinwinjinwin” as observed in the source expression.<sup>71</sup> In like manner, the description of ‘legs were tinkling’ by Adebawo has watered down the meaning of the sentence. In as much as it was not actually the legs that were making the sound, but the snail shells attached to the legs. Despite the inherent reduction in the two translations, Soyinka’s translation may be considered better for formulating the sound made by the snail shells, while Adebawo did not.

In the English version of Luke Chapter 23 verse 48 of the Holy Bible, we have the statement that, when the multitude that came to witness the crucifixion saw all that took place, they “went home in deep sorrow” (*New Living Translation*),<sup>72</sup> while another version says...“they smote their breast and returned” (*King James Version*).<sup>73</sup> The Yorùbá versions describe this event as,

...*Wón lu ara won li oókan àiyà, wón sì padà*<sup>74</sup>  
(they smote their breast and returned) (*Bíbèlì Mímó*. King James Version).

.... *Wón padà, wón si káwọ lé 'rí pèlú ibànúje*  
(They returned and put their hands on their head  
in deep sorrow). *Bíbèlì Ìròyìn Ayò*.<sup>75</sup>

While ‘smiting of breast’ is the Jewish manner of expressing sorrow, a Yorùbá person would not smite his/her breast (chest) to express sorrow, rather he/she does this to express pride. Instead, to express sorrow he/she puts the two hands on the head. Indeterminacy occurs in these translations, according to Quine. Putting hands on the head and beating of the chest cannot be said to be expressing the same thing. However, if the aim of the author is to enlighten the Yorùbá on how the Jews express sorrow, this fact would be enough to show that ‘smiting the breast’ would be a better expression

than putting hands on the head. In like manner, if the intention is to express the depth of their sorrow, 'putting their hands on the head would be a better expression.

This shows that in Yorùbá, such expressions as this could not just cave in into indeterminacy but the degree of accuracy needs to be determined based on the available facts within the cultural milieu. The aim of the translation would determine which of the available alternative schemes would adequately fit into the context. This would allow the translator to make an informed choice. Yet according to indeterminacy thesis of Quine, one of these translations cannot be said to be better than the other. However for anyone who is well entrenched in the language, one of the translations would surely make a better sense than the other.

The controversy on whether '*Olódùmarè*' is 'God' in the Yorùbá belief system has been seriously debated by scholars. The question of whether *Olódùmarè* is the same as God has been answered in three different ways by scholars. Among these scholars are the Western anthropologists who deliberately or not deliberately (mis)-translated *Olódùmarè* as being lesser than God. The second group of scholars is mainly African Yorùbá theologians who have equated the status of *Olódùmarè* with that of the Western God.<sup>76</sup> He is also regarded to be omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent.<sup>77</sup> The third group is a decolonisation school<sup>78</sup> which have tried to divest *Olódùmarè* of the foreign attributes imposed on His nature.

The conceptions of '*Olódùmarè*' by these three groups are at variance with one another. In the Quinean view however, the translations of '*Olódùmarè*' from each of these various perspectives fits into the structure of each conception. It would, therefore, be indeterminate. This is because there is no fact of the matter from which we can accept one or reject the other. Each will therefore be correct within its own considerations. Contrary to Quine's indeterminacy thesis however, the difference in the conception of *Olódùmarè* and God by the adherence of Yorùbá traditional religion and the Western missionaries respectively shows that translating one to mean the other would be a category mistake. Scholars like Sodipo and Hallen have warned against such error.<sup>79</sup> In line with Quine, they disagreed with careless word-for-word translation of a linguistic expression into the other, because of indeterminacy of meaning which may occur between the initial and the other language.

The Yorùbá believe the task that is easy for an individual with an adequate skill may be a difficult task for another individual without a well equipped skill. As such they say, *àkàrà d'enu akáyín ó de'egun* ('Bean cake gets to the mouth of the toothless and becomes bone').<sup>80</sup> Bean cake is a delicacy in Yorùbá culture that is fried into soft solid form. It is easily crushed with the teeth and swallowed. However, for someone who does not have any teeth left, who has become toothless, there is nothing to use to crush the bean cake. The effort at eating the bean cake then becomes a herculean task. This implies that what a translator who is well equipped (with sharp teeth) could easily translate because of training and proper education, the same will be difficult for an individual who is ill equipped, without the facility for translation (toothless).

Education equips and prepares a person from childhood. A notion of education was already present among the Yorùbá people prior to their making contact with the West. They regard as education any process or occurrence that maintain an incorporating and influential impression on the mind. Such that can shape personalities, skill, physical and spiritual capabilities of the person, to facilitate his/her living efficiently and dutifully, with a sense of responsibility within the society.<sup>81</sup> In accordance with the Yorùbá conception, Babatunde Fafunwa defines education as the combination of all the procedures by which a child or young adult acquires abilities, attitudes and other forms of human behaviour, which are of constructive value to the society in which he resides.<sup>82</sup>

Education, for the Yorùbá, was therefore a lifetime progression which involves interrelations among diverse practices that had decisive and influential effect on the whole conduct of a human being in relation to his/her society. Akinpelu says of Yorùbá education that a man that is regarded as educated can be illustrated as somebody who blend proficiency in some particular economic abilities with reliability of temperament and skills with insight in sound judgement.<sup>83</sup>

One of the fundamental philosophical ideologies that inspire the Yorùbá idea of education is that like the other African thought of an educated personality, as against the conception of the Western world, it is characterised by the policy of communal accountability, functionalism, political involvement and consciousness, occupation orientation, spiritual and moral values.<sup>84</sup> The importance of skill acquisition in order to

enable a person to be able to perform a task successfully cannot be over-emphasised. What comes easily to a skilled individual would be difficult for someone who lacks the necessary ability to perform the task. Owomoyela says ‘the bird of the forest does not know how to fly in grassland’ (in a strange environment becomes a dunce).<sup>85</sup>

From the Yorùbá proverbs, it could be deduced that the Yorùbá agree with the notion that there are some words that may be intractable and not easy to translate. The Yorùbá say,

Òwe lẹsin òrò,  
Òrò lẹsin òwe  
T’órò bá sọ̀nù  
Òwe la ó fì wa

This could be translated thus:

*Proverb is the horse or powering machine of speech*  
*Speech is the horse of proverbs*  
*When any discussion is lost*  
*We use proverb to find it out*<sup>86</sup>

However, no matter how intractable a word or concept may be, it could be found through the use of proverbs. This means in Yorùbá parlance that there is always a way to circumnavigate the challenges of words or concepts that seem inadmissible to translation. The Yorùbá have made efforts to ‘unwrap’ meaning of alien words and concept through the use of pragmatic means.

Yorùbá linguists have proposed some devices for formulating Yorùbá terms. These include;

- i. **Composition:** This has to do with two or more items like morphemes, words phrases and others, for the purpose of expressing foreign concepts or objects based on the qualities or features that such concepts manifest. For instance,

**English:** Bill

**Yorùbá:** Àbá - òfin (This means literally suggestions)

- ii. **Explication:** It involves making explicit information available about foreign objects or concepts in Yorùbá. For example,

**English:** Imprisonment

**Yorùbá:** *Ìsẹ̀wọ̀n* (The acts of being put in chains)

- iii. **Semantic extension:** This has to do with extending the meaning of a concept, term, or word in Yoruba language for the purpose of expressing or describing a foreign one that is not available in the language. For example;

**English:** President

**Yorùbá:** *Ààrẹ* (An official title of a war high Chief, who is first in rank). This is extended in translation to the President of a Federal Republic.

- iv. **Idiomatisation:** This involves the use of idioms as a means of expressing or describing foreign concepts or objects.

**English:** Veto

**Yorùbá:** *Ìgbẹ̀sẹ̀ -lé* (Literally - the act of putting legs on something)

- v. **Loanwords:** It involves the adoption or borrowing of words from a foreign language (mainly English) for the purpose of expressing concepts or objects for which either there are no equivalents Yorùbá terms or the available Yorùbá terms are inappropriate. For instance;

**English:** *Budget*

**Yorùbá:** *Bójẹ̀tì*<sup>87</sup>

The need to communicate Western scientific terms not available in Yorùbá language has led to scholars developing 'metalanguage.' These are technical terms required for teaching and discussing the different disciplines and subject matters of practical and intellectual interest. For instance,

<b>English</b>	<b>Yorùbá</b>
Alkali	alikalai
Acid	asiidi
Bacteria	bakiteria. <sup>88</sup>

Odoje proposes that additional data, especially literary texts should be obtained to train the translator for wide-ranging efficiency and fluency.<sup>89</sup> Therefore consideration should be given to minute but sensitive variations at the sentence level to attain superior translation qualities.<sup>90</sup>

These pragmatic steps that need be taken include; ‘coining,’ ‘borrowing’;<sup>91</sup> description of reference as it can be visualized or imagined by the speakers of these languages; and ‘adaptation’ in such a way that the words will enjoy acceptability, harmonization, uniformity and consistency in their orthography<sup>92</sup> to take care of the different levels of equivalence that exists. Equivalence in translation should not be word-for word translation. However as identified by Baker,<sup>93</sup> different levels of equivalence should be considered. These include; lexical word, grammatical differences in language, difference in language information structure, textual cohesion, pragmatic issues; original writer’s intention or implied meaning.<sup>94</sup>

The criteria of equivalence in translating these words and concepts should be determined by the nature of the words and concepts which must be preserved in any successful translation. Thus the type of equivalence sought between originals and translations is not the same in all cases. While in some cases concepts are borrowed from the foreign culture, in some other cases coining of concepts are evolved.

Words that are culture based tend to be influential towards indeterminacy. This depends on the structure or arrangement in the way the statement is obtainable, that is figurative or literally; the intricacy of the assertion and the complexity of the propositional sentence. A text that has more possibilities of variations in translation in the manner language is being used, with absurd of meaning, becomes indeterminate. Whereas when a statement is determinate, it does not warrant any further translations again. Translations are usually not similarly determinate or indeterminate in the same manner as much as language usage in different culture is not the same. Translators of the same text would have to translate the text differently according to their language competence, individual experience, the standard of their educational standard and the background of their culture. A source text would be very challenging to translate (indeterminate) when it is removed from the usual cultural background. As Francis Offor observes

Theoretical and metaphysical claims involve beliefs, worldviews, and social values, and there is the tendency for the meaning attached to such concept in the language of a group to be defined by the totality of the culture of that group in question. And just as the meaning of concepts in

the language of a group is defined by the totality of the culture of the group, so also is language the vehicle through which the cultural beliefs of any group are transmitted.<sup>95</sup>

The translator would thus be pessimistic of whether the transformation that has occurred in the given text during translation is correct. Most especially when observed that the translation is not in tune with the convention of the culture and the language expression. A translator needs to exercise caution in a situation where we have the same concept in different cultures but different conceptions of the concept, where a conception in one is seen as a misconception in the other. For instance, 'Cow' is a concept familiar to both Yorùbá and Hindu cultures. A Yorùbá man sees a cow and says, 'this is a cow'. The Indian agrees and says, 'this is a cow'. Let us consider this dialogue between them:

**Yorùbá:** This is meat.

**Hindu:** This is a god.

**Yorùbá:** When it is slaughtered, it is fun and entertainment.

**Hindu:** When it is slaughtered, it is a sacrilege and abomination.

**Yorùbá:** It is for food, to be eaten.

**Hindu:** It is a god, to be worshipped.

Whereas the concept 'cow' is the same in both cultures, the conceptions (functionalities) are different. A Yorùbá author describing a ceremony where cows were slaughtered to portray the wealth of a family in a Yorùbá cultural setting would 'misfire' if he should assume same conception of cow in Hindu culture and translate as such. There is then the need for fidelity to ensure that what X means is what Y understands. As George Steiner points out, to dismiss with the wave of the hand the validity of translation, just because it seems not possible in some cases, is ridiculous. What needs clarification is the degree of fidelity to be pursued in each case.<sup>96</sup> If we are not to limit ourselves to translation in the narrow sense, but jump into greater adventure towards communication with all cultures, then we need to have "shifting of meanings and dynamic hybridities as our object and state."<sup>97</sup>



## Statement of the Research Problem

Previous studies on translation have examined the problem of translation from the theories of conceptual relativism and universalism. However, the studies failed to provide enough bases for resolving the quandary of translation and cross-cultural understanding. This is due to the inconsistencies in the principles they enunciate and their relegation to the background the importance of the skill the translator needs to acquire, as a key agent of translation. This study has made a shift by looking at the indeterminacy thesis of Quine from the perspective of an African culture, in this case, the Yorùbá culture of Nigeria. The study sought to analyse indeterminacy within languages and the effect that plurality of possible interpretation has in Yorùbá cultural translation, so as to determine how to reduce complexities where shared culture is sparse.

Relativism fails to account for the reality involved in the ability of individuals to communicate with others across culture. Universalism on the other hand, has some standards such as rationality, inter-cultural intelligibility and objectivity that words or concepts need to possess before they can be recognised to apply across cultures. The gap in literature is the failure of these accounts to take into consideration that all these characteristics would depend on the individual translator's ability to have adequate conception and perception of these concepts. This invariably would have effects on the product of the translation.

The central question this study tried to answer is whether every manual generated by a translator could be accepted as being adequate for translation as posited by Quine; whether incompatibilities in the alternative manuals of translation could be attributed to the ambiguity of the concept or the competence/ incompetence of the translators. The study also sought the conditions that need be fulfilled before adequate translation could be achieved, the importance of fidelity or faithfulness that should occur between texts in the search for adequate theoretical framework for cross-cultural understanding.

The study has been approached from the identification of the general problems and challenges of textual translation, as a result, there is a need for an account of translation firmly grounded on a certain kind of close-circuit faithfulness to the spirit of the original between the source and target texts. The study placed Yorùbá language

in the linguistic perspective in relation to the nature of language and the features of 'science' to determine how local factors could be deployed in the translation of scientific concepts across linguistic borders. It examined how emerging trans-cultural network could be used for the development of new communities of knowledge. This would enhance an enlargement that breaks with old linguistic and literary custom and serve as major instruments in the on-going process of socio-political and technological transformation.

### **Statement of Thesis**

Quine claims that no single scheme of translation between natural languages can be accepted finally as the right or correct one and that there is no objective matter to be right or wrong about. The thesis of this study is that the emphasis placed on adequate skill of the translator in the Yorùbá traditional culture could be employed to promote translation and mitigate the challenges that indeterminacy poses as a threat to cross-cultural understanding. While agreeing with Quine that there can be several alternative manuals of translation, it is argued in this thesis that a manual of translation could be better than another depending on the skill of the translator who designed it and the purpose of carrying out the translation. The study moved the burden of justification from the instability of words or concept to the ability or skill of the individual translator. We argued that, though indeterminacy is partly a feature of any language, the determinate aspect of language could be sufficiently explored to make cross-cultural translation possible and cross cultural understanding achievable. This work explored the Yorùbá intra-lingual approach to translation which entails a concentration on the features causing determinacy and indeterminacy contained by the language itself in its internal structure.

The implication of this is that attention must be paid to the immediate cultural framework of the circumstances of the Source Language for it to be matched with that in the Target Language text. The pragmatic consideration embraces variables such as the intention of the writer, illocutionary force<sup>98</sup> and truth value of the proposition and the communicative use of sentences to perform certain actions. There is the need for a suitable procedure for translation for there to be an effective cross-cultural communication. It should be noted that not all texts can be translated the same way. A

translation is usually written and intended for a Target Language reader, even if the Source Language Text was written for no specific reader at all, for nothing but its author's pleasure, the translator needs to have an understanding of the local situation context, when and why the text was written, who is to read it now and for what purpose.

These questions are manifested in how the text is interpreted and translated to meet the requirement of the target-audience. When translating, the conceptions themselves are embedded in the larger cultural world. A translator is successful when he finds the correct answers to those questions. A translator should not consciously strive at preserving the foreign conceptions alone, but needs to strive at the elimination of anything that could be a barrier between the translated text and the reader. A text that is translated should be the site where varied cultures emerged and merged, the point at which a reader 'can gain access into the life experiences of others and in the process; discover the genuineness of their beliefs and the meanings they attribute to their use of words.'<sup>99</sup>

A text is not just the total addition of its parts, and when words and sentences are used for the purpose of communication, they are brought together to make meaning in different ways. It is, therefore, the whole text that has to be translated, rather than separate sentences or words. A text that would adequately communicate will take along its cultural characteristics while going from one language to another. The individual translating needs to be accustomed with both the Source Language (SL) and the Target Language (TL) cultures, know the intention of communication and the targeted audience for there to be a correct translation. It should be kept in mind that because of the differences in culture, there is no total exact translation between any pair of languages, we can only hope for approximations. The more similar the system and cultures of the two languages, the more efficient the translation in cross-cultural communication. One may make no mistakes in the translation and yet 'completely loses the force and spirit of the original'<sup>100</sup>

When translation makes us familiar with strange cultures it may do so by conveying it in our own cultural sense. Sometimes the translator may absorb the sense of the foreign work, but replace it with a construct taken from his own natural language and

cultural milieu, such that an indigenous array is superimposed on the foreign form. This can lead to ‘misfire’, ‘cross cultural misjudgement’ and ‘infelicities’. While keeping his text in focus, the translator must also “allow himself considerable latitude if he is to convey the many “intangibles” that make the style of the text.<sup>101</sup>

Quine states that words in our language get their meaning from their interaction with the other words taken together in the language. He states that there is a vast network of meaning; therefore one does not have a way of differentiating those sentences that are completely a matter of meanings from the ones that link up with experience. The Yoruba also believe that the meaning of a word could not be isolated from its relations with the other words in the language. However, there is a group mind that is expected to capture the essence of any concept or word, because it is a product of the culture, tradition and way of life of a community, which is usually passed orally from generation to generation. It is not codified or documented anywhere except in the minds of the community.<sup>102</sup>

Pragmatic steps need to be taken towards adaptation. Adaptation stands for abridgement or simplification which takes the idea of the source text and re-writes them in a completely new way. The source text may be altered somewhat to appeal more to a new audience or it may be placed in a different setting. More fundamentally in literary, poetic form, one may choose to give up literal meaning in favour of the transmission of a particular message or conveying emotion, if one or the other is considered more necessary to that particular situation. In making a choice for adaptation, it is expedient that the translator needs to put into consideration the purpose or aim (skopos)<sup>103</sup> of the text pertaining to its use and targeted audience. In adaptation, there is localisation, modification and moulding, making suitable to a new audience in a new language or cultural group in rendering information, or ideas, putting in mind the spirit of the original text. Only well trained translators who have acquired basic tools for translation can achieve the desired purpose.

From the perspective of the Yorùbá, we conclude that while total, exact translation may be difficult to reach, adequate cross cultural understanding is achievable. The implication of this is that consideration must be given to the immediate cultural context of the Source Language text for it to be matched with that in the Target

Language. In as much as word or concept is a product of culture, tradition and way of life of a community, which is usually passed through socialisation, enculturation and orally from generation to generation. This makes it possible to determine whether a translation is acceptable based on the group's cultural understanding, though not codified or documented anywhere, but in the minds of the community.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, if there exist mutually incompatible translation manuals, it will not be mainly due to the indeterminacy of translation, rather it would be due to the indeterminacy of the translators. For even when words and concepts are stable, there may be instability of the translators whose inadequacy could make a logical concept to have a pre-logical meaning.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

This study aims at a critical analysis of the concept of indeterminacy of translation as postulated by Quine using a Yorùbá cultural perspective to interrogate the debate between determinacy and indeterminacy and thereby reconcile the two extreme positions.

The specific objectives are:

1. To show the relationship between linguistic interpretation and the analysis of the culture to which the language belongs.
2. To examine the concepts of 'meaning' and 'translation' from the traditional Yorùbá perspective in order to understand their implications for cross-cultural translation.
3. To compare Quine's indeterminacy of translation with the Yorùbá perspective on indeterminacy.
4. To enquire into the exact nature of translation and its implication for the communication of the Western Scientific thought in the African language.
5. To evaluate other alternative theories to Quine's indeterminacy thesis so as to appropriate the strengths in them.
6. To make a case for basic training of translators, for pragmatic understanding, as necessities for adequate trans-cultural translation.

## **Methodology**

The methodological approach that is used in this study includes the critical and conceptual analysis that will be on hand to clarify words and concepts; hermeneutical approach to investigate what it means to ‘understand’ a piece of oral or written speech, and to attempt to diagnose this process in terms of a general model of meaning, interpretation and translation from Source Language (SL) to Target Language (TL); and logical argument and reconstruction of ideas which is intended to bring about the synthesis of idea of determinacy and indeterminacy.

## **Justification of Study**

That the world is fast becoming a global village is indisputable. However, despite the position of many scholars that elements useful in other cultures should be appropriated for acceleration of development most especially in Africa; this could not however, be achieved without knowing how to adequately appropriate these values through translation and cross cultural understanding. There is a need for a measure of understanding of how to achieve cross cultural translation. In the quest for scientific and technological development, many scholars have canvassed for the use of the indigenous language to teach Science and Mathematics to the pupils in Africa communities, but only few have made useful suggestions on how to achieve communication and transference of terms or concepts that are elusive and not readily available in other cultures. The need for theoretical framework for translation to pave way for consistency makes this study necessary; this could be done through the effective appropriation and enlargement of the tools the Yorùbá have used to cope with translation in their socio-cultural environment.

## **Chapter Outline**

The thesis is divided into six chapters as follows:

### **Chapter One: General Introduction**

This is the introductory part of the study. A general overview of the thesis was given. We gave background information into the study and made a review of the Literature scholars have written on interpretation (cultural hermeneutics), translation and

indeterminacy. The relationship between interpretation and translation was also analysed.

### **Chapter Two: Language and Meaning**

This chapter analysed language as a tool of communication. The nature, characteristics and the contemporary theories of language, semantics, meaning and translation were examined. This is expected to provide a background on how individuals are able to understand one another within culture and across cultures.

### **Chapter Three: Quine's Indeterminacy Thesis**

This chapter sheds light on the perspective of W. V. O. Quine on translation. His theory of indeterminacy of translation was critically examined to determine how far it can go in helping us to achieve cross-cultural understanding. His attack on 'the two dogmas of empiricism' was also reviewed. In like manner, we subjected Quine's idea of meaning and translation into a critical analysis.

### **Chapter Four: Alternatives to Quine**

This chapter is a critique of 'indeterminacy thesis'. Alternative views on the possibility of translation across cultures were considered. Among the works examined were those of Donald Davidson who considered the situation of 'radical interpretation' as against Quine's 'radical translation, 'Thomas Kuhn's 'incommensurability of paradigm', relative to Quine's 'indeterminacy of translation'. Kwasi Wiredu who considered the situation where there is conceptual disparity as against 'conceptual relativity' of Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf. Austin and Searle's speech acts. Some of these scholars focused on the problem of compatibility in the use of concepts among individuals and groups. In this chapter we argued that interpretations and translations as posited by each of these alternative views have their weaknesses.

## **Chapter Five: A Yorùbá Cultural Perspective on Translation and Quine's Indeterminacy Thesis**

This chapter examined the perspective of the Yorùbá on indeterminacy. The issue of the synergy between translation and interpretation within Yorùbá pragmatic cultural hermeneutics was discussed as a way of bridging the gap between determinacy and indeterminacy. This was used to interrogate Quine's indeterminacy of translation on how translation is achieved and the extent to which the systems of translation by the Yorùbá have been adequate.

## **Chapter Six: Towards a Pragmatic Understanding of Meaning and Translation**

This chapter focused on pragmatism as a way out to achieve a better translation. Skopos theory of Hans Vermeer was discussed to reflect a general shift from predominantly linguistic and formal translation theories to a more functionally and socio culturally oriented concept of translation.

## **Conclusion**



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## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LANGUAGE AND MEANING**

#### **Introduction**

The concept of language, as well as meaning, is complex and has been a subject matter for significant attention to philosophers, linguists and anthropologists alike. Among the earliest known views on language expressed in the West are the ones found in the work of Plato and Aristotle in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century BC. While Plato considers the physical objects as passing representations of eternal ideas, Aristotle views that the relationship between words and objects consist of resemblance and convention. Aristotle states that words represent objects and there is a convention about which word represents which object.<sup>1</sup>

The views of other philosophers, on language and meaning, from Augustine in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century CE, to the mediaeval philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas and Ockham and the 20<sup>th</sup> Century materialists, revolve round the rationalist view of Plato and the empirical view of Aristotle. Contemporary scholars have shown interests in language and the complexities of grammar in human communication. In order to elicit more understanding of language and meaning, this chapter shall analyse language as a tool of communication. The nature, characteristics and the contemporary theories of language, meaning and translation shall be examined. This is expected to provide a background on how individuals are able to understand one another within a culture and across cultures.

#### **Language as Communication**

One of the facts of existence is that, human beings are capable of interacting with each other and one another through communication. This gives them the privilege to exchange beliefs, opinions and knowledge. It also enables them to express wishes, appreciations and emotional feelings. These they are able to do through the use of

language. This composition of language involves the set of guidelines (grammar) that link symbols and meanings to enable us communicate with each other.

We need to differentiate between ‘language’ and ‘a language’. The term ‘language’ is used to designate the common faculty that makes it possible for human beings to participate in the vocal exchange of information to discuss with each other or one another.<sup>2</sup> The sharing of information may be achieved through speech, writing or signing. The exchange may also take place in any of the globally identified languages. Verbal and writing are two ways of the expression side of a language. Speech or verbal is the most important medium of expression.<sup>3</sup> The capability to speak is acquired first, before we are taught to write. All human languages are orally or verbally expressed, but it is not all spoken ones that have written form.<sup>4</sup>

Language makes it possible to share comprehensible messages with other fellow human beings within the group through discourses and texts. These discussions and texts are structured in such a way to follow the laid down principles conventions peculiar to that language that we share with other people. The use of language for communication can be referred to as ‘linguistic communication’.<sup>5</sup>

There are other means of communication such as laughing, smiling, frowning, and clenching of fist and so on, which are non-linguistic activities. Language and other activities related to it may be the most important exclusive privilege setting humans apart from other creatures. It is a major tool that conveys the values and tradition peculiar to a group, which gives them a unique identity.<sup>6</sup>

However language could be used other than for communication. It could also be used for internal monologue, soliloquy and so on. When a civilization is destroyed, so also is its language, this is the more reason why when a people are colonised; there is imposition of the colonialist’s language. As new ideas or concepts are learnt, so also, are new words needed to describe them. It is possible to recall some occasions when one had had a thought or meaning in one’s mind. This thought might have been as clear as crystal. Yet one might not have been able to formulate the linguistic expression (word or string of words) necessary to convey the idea or message in the mind to an interlocutor.

The difficulty of generating the linguistic expression may be temporary. It may be as a result of what is referred to as, 'tie-of-the tongue' phenomenon. This is a situation in which one knows what one wants to say, but the word to express it is elusive, exhibiting a kind of barrier in the connection between thought (word meaning) and language (word form). This occurrence can also be permanent. This is evident when one has never learnt the expression for a specific idea or concept. It even possible that the language itself does not make available the necessary materials for discussing the idea one wishes to express. More often than not, it is the language itself that is restricted, rather than the knowledge of vocabulary of an individual speaker.<sup>7</sup> A language technically consists of several parts of speech. These include; nouns, verbs, adverbs, prepositions, articles, tenses, adjectives, and so on. A lexical term could be associated with a concept. Some scholars of language have distinguished the difference between three parts of language or the manner in which it is used. These are: syntax, semantics and pragmatics.

### **Syntax**

Syntax studies the way in which words and other elements are weaved collectively to make grammatical unit, without putting the meaning of the sentence into consideration.<sup>8</sup> Syntax is a creative invention that made it possible for human beings to be able to talk about everything imaginable to them.<sup>9</sup> Since the languages of human beings are made up of an infinite number of sentences, new sentences are constructed out of simpler ones indefinitely. For example;

Look at the garage that John constructed.

Look at the car that is parked in the garage that John constructed.

Look at the book that is put in the car that is parked in the garage that John constructed.

Look at the boy that tore the book that is put in the car that is parked in the garage that John constructed.

There is always the possibility of making any simple sentence in a language longer.<sup>10</sup> This is made possible through syntax. It is quite difficult, if not impossible, for a speaker to have merely engaged in memorising all the existing phrases, expressions and sentences available in a given language.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, it is impossible, in principle, to memorise in its entirety the list of all the sentences of one's native language.

Though any specific sentence is limited in length, yet sentences that are present in any language is infinite.

As an indigenous speaker of a language, even if one has never come across a sentence in the preceding linguistic experience, one, however, is able to comprehend it in as much as one recognised common units (words that one knows), brought together in a novel but suitable way. A native language's speaker is competent to generate and understand an infinite number of statements, together with many others that are new and unfamiliar.<sup>12</sup> In a similar manner, the people are able to recognise some certain expressions as not being acceptable and that they simply do not feel right in their language. This knowledge is regularly called 'linguistic competence'.<sup>13</sup> Speakers of a language are over and over again substantially innovative in their invention of novel sentences, they do not just utter the same sentences repeatedly all the time.<sup>14</sup> Syntax therefore, enables a person to speak and comprehend infinite number of sentences made from a finite number of small units, which serves as the foundation for understanding language.

### **Semantics**

This is an aspect of language that makes an inquiry about the meaning of words and sentences. Meaning is believed to be the relationship that exists between the words and the world. Two principal concepts used in semantics are 'reference' and 'truth'. What connects a word and a thing cannot be a thing in itself, because if it is, it will need another thing to connect itself. This will eventually lead to a vicious circle.<sup>15</sup> While language represents the world; Semantics represents the relation between language and the world. The determination of what this relationship is has been a subject of debate among scholars.

### **Pragmatics**

This studies how language is used. It encompasses social language skill that is used in daily interaction with others. This includes what we say, the way we say it, our body language and its appropriateness to the specific situation. This is crucial to communicating personal thoughts, ideas and emotions. It studies how context contributes to meaning. The absence of pragmatic skill in an individual could lead to

misinterpretation of the communicative intent of others and difficulty in giving appropriate response either in oral communication or written. The study of pragmatics became important in the early 1950's and became prominent till the early 1980s. An individual can use language to make statements, to express belief, opinion, promises, command and so on. The interaction between the speaker and the hearer is a focus of pragmatics.

These three aspects of language are believed to enhance communication. Communication can be defined as the transmission of information, from one creature to the other, through the use of signals. It requires at least four elements: transmitter, signal, channel/ medium, and receiver. Verbal communication involves the utilisation of sounds and language to send a message. It functions as a means of articulating needs, ideas and desires. It is very paramount to the progression of learning and teaching.

Non-verbal communication has to do with transmission of information through other means apart from spoken, written or other coded form of language. Communication is not only verbal exchange, it also takes place in writing. Writing, even though, is a relatively more recent development than oral communication, yet it has a vital significance for a language. Language is triggered by the need to communicate among people within a social community.

Language and communication are two aspects of a culture. One aspect cannot be separated from the other. Language is, without doubt, the most essential device for communication that an individual has at his disposal. The purpose of acquiring language, as established by Chomsky,<sup>16</sup> is mainly to communicate. The other systems of communication have numerous weakness, hence, the language of the human being is the best means of communication. A distinct language, which is understood only by some people, is often the determining factor in casting these people into distinct groups as a people, state or nation. Communication is 'transactional' in the sense that the source and the receiver are both always having an influence on each other, through symbolic behaviour. Communication then becomes 'instrumental' when we use it as we often do, as a device to modify our environment and to have effect or impact on other people.<sup>17</sup>

Berth Bradley points out six characteristics of communication.<sup>18</sup> These are:

- i. Communication is dynamic: Communication is not static, but dynamic. It has to do with change adjustment and effects, as the elements intermingle.
- ii. Communication is continuous: There is no beginning and it does not end in a person's life.
- iii. Communication is complex: It takes place at many stages and manifests many influences.
- iv. Communication is not reversible: The communication process cannot be reversed. For example, what has been said, cannot be "unsaid" (withdrawn).
- v. Communication does not follow a fixed sequence: The elements in the communication process are arranged in a flexible manner. Which element comes on at which time and place in the process depends on situation.
- vi. Communication is unrepeatable: A given communication act cannot be recreated.

There are other categorisation of definition which include those that stress sharing of ideas (or 'transactional' nature of communication; those that stress intentional influence or 'instrumental' nature of communication); and those that are all inclusive.<sup>19</sup>

It is logical to consider language as majorly a system of communication, but we should not push the comparison with the other system too far. It is not all the time that language usually has a 'message' in any real sense of being a piece of information. Some of its functions are concerned with social relationship, although this is also correct of the animals communicating system too. Also, in language, the signs and the messages are themselves greatly complex and the affinity between them is even of higher complexity. Due to this fact, it has been argued that human language differs in kind, rather than degree, from other languages.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, in language, it is very challenging if not sometimes unattainable, to state categorically what the message is. Other communication systems do not have such challenges, because the message can be autonomously verified in relations to a specific language. For language in general, we do not have such an easy way out, for meaning

(the message) cannot be defined independently of the language. One can only state a set of meanings in terms of another set, which only explain language in terms of language.<sup>21</sup>

## **Language and Culture**

William Raymond describes 'culture' as one of the most complex words in the English Language.<sup>22</sup> There is still; nonetheless, no single broadly agreed definition of it today. The term is not only difficult to pin down, but downrightly controversial. Three main perspectives of culture have been identified by scholars, these are: Received views of culture, Post modern view and Cultural studies views of culture.

### **Received View of Culture**

This is described as a common-sense idea which perceives the world as partitioned into a variety of distinct organisations, with each society having its peculiar culture.<sup>23</sup> This view conflates large political groupings such as nation, states and ethnic communities and with their shared belief, point of view and behavior, overlooking the disintegrating effect of immigration, social class and cultural diffusion.<sup>24</sup>

### **Post Modern View**

This emphasises change, disruption, discontinuity, inequality, movement, hybridity and difference.<sup>25</sup> This directly addresses the unanticipated interesting and disorganized integration, combining and cultural synergies that international movement of humans and ideas have brought about in the last half century.

### **Cultural Studies View of Culture**

Cultural studies view approaches contemporary culture from an ideological point of view. Even though there has been no view of culture which is universally accepted, a version which seems to have the most influence in the language studies regards 'culture' as a historically transmitted and systematic network of meanings which enable us to understand, develop and communicate our knowledge and beliefs about the world.<sup>26</sup> This shows that cultural factors help mould our background understandings or schemas of knowledge. These are likely to have a serious impact on

what we write and how what we write are organised. It also influences our response to different communication contexts. Culture is seen as being so interwoven with language in such a way that one cannot be isolated from the other. Factors that are pertained to culture have the prospect of influencing perception, language learning and communication.

Perhaps one of the most scrutinised influences of culture in language is the conflicting expectations that people have about the logical organisation of written texts and the effect this may have in trans-cultural translation. What is seen and counted as logical, engaging, relevant, accurate, concise, coherent and well organised texts are all said to differ across cultures.<sup>27</sup> Two individuals cannot speak and write a language in exactly the same way. Everyone is an individual when it comes to language. An individual's language is called his/her 'idiolect'. 'Idio' is derived from the Greek word for 'private' and 'lect' is derived from the Greek word for 'language'.<sup>28</sup> There are several factors that have impact on the manner an individual uses language. These include; social factors, that is, the social group in which a person is brought up; the geographical factors, where a person comes from or has lived during the childhood, adolescence or adulthood; and the psychological factors, which have to do with individual history as language users. There are also extraneous factors relating to the purpose of the discourse or texts.<sup>29</sup>

Language and culture cannot be disentangled, they are both tied to each other. Both impact immeasurably on each other. Individuals with a common culture, but who speak differing languages will view the world differently. At the same time culture is also reflected and transmitted through language from one generation to the other.<sup>30</sup> It thus implies that when an individual decides to acquire a new language, it will invariably involve the learning of a new culture. Some scholars have stated that a new child is just like any other infant until it is exposed to its surroundings where he/she is exposed to culture and language. The exposure makes him/her becomes an individual within his/her own cultural group. It is the cultural group that shapes the life and opinions of the individual. The group's approval or disapproval influenced the behavior and make acceptable language vary from location to location.



Language goes beyond just being a medium of communication, it has influence on both the culture and thought processes. A person visiting another society would come along with his/her individual culture's categories and construe events and occurrences in those conditions. However, there will not be adequate comprehension of the thoughts and utterances of the people in the society being visited. The person could, however, put aside his/her own culture's viewpoint and study the categories of reality in the other society. Through this, a much deeper insightful understanding of the other culture is gained.

Byriam M. defined culture as 'shared beliefs, values and behaviours of a social group'.<sup>31</sup> Kramsch defines language as both an instrument for sharing information and also a symbolic system with the ability to produce and modify symbolic realities, such as values, perception and identities, through discourse.<sup>32</sup> Language usually forms a foundation for ethnic, national, regional or international identity. Contacts of an indigenous culture with a foreign culture, such as religious and political culture often create new concepts, terms or word in a language. For instance in Yoruba language terms like, 'Satani' (Satan) "Asitani" Angeli, Malaika (Angel) and many others came into being due to the contact made with the new religious concepts of the West. Also, in politics, concepts like democracy, capitalism and government, have been accommodated by the indigenous language.

The development in technology has resulted in the need to create new words to describe computers, laptops, anti-virus, Central Processing Unit (C P U), Monitor, and some other characteristically similar words. Language also helps in formulating cultural values, norms and taboos. It expresses the approval and prohibitions of the society. The destruction of a culture, would therefore lead to the destruction of a language and vice versa. Individuals in a culture are members of a society, which means that their cognitive functions and structures mirror those of their social knowledge system within the social community.

Individuals continue to extend the range of meaning and knowledge available to them. This is done through the participation in social interactions and by assimilating new information in problem solving and decision-making. In doing this, they develop understanding of acquisition of learning styles and strategies of communication within the social group. This leads the individuals within the community to use socially

acceptable standards for the categorisation of circumstances, people, emotions, knowledge and entities.

Individuals' understanding of culture is influenced by the social identity. This is the sum of the numerous social sub-groups, which include; sex, age, profession, religion and other factors, to which an individual belongs and of which he or she is a recognised and competent member. Individuals acquire world-views, that is, sets of ideas, beliefs, representation, values and attitude which then form the interpretative repertoire they rely on to organise and make sense of their experience. The individual acquires the linguistic, communication and cultural competence, including both forms and norms. The parameters, skills and practices acquired during childhood interpersonal communication, provide the resources for the interpersonal dialogue which is the primary identity formation process.

Despite the opportunity available to acquire knowledge and communication skill, yet, not all individuals within a culture in a given society have the same culture. That is, they may not know all and the same things, because their involvement in the society varies. Individuals construct their worldviews and languages on the basis of materials available to them. Culture is therefore has to do with all the necessary habits that a person need to acquire to operate in a way that is acceptable to the general members of the society. It is what a person has to learn, different from the biological inheritance.<sup>33</sup> The linguistic system of a society has to be learnt and transmitted to others within the culture. A theory of culture is therefore, of necessity, a theory of communication.

According to Riley, there are three broad categories of cultural knowledge: 'know-that', 'know-of' and 'know how'. 'Know-that' consists of what individuals believe to be true, their political and religious 'philosophy' and values, their 'theories' of disease, physics, child-rearing, hunting, history and geography. This is said to form what might be called 'relatively permanent background knowledge'. This is the version of each individual of 'how the world works'. 'Know-of' consists of present issues and preoccupations. This has to do with the day-to-day information about events and people. 'Know-how' comprises of the personal skill, capacities and competencies of the individuals, their efficient acquisition of reasoning, behaving and speaking in acceptable ways. That is, understanding how to go about and speak in the way things should be said and done.<sup>34</sup>

Culture, language and individual identity are interwoven. It may then be claimed that since a language itself is a system of culture, all words are culturally inclined, however, some words could be more cultural than others. Individuals within a culture are expected to attain a level of linguistic competence, socio-cultural competence and communication competence. Linguistic competence is the term used by Chomsky<sup>35</sup> for the capability of an indigenous speaker to construct or recognise correct sentences in a language. Communicative proficiency could be described as the capacity to adapt one's expressions to the circumstances. Communicative competence needs knowledge of the socio-linguistic standards governing variations and makes it possible for the speakers to speak in situations appropriately. The learner is considered in this perspective as a language user.

The Socio-cultural competence then pulls together the individual's knowledge of language with his/her understanding of the world, the society, situations and culture of which he/she is a member. The socio-cultural competence could also be described as learning competence. Each society has its vision and standard of a competent adult, concept of personhood, and aims to produce individuals who will fit into the social frame. Linguistic competence denotes being a grammarian, communicative competence means being an adequate speaker and socio-cultural competence stand for being an acceptable member of the society.<sup>36</sup> Any competent member of a society must therefore understand the meaning of words, concepts and expressions being used across the socio-linguistic community for effective integration into the society.

### **Meaning in Communication**

What most obviously distinguishes those sound and scratches which belong to language from the innumerable ones that do not, is that, the former have meaning. Then the question is, what gives this type of force to a noise or scratch?<sup>37</sup> Sometimes when people are confronted with the implication of what they have said, they usually say, 'that is not what I mean'. It shows that the words may not actually mean what we thought it to mean. Obviously there seems to be the other meaning apart from the literal meaning of those words.<sup>38</sup> The lexicon will recommend a number of alternative meanings of 'meaning' or more correctly of the verb 'mean'. Ogden and Richards, in their research work, listed not less than sixteen different meanings that have been

accepted by various reputable scholars. However, we shall consider only the relevant ones to this study.<sup>39</sup>

Questions usually asked by scholars about meaning include; Are meanings of expressions, words or sentences abstract entities of some sorts? What conditions must an expression meet to be meaningful? And what does it mean for two expressions to mean the same?<sup>40</sup> There are different conceptions of meaning that have been postulated by scholars in answer to the query, 'what is meaning?' The question has also generated different types of semantic theories.

Semantics is the study of linguistic meaning. The two uses of 'mean' in semantics illustrate two major kinds of meaning, namely, 'linguistic meaning' and the 'speaker meaning'. The difference can be demonstrated with an illustration. Assuming you have been having an argument with an individual, who suddenly exclaimed, "the door is right at your back". Your assumption quite rightly in this context would be that you are being told to take your leave. Even though, the speaker's real words did not show anything more than where the door is located.<sup>41</sup> This exemplifies how individuals can use words to mean something rather different from what their words mean. Generally, the linguistic meaning of an utterance or statement is purely the meaning of that word, phrase or sentence, in that particular language. When compared to the linguistic meaning, the speaker meaning may differ from the linguistic meaning. This will depend on whether the speaker is speaking plainly (literally) or figuratively. However, when we make a statement literally, we mean exactly what our words mean, without any major disparity with what our words mean.<sup>42</sup>

Instances of non-literal uses of language are sarcasm and irony. Metaphorical use of language is also a type of non-literal language use.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps the central semantic properties of words are the property of being meaningful or being meaningless. For instance, father means male parent; bachelor means unmarried adult male; spinster means unmarried adult female. 'Ambiguity' is another essential semantic property of words, most especially the one referred to as 'lexical ambiguity'. This could be shown with this example;

- i. He found a 'file'

(File: Iron sharpener; office paper for keeping record)

- ii. She could not 'bear' boys.

(Bear: give birth to; put up with /tolerate)

The words in inverted comma are ambiguous in each case as they have more than one meaning.

The capacity to identify ambiguity is vital to communication. Successful communication often depends on not only the speaker but also the hearer recognising the same meaning for a potentially ambiguous word. An expression is said to be anomalous, if the meaning of its each separate words are incompatible. For instance, 'Colorless yellow idea', 'Speak diagonally caring.' In the same way, we have 'polysemy'. It is usually defined as the quality of possessing more than one associated meaning. Eye can mean both a 'sense organ' and 'sight'.<sup>44</sup>

### **Theories of Meaning**

Attempts at resolving what meaning is, have led to postulations of some theories of meaning by scholars. These include;

#### **Denotational Theory of Meaning**

The relation between a linguistic statement and what it refers to, is often called 'denotation', linguistic reference, and semantic reference. The conception may be formulated that the meaning of each expression is the real object it denotes, that is, its denotation. A debate of meaning often starts by making a line of demarcation between the 'reference' and the 'sense' of a word. Reference has to do with the external meaning relation; it is the affiliation connecting a word and the object that it indicates in the material world, in the world of ideas or in the world of our experience.<sup>45</sup> This is a common sense theory that words or sentences have meaning because they refer or stand for what they stand for.

Even though denotation reflects the understanding that language is used to talk about the world, there are critical challenges with the classification of meaning as denotation.

For example, to suppose that the meaning of an expression is its denotation, one is then ready to accept additional claims that; (i.) if an expression has a meaning then it must have a denotation (meaningfulness). (ii) If two expressions have the same denotation, then they have the same meaning (synonymy). These two assumptions of denotation theory come out to be false. For example, the first assumption is that if an expression has a meaning, then it implies that it must have a denotation (meaningfulness). This necessitates that for any expression that has meaning, there must be a real object that it denotes. However, this is false. A word like 'empty', 'nothing', 'so', 'very', 'Pegasus' (the flying horse) and such others, could not be said to denote any object.

If we also consider the second assumption, that if two expressions have the same denotation, then they have the same meaning (synonymy). It would then be discovered that there are numerous expressions that may be used to correctly denote a specific object, but which do not signify the same thing. For example, 'the morning star', 'the evening star' and 'Venus', all denote the same planet. However, these words are not synonymous. This can be verified in the fact that the morning star is the last star that is seen in the morning and the evening star is the first star that is seen at night.<sup>46</sup> Neither is the expression, 'the first civilian president of Nigeria' synonymous with 'Alhaji Sheu Shagari', but they denote the same thing.

One of the problems with denotational theory of meaning is, not all words refer to concrete or actual thing. Some words do not even refer to anything that exists at all. A sentence like "I saw nothing." What can 'nothing' stand for? Secondly, 'water is colourless'. 'Colourless' cannot be a reference for 'water'. We have some nouns that do not name particular individual things, or which may not even have to refer to anything abstract. Similarly, some words that are not nouns may not refer to anything. For instance, 'a', 'the' 'no' 'absurd' do not name any particular thing, yet they are meaningful.

Thirdly, some words can refer to the same meaning. Muhammed Buhari is the Nigerian President. 'Muhammad Buhari' refers to Nigerian President, but does not mean Nigerian President. In defining 'meaning', then we are expected to generate a term that is more common than the one whose meaning is being interrogated. Translations are made from terms that are difficult to understand, those that are

technical or foreign language into words that can be easily understood. It is apparent, however, that this method will not get us very far in our attempt to study meaning.<sup>47</sup>

### **The Mentalist Theory of Meaning**

This theory has many versions.<sup>48</sup> It states that an expression is meaningful if and only if it is associated in some way, with a particular mental image, item, thought or idea.<sup>49</sup> The major features that are associated in such relationship have to recur consistently before it can be regarded as its meaning.<sup>50</sup> The theory can be formulated thus; the meaning of an expression is the idea (or ideas) connected with that expression in the minds of the speakers.<sup>51</sup> For instance, it may be held that 'piglet' is meaningful because it is synonymously associated with a certain mental image. 'Piglet' is synonymous with 'a young pig', because they both correlate with the same image. To analyse meaning, therefore, is to scrutinise people's mental states or processes. Two words are different in meaning if there are dissimilarities in the psychological contexts that are involved in the two cases. If meanings are not real objects, then it has been suggested that they are mental objects. If no flying-horse actually exists that 'pegasus' could denote, then there actually exists a mental image or idea of Pegasus - a flying-horse.<sup>52</sup>

However, there are deficiencies in this theory. If one is to adopt this theory, it would be difficult for two expressions to be synonymous, that is, have the same meaning. Also, there are many meaningful words which do not correspond with any relevant images that we could call up. If we concentrate on words like 'dog' or 'yellow' we may be tempted to suppose that all words have corresponding images or mental items. However, we cannot say the same of words like, 'so', 'for', 'or', 'definitely' and so on. Even if some images are associated with each of the words, it is most unlikely that one could explicate the meaning of the words in terms of the nature of the images. Words like chair, desk, and so on could be said to be meaningful as they refer to images which correspond to 'chair' or 'desk'.

It may not actually be possible to give similar account of theoretical terms. As Cooper observes, it is well known that some people are much better at imaging than others. If to know the meaning of a word was a matter of having the right images, it would then



seem to follow that a person who is not good at imaging is correspondingly poor in his understanding of meanings. This is however, an absurd conclusion.<sup>53</sup> If concrete objects have meaning in terms of their corresponding with images or mental items, how do we determine the meaning of a mental image? What image would correspond to another mental image before we could know the meaning?

In mental representation, a noun is believed to have its capacity to denote, as it is connected with an impression in the speaker / hearer's mind. This takes one out of the dilemma of maintaining that all we talk about exists in reality. The theory, however, encounters serious problem when it comes to common nouns. This is due to the variations in mental images that individual speakers might have, when a common noun like 'cup', or 'plate' is mentioned, based on their experiences. An illustration often referred to in the literature is of the word 'triangle'. A person may have a mental representation of an equilateral triangle; another person may have a mental image of an isosceles triangle or scalene triangle. It would be hard to visualise an image that would merge the characteristics common to each of these triangles. In the same way, it is hard to find an image that is compatible to all cars and all dogs. In like manners, the mental representation one would possess for words like animal, food; or concepts like love, justice or democracy would be blurred. So if images are linked to words or concepts, they cannot tell everything about such words or concepts.<sup>54</sup>

Similarly, images are identified separately from the words that are used to describe them, but we can have an image without applying words to it at all. The problem then is that images, conceptions or ideas, seem to have no way of recognising or identifying them except through the use of words to express them. They could be identified only through verbal interpretations or descriptions, that is, through the use of language. There will then be no way of explaining meaning by referring to these mental images, since we need to understand already, the meaning of words in order to identify what the mental items are and what makes a particular thought or idea the one it is. Thinking or conceiving, are regarded as inner, non-verbal procedures which may or may not receive clothing in the forms of words, but if these were to be so, it should be quite possible to go about thinking and meaning things in total isolation from any verbalisation, tacit or aloud. However, this isolation seems impossible.<sup>55</sup> While



meaning could be associated with mental activity, any attempt to use words to explain meaning as a mental activity would be circular.

### **The Behaviouristic Theory**

It states that an expression is meaningful if and only if utterances of it generate certain behavioural responses in people and/or are produced in response to some specific stimuli. If one is to examine meaning, then one needs to examine the behavior connected with utterance of expressions. An utterance may, however, have different responses at different time. For instance, 'pig' may elicit different reaction at different occasions. This does not mean it has changed meaning on those different occasions. It may even, sometimes, not produce any response at all. Not producing any response does not make it meaningless either. Also, the responses to words or sentences are sometimes irrelevant to their meanings. It will therefore be absurd to say that each word or sentence changes meaning when different responses are elicited at their utterance. As Cooper points out:

Now by 'behaviour' presumably, we mean not just movement of muscles, contractions of ligaments etc. but human actions, like kicking, praying or building. However, once we include actions under the heading of 'behaviour', it is difficult to see that we are always in a position to identify what the behaviour is, without already knowing the meaning of the words we are supposed to explain by reference to behaviour.<sup>56</sup>

He further states that if a certain anthropologist visits a certain strange tribe and observes some of their actions when certain words are uttered, he may observe that they bow, kneel, raise and wave their hands. He may not be able to determine whether the behaviour is praying or giving thanks, or rather frightening away some spirits.<sup>57</sup>

This is to say that the same set of physical movement may be involved in performing uniquely different set of bodily actions. It would then be difficult to state which of the actions are being performed without first knowing the meaning of the words. An appeal could only be made to non-behaviourist criterion. These show the inadequacy of the behaviouristic theory at explaining meaning.

### **The Use Theory of Meaning**

This theory also has many versions. It states that an expression is meaningful if and only if people can make use of it for a particular purpose and in a certain way. Two expressions will be synonymous, correspondingly, if and only if people can use them in the same ways for the same purposes. Scrutinizing meaning is mainly examining the function the expression plays in the actions of human persons. To provide the meaning of an expression is to present universal guidelines for the way it is used to refer or mention specific objects. To give the meaning of a sentence is to provide the general information on how to use it to make true or false statements.<sup>58</sup> The major challenge with the Use Theory of Meaning is that the appropriate conception of use must be made accurate and the theory must say how, specifically, meaning is connected to use.

### **The Naming Theory of Meaning**

Two major reasons why philosophers analyse language are to grasp the characteristics of truth and to comprehend the structure of reality. The way languages attach to the world is called 'reference'. This is generally considered to be an attribute of proper names or subjects of expressions that denote individual objects, in as much as individual objects existing in space and time are seemingly the essential components of the world.<sup>59</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein says that a name means an object and the object is its meaning.<sup>60</sup>

Bertrand Russell, while presenting a variation of Naming theory, states that two types of names can be identified, these are; proper names and common names.<sup>61</sup> Proper names directly refer to particular objects that are usually sense data or sensations, different from separately accessible concrete objects such as chairs, tables, goat and rabbit. Common names refer to concepts, properties and universals. Examples can be used to illustrate the differences between individuals and concepts. The sensation of 'Red' has something in common. They are occasions of a definite general thing. That something that is general is the concept, property, or universal.

## **The Verification Theory of Meaning**

The logical positivists believe that meaningful sentences could be categorised into two groups; the first group being those that were cognitively meaningful and the second, those that were emotively meaningful. Sentences that belong to religion, ethics, aesthetics and politics, which are value laden, were considered to have 'emotive' meaning. Such sentences, as the logical positivists posited, were not aimed at describing the state of the world, but to convey or stimulate some attitudes or emotions. Therefore, to affirm that, 'the teacher is good', 'the lady is beautiful', 'God is the designer and creator of the universe' is either to communicate positive emotion or intend to induce positive emotion in the listeners. While such sentences as, 'stealing is wrong,' 'lying is evil', either convey or intend to stimulate some negative feelings or emotions by the speaker.

According to the logical positivists, to say that something was good is to commend or recommend it. For the logical positivists, cognitively meaningful language consists of two categories of sentences: sentences of logic and those of empirical sentences. A sentence is meaningful when it is verifiable. That is, when there is a way of confirming whether it is true or false. The criterion of meaning of a sentence is, therefore, its mode of verification.<sup>62</sup> The verifiability principle was modified to state that, a sentence is meaningful when there is a process of finding out the condition of its truth. Affirmative universal sentences are meaningful on this basis.

However, negative sentences such as 'there are no flying horse' are not meaningful based on the verification principles, for they do not have any evidence that could conclusively falsify the sentence. Although, there is no positive evidence that unicorns exist. Verifiability principle is also self-refuting. Going by its own condition, none of the verifiability statement would be meaningful, since it can neither be a proposition of logic nor an empirical position that describes the world.

## **Theories of Translation**

Using language to communicate in a meaningful way not only involves making one's thought clearly known to others, but also communicating with people of diverse cultures. In order to make others understand us, there is a need for translation of words, concepts and sentences from one language to another. As Paul Ricoeur<sup>63</sup> enumerated, translation may be either in a particular or in a broad sense. When in the particular sense, it begins the act of translating the meanings of a specific language into another one. In the more general sense, it points to ontological act of talking as both the way of translating oneself (inner to outer, private to public, unconscious to conscious) on the one hand, and translating oneself to others on the other hand. Domino Jervolino puts it thus, the act of speaking itself is a translation (both when a person is speaking a native language or when one is speaking within oneself.)<sup>64</sup>

The plurality of languages, which require a more accurate interaction with the different cultures, which cannot be avoided, makes translation necessary and unavoidable. The question however arises, how do we make the thought of a culture intelligible in another that is alien to it? In answering this question, scholars have posited various theories of translation. As outlined by Roman Jakobson,<sup>65</sup> some of the contemporary theories of translation include:

### **The Socio-linguistic Approach**

This approach states that the social context determines what can be translatable and what is not translatable. It also defines those things that are or are not acceptable, through selection, filtering and even censorship. According to this perspective, a translation is unavoidably the product of each society. Each person's own socio-cultural background is inherent in everything that is translated.

### **The Communicative Approach**

This is interpretive. It is developed based on the understanding of conference interpreting. According to this point of view, what needs to be translated is 'meaning', not language. Language is not anything more than a means of transportation, for if the message is not carefully handled it can constitute an impediment to understanding.

This is the reason it is more advisable to ‘deverbalise’ (rather than transcoding) whenever we carry out the act of translation.

### **The Hermeneutic Approach**

The hermeneutic approach is largely grounded on the work of George Steiner, who states that any act of human communication can be regarded as translation. In his book, *After Babel*,<sup>66</sup> he states that translation is not a science but an “exact art”. A genuine translator needs to be competent by developing a writing proficiency, to get hold of the message the author of the source text intends to convey.

### **The Linguistic Approach**

According to this viewpoint, any translation (whether it is a legal translation, a marketing translation, a medical translation, or any other type of text) should be evaluated from the perspective of its basic units; that is, the word, the syntax and the sentence.

### **The Literary Approach**

According to this approach, a translation should not be seen as a linguistic enterprise, but a literary one. Language has a force that is revealed through words when an individual experiences a culture. This change is the thing that gives it power and eventually meaning. This is what the translation-writer should translate.

### **The Semiotic Approach**

Semiotic is the discipline that studies signs and signification. Consequently, for meaning to exist, there must be relationship between a sign, an object and an interpreter. Thus, translation is thought of as a system of interpreting texts in which there are variations in socio-cultural content and context.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has tried to make a review of the nature of language as a tool of human communication. It stated that language is a reflection of human cultural system. It

emphasised the complexities in human grammar and its meaning. The chapter considered language in the traditional model which consists of semantics, that is, the meaning behind an utterance. It also examined syntax, how words combined into utterances, and the pragmatics, the way language is put into use. It concluded that the utterance in a language needs to mean something before it can be an effective means of communication within culture and across cultures. Theories of meaning were examined to determine the necessary properties needed for words, concepts or sentences uttered to be meaningful. Contemporary theories of translation were also reviewed. The next chapter shall pay attention to the difficulties involved in translation. W. V. O. Quine's indeterminacy thesis shall be critically examined.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### INDETERMINACY OF TRANSLATION THESIS OF QUINE

#### **Introduction**

In the preceding chapter, an attempt was made to clarify the concept of language as it is understood by philosophers of language and the linguists. The role of language as a means of communication was examined. The aspect of language such as syntax, semantics and pragmatics were also critically examined. Also, the relationships between language and culture were analysed. The conceptual clarification of the idea of meaning was also attempted. This chapter shall be concerned with shedding light on the perspective of W. V. O. Quine on translation. His theory of indeterminacy of translation shall be critically examined to determine how long it can go in helping us to achieve cross-cultural understanding. His attack on ‘the two dogmas of empiricism’ shall be reviewed. In like manner, we shall look into Quine’s idea of meaning and translation.

#### **Indeterminacy of Translation**

The quest for communicating with others involves understanding people of other tongues. Quine however sees the business of translating from one language to another as having a major obstacle of “indeterminacy”. In the second chapter of Quine’s book, *Word and object*, he formulates his ‘indeterminacy thesis’. The thesis shows that translation of language is largely indeterminate.

Indeterminacy of translation thesis states that the totality of empirical evidence influencing the translation of one language into another fails to determine a unique system of translation.<sup>1</sup> It is the assertion that there is no particular system of translation among the natural languages which can be accepted finally as the right or correct one. If a person speaks of correctness in translation, it will be in relative to a specifically

accepted scheme, but to query the correctness of an entire scheme, relative to another, is meaningless.<sup>2</sup> No matter the number of data a person acquires, there will always be irreconcilable systems of translations that are also equally supported by data, there is not even “an objective matter to be right or wrong about.”<sup>3</sup> Quine believes that all types of empirical theories are underdetermined by observational evidence. The indeterminacy thesis maintains that theoretically any number of alternative schemes of translation may be set up, each of which is compatible with the data available and none of which we have any basis for preferring to the other.<sup>4</sup>

The Indeterminacy of Translation thesis does not imply that it is difficult to discover the meaning of foreign sentences. It is also not that the facts accessible to us as finite beings is not always complete.<sup>5</sup> What it is saying is that there is no well-defined inter-linguistic meaning. There are usually many competing alternative manual available for translating the meaning of a foreign sentence. The meaning of the translation cannot, therefore, be attributed to any of the competing manuals. There is no fact of which manual is the correct one.

One of the reasons that led Quine into this thesis is that he is a behaviourist philosopher who does not so believe in intentional properties such as beliefs, desires and other propositional attitudes. For this reason, Quine does not agree that meanings of words and the sentences made are objective facts, as usually generally conceived. Thus, we can question whether one sentence mean the same as another. The view of meaning as an entity is supported by Gottlob Frege and Ludwig Wiggstein. Frege considers the sense of a declarative sentence to be the thought which it contains. He says it is however “not the subjective performance of thinking but its objective content which is capable of being the common property of several thinkers.”<sup>6</sup>

The ‘sense’ of a sentence is then taken by these philosophers as a kind of entity which is apprehensible by minds. The sense of a sentence or word (thought) is not expected to be confused with the reference (object) of that sentence or word itself. We realise from Frege’s differentiation that ‘sense’ (thought) is different from language and the user of language as a person. However, the problem with Frege’s distinction is how to recognise and identify thought independently of its expression in language. Frege fails to intimate us with what kind of entity ‘sense’ (or thought) is, but tells us what sense is

not. He says, thoughts are neither things of the outer world nor ideas but have their own mode of being.<sup>7</sup>

Wittgenstein also claims that proposition has sense. The sense of proposition will then be the state of affairs that is revealed in that proposition. Wittgenstein and Frege, both show that meanings are objective facts. Therefore, it is on the basis of this conception that linguists are believed to be capable of translating sentences of one language into another. Thus, it is possible to translate successfully when meanings of statements are taken to be objective. This claims boil down to the belief that when two sentences share similar evidence they must be equivalent or have the same meaning. In other words, two sentences cannot be non-equivalent or differ in meaning if they have the same evidence.

Quine, however, challenges these claims. He believes no reason can be adduced to such assumption. The idea of synonymy or sameness of meaning is not convincing. He states that it is possible to generate alternative scheme which would be completely different from the one we claim to have same meaning, and yet have the same evidence. Due to this, it is not proper to accept the former as equivalent to the word in translation. This would also apply to several other schemes of translation that could be formed which would serve as rival schemes of translation. Yet, the rival schemes would produce the same evidence that the scheme has. This is the thesis of indeterminacy of translation. It implies that the concept of meaning as an objective fact should be done away with. Thus, Quine rules out facts about desires, beliefs, intention and other propositional attitudes. He does this by showing that translation relations are not matters of facts. His critical point is that it is possible to devise two or several schemes of translation which are mutually incompatible but fit all the probable evidence.

Quine supports his claim with the behaviourists' assertion that language is learnt through observation of the linguistic behaviours of others. What is pertinent in determining linguistic meaning is the overtly observable behavioural fact, most especially fact about stimulus meaning. However, he posits that there is the problem of under-determination of translation by data. This means that the available facts do not establish what our words mean.<sup>8</sup>

## **Ontological Relativity**

In his essay, 'Ontological Relativity', Quine states that meaning is grounded on the behaviour of the speakers. He understood that there is the possibility for vagueness and obscurity in the process of learning a language or word. He therefore believes that all that we need to work with is the observation of the behaviour of other speakers.<sup>9</sup>

Quine thus urges us to abandon the idea of "mental museum" which is already harboured in the mind of those with different culture and different cultural background. This is because, it is not possible to know if the translation is correct or whether it is inaccurate. He states that there is no accessibility into the "mental museum" of the people who are culturally different. One can only understand implicitly, the dispositions of the speakers through their behaviours.<sup>10</sup>

## **Radical Translation**

Radical translation, according to W.V.O Quine, is a translation of the language of a "hitherto untouched people."<sup>11</sup> He gives the example of radical translation in his imaginary language, Junglese, translated into English Language.<sup>12</sup> Quine has been sharply criticised that radical translation is not in practice. However he has already defended himself against this attack. He states that it is a fact that the task of radical translation does not exist in reality as there is most likely to be some interpreters available anywhere in the globe. However, even when languages are close and have some affinities, there are possibilities that the distinct features of each language may be poorly interpreted.<sup>13</sup> He therefore imagines a situation, hypothetically, where there is an encounter with a language and there is no luxury of an interpreter. The imaginary situation is given thus

A rabbit scurries by, the native says 'Gavagai' and the linguist notes down the sentence 'Rabbit' (or 'Lo, a rabbit') as tentative translation, subject to testing in further cases.<sup>14</sup>

A jungle linguist is expected to begin his search for translation through a trial and error means. He is supposed to observe the physical disposition of the native starting from a simple sentence such as 'Gavagai'. Through this, the empirical meaning of the word is determined. Meaning is then what that particular sentence share with its translation.

This is seen in the identification and matching of the word with the non-verbal stimulation. Quine tries to show the limitation in linguistic meaning. Linguistic meaning only could not go beyond what one could get from the overt behavior in observable circumstances.

In the radical situation, the jungle language is inaccessible through any known languages. The only data one could use to make an in-road into the understanding of the language are the utterances of the natives and the present stimulation of the observable circumstances. Even though this basis is meager, Quine says, the native speakers do not have any other way of showing the meaning of their utterances.<sup>15</sup> The linguist would construct his manual of translation by the speculative generalisation of the data collected through observation. There would however be little or no data to confirm the fact of his manual. This is because the current publicly observable circumstance would not be sufficient to make prediction on what a speaker of a language, even our own language, would say. The reason for this is that utterances do not usually bear much relevance to the situations that is overtly observable at the same time. Quine sees language as consisting of past unshared experiences and concurrent situations.

### **Inscrutability of Reference**

Indeterminacy of reference has to do with single words. Quine challenges the idea of referential scrutability or determinacy. Quine says that there is what could be called holophrastic indeterminacy. That is, there are always multiple translations of a single sentence. The various translations of a sentence are not only different in the meaning of each part of them, but also in the whole meaning. Both translations may even not be similar. Quine submits that there is no way to give an example for holophrastic inscrutability because it affects the whole, and every language. If we try to determine what the referential object of a certain word is, the answer we would give would depend and be relative to our background language.

Another important factor raised in Quine's argument for the inscrutability of reference is that, there is nothing in ostensive behaviour to solve the problem of ambiguity between two speakers from different cultural background. Quine demonstrated this in "Gavagai". He states that if a speaker points to a rabbit and utter the word, "Gavagai"



there is no way the outward behaviour of the speaker could prove that he is referring to a rabbit, rabbit hood or rabbit stage. The difficulty is based on the difference in culture and language. It is not easy to know whether one's translation is correct or in error. Our judgement can only be based on the behaviour of the speaker to identify the correctness or otherwise of our translation. However, the scheme that we use, that is the behavioural disposition is vague and obscure, because the exact object being referred cannot be determined.

Quine states that there are two types of translation. The first is 'home translation', that is, translation within the cultural background and language of a speaker. The second type is 'radical translation', that is, translation of a language that is distinct and different from the cultural background and language of the speaker. Despite Quine's bifurcation between 'home translation' and 'radical translation', he still believes that radical translation begins at home, This means that even in one's local culture there are elements of radical translation. Thus, we cannot equate our neighbours' English word with "the same strings of phonemes in our mouth."<sup>16</sup> We therefore need to recognise that the way we use words such as 'cool', 'square', 'hopefully' and so on, are different from the ways our neighbours use them.

### **Theories of Reference**

Two opposing answers to the reference question include the traditional Fregean view which claims that definite descriptions play a crucial role in conferring reference on a name. This is in contrast with the Kripkean 'causal theory of reference', which claims that descriptions are not so important in reference. This position states that the right answer to the question of reference has to do with 'initial dubbings' and 'causal chains' of usage.<sup>17</sup>

#### **The traditional view on reference**

In the traditional view, definite description is very crucial for both meaning and reference for names. The basic claim of 'reference descriptivism' is that what a name refers is already determined through the description of such names. Whatever is in conformity or satisfies the description counts as the referent of such name. Such description should not be that of a single instance, but a cluster of description within

the belief system that is associated with the name by speakers. This only is expected to do the reference determining job. This is the description accepted as the reference for the name by the majority of speakers.<sup>18</sup> However, this view is problematic in that, there may be error in majority association of a reference with a name.

### **The causal theory**

In *Naming and necessity*, Kripke<sup>19</sup> comes against meaning descriptivism. He offers a new theory of meaning, known as causal theory. According to this theory, Kripke claims that a name first acquires its reference at an 'initial dubbing' or 'baptism'. Some speakers just determined that certain objects shall have certain names. The speaker needs to be in perpetual contact with the object. There has been an objection against this theory for it does not account for reference change. A name can definitely change its reference.

Quine, however, sees language as a social enterprise which is learnt from other people through observing their actions, imitating words of others in circumstances that are open to public examination. This enables individuals in a linguistic community to form his/her concept and enables the individual to participate in inter-subjective discussion. One of the basic facts of human existence identifies by Quine is that despite the uniformity binding a people together in having a common language, there exists "a chaotic personal diversity" in the way we learn and understand a language. This is due to the fact that, no two individuals learn a language in the same way; neither can an individual finish learning a language in a lifetime.<sup>20</sup>

He believes that a child would begin to learn the language of his/her social group through the identification of subjective sense data and reflecting those data in external objects. This will enable the person to be able to form a conceptual scheme relevant to his/her society. He believes that it is not possible to have inter-subjective communication without having a conceptual scheme. For him, there is 'no inquiry without a conceptual scheme. He also agrees that some objects will be learnt by a child contextually and some by description. He says that words like "centaur" though is not true of anything, will generally be learnt by description of its supposed object and that it also could be learnt contextually. However, word like 'sake', he says, can be learnt

only contextually. Words that depict concrete objects like 'tiles' may be learnt both when it is isolated as a one-word sentence, contextually or through description.

Quine's work, *Two Dogmas of Empiricism*<sup>21</sup> is a response to the empiricists' claim of meaningfulness. The basic assumption of the Analytic and Synthetic statement is that, all knowledge can be put in the form of a statement.

### **Analytic Statements**

Analytic truths, according to the empiricists are statements that their negation would be self-contradictory. Example of analytic statements is, "All bachelors are unmarried". This statement is known a priori, that is, it is self-evident, self-explanatory. It does not need any reference to the world. Its background knowledge is already in one's head. The conclusion about truth or falsehood is reached by definition and through logic. The degree of certainty of an analytic statement is total and absolute. Its truth or falsity is assured by the rules of language alone. The statement is true by the reason of its meaning. Instances of this include; propositions of logic, mathematics, and definitions for translating empirical sentences into sentences about sense data.<sup>22</sup> In analytic statements, the rule of logic does not tell us anything about the nature of the world. They are relationships which we define to be true in our minds.

Ayer, concludes that, when we affirm that analytic propositions are devoid of factual contents and accordingly that they do not say anything, we are not signifying that they are senseless in the way that metaphysical expressions are senseless.<sup>23</sup> For even though they provide us no information concerning any empirical situation, yet they do enlighten us, by demonstrating the way in which symbols are used.

### **Synthetic Statements**

Example of a synthetic statement is, "All metals expand when heated." The statements are known a posteriori, that is, by observation, through reference to the world. Its conclusion is reached based on what is observed. The degree of certainty of synthetic statement is only probable, as we are restricted in time and space. We could not absolutely trust our senses as they are imperfect. The knowledge of our existence and the universe outside our head or brain is in the form of Synthetic statement. Synthetic

statement passes the verifiability test. It is possible for experience to either confirm or disconfirm it.

Quine defines an analytic proposition as that which is “true by meaning”<sup>24</sup> He states that the nature of meaning is obscure and that Rudolf Carnap made a mistake in semantics by equating ‘meaning’ with ‘naming’. He said, one should not confuse meaning, with naming. He gave an example of “The Morning star” which has a diverse meaning from “The Evening star”. However, both of them ‘name’ the same object, that is the planet ‘Venus’. This makes the two to share the same reference.<sup>25</sup> The British empiricist, John Lock, also tries to investigate the origin, certainty and extent of human knowledge, together with ground and degrees of belief, opinion and assent. He claims that all knowledge starts with sense experience. He states also that before we have sense experience, our mind was a “tabula rasa” like a white paper,<sup>26</sup> a blank slate on which nothing is written. What is written on the blank slate is through experience. Lock claims that what we can know are only perceived qualities, ideas and impressions sense experience imprint on our minds.

George Berkeley on the other hand, claims that ideas are things in themselves. For things to exist, they must be perceived by a mind. He states further that, affirming the meaning of a sentence sums up to declaring the rules according to which the sentence is to be used and this is the same as giving the condition of how it can be verified or falsified. The meaning of a proposition is therefore its system of verification. If there is no way to verify a sentence or no rule for its use is verifiable, such a sentence, statement or proposition is meaningless.<sup>27</sup>

In the search for criteria of meaning to distinguish meaningful statements from meaningless ones, many philosophers have posited various standards for the determination of meaningfulness or meaninglessness of statements. Among these groups are, David Hume, Immanuel Kant and the group known as the logical positivists. David Hume states that a statement must satisfy two different conditions for it to be meaningful. The first condition is that a statement must be about the “Relations of Ideas”. Relation of ideas is found in logical tautologies and mathematics. The second criteria is that the statement should be about “Matter of Facts”, such as we have in subjects like Geography, Chemistry, History and Biology.<sup>28</sup>

According to Hume,  $2+2=4$  and “A triangle is a three-sided figure” are meaningful because they have to do with relations of ideas. Due to the ideas expressed by these statements, Hume takes them to be necessarily true. Matters of fact or existence are not involved in the case of logical tautologies. One only needs to have an idea of what the word like “triangle” mean and reason about the idea to determine its truth or falsity. The negation of statements which involves relation of ideas would lead to contradiction. The second type of statements is that which involves matters of fact and based on experiences. Example of this kind of statement is, “The man is tall,” “Rain is falling” and so on. The denial of such statements does not lead to contradiction. Hume differentiated between simple ideas and complex ideas. He states that simple ideas correspond to simple impressions, whereas complex ideas correspond to complex impressions.

This boils down to the understanding that at any point in time, any existing idea must correspond to something. Hume then distinguished between two kinds of relations, these are; natural relations and philosophical relations. Natural relations exist when the associated ideas are linked to one another by customs and natural force of association. Philosophical relation has to do with matters of facts and relations of ideas. The logical positivists, led by Moritz Schlick,<sup>29</sup> while deriving their principles from the empiricists, formulate the “principle of verifiability” or a verification principle. According to the verificationists, there is no means of understanding any meaning without eventual reference to ostensive definition, and this means reference to experience or possibility of verification. According to A. J. Ayer, the truth of a sentence and the meaningfulness of a word are not about corresponding to things. They are about verifiability. The principle which is used to confirm the genuineness of perceptible statement of fact is the criterion of verifiability. He says that the question that needs to be raised concerning any supposed statement of fact is, whether any observation would be pertinent to the determination of its truth or falsehood. It is only if the answer is negative that we come to the conclusion that the statement under consideration is nonsensical.<sup>30</sup>

## Quine's Attack on Two Dogmas of Empiricism

Even though each empiricist's claim varies a little from one another, yet they are similar in the idea they posited. They posited analytic / synthetic distinction and principle of verification. They assert that a meaningful statement is either an analytical statement which expresses truth without reference to experience, or a synthetic truth which refers to immediate experience or matter of facts. Quine rejected the analytic / synthetic distinction as invalid. He states that the distinction does not make any important and clear difference between both analytic and synthetic statements. He claims that there is no clear cut between what is analytic and what is synthetic. He also claims that what meaning is, is obscure and not clear and so, not settled.<sup>31</sup>

Quine in reaction to Hume and Kant identifies two extant definitions of the analytic statement and synthetic statement. The definition of analytic posited by Hume states that analytic statement is one whose negation or denial is self-contradictory, whereas the negation of a synthetic statement is not self-contradictory.<sup>32</sup> Quine urges us to reject this definition. According to him, though analyticity has presupposition of contradiction as the effect of its negation, yet this contradiction is not self-contradiction. Quine asserts that we do not even have a good definition of 'self-contradictory'. So, this definition does not help. Thus, the notion of self-contradictions and analyticity is vague. Self-contradiction, therefore, does not clearly explain the distinction between analytic and synthetic statements.

Another definition of analytic statement that was given by Kant states that an analytic statement is one in which the concept of the subject term is contained or included in the concept of the predicate term. However, a synthetic statement does not have the concept of the subject term included in the concept of the predicate term.

Quine identifies two important limitations to these definitions of analyticity. These are

- i. There is a restriction to only the statements with subject-predicate form, like "A tall man is tall," "A square is a four-sided figure."
- ii. It involves the metaphorical notion of 'containment', whereas Kant does not state the way in which an idea or concept can be said to contain or be implicit in

another. Quine then concludes that the analytic/synthetic distinction is not clear enough.

The second criticism of analytic/synthetic distinction by Quine is that except we have a clear understanding of the notion of “meanings”, it would not be proper to place the distinction between the analytic and the synthetic on the notion of meaning that is vague. We would need to know what meanings are in order to evaluate this statement. He points attention to Frege’s definition of meaning, where meaning is said to be different from referent or what is referred to. Frege differentiates between sense and reference. He regards ‘sense’ as a matter of meanings. Meaning is what makes the sentence true in some given context of utterance. Frege states that sense determines meaning because to know what an expression means is to know what its sense is.<sup>33</sup>

Quine argues that meaning cannot be the same as what it names. This is because two expressions can name the same thing but have different meanings. Words like ‘Hesperus’ and ‘phosphorous’ named the same thing, but each has different meaning. Quine argues further that the notions of synonymity and necessity on which one could base one’s explanation of meaning are themselves not clear and need clarification. Therefore, the distinction between the analytic and the synthetic is vague and arbitrary. It is circular and is therefore not tenable. The classification of a statement as either analytic or synthetic would depend on the conceptual framework in which one decides to operate. Analyticity can be defined only in terms of meaning. Meaning, also, can only be defined in terms of analyticity. This makes the definition of analyticity to be circular. He therefore urges us to discard the analytic and synthetic distinction, as well as, the notion of exact sameness of meaning. There is no clear, cut line of distinction between analytic and synthetic statements.

Quine postulates that words in our language are interconnected with one another. They do not get their “meanings” in isolation, but are connected with other words in a vast network. The meaning of a word would depend on its relation to all other words in the language.<sup>34</sup> In his later work, Quine says that a sentence is analytic for a given native speaker, ‘if he learned the truth of the sentence by learning to use one or more of its words.’<sup>35</sup> He also states that the analytic /synthetic distinction is related to the principle of verification. This is because the verification principle is derived from the

analytic/synthetic distinction. If the former had been rejected, so should be the latter, for they rest on the same foundation. According to Quine, no statement depends on a direct confrontation with experience for their truth and each observation involves value judgement.<sup>36</sup> Verification criterion of meaningfulness therefore lacks justification. He then concludes that we need to use pragmatic principle to determine whether to reject or accept any theoretical claims.

There have been criticisms of Quine's skepticism on the idea of meaning. Firstly, when he claims that the notion of analyticity is not sufficiently clear, what standard of clarity he is employing is also not clear. There has also been the criticism that if our words do not have determinate meaning, it would be difficult to understand one another, even in the same culture and language.

### **Quine's Notion on Analytic/Synthetic Distinction**

Quine argues that the analytic-synthetic distinction made by the empiricists is not tenable. He states that there are no "analytic" truths but all truth involves aspects that are empirical.<sup>37</sup> According to him, the distinction include; Analytic propositions, those propositions that are grounded on meanings, which do not base on experience and; Synthetic Propositions which are propositions grounded on facts. Quine however, disagrees with these distinctions between analytic statements and synthetic ones. He shows that one must not confuse the intension of a general term with its extension, that is, class of particular things to which we may apply the terms. He cited the example of "creature with a heart" and "creature with a kidney" both of which bear the same extension, since all beings with hearts also possess kidneys and vice versa. However, the two statements do not actually mean the same. He then concludes that, there is a vivid difference between intensions and extensions, which give a vivid difference between meanings and references.<sup>38</sup>

Quine gave a brief explanation of what a word might mean as against the necessary qualities an object that is denoted by such word might possess. For example, the object 'man', may be said to have the quality of rationality. Yet one might say 'man' has the accidental property of being "two-legged". However, many human beings exist who have either only one leg or none at all. The word 'Man' therefore could mean 'rational being, but not necessarily mean, "two legged." Hence, Quine comes into the



conclusion that, it seems that a sort of parallel exist between the necessary properties of an object and the meaning of the word that denotes such object. Quine therefore concludes that meaning must not be confused with objects (reference).<sup>39</sup>

Quine seems to have intentional structure in mind rather than the truth conditions in consideration of meaning. He describes what type of evidence a radical translator needs to have to move on in decoding the jungle language. This evidence is the empirical observation of the stimulus reaction of the natives. However, he proclaims that this evidence is not enough to get an adequate correct manual. Quine's thesis of indeterminacy consists of two parts. The first is the claim that all relevant evidence has been described. The second is the claim that there are divergent manuals that are compatible with the evidence described.<sup>40</sup>

Quine linguist notes the natives' utterance of 'Gavagai' where he (the native) might have said "Rabbit". The linguist, therefore tries saying, 'Gavagai' on occasions that would have prompted the native to say 'Rabbit' he then looks to the natives for approval. After doing this repeatedly and got the native's assent each time, he then records 'Gavagai' as the translation for 'rabbit' tentatively. The linguist then continues to identify and translate observation sentences. Through assents and dissents by the natives, he is able to understand the line of connective from them. In the successive utterance of the natives, some will be expected to favour translations that ascribe beliefs to the native which stand to reason or which are in consonance with the observed way of life of the natives. Yet, he should not accept these values at the expense of making the structure that would be attributed to the grammar and semantics of the native to be excessively difficult. Doing this, Quine says, would be bad psychology. He states that the language must have been sufficiently straightforward for the native to acquire.<sup>41</sup>

The translator needs to consider various evidences to determine the manual to be used. This is not because the meanings of sentences are elusive or inscrutable, but because there is nothing in them to show they are the correct or adequate meaning. Quine asserts that, there is nothing we can get in linguistic meaning, beyond what is to be gathered from overt behavior in observable situations.<sup>42</sup>

## Quine on Translation and Meaning

According to Quine, any theory of meaning that would be formed must have three basic considerations. These are; evidence, simplicity and sufficient reason.<sup>43</sup> Evidence is intentionally deployed when there is close balance between the sensory conditioning of ‘an affirmative response and the contrary conditioning’ of what could be seen as being the action of an individual. There is also consideration for simplicity in determining the most causal physical dispositions of individuals during their observations. Sufficient reason is needed to justify the theory being considered based on stimulus and response, which is determined through observation.<sup>44</sup>

Quine therefore states an indeterminacy theory thus;

Manual for translating one language into another can be set up in divergent ways, all compatible with the totality of speech dispositions, yet incompatible with one another. In countless places they will diverge in giving, as their respective translations of a sentence of the one language, sentences of the other language which stand to each other in no plausible sort of equivalence however loose. The firmer the direct links of a sentence with non-verbal stimulation, of course the less drastically its translations can diverge from one another from manual to manual.<sup>45</sup>

He states that making sentences such as, “That man shoots well” while indicating a man not armed, has the thought of the hunter’s familiar face as its stimulation. What contributes to the past stimulation includes the individual’s past observations of the shooting activities of the man and other situations that have given the speaker the understanding of the manner in which the word should be used. The stimulus observation of the past is, therefore, taken to be both partly aspect of acquisition of language and that of ‘acquisition of collateral information.’<sup>46</sup>

The task of a linguist, according to Quine includes the recovery of man’s current language from his currently observed responses. The linguist is expected to penetrate and translate a language that was hitherto unknown. He has to do the translation without the aid of an interpreter. While translation between languages with close

affinity is aided by the similarities in the forms of the words, translation between languages that are not related could be assisted by 'traditional relationships that have evolved in making them shared a culture.'<sup>47</sup>

### **Stimulus Meaning**

The stimulus meaning for an individual, according to Quine, is the totality of his/her inclination to assent or dissent from the sentence based on the current stimulation. It is defined in terms of two notions: Affirmative stimulus meaning and negative stimulus meaning. The affirmative stimulus meaning for a speaker is defined as class of all stimulations that would prompt the speaker to assent to the sentence. The negative stimulus meaning, on the other hand, is the class of all stimulations that would prompt the speaker to dissent to the sentence. It is peculiar to a particular period of time. In as much as we need to allow a speaker to change his way and manner. It is the stimulation that activates the disposition. Quine conceives of this stimulation as a universal event, and not as a dated particular event. Thus, stimulation is seen as a repeatable event form.<sup>48</sup>

In *Word and object*, there is a missing component in Quine's "vindictive categories."<sup>49</sup> Apart from assenting and dissenting, a speaker may abstain or suspend judgement when asked concerning the truth of a sentence.

### **Observation Sentence**

According to Quine, some sentences are based purely on the current stimulation of observable behavior. These are sentences like 'it is raining', "that is a rabbit". Such sentences like these are called observation sentences. The linguist in trying to translate Jungle language needs to begin with observation sentence. He assumes that the native's utterance could be linked to a physical disposition that is concurrently observable. In order to check if his assumption is correct, he takes the initiative to volunteer the sentence himself and look out for the native's assent or dissent. However, for the linguist to be able to make correct assumption he should be able to recognise the signs of assent and dissent of the natives of the Jungle, even if only speculatively.<sup>50</sup>

However, some sentences exist that are not observation sentences. That is, sentences that could not be correlated with the current physical behaviours of the speaker which

the linguist could share. In such situation, Quine suggests the linguist could note such words and try to compare them to some English words. Quine says:

Our linguist keeps testing his system for its efficacy in dealing with natives and he goes on tinkering with it and guessing again. The routine of query and assent that had been his standby in constructing observation sentences continues to be invaluable at these higher and more conjectural levels.<sup>51</sup>

The linguist does much guesswork before he could form his manual of translation. He is expected to eventually accumulate the Jungle vocabulary through the speculative interpretation of the non-observation sentences into English language. The meanings attributed to these sentences are regarded as tentative and are subject to repeated confirmations.

In translating the native's beliefs, Quine states that the translator would rely on psychological speculation to determine what the native is likely to believe. He however observes that it is difficult to get words that would match colours from one language to another. This is due to the differences in the customary groupings of shades. This is a limitation already on the mode of determination of the beliefs of the natives.

### **Occasion Sentence**

An occasion sentence, according to Quine, is, one in which a person gives assent or dissent and which is partly dependent on the speaker's present observation and the background information. An observation sentence, on the other hand, is an occasion sentence of which assent or dissent depends on observation, with no, or only minimum background information needed. For instance, 'she is a spinster' is an occasion sentence because assent or dissent in a particular instance depends, partly, on the person the subject is observing. It is not an observation sentence in the Quinian's sense because to assent or dissent in any specific case is dependent on the background knowledge regarding the person being observed. 'Rain is falling', however, does not depend, in the same way, on possessing similar type of background information like 'She is a spinster'. 'It is raining,' therefore qualifies as an observation sentence.

Occasion sentences may be called observation sentences when their stimulus meaning may be sufficient to give their meanings. Such sentences are said to “wear their meanings on their sleeves.”<sup>52</sup> An occasion sentence may be more accessible to observation when its stimulus meanings for diverse speakers tend to match with one another. That is, when there is high degree of agreement by well placed observers. Thus, we have an observation sentence that is firm and nearly infallible. However, infallibility is not total but could only be of degree.

Quine’s observation sentence is a bit different from philosophical tradition in that it allows the sentence to be about ordinary things rather than making them to report data got from the senses.<sup>53</sup> Observational predictions made by translation theories are dependent upon the stimulus meanings of observation and occasion sentences that perform important roles.

### **Translation Theory**

A translation theory for two languages bears a reciprocal or mutual relation between individual words, phrases or sentences of one language with words or sentences of another language. This connection is then employed to relate the sentences of the two languages. The procedure of determining such correlations can be regarded as a translation manual or a translation theory. According to Quine stimulus meanings are very essential in appraising translations of “occasional sentences” and “observation sentences”.

Three principles are identified by Quine for obtaining testable claims from theories of translation for these observational predictions.

- i. The first principle is that correct translation must maintain the stimulus meanings of observation sentences in their individual linguistic societies.
- ii. The second principle states that accurate translation must conserve the stimulus synonymy of pairs of occasion sentences.
- iii. The third principle states how the translation of truth functional connectives relates to their effects on stimulus meanings.<sup>54</sup>

Related claims are made concerning other truth functional operations.

### **Standing Sentence**

There is a probable limitation which is pertinent to the translation of what Quine calls 'standing sentence'. These are sentences assent to, or dissent from, which is free from current sensory stimulation. The possible limitation is that sentences assented to or dissented from, in every circumstance by the society of speaker L1, must be translated to those assented to or dissented from, in every circumstance, by the society of speaker L2. This constraint itself is however, problematic, for it will need us to regard some sentences that may be generally given assent by the speakers of a Language L1, which in L2 may be false, as being the same. For example, considering a sentence like 'O cupid, the god of Love', in Greeks. It is expected to mean the same as some sentences of our language that we accept as apparent truth. However, if the observational data for theories of translation are confined to behavioural evidence, the type of which Quine suggested, then, extremely different theories of translation will be equally well supported by all observational data, known and unknown in several cases.

Quine assumes that the truth function of logical connectives can be learnt inductively from observation of a speech community's behavioural verdicts. This may, however, not always be the case.

He concludes that meaning is holistic.<sup>55</sup> It is not only about words or sentences, but has to do with the whole language. Possible situation does not exist that that can make us to choose a rule above another. Nothing prevents a linguist from reaching more than one incompatible system. He cannot attain 'one true grammar' of the language in consideration. It can therefore be concluded that there is no known rule that exists and used by the native speaker. Even when there is a fact about what an individual item in the language means, there is much likely to be under-determination of such. That is, there would be no means finding out because of lack of adequate evidence. According to Quine therefore, there will always be indeterminacy in translation because there is no fact about what rules are guiding the natives, neither is there any definite rules guiding the translator in his / her translation.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, Quine's perspective on the indeterminacy of translation has been evaluated. Likewise, his view on meaning and translation has been critically considered. Quine's 'Radical Translation' is a term coined to refer to a hypothetical situation in which a linguist approaches a completely isolated linguistic community. In such a situation, all the linguist has to go on in making an in - road into the foreigners' language is through the study of their behaviours. Thus, the translation manual that the linguist ends up constructing captures only such behavioural data. An important claim of Quine is that the outcome of interaction in this kind of setting affects linguistic interaction in general. His view is that when understanding each other's speech we correlate linguistic behaviour with our experience of the world around us, and that there is nothing to linguistic meaning beyond such correlation. This position points to Quine as both an empiricist and a behaviourist. The next chapter shall consider the alternative view to Quine's as regards the possibility of translation.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### ALTERNATIVES TO QUINE

#### Introduction

Having examined the indeterminacy thesis of Quine in the preceding chapter, this chapter shall consider alternative views on the possibility of translation across cultures. Among the work that shall be considered is that of Donald Davidson who considered the situation of 'radical interpretation' as against Quine's 'radical translation', Thomas Kuhn's 'incommensurability of paradigm', relative to Quine's 'indeterminacy of translation'. Kwasi Wiredu who considers the situation where there is conceptual disparity as against 'conceptual relativity' of Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf. J. L. Austin's speech acts. Some of these scholars focused on the problem of compatibility in the use of concepts among individuals and groups.

In this chapter, we intend to argue that interpretations and translations as posited by each of these alternative views are liable to be contested. Despite the best of intentions with which they may be carried out, they run the risk of being counterproductive. Some take the 'relativity approach' to show that words and concepts have peculiar meanings depending on the cultures and context in which they are used. Others take 'universalists approach' to show that concepts are similar and their translations are possible across culture. We shall argue that each of these alternatives, however, has its limitations.

#### Donald Davidson

Donald Davidson describes conceptual scheme as 'ways of organising experience; they are systems of categories that give form to the data sensation; they are the perspectives from which individuals, cultures, or periods survey the passing scene.'<sup>1</sup> He

states that there may be difficulty in translating from one scheme to the other in the case in which the beliefs, desires, hopes and bits of knowledge that characterised one person have no corresponding item for the subscriber of another scheme. What a society counts as real in the culture may not, as such, count as real in another. Reality is then taken to be relative to a scheme.

Davidson says that, sometimes when some sentences that have been held as true are revised in a discipline, the centrality of such concepts may give the impression that the concepts have changed their meanings.<sup>2</sup> He notes that languages that have evolved in places that are far in distance may vary considerably in the resources at their disposal to deal with one or some phenomena. What is easy to translate in a language may be difficult to translate in another. The difference in two different languages may show difference not in style alone, but also significant variations in the value of the two cultures or societies.

Davidson notes that to hold a relativist position by saying that points of view may be different seems to make sense. However, this could only be partially, because the reality of systems that are common opposes the declaration of striking incomparability.<sup>3</sup> He arrived at the conclusion that having a language may be connected with having a conceptual scheme. Despite this, those who are speakers of dissimilar languages have the propensity to have a common conceptual scheme, if a method of translating a language into another is available. If we want to study the criteria necessary for translation, we need to focus on the standard for identity in conceptual schemes.

Davidson believes that if conceptual scheme is not associated with language, then it will be doubtful if we can have the initial problem of difference in conceptual scheme. This is because, it will be difficult to imagine the mind grasping with language directly without functioning within a framework of conceptual scheme. Also, if the idea that any language distorts reality is sustained, as believed by some thinkers, it means that minds could only grasp reality as they are, without using language (that is 'wordlessly').<sup>4</sup> Seeing language in this perspective would make language to be independent of the individual person that uses the language. Davidson, however, states that such claim cannot be sustained. Also, if it is possible for the mind to grasp with

things as they are without distortion, then the mind has to be without categories and concepts. This also could not conform to the understanding of the mind as having some traits that constitute it.

Donald Davidson suggests that it is either we relate conceptual scheme with languages or make way for the possibility that two or more languages could share the same scheme and sets of inter translatable languages. Man cannot lose the traits of language speaking and still retain the power of thoughts. As such, it would not be possible for an individual to be in an advantage position of being able to compare two conceptual schemes by temporarily suspending his own scheme and taking on another. This leads to the question whether it is valid to affirm that two individuals possess conceptual schemes that are different from each other, if they speak different languages that would not inter translate.

Davidson considers two types of cases that may arise. The first is the possibility of complete failure of translatability. This could occur if we cannot have fundamental scope of sentence in a language translated into another language. Likewise, there would be partial failure if it is only some forms of sentences that cannot be translated.<sup>5</sup> He believes it is not intelligible to speak of total failure of translatability. If there is anything that is not translatable, it is most likely such is not speech behaviour.<sup>6</sup> Translating a language into a common tongue, for him, is a criterion of languagehood.<sup>7</sup>

Davidson sees it as being very unlikely that we attribute intelligently such complex attitudes as beliefs and intention, to a speaker except we accept it is possible to translate his words into our own. This is because the relation between the ability to translate a person's language and the ability to describe the person's attitude is very close.

If we juxtapose this with Quine's assertion that we may not be able to distinguish the meaning of the native's statement 'gavagai', whether it means rabbithood, rabbit stage or rabbit's tail; it shows that inability to understand accurately what the native utters shows inadequacy in understanding rather than the native not having exact concept to describe rabbit.

### **Belief and the Basis of Meaning (Principle of Charity)**

Davidson analyses the evidential base needed for radical interpretation. Accordingly, ascribing meanings to utterances and intentions to speaker has to proceed simultaneously. This is because we do not have a prior grasp on either the meaning of those utterances or intention of the speaker. In the same way, for an interpreter to have headway into interpreting a radical language, he must begin by using an interpretative ‘principle of charity’<sup>8</sup> It states that, when interpreting another individual, you do not have any option than to attribute to him or her (1) overall logicity and rationality, and (2) beliefs and expression that are generally true. The justification of this principle is directly obtained from the situations of radical interpretation. To facilitate having a meaningful language (and thought), Davidson says, one has to be interpretable, and being interpretable has to do with showing the above-mentioned features (logicity, rationality, and truthfulness).<sup>9</sup>

Davidson says the translator needs to assume from the beginning that the beliefs of the speaker are mostly true. Also, he has to presuppose that most of the utterances made by the speaker are assertions of what he believes or considers to be true.<sup>10</sup> The interpreter (translator) should hold the belief of the ability of the speaker to be concept specific. If a native says ‘gavagai’ and points to a rabbit as Quine suggested, the onus rests on the translator to know the specific part or object being referred to. Therefore, interpreters need to shun attributing inexplicable error to the speaker. Instead, he needs to maximise agreement. The point is that one should be careful when interpreting variations in linguistic expressions. One should not regard them as world-views that have differences that are too wide apart and therefore unbridgeable.

Davidson cautions that people should not hold the thought that ideas framed in languages that are different, or even conflicting intellectual concepts, cannot be accessible to translation. People from different cultural background may obviously possess ideas that are relatively dissimilar to our own and there may be few differences not easy to capture or that are even not possible to denote. Yet, it is not unlikely that there exists large section of indispensable misinterpretation, that are not possible to set straight. Therefore, one must not regard lexical disparities as signifying incommensurability. It may require an entire paragraph to elucidate the meaning of a

particular statement in another language, but the general interpretation and translation must be achievable. This serves as a precondition for meaning.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, for instance, one cannot make a decision to interpret a specific word in the other's language as one's English "for", and go ahead to make the person's use of the word totally illogical. What should be majorly considered in the decision to interpret the other's word, as "for" is that; his / her utterance makes sense and turns out in a logical manner. One therefore does not have an option than to attribute one's own system of logic to the others also. In the same manner, whenever we attach interpretations to the expressions that are making references in the language of the other, there is the need for us to make him/her truthful as much as possible most of the time. For instance, if we decided that a specified word of a person means "chair" or "dog," we did so by linking the word with whatever is available in the surroundings that appears perceptible to him/her (and pertinent to his/her interests). Consequently, we do not have an alternative than to assign to the other person our perception of the world. For instance, that there is now a dog or a chair next to us and in making a choice, we must make him/ her to be correct through our own understanding. As such, there is the need to utter the word that aliens use for dog, when there is actually a dog around.

### **Communication and Convention**

Davidson enumerated how the concept of convention could shed light on linguistic behaviour and other concepts that are related to it. He denies that conventions govern the way assertions are made and how assertions are linked to what is believed to be true. He claims further that individual sentences with single uses offer at best a partial analysis of the connection of speakers' intention to their utterances; and that convention is not a condition for language, neither is language a condition for convention.

### **Davidson's Account of Language and Belief**

Davidson states that, a speaker is a person who communicates thoughts, and to convey thoughts a person must mean something by his/her statement. The person interpreting must comprehend whatever the other person within the group utters. Both the speakers



and the interpreters must therefore, be capable of comprehending the meaning of expressions, by allotting propositional content to those utterances.<sup>12</sup> He states that an individual using language must be proficient enough to be specific, in such a way that depends efficiently and exclusively on formal considerations, what the meaning of every sentence is.<sup>13</sup>

Davidson sees the theory of meaning as being capable of generating a sentence in the meta-language for each sentence of the object language.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, it is achievable to produce this sentence only if an interpreter understands the condition under which an expression of a sentence is true and often knows that if some specified sentences are true others also must be.<sup>15</sup> This shows the commitment of Davidson to the holism of language. Therefore, one can ascribe beliefs to a speaker if we have not less than two rational agents, with the external world. It is these three agents that constitute the triangle that is essential both for communication and for the speaker to possess thought. The reason being that, if it is not possible for an observer to interpret an oral behaviour, then the oral behaviour would contain no meaning and the speaker would therefore possess no thoughts.<sup>16</sup> The 'Principle of Charity' must be made use of by the two speakers in the triangle, both must attribute rationality and meaningful thoughts to each other.

The aim of radical interpretation has to do with taking the behavioural evidence of a community speaking an alien language and giving an account of meaning for the sentences of this community. In order to accomplish this, the 'principle of charity' must be used. Davidson also refers to it as the Principle of coherence. One needs to presuppose that the speakers of the language are, to a large extent, rational and will not maintain contradictory or conflicting beliefs. If a speaker's sentences cannot be consistently interpreted, then the claim is that such a speaker is not communicating in any language.<sup>17</sup>

Unlike Quine, Davidson asserts that one can explain language relative to thought, or thought explained in terms of language. He states that for a being to possess thoughts, it must be an interpreter of the words of another.<sup>18</sup> The implication of this is that it is not possible for a person to possess thoughts without being a member of a language community. This is because thoughts, whether expressed or not, are either true or false.

The thinker must also understand the meaning of those thoughts. Davidson therefore believes in objectivity of meaning of some concepts. A speaker must know the truth-conditions of a sentence before he/she can understand such a sentence. Davidson regards linguistic meaning as evolving from linguistic communication, which is not only expressed, but rather, is established in interaction.

Davidson follows Quine in holding that, to enhance our understanding of what meaning sums up to, a person should reflect on a hypothetical state of affairs. This is a situation, where a person is faced with an alien language speaker with whom he / she does not share any linguistic or cultural background. In this approach, all confusing conceptions that have to do with thoughts and ideas that were previously shared before interaction are put aside. One is then obliged to explain meaning and understanding based on that which is obtainable within the framework of the interaction itself. Davidson refers to this kind of setting as "radical interpretation". He follows the footsteps of Quine, who tagged his own thought experiment "radical translation."

The interpreter in this Davidson 'radical world' then meets with a foreigner. He/she must allocate content to this foreigner's statements or expressions based on his/her linguistic and non-linguistic observable behavior. Before the interpreter can comprehend the literal or central meaning of the expression of the other, he / she must be capable of allotting truth-conditions to the statements the other makes. He / she would have to use, for this purpose, his / her local language. What also needs consideration, in a methodical manner, is the syntactic composition of the sentences in the language of the other with whom interaction is taking place. Davidson integrates truth-functional semantics with communicative constructivism. He, therefore, arrived at a view that truth performs a crucial function in respect of how language is associated with the world, through the procedure of interpretation.<sup>19</sup>

Davidson shows that we recognise the meaning of our utterances and those of other people through the identification of the truth-conditions of the sentence. There cannot be a truth ( T ) sentence without a community of language users.<sup>20</sup> For if there were no beings that would communicate, there would be nothing such as truth. This is for the reason that truth belongs to sentences. It is a relation between the sentence, the individual and the time.<sup>21</sup>

The idea of error is very crucial to the formation of theory of meaning, according to Davidson. In our attempt to interpret others, we harbor the assumption not only that they are beings who are rational, but also that they possess a considerable number of beliefs that are true. Nevertheless, we should not presume that they possess true beliefs alone, but are also subject to errors in beliefs. He says “error is what gives beliefs points.”<sup>22</sup> The implication of the notion of error for indeterminacy of translation is that, some of the differences accounted for in manuals of translation may be due to error and inaccuracy in the attribution of meaning to the speaker by translators. For a person to possess a belief, then, he/she must have an idea of belief, for one to have an idea of belief is to understand the possibility of such a belief to be mistaken. It is however not possible to have a notion of mistaken belief unless one has seen the differences between his/her belief and those of others.

Davidson’s point is that for another person to understand the meaning of a speaker’s word or expression, the person speaking must, first, personally have holistic and rational correlation between his/her own beliefs. His/her belief also has to be consistent with the external world. The triangulation on which Davidson’s theory rests says that, both thought and communication take place at a point that a speaker is capable of attributing a belief to another person, concerning some state of affairs.

The point that every speaker ascribes beliefs and rationality to other individuals in a linguistic community seems not to be in dispute.<sup>23</sup> In our interaction with others, it is usually assumed that we converse with speakers who also have beliefs in the existence of other minds. As such, each assumes that the other person with whom he / she converses is rational and sane. The people being interacted with may not even be of the same language, yet it is often assumed that there is a shared belief system common to both. This, he states, is because all interpreters ascribe beliefs, rationality and desires to the ones they are interpreting. He claims that all speakers, who also are interpreters, must be capable of attributing beliefs to others.

According to the claim of Davidson, interpreting has to do with attributing to the agents the belief they ought to have in relation to their environment. For instance, if an individual is holding an umbrella in the rain, an interpreter would assign the belief that it is raining to the individual. However, if an agent puts his cloth in a bag and departs

the room, if another person comes and removes the cloth from the bag into the store, the agent would most likely believe that his / her cloth is still in the bag and look for it there when he / she comes back. However if children are asked where the agent is likely to look for his cloth, he / she would likely say 'inside the store'. Some interpreters may not ascribe to the agents the belief that such agents should have, but attribute to the agents the belief that they, the interpreters, themselves have in this situation. This could only but show that such interpreters are incompetent in some circumstances. Thus, the skill to interpret and the competence to communicate with language, come in degrees.

Davidson asserts that an individual must hold the idea of belief and objective truth for him/her to be a speaker of a language. However, the question is 'how do we predict the behaviour of a person with false belief? An interpreter, according to Davidson, should be competent to ascribe beliefs, desires and rationality to the other person. He/she must have a notion of truth and recognise that it is possible for beliefs to be false. According to Davidson, it is possible for there to be a constraint in possible interpretation of an expression, most especially when the speaker is seen as an proficient speaker.<sup>24</sup>

The implication of this is that language and interpretative understanding appear in a continuum. The level of knowledge in interpretation would then correspond to the degrees of competence of the interpreter in the language.<sup>25</sup> The implication of Davidson's submission shows that every rational human being has the potentiality to develop progressively from childhood, to fully participate in the triangle of communication. Language, thought and interpretive ability, all therefore develops in progression.

Davidson rejects the idea of indeterminacy of translation. For a conceptual system to be identified as indeterminate, it must be accepted as a conceptual system, that is, it must be recognised as interpretable. Nonetheless, interpretation entails a significant measure of concord and understanding. Hence, any suspicion of obstinate indeterminacy must be much more limited or shallow than it appears. It is either the disparity is clouded by areas of concord that are not properly observed, or the differences in some concepts, may not be as really difficult as it is emphasised. The grey areas may be overcome by a sufficiently thorough interpretive effort. Davidson

takes interpretation to be a process that is, not only local, but also inter-subjective. The essential problem with Davidson's approach is that he does not see the interwovenness between interpretation and translation. He rather sees interpretation as an alternative to translation. This bifurcation does not exist in the Yoruba pragmatic cultural hermeneutic approach that operates on the principle of complementarity.

### **Sapir-Whorf: Linguistic Relativity**

In the Enlightenment period, thought and language were taken to be two distinct processes. Thought was seen as taking absolute control over language, while 'ideas' were taken to be conceived only through the inner logic of thought, and thus, independent of language. The categories of thought were believed to be universal to all rational beings. Language was then taken to be a means of communication only. The apparent distinctions between languages were not really noticed or mentioned then. Whenever, differences were noticed in languages, they were considered to be slight aberrations from a universal that is a common theme, most especially the European languages. A language may also be seen as being less developed in comparison to the European languages. The non-European languages are in this category. In the Enlightenment period, language was seen as secondary to thought when it comes to the formulation of a person's ideas.<sup>26</sup>

Linguistic relativism has to do with the idea that the language that an individual speaks has an impact on his cognition. This idea is typically associated with Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf. It is called 'Sapir-Whorf hypotheses'. Linguistic relativity dwells on the relationship between language and thoughts. The principle of linguistic relativity, according to Sapir-Whorf, consists of two important characteristics, these are that;

- i. Different languages cut up and name the world differently. That is, fundamental differences between languages exist.
- ii. Different language constructions lead you to perceive and interpret the world in different ways.<sup>27</sup>

Linguistic relativism asserts that the language spoken by an individual has an active impact on that individual's world view.<sup>28</sup> Extreme form of Linguistic relativity is

‘linguistic determinism’’. This states that our language determines how we see the world. This implies that we cannot see things another way except through our language. However, there have been criticisms against this form of linguistic determinism in that it is not testable as it makes bilingualism and translation impossible. Linguistic relativism however, sees having a language as a form of disposition rather than constraint in seeing the world. Since technologically simple societies can have complete, elaborate grammars. Whorf therefore urges us to judge a given language or culture on its own terms and not with a standard of another. Language does not only shape thought, it is also shaped by how we use it.<sup>29</sup>

One of the major linguistic relativity debates is focused on the question whether language does affect thought or not. The traditional claim of Sapir-Whorf is that the languages we speak usually influence the way we think. According to Whorf, individuals divide nature along outlines arranged by their indigenous languages.<sup>30</sup> The hypothesis of linguistic relativity states that where languages are different from one another, it will lead to variations of thought.<sup>31</sup>

Language is seen as a code that all the members of certain group of people learn and share.<sup>32</sup> Through this language, a large portion of what the people know about the world is learnt. Language is thus so important that it has great impact on the way a people perceive reality.<sup>33</sup> Sapir views that the habitual language of each community seriously impacts on the observation of experience. It also affects the options that are chosen on how the experiences are interpreted.<sup>34</sup> Whorf emphasises that the way language is structured, has a tacit and great impact on the framework which the mind imposed upon reality.<sup>35</sup> Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is an offshoot of the *Structuralists* school of linguistics.<sup>36</sup> All languages are said to have specific universals which primarily include space, time, quantity, action, state, and so forth.<sup>37</sup>

It is very important to note that though language has fundamental impact on behaviour and consequently on culture, yet we can only analyse it in relation to some other factors that are not verbal. Some of these factors are psychological. The factors come into play as they affect the ability to communicate, most especially when communicating with people of different cultural background, where ‘communication accuracy’<sup>38</sup> is expected to be established between two individuals or group. For a

person to comprehend the culture of a group of people is predicated on learning the language of that culture. The easier it is to have a grasp of a given language, the more profound the person is linked with that culture.

A very important question that is necessary to ask is, what power does a language have to shape reality? This is because to have real agreement among people, there is required the use of language. Sapir and Whorf believe language and culture are two sides of the same coin. The idea is that language shapes thought, and each language creates a distinct worldview.<sup>39</sup> The thought that an individual may possess at a point in time, naturally, is dependent on the nature of that person, his/her background, history and the specific circumstances or situation the individual finds himself. Language as such may have a weak or a strong influence on an individual's worldview. If we say that language influences thought, the scope of the influence is not well specified. It may be restricted to only some relatively isolated parts of thought, and it may also extend towards the whole of the thought. However, whatever is taken to be the scope, whether covering minor area or major, we are still involved with a certain form of linguistic relativity. Also, when we talk about 'worldview' this may include both 'perception' and 'thinking'.

### **Kwasi Wiredu**

Kwasi Wiredu delves into the foundation of human communication to discover whether it is possible to have universal canons of thought and action<sup>40</sup> In the debate on cultures and language, some scholars have argued for particularity or peculiarity in cultures leading to relativism, while some have argued for universality in culture. There is no doubt that any position on universality or particularity in a language also determines that of languages in general. While cultural universals would eventually lead to the possibility of easy cross-cultural communication, cultural particularity would lead to relativism and hence difficulty in cross-cultural communication. This however is not to say that there is no point of compatibility in the various points of view.

Wiredu gives consideration and proffer argument in favour of the existence of cultural universals, without which there can be no cross-cultural communication. Wiredu says that there could be problem in communicating with people of other cultures if the



language of the other has been poorly or wrongly conceptualised. According to him, there are three things in this connection that might need a little more reflection. These are;

- i. Those categories of thought may be inconsistent with the ones resident in the framework of the given African system of thought, such that formulations that appear to make sense in the foreign language may be quite radically incoherent in the African language concerned.
- ii. The cause or causes of such situation may lie in defects in any one of the languages, foreign or indigenous.
- iii. It is possible, by a cross-cultural evaluation based on independent considerations, to get to the root of the matter.<sup>41</sup>

According to Wiredu, there are some independent considerations, that is, those that are not particular to the peculiar nature of any language under consideration. Such are general to and intelligible in any of the concerned languages. Their possibility for consideration is based on their in-built nature of 'self-reflexivity'<sup>42</sup> which is universal to all natural languages.

Wiredu defines communication as 'the transference of thought content from one individual or group of people to another.'<sup>43</sup> The thought content may be a statement, which may be true or false. It may be the expression of emotion, attitude or a wish. Language is considered to be the medium of transference of thoughts. This may take place through the use of words, gestures, artifacts and so on.<sup>44</sup> Indeterminacy may arise out of these situations when the concept of a culture is not adequately conceptualized when it is formed for translation into a foreign culture. This could only make the concept to be intelligible in one culture and not in the other. Even when it is intelligible in the other, it is inconsistent with the intended formulation, thus rendering it indeterminate.

Indeterminacy could also arise when there is a defect in any one of the languages under consideration, whether the source language or the target language. The defect may also arise when concept is available in a culture (the source language) and not in the other being translated into (the target language), or vice versa. In the effort to find a formulation by different translators, each would conceptualise through personal effort



and understanding. The ability in most cases varies in degrees. Wiredu notes that there can be no human society without communication. He states that a community exists through individuals, who are intermingling persons based on the meanings they shared as a group. Certainly, without communication, Wiredu asserts, there is not even a human person. A human being who is denied the socialising impact of communication will keep on being human only biologically, but mentally is bound to be sub-human.<sup>45</sup>

Among the factors that are fundamental to human communication, according to Wiredu, is “shared meanings”, However we need to know what meanings are, and how they can be shared. Some philosophers conceive meaning to be subjective in nature. However, this position has been argued against; if meanings were subjective, they would not only depend on irregularity obtained in the distinctiveness of individuals, also there would be no conventions, no socially established rules, correlating symbols to meaning. This will consequently make it impossible to converse with other people. Worse still as Wiredu puts it “no one could converse with himself / herself”<sup>46</sup> The implication of this according to Wiredu is that thinking is impossible.

In Western philosophy, another school of thought postulates ‘meanings’ as abstract entities, that is, meaning exists independently of human minds. Understanding a meaning is therefore conceived on the model of perceiving an object. There have been arguments against this conception of meaning. Wiredu puts the objection thus:

If meanings were entities, differences between them could never, in principle be grasped, which is absurd ... If meanings were entities, it must be capable of being referred to. Referring involves the use of symbol, a meaningful symbol, if the meaning of the symbol is also an entity, it would involve relating it to another ad infinitum.<sup>47</sup>

Wiredu concludes that if meanings were entities, they would lose their generality. Conception of meaning as an entity will lead to infinite regress. Another tradition in Western philosophy also opposed the theory of meanings as entities. It is a form of realism. This doctrine is referred to as nominalism. It denies that meanings are entity of any sort. It also tries to eliminate the category of signification from the analysis of semantics. It therefore, recognises the symbol and the referent alone. However, when there is no referent such as the case of ‘non-existence.’ There arises a problem in

nominalism account as a means of communication. Thus, “there remain only marks on some surface, written, or a series of sounds signifying nothing. Wiredu concludes that the aversion the nominalists have for the concepts is because concepts have been historically taken to be mental entities by some philosophers in Western philosophy. He asserts that it is, however, right to say that concepts are necessary in the theory of meaning. It is also correct to emphasise that concepts only exist in the mind. The objection to the conceptualist view, however, is that it cannot be sustained to conceive of mind as a kind of entity. Wiredu asserts that a meaning can apply to many objects or situations, which is called generality of meanings. However, an entity or object cannot apply to anything. He states that

... an entity can signify something; but this means that a rule can be established by which the given entity puts us in mind, in a certain way, of the ‘something’ in question ...When an entity signifies something, the signification is neither identical with the entity itself nor with any other entity that may happen to be ‘signified’.<sup>48</sup>

He states further that when a meaningful symbol is used, what is signified is a thought, and never an entity. It is correct to say that symbols sometimes refer to entities or object, but when they do, the object or entity cannot be said to be the signification of the symbol. The object is just the referent and not the signification. However, it is the signification that directs us to a referent. Notwithstanding, the signification may not direct us to anything through the signification. Wiredu claims further that the same kind of element of communication can be a signification in one context and a referent in some other contexts. ‘Non-existence’, for instance, though is an English word, what it expresses, that is , its signification or meaning could not be said to be English, but the concept of ‘not-existing.’

According to Wiredu, one essential condition for communication is ‘objectivity’. For meaning to be objective is not the same as its being an abstract entity having an independent existence of its own outside the mind. Wiredu insists that if meanings are entities, it would be impossible to ever grasp with them. The difficulty of how meaning, if it is an entity, would be related to other physical entities to which they apply is problematic. In as much as human communication is described as the transference of thought content from a person or group to others, the process would not

be feasible if it is taken to mean sending out an abstract entity to one another. If on the other hand, communication is conceived as a person or group directing the attention of the other to an abstract entity that has independent existence, it would not be logically sensible. This is because this already presupposed communication. To direct the attention of another person is to communicate to such a person. This will mean communication being defined through itself. This is nothing but absurd, as it involves circularity or infinite regress. Also, for any two or more individuals to perceive, apprehend, grasp or comprehend the same entity, has already presupposes communication.

Wiredu while citing Okot P' Bitek<sup>49</sup> shows the conceptual translation problem involved in the translation of the Chapter 1 verse 1 of the St. John's Gospel, in the Holy Bible; "In the beginning was the word, the word was with God, the word was God." This when translated into Luo, means "from long ago, there was News, News was with Hunchback Spirit."<sup>50</sup> This religion-anthropological works "interpret African traditional world-views in essentially Anglo-Christian terms".<sup>51</sup> The concern to analyse those senses of meaning which are relevant to understanding language, communication and translation arises out of the barrier seemingly created by the idea of 'conceptual scheme,' conceptual category or framework. While many have ventured into relativism and suggested the impossibility of one culture penetrating the conceptual scheme of another, Kwasi Wiredu, sees 'disparities' in conceptual scheme, rather than 'relativity'. He explores the possibility of deriving equivalence through coining, and importing through borrowing, where a concept is not available in a particular culture.

There is the need to search for the root or fundamental basis of communication. Wiredu says the answer needs to be looked for in the biological similarity of human beings. Further, in line with the argument of Len Doyal and Dogal Harris,<sup>52</sup> Wiredu says the biological unity of man has made it possible for anyone to partake or imaginatively penetrate into any human life form, no matter how initially strange. This fact, he states, underlies the possibility of trans-cultural translation.

Wiredu claims that a human person is born with certain innate conceptual abilities. This is due to the biological make-up of human beings. A person is born without having any concept. These innate abilities due to biological affinity of human beings, makes it possible for them to compare experiences and have inter-personal adjustment

of behaviour that makes social existence possible. For instance an African can accept Western idea after due reflection. According to Wiredu

... The African concerned should satisfy herself that there are no better or equally good African alternatives to the proposed Western idea. More radically, she should consider whether the categories of thought in terms of which the propositions in question are framed are intelligible within the scheme of categories embedded in her own vernacular. Should this turn out not to be the case, she would then have to investigate whether the problem lies with her vernacular or with the foreign medium. That would be an exercise in cross - cultural conceptual analysis – a difficult but not impossible project. So there is a condition of intelligibility and also a condition, in a nutshell, of truth.<sup>53</sup>

In his efforts at solving translation problems, Wiredu suggests two ways in which this can be done. If we have a situation where a concept exists in one language but does not in another, one of these could be done: (i) Coining – devising new term which may be a word or phrase, by the specialisation of old words in our languages, and (ii) Borrowing – the adoption of new words from other languages where the phenomenon to be named has no apparent linkages with previous experience. In support of this method, he reiterates its usefulness in the science where equivalent words could not be found for such concepts as ‘electron,’ ‘atom,’ ‘molecule’ and so on. The adoption could be ‘electron,’ ‘atom,’ ‘moleku’. Introduction of new words has to be followed by pedagogic package, a through teaching and enlightenment of what they stand for. This would guard against imposition of categories, in case the English philosophical discourse seems to lose meaning when processed in African language, because of the insufficiency in the language due to specifics of culture, environment and even accidental idiosyncrasies of the people concerned.

He acknowledges the fact that there are conceptual and methodological disparities in the thinking of different people. However, overriding this fact, he said, is the fact about language, that we can comprehend even what we find difficult to translate.<sup>54</sup> According to him, there is the necessity for cultural decolonization, that is, decolonization of the mind, through sustained and critical reflection of the foreign

categories of conceptualization which Africans inherited through colonisation.<sup>55</sup> Wiredu gives three conditions which need be satisfied for the rational and effective pursuit of translation to take place. These include;

- i. The necessity and importance of the enterprise must be clear.
- ii. The ideas and techniques must have universal intelligibility and applicability, and
- iii. There must in any particular case be an adequate mastery of the given African or foreign language and the body of knowledge.<sup>56</sup>

These three conditions given by Wiredu, though necessary, are not sufficient for adequate translation. At the back of the translator's mind should be the principle of charity as stated by Davidson, which requires that,

- i. Any language makes sense in terms of taking any of them as making truth claim.
- ii. Any language in making sense does not differ radically from any other and
- iii. The generalised principles which are operative in our language will also work, at least up to a certain point, for the language we want to translate.<sup>57</sup>

### **Thomas Kuhn**

#### **Incommensurability**

In his book, *The structure of scientific revolution*, Thomas Kuhn emphasises a notion which he calls "incommensurability." Incommensurability states that comparison between theories will not be as straightforward since the criteria for evaluating them are liable to change. This type of challenge in comparing theories is what Kuhn, as well as Feyerabend called 'incommensurability'.<sup>58</sup> Theories are said to be incommensurable when they do not have any common measure. So, if paradigms are the standard for measuring attempt at puzzle-solutions, it means that puzzle-solutions

which developed in different eras of normal science will be judged by comparison to differing paradigms, and therefore devoid of a common measure. Three types of incommensurability may be distinguished. These are;

Methodological incommensurability, Perceptual Observational incommensurability, and Semantic incommensurability.<sup>59</sup>

### **Methodological Incommensurability**

In methodological incommensurability, there is no common measure, since the techniques of comparison and evaluation undergo changes. Puzzle-solutions are evaluated through making of reference to different paradigms. In methodological incommensurability, advocates of rival paradigms may not be of the same opinion on which problems a competing paradigm should resolve.<sup>60</sup> In a nutshell, the factors which determine the choice of theory are not fixed and are not familiar as well. These factors vary and depend particularly on the framework within which the evaluation is taking place. As a result of this, there is no assurance that individuals working within the same disciplinary culture would be in agreement on the theory for their evaluation.<sup>61</sup>

Despite this, the room for divergence will be lesser in the same disciplinary culture than when communication is with individuals of different disciplinary cultural background. In spite of this variation, there can still be widespread agreement on the attributes that are desirable for a new puzzle-solution or theory.<sup>62</sup> Kuhn enumerates five important features that serve as foundation for a choice of theory. These are

- i. Accuracy: empirically adequate, with experimentation.
- ii. Consistency: both within and outside, with other pertinent currently acknowledged theories.
- iii. Scope: its implications should go further than the data it is expected to explain. It must be broad.
- iv. Simplicity: phenomena must give the simplest explanation.
- v. Fruitfulness: (useful for further research) should disclose new phenomena or new relationship.<sup>63</sup>

However, there have been criticisms against these criteria for choice of a theory presented by Kuhn. The first criticism is that there may be dispute about which features of the theory satisfy these criteria. In addition, these measures are not precise and there is the possibility for disagreement on the extent to which these criteria hold. Another criticism is that, there can be differences in opinion on how they can be evaluated comparative to one another, most especially when these theories conflict.

### **Semantic Incommensurability**

The fact that the languages of theories from different eras of normal science may not be inter-translatable makes an impediment to comparing those theories. Kuhn expressed meaning holism, that the meaning of terms are interconnected in such a system that if one changes the meaning of a term, it will consequently result in changes in the meaning of other terms that are related in the conceptual web.<sup>64</sup> The strands of this conceptual web are space, time, matter, force and so on. Kuhn lays emphasis on Semantic incommensurability. He states that certain kinds of translation are impossible.

Kuhn's incommensurability thesis is different from Quine's indeterminacy thesis in some ways.

- i. Quine states that if we are translating a language into another, there are multiple ways in which we may give a translation that are compatible with the overt disposition of the speakers. However, one cannot take any of the translations as the most uniquely correct translation. Kuhn in contrast to this view of Quine claims, that incommensurability is, not having any fully adequate translation.
- ii. Secondly, Kuhn believes that the expressions translated do have a meaning contrary to Quine who rejects the idea that expressions are meaningful.
- iii. While Quine states that reference is inscrutable, Kuhn states that reference is not inscrutable but is only not easy to recover.<sup>65</sup>

The nature of the problem of incommensurability of translation arises based on these assumptions that meaning is holistic locally; if there is a shift in the meaning of one

part of the lexis and structure, there will be a corresponding shift to all its parts. Hence, to understand one paradigm through the conceptual network and terminology of another rival paradigm is not possible.

Kuhn applied this notion to quite a number of different areas all of which have a common pattern. This applied to translation in the following ways:

i. **There is no neutral language.**

Kuhn states that different paradigms, even if they use the same words or concept will use it in different ways. Individuals who are committed to different paradigms when they discuss will not do so based on the same platform. This is because they will use, same or similar terms in different senses. The result will be that rather than discussing on the same pedestal, they tend to 'talk through' one another. The justification for this is that any part of a theory can affect the meaning of the terms used in that theory. Kuhn says that there is no difference between sentences that are analytic and those ones that are synthetic. Therefore, it would not be easy to give neutral definitions of concepts or vocabularies that are shared by different theories, which both epochs can accept. As a result, it will be extremely difficult for proponents of a paradigm to even understand what the other person from another background is saying or the information he /she intended to pass across.

ii. **There is no neutral observation**

Kuhn states that whatever a person observes rests to some extent on the person's theoretical leanings. Observation is "theory - laden". It is those theories that provide the framework in which observations are classified. The categories provided therefore affect what a person or group sees. The ideal choice of theory by the positivist is a situation in which two competing theories which made opposing claims or observational predictions, are subjected to crucial experiment.

The one that comes out better would be chosen over the other. However, Kuhn believes that the matter is not as simple and straight forward as this. More often than not different theories will handle different sets of observations. Even when their observations seem to overlap, they may be interpreted differently according to the perspectives of the observers. Two individuals can look at the same letter or image



from different perspective and give different interpretation. Examples of this is looking at the number '6'. This may be interpreted as '9' by another depending on the angle from which it is observed. The same goes for the 'duck-rabbit' drawing. For an individual, the diagram looks like a duck, and for another, it looks like a rabbit. This shows two individuals can see or observe the same thing and see totality different things.

iii. **There is no neutral choice for criteria**

Kuhn seems to suggest that each 'paradigm' has a set of evaluative criteria that it carries with itself. It scores itself so well based on these standards. Since each paradigm decides and evaluate itself based on its set of criteria, no neutral criteria are available that will decide which theory is the best.

In *Objectivity, value judgment, and theory choice*,<sup>66</sup> Thomas Kuhn states that there are general criteria for choosing theory which almost everyone can agree upon. These criteria include; simplicity, scope, and coherences with existing theory and so on .He however cautions that proponents of different theories may still interpret these criteria in different ways.

iv. **There is no neutral world**

Kuhn makes a radical claim that those scientists who are committed to different paradigm, in a particular sense, "live in different world". He does not deny the existence of a real world, but yet states that the one we experience and live in undergoes changes when our theories change.<sup>67</sup> The claim that there is no neutral world seems to involve some kind of metaphysical claims of anti-realism pertaining to the empirical world. This is combined with the acknowledgement that a real world exists that does not change with our theories that are changing.

Thomas Kuhn's point of view in this wise is similar to that of Kant. The difference is that while Kuhn postulates different worlds for different paradigm, Kant states there is only one human paradigm and therefore only one empirical world. He agrees with Kant that the really real, independently existing world, which Kant calls "things - in itself" is totally unknowable. Not only this, but also that the empirical world which is knowable, is partly influenced by our categories or concepts.

One of the charges against Kuhn that is very common is that, he is a relativist, since he says that all evaluation is relative to a paradigm and since there is no paradigm independent means of evaluation. Paradigm itself has no means an individual can evaluate it. What counts as a puzzle and what count as a solution are dependent on the paradigm that is used at a particular period in time. However, a new paradigm must, at least, make an effort to retain most of the puzzle-solving ability of the preceding period and able to solve some of the challenges that were in the previous era.

Incommensurability is therefore only partial. Most of the puzzles from the previous period by recognition need to remain the same as that of the earlier ones or at least the ones that succeeds the earlier puzzles.

### **J. L. Austin**

#### **Speech-Act Theory**

Speech acts theory is a pragmatic reflection which evolves from the pioneer and revolutionary work of John Austin. In *How to do things with words*,<sup>68</sup> Austin considers that the truth-conditional account of the use of language as posited by the Logical Positivists is faulty, due to the “descriptive illusion”<sup>69</sup> which leads to the supposition that the main objective of language is that it is principally directed at saying true things. Rather, language transmits specific piece of information about something, either about the world or the thought of the speaker about the world. The pragmatic aspect of language was emphasised by Austin that discourse may lead to action. A speech act as an utterance performs a function in communication. A speech act is carried out when words of greetings, apology, complaint, request, compliment, invitation, and so on, are uttered. It may contain a word like ‘No’, to make a refusal or denial, and ‘sorry’ to make an apology.

Different types of “Speech acts” may be distinguished. These include promises, declarations, statements and so on. Any of these has peculiar conditions of felicity which are determined conventionally and contextually and which do not have anything to do with truth-conditions. Thus, the felicity of a statement would depend on certain conventions.<sup>70</sup>

J. L. Austin observes that certain sorts of sentences seem to be designed in order to 'do' something. For instance, "I pronounce you husband and wife" which is to (wed) perform an act, rather than to merely say something. He therefore calls such sentences *Performatives*, as distinguished from another sort of sentences which he calls *Constatives* which is a merely descriptive sentence. Austin posits that every normal utterance has both a descriptive and an effective aspect of it. He regards saying something as also doing something at the same time<sup>71</sup> To replace the initial differences between performative sentences and constative sentences. Austin classified speech acts into three basic categories which apply to all possible utterance. These are; (i) Locutionary Act, (2) Illocutionary Act and (3) Perlocutionary Act

- i. **Locutionary Acts:** These are acts of speaking which expresses sense or reference. It is involved when certain sounds are made using specific words in accord with 'the grammatical rules of a certain language. For example, 'A dog is an animal' or 'a table is flat. This is the basic act of utterance which generates a meaningful linguistic expression. It is the act of saying something through physical utterance of words.
- ii. **Illocutionary Acts:** These express the intention of the speaker through the use of a performative verb. It emphasises the acts done in speaking which is apparently the purpose of using the sentence. For instance, "I baptise this ship 'the spirit of Galway'".<sup>72</sup> These are the actual actions that are performed through the utterance. An utterance is formed with some sorts of functions in mind, that is, intention or desire of the speakers. The communicative force of an utterance is called illocutionary force.
- iii. **Perlocutionary Act:** This is the effect which is produced on the hearer or listener as they pay attention to a locutionary act, which elicit a response on the listener. It may be intended or not. Perlocutionary act involves the production of effects on the thoughts, feelings, or action of the audience or listener. For instance, this produces belief that makes the audience accept that Joseph and Mary should be considered husband and wife.<sup>73</sup>

Austin makes a distinction between the locutionary 'Meaning' and the illocutionary 'force' of the utterance. For clear interpretation and translation, there must be independent knowledge of the use of the words in the context.

John Searle, however, believes that the taxonomy used by Austin is defective as it lacks criteria for differentiating a variety of illocutionary force from another. Searle<sup>74</sup> divides illocutionary acts into five basic types. These are; (i.) Directive (ii.) Commissive (iii.) Representative / Assertive (iv.) Declarative (v.) Expressive. He states that illocutionary act is a discussion between the first and the second person. By giving *directive*, the speaker tries to make the hearer do something. Words such as, ask, order, command, beg, plead, request, entreat, pray, demand and so on. Example of this is, 'Go out now', 'Bring that book'.

In *commissive*, the speaker commits himself / herself to future action. Verbs such as promise, swear, guarantee, threatening, refuse and so on.

In *representative or assertive*, the speaker asserts that a statement or proposition is true. By *declaration* the speaker alters the external status or condition of an object, situation or context, solely by making an utterance. For example, 'You are guilty', 'Take him out'.

In *expressive*, the speaker expresses an attitude to a state of affairs or about a state of affairs. Verbs such as congratulate, thanks, praise and apologise.<sup>75</sup> Searle's analysis of speech act is different from Austin's own in some respects. Searle makes a rigid distinction between the content and the force of the speech act. This is not present in the analysis made by Austin. Another distinction is that Searle's analysis is based on the intentional view. The implication of this is that the intentions of the speaker and the recognition of these intentions are very important to realising speech act. Austin, however, states that a person cannot carry out an act by making reference to intention.

In addition, Searle states further that a person may carry out a speech act only if he / she exhibits the intention to do it, through the use of such a sentence and if one exhibits such intention to embark on all the obligation of the speech act one wants to perform. Therefore, Searle's scrutiny brings together conventional and intentional parts in order to put up a new semantic account of speech. This claims that what is needed to put up a speech act is not just certain process, but also a certain cognitive content (the intention). Thus, the speech act does not really modify the world any longer, but now has to do with the way the audience or listener perceives the speaker's intention. It directs attention to a modification in concept "in the head" of the speaker.<sup>76</sup>

Other conclusions may be drawn from this intentionalist perspective. If speaking is considered a way of making explicit a person's intentions to put together certain speech, then speaking can be perceived as a communication of intentions. Language can therefore be grasped as a medium of communicating to others.<sup>77</sup> Searle sees language as a non-natural method of meaning something. It is a way of communicating some intentions. He departs from Austin's philosophy of ordinary language. He decides not to put forward a theory of speech but that of communication. Grice makes a distinction between natural meaning and non-natural meaning. The natural meaning is close to natural and regular relations between two elements in the world. For example, clouds mean that it will rain.

The non-natural meaning consists of all conventional meanings, particularly linguistic meanings. As opposed to Austin's position, Grice tries to make a profound explanation of non-natural meaning based on intentions and not largely on conventions. When a speaker uses something that has to do with intention to give information to the listener, he is using a non-natural means. For example, when one says "it is raining," the speaker intends to generate the belief that it is raining. This is done by making the hearer recognise his/her intention to influence him/her to believe that it is raining. This is to convey to the listener that the utterance the speaker has made connotes certain meaning. Through the convention of intentional uses, language then develops into a code that has a semantic content to decode.<sup>78</sup>

However, language on its own can be used to pass message across, other than the coded content. The message conveyed may not be incorporated in the meaning of the sentence in its propositional content. By inference, the sentence, "it is raining" may intend to mean, "I am not ready to go out now." This may be in answer to the question, "Can we go out to play?" The implication of "it is raining" to this kind of question may be, "the weather is bad and I cannot go out now.'

The question one could ask is that, how does an individual determine the inference that can be made from the sentence? Also, what is the assurance that the hearer or listener would be able to grasp with such inference? The inference can be established because communication is a practice based on cooperation of social individuals. It is determined by many principles of conversation, which are universal in nature. These principles govern linguistic behaviours and inferences. Thus, the conventional

implication of “it is raining” may be “the weather is poor.” However, if the conclusions do not follow directly from the linguistic meaning, then we have conversational implication that is made based on the ‘conversational principles.’<sup>79</sup>

### **Felicity Condition**

Thus, Austin’s focus is the task accomplished by speech and not so much about what is said. What is said, then, depends on what is done. Austin’s concern is majorly the use in which language is put into “utterance” which he says could be distinguished from “sentences”. When words are uttered, it does not only depend on truth-conditions, but aims at specific “felicity conditions.” Felicity conditions are factors that need to be present for a speech act to be successful.<sup>80</sup> Specific conditions of felicity are related to every kind of utterance.<sup>81</sup>

A felicity condition is fulfilled when the ‘circumstances’ are adequate for using a sentence and not just when the substance of a sentence is true.<sup>82</sup> For example, if I say “I promise to visit an orphanage”. It is only if the listeners trust me that determine whether I have actually made a promise. If they do not, then a felicity condition has not been fulfilled. Therefore, the assertion fails because there is no justification. In the same vein, a promise does not fail for the reason of the falsity of its content but due to its inability to perform it as an action.

When one makes a study of the different kinds of speech acts, it reveals that determining whether the act is successful or not depends on other extra-linguistic conditions. For example, for an act of baptism to be performed, it has to be done by a competent authority. That is, someone who is entitled to do it. A person who is a priest can baptise a child. So also can a judge discharge and acquit an individual accused of a crime. The actions performed by these competent individuals usually have a ritual structure. This requires special words or phrase which has to be spoken correctly, failure of which the speech acts misfires.<sup>83</sup> Despite the fact that Austin tries distinguishing between the three types of speech acts, it is usually very difficult to separate them in practice. To separate illocutions and locutions are not as such easy, the same with the separation of locutions and perlocutions.

The main suggestion that Austin made for distinguishing an illocution from a perlocution was that illocution is “conventional” as it could be made plain clear by the performative formula; but perlocution could not. This distinction however, is a mere possibility and not a practicable test. The test may give unequivocal evidence as regards what is not an illocutionary act, but cannot convincingly state what the illocution really is. If for instance somebody says “The building is about to collapse“. He may be taken to make a locution. His sentence may be translated as directing attention to the building , making reference to the condition of the building, that is about to collapse. However, another person may look at the illocutionary act of the statement and take it to be a warning statement. It may thus be taken to be, “I warn you of the danger, that the building is about to collapse.” This may lead to translational differences, if translated based on the understanding of different translators, thus leading to indeterminacy as pointed out by Quine. If such translation differences occur, Can we say it is because of ambiguity in the statement or lack of understanding of the hearer? How do we determine the intention of the utterer of the speech?

Austin sees the kind of imperfection that speech acts are liable to. His interest was motivated by the way things can go wrong in speech acts even when they appear normal at first sight. There are indirect speech acts where the literal meaning of a sentence is not what the speaker wishes the hearer to use in his / her interpretation. For instance, ‘It is very cold in here’ when it is not expected to be interpreted as a complaint, but as an indirect request to switch off an air conditioner. This may be said as an act of politeness. Such request may allow the person being addressed to have the option of either to comply or refuse the implied request without picking offence. For two translators therefore to translate this simple statement, “It is very cold in here.” A translator may translate on the face value, making the sentence a complaint, while another may understand the request being made and translate it as such. This will not be a case of indeterminacy but purely an incorrect translation on the part of one of the translators. This shows that many of the so called indeterminacy are determined by the level of understanding of the translators on the subject matter and knowledge of the concerned languages.

Language may be used to send messages of which content is differently coded in the sentence written. For example, “It is too cold this morning,” may mean I will not take



my bath this morning or that if at all I will take my bath, it will be with warm water. However, what is communicated by “It is too cold this morning” is not integrated in the interpretation of the sentence uttered in its propositional content. Thus it cannot be reduced to what is uttered but can only be inferred or implied.

Inference is made possible for the reason that communication is a cooperative practice. It is influenced by many principles of conversation which are universal. The ‘implications are conventional if the inferences are only made based on the conventional meaning of the words used in the sentence. However, “conversational implicatures”<sup>84</sup> are made if the inferences do not follow directly from the linguistic meaning. These are based on the conversational principles. It is possible for a speaker to violate conversational principle in one way or another. Yet, the listeners will be able to translate the linguistic act in a rational way due to the meta-principle of cooperation in a social environment.

According to Austin, perlocutionary acts are not conventional. By insisting on the non-conventionality of perlocutionary act, Austin’s theory undermines the potency of customs, norms, and traditions not only on the hearer’s understanding and interpretation of illocutions, but also on their performance of perlocutionary acts. This shows that Austin’s position did not take cognisance of the importance of customs and traditions of societies which on many occasions may be at variance with one another.

The norms adhered to by a people have social influence on the understanding of the audience and the interpretation that will be given to any sort of illocution. Thus, Austin’s view fails to take into consideration the “biases and prejudices of distinct conceptual schemes in the performance of acts.”<sup>85</sup> The implication of this is that an individual would not be able to experience the ‘world’ of the other, live their experiences and discover how genuine their beliefs are. Secondly, if one is not privy to the contextual use of words and sentences by the other there would be no intersection of beliefs and attitude. Then there is the need to consider how and why a sentence that is meaningful in a society would be apparently absurd in another.

Speech acts are not so easy to perform in translation because to understand the idiomatic expressions or cultural standards in the second language may be difficult. The translators may hence, transfer, the rules and conventions of his / her first



language into the second language. He/she may presuppose that such rules and conventions are general. This is so as there is the natural predisposition of the translator to fall back on what they understand to be relevant and suitable in their first language. It is necessary that a translator knows exactly the nature and meaning of words being used in their first language before deciding what is transferable or amenable to translation.

For instance, when an individual decides to appreciate a host, by saying, "Oh! I love ginger tea," No English principle is tied to the statement that a person loving ginger tea constitutes appreciation and thus a way of thanking the person who has made the offer. However, the 'intention' of the speaker under the condition of utterance is a very important factor which plays a major role. It should, however, be noted that whichever is paramount between 'convention' and 'intention' does not guarantee that the listener would understand and properly grasp the content of the utterance. On the other hand, greeting someone through the utterance of the word, "Hi!" is a conventional way of greeting in English. However, if the person to whom the conventional way of greeting, "Hi!" is directed does not understand English, but speak another language in which the word means, "Go away", the attempt at extending greetings to the person is likely to fail. This failure is possible in spite of convention. There is therefore the need to strike a balance between convention and intention. Speech acts require both the knowledge and the proper use of such language within a given culture.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter examined the views of other philosophers on the possibility of translation from one culture to another. Among the views considered was Davidson's 'principle of charity' which has to do with the prospect of bridging the conceptual differences between cultures. Kuhn's idea of extensive incommensurability between worldviews was analysed. The idea he takes into account is that there really are (or the possibility of) definite conceptual systems that are not amenable to translation, one into the other. Many scholars have made broad use of this idea of Kuhn. As he argues that there are incommensurable scientific theories that represent the world differently. Sapir and Whorf also argue that the divergent linguistic systems of alien cultures lead to conceptual systems that cannot be harmonized with one another.

Wiredu however argues for conceptual disparity rather than indeterminacy or incommensurability. He pushes for the possibility of cross-cultural understanding through coining and borrowing where a concept does not exist in a culture. John Austin's speech acts was also considered. Each of these perspectives however has its strengths and weaknesses. The 'universalist approach' did not actually explain what aspect the universality actually covers or to state how to take care of different concepts with their cultural peculiarities and conceptions. The Universalists have standards that words or concepts need to possess before they can be recognised to apply across cultures. Some of these characteristics include logical coherence, rationality, inter-cultural intelligibility, objectivity and open mindedness. However, no matter the list of characteristics arrived at, meaningful translation would depend on the individual's own conception and perception of these concepts (what is to be translated). This invariably will have effect on the eventual translation. Having seen the limitations of these views, the next chapter shall examine a perspective of the Yoruba on translation.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### A PERSPECTIVE OF THE YORÙBÁ ON INDETERMINACY OF TRANSLATION

#### Introduction

In the last chapter, the alternative views of various other philosophers to Quine's Indeterminacy thesis were considered, to see the extent to which they could achieve adequate translation. However, it is discovered that each of these other alternatives has its own limitations. In this chapter, the perspective of the Yorùbá shall be examined to discover their views on indeterminacy of translation; how translation is achieved and the extent to which their system of translation has been adequate.

The Yorùbá is one of the major tribes in Nigeria. The ethnic group stretches and occupies South-Western part of Nigeria. The area which consists of the whole of Lagos, Ekiti, Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, a major part of Kwara and Kogi States and a part of Edo State. The Yoruba are not only found in Nigeria. They are also present in large numbers in some other parts of West Africa, such as; the South-eastern part of the Republic of Benin; Dahomey and Togo. Apart from West Africa, Yoruba are also found in South Africa and in the West-Indies. Yorùbá culture is also present and flourishing in South America and the Caribbean, most especially Cuba and Brazil.<sup>1</sup> The Yorùbá are dispersed throughout the globe.

#### The Meaning of 'Meaning' and 'Translation' in Yorùbá

The word 'Translation' in Yorùbá language is '*itumò*,' which morphologically derived from three words

- i. '*ì*' – *the act of*
- ii. '*tú*' - 'unwrap'
- iii. '*ìmò*' – knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

*Ìtumò* could refer to ‘translate’, ‘interpret’ and ‘meaning’, However, the verb *tú* could mean to unveil, reveal, unearth, unwrap or unconceal. Like we have in *tú àsírí* (revealing a secret). In essence, *tú* can variously mean to translate, to interpret or to ascribe meaning to or give meaning to something; to uncover or open up something hidden.

Further, if we remove the prefix ‘*I*’ such that we have *túmò*, a verb, which rendered fully would read: *tú ko mò* (unwrap to know); this is instructive of the very act of translation, interpretation and ascribing meaning to. *Ìtumòrò* is a narrow, more particular sense of *ìtumò*. *Ìtumòrò* refers to the knowledge of interpretation and translation of words, both oral and written.

This suggests that the Yorùbá believe that knowledge is a difficult task to accomplish and it is not accessible to everybody but ‘wrapped’ and, for access to be gained into it, it has to be “unwrapped.” “*ìmò*” could also mean ‘know-how’ in Yorùbá, which shows that ‘*ìtumò*’ not only means unwrapping knowledge, but also expertise or skill in unwrapping knowledge. It shows that it is not everybody that could attain the feat of unwrapping knowledge, but the skillful ones. By implication, translation, from the Yorùbá perspective, could be achieved only by those who are adequately skilled. Translation as an act, within the purview of Yorùbá thought, has passed through an evolutionary trend.

The Yorùbá believe that translation is both a linguistic and cultural act. The saying that, ‘*Bí a bá sún mọ̀ nì, là n mọ̀ se ẹ̀nì*’ (It is only when we move close to a person that we have insight into his/her actions) shows the understanding that translation, for the Yorùbá, involves both language and culture. Physical reaction to stimuli is not interpreted on the face value. Observation of stimulus constitutes appearance, but the real meaning of linguistic objects can only be comprehended when examined together within the cultural context in which the linguistic items are used. Therefore, when one is observing the activities of individuals in the culture from a distance, what the observer perceives is most likely to be at variance with the actual occurrence taking place in the culture.

Both language and culture are believed to have roles to play in shaping reality. Hence, it is important to make a clear demarcation between the linguistic meaning of a word,

term or statement and the conception attached to it. A culturally explicit term in a Source Language (SL) may not have the equivalent word in the Target Language (TL). Some words have immense suggestiveness in certain context, whereas some descriptions hardly have equivalence in other languages. The Yorùbá believe that meaning is not just the component of words, but it is that which permits the understanding of what each of the words stands for within the confines of the context.

### **The Evolution of Translation in the Yorùbá Culture**

The Yorùbá oral tradition of *Ifá*,<sup>3</sup> as a methodology (i.e. the act of divination), is pure hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is simply interpretation or technical interpretation, which involves the acts of analysis and synthesis. *Ifá* describes the manifestations of translation in the traditional worship of *Egúngún* (Masquerade). *Egúngún* is one of the Yorùbá pantheons of divinities.<sup>4</sup> It is ancestor worship and is believed to come from ‘another world,’ the ancestral world. *Egúngún* is called ‘*Ará-òrun*’ (one from the ancestral world).<sup>5</sup> This in itself is shrouded in the act of unveiling or opening up secrets (that is, as evident in reference to the *Egúngún* as *ará-òrun*), which further corroborates that *itumo* involves the hermeneutics of interpretation, translation and meaning.

The language of *Egúngún* is not understood by all, and is therefore expected to be translated by a translator, who is an appointed member of the ‘*Atókùn*’ (messengers) family. The messenger/translator is always readily available at the side of the *Egúngún* (Masquerade) to translate and pass on the meaning of the *Egúngún*’s speech to the listeners. *Egúngún* understands what everybody says, because he is a supernatural being, but only his translator(s) understand his language because it is a language from the spiritual or metaphysical world. *Egúngún* speaks a peculiar language (ancestral language) which is translated by his guide. This *Egúngún* translation tradition has passed from generation to generation to the present day by *Egúngún* worshippers in Yorùbá land.<sup>6</sup>

Another tradition of translation found in Yorùbá culture is that of *Òsanyìn* speech. *Òsanyìn* is the deity of herbal medicine in Yorùbá land. *Òsanyìn* involves the ability, capacity, skill and depth of the secrets of plants which then translates as knowledge of

the herbs; meaning that the speech of *Ọsanyìn* derives from the versatile and dense knowledge of the herbal world; making speech act in *Ọsanyìn* a pure act of *ìtumò*.

The priest of the deity is the translator of the communication between *Ọsanyìn* and the clients who consults the deity. This translator must translate in the way the client must understand. In these two instances of translation, that is, *Egúngún* and *Ọsanyìn*, the Source Languages are not actual mother tongues (as the traditional Yorùbá believe) neither are they regarded as foreign or alien, but the ‘voice of the gods,’ understood only by their assigned translators among their worshippers.<sup>7</sup>

Another form of translation among the traditional Yorùbá is found in drumming. The Yorùbá have the talking drum, *dùndún*. Its sound is expected to be understood by those who are skilled in it. They also have the *agidigbo* drum. This elicits the proverbial saying in Yorùbá, “*Bí òwe bí òwe là nlú ilù àgìdìgbó, ológbón ló ngbó, òmòràn ló n mọ*”. Translated, “The *àgìdìgbó* drum is beaten /drummed in proverbs, the clever ones hear it, and the intelligent ones understand it.” The Yorùbá expect every person in the community to demonstrate in-translation. As pointed out by Na’Allah

Each person must be capable of an explanation that his or her action makes sense to the community and not just expect the community to accept such action. Explanation or ‘sense’ here means translation; to make sense is to be able to explain one’s action meaningfully.<sup>8</sup>

Different people are entrusted with message and the onus is on them to bear this responsibility and deliver the messages from person to person and community to community. Na’Allah states further that

...any mistake in translation (not just transmitting speeches and conveying their proper meanings) may result in serious cultural consequences. The drum, the gong, and fire making in the bush or forest are all examples of traditional vehicles for conveying messages.<sup>9</sup>

These must be correctly interpreted and translated for the understanding of others within the community.

The Yorùbá do not bifurcate between the word “meaning” and “translation”. “Ìtumò” is used for both meaning and translation, therefore, there is no real ontological problem of how to translate “meaning”, for once translation is done, “meaning” is automatically transferred.<sup>10</sup> In the word ‘Ìtumò,’ (‘translation’ or ‘meaning’) the most important thing is that the translator is dedicated to the translation of the voices of the deities to the worshippers or clients. The translator does not choose his own way of translation, he does not convey implied, implicit, inadequate or inconclusive information. If he did any of this, there is the expectation of his being visited by the anger of the gods.

The translator does not even consider the state of mind of the client. He must not hijack the message and turn it to his own. The translator holds his office (as the translator) in trust for the community and the gods. The translator could therefore not “deconstruct” society simply to cause disarray or to challenge the idea of society’s truth. Neither the *Egúngún* translator nor the *Òsanyìn* translator is permitted to speak in riddles during translation. When translating their deities’ messages, however, their responsibility is to convey the meaning intended by their deities in the clearest way possible to the receiver. The duties of these translators involve decoding the messages correctly and ensuring the receivers or targets understand and go away with the correct intended messages.

All these forms of translations enumerated above, however, are just the evolutionary trends of translation from the Yorùbá thought system. They are as such not on the same critical pedestal with the kind of translation Quine is suggesting in his indeterminacy thesis.

### **Translation and Indeterminacy from Yorùbá Perspective**

When considering the perspective of the Yorùbá on translation as we have it at the level of Quine’s approach, there is a need to consider some of the earliest texts translated into Yorùbá language, as well as other Yorùbá language texts translated into English. These could be found in the early works of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther<sup>11</sup> who translated the English version of the Holy Bible into Yorùbá language. Translation in Yorùbá from one language to another takes its earliest root in this work of Crowther, and D. O. Fagunwa who wrote some Yorùbá novels and got it printed

through the assistance of the Church Missionary Society. Fagunwa wrote ‘*Ògbójú Ọdẹ Nínú Igbó Irúnmalẹ̀*’ in 1938.<sup>12</sup>

Also other novels of Fagunwa, such as *Igbó Olódùmarè*,<sup>13</sup> which have been translated into English Language, need to be considered. Translation in Yorùbá started as an offshoot of the activities of the missionaries who came to propagate religion. The missionaries translated the Bible into various indigenous languages of Nigeria among which is the Yorùbá language. Even though, the absence of established orthography creates some problems for the missionaries, but they were able to translate the bible into various indigenous languages like Yorùbá, using the literal translation method.<sup>14</sup>

### **Yorùbá Functional Approach to Translation**

The approaches used in the *Holy Bible* translations show that the scripture was translated into Yorùbá language to make it available to the speakers in their common language, as such there was application of domestication and borrowing of foreign terms. This emphasises the task of the translator as a moderator between two cultures. The critical analyses of the efforts made at the translations of the novel written by Fagunwa, titled, *Igbó Olódùmarè*, into English by two different translators, Wole Soyinka<sup>15</sup> and Gabriel Ajadi<sup>16</sup> on one hand; and those of the translations of the English Bible into Yorùbá on the other hand, lend credence to the understanding that sense, takes precedence over style, in these translations.

In the translation of *The Holy Bible* into Yorùbá, functional approach was used. The original translation of the Yorùbá Bible (*Bíbèlì Mímó*) and the subsequent translations of other versions of Yorùbá Bible have variations in the way some concepts and words are translated. For instance, the way ‘bread’ is translated into the Yorùbá language in these various versions of the Yorùbá Bible are not the same. *Bíbèlì Yorùbá Atọka* (BYA), *Bíbèlì Ìròyin Àyọ̀* (BIA) and *Bíbèlì Mímó* (BM).<sup>17</sup>

In the biblical period, ‘bread’ was a prominent nourishment which was generally identified with food, in the Bible. However, on some occasions, it indicates a specific kind of food (an admixture of flour and water, with or without yeast, which is baked). When yeast is added, it is called leavened bread, while it is called unleavened bread when yeast is not added. This is, however, not the situation in the Yorùbá culture. In the

traditional Yorùbá culture, bread was not part of their delicacies. Hence the Yorùbá did not have a name for it. This makes it particularly intricate to translate the word ‘bread’ into Yorùbá in the Bible. According to the research by scholars, it was found that the word ‘bread’ was written about 330 occasions in the King James Version (KJV) of the English Bible. Yet it has very few appearances in the Yorùbá versions of the Holy Bible.

In the first version, *Bibeli Yoruba Atoka (BYA)*, published in the 1880s, bread is synonymous with food in general. It is mostly translated as *ounje* (food), signifying that something is eaten but not showing the particular thing that it is. Nevertheless, whenever the bread is mentioned as a specific kind of food, it is referred to as *àkàrà*, a particular food of the Yorùbá people prepared from beans flour. In the latter version (*BMV*) published in the 1990s, bread as food, in general, is also majorly translated as *ounje* or the verb *je*, but whenever it is a type of food, it is rendered as *àkàrà*, with few occurrences of ‘*búrédì*.’ Luke 22: 19

‘*Ó bá mú **búrédì**, ó dúpé lówó Ọlórún, Ó bùú, ó bá fún wọn Ó ní...*’ *‘Bakanna ni Ó gbé ife fún wọn léyìn ounje, Ó ní ... (Bíbèlì Ìròyìn Àyọ).*<sup>18</sup>

*Ó sì mú **àkàrà**, nígbà tí Ó sì tí dúpé Ó bùú, Ó sì fí fun wón, Ó wípé,...Bèè gégé léyìn ounje alé, Ó sì mú **ago** Ó wípe...*(*Bíbèlì Mímó. KJV*).

In *Bíbèlì Ìròyìn Àyọ* (Good News Bible), ‘bread’ when it is generally used to signify food, is either written as *ounje* or translated literally as ‘*búrédì*’, an adaptation of the English version. However, where it occurs as a variety of food in this version, it is generally translated as *búrédì*. It is only on few occasions that ‘*àkàrà*,’ is used. This shows the borrowing of the word ‘bread’ as ‘*búrédì*’ into the Yoruba language and culture.

Going by Quine’s Indeterminacy thesis, indeterminacy occurs in the translation of these different versions of the Bible. While back translation of bread (*àkàrà*) would give ‘bean cake’ in the version of *Bíbèlì Ìròyìn Àyọ*, bread (*búrédì*), would translate ‘bread’ when back translated. The question of which would be a better translation would not occur as Quine posited, because there is ‘no fact of the matter’. Similarly, ‘**cup**’ is rendered as *ago* in one version and *ife* in the other version. While ‘ago’ in



Yorùbá traditionally referred to the ‘gourd’ used to bottle drinks like palm wine, ‘ife’ usually referred to a clay cup used for drinking water and other drinks.<sup>19</sup>

The English version of Luke 23: 48 says that when the crowd that came to see the crucifixion saw all that occurred, they “*went home in deep sorrow*” (*New Living Translation*). ...“*they smote their breast and returned*” (*King James Version*).<sup>20</sup>

...*Wón lu ara wón lí oókan àiyà, wón sì padà* (they smote their breast and returned) (*Bíbèlì Mímó*).<sup>21</sup>

.... *Wón padà, wón sì káwó lé'rí pèlú ibànújé*.<sup>22</sup> (They returned and put their hands on their head in deep sorrow) *Bíbèlì Ìròyin Àyò*.<sup>23</sup>

While ‘smiting of breast’ is the Jewish manner of expressing sorrow, a Yorùbá person would not smite his/her breast (chest) to express sorrow, rather he/she does this to express pride. Instead, to express sorrow he/she puts the two hands on the head. Indeterminacy occurs in these translations according to Quine. Putting hands on the head and beating of the chest cannot be said to be expressing the same thing however. If the aim of the author is to enlighten the Yorùbá on how the Jews express sorrow, this fact would be enough to show that ‘smiting the breast’ would be a better expression than putting hands on the head. In like manner, if the intention is to express the depth of their sorrow, ‘putting their hands on the head’ would be a better expression.

This shows that in Yorùbá, such expressions as this could not just cave in into indeterminacy but the degree of accuracy needs to be determined based on the available facts within the cultural milieu. Yet according to indeterminacy thesis of Quine, one of these translations cannot be said to be better than the other. However for anyone who is well entrenched in the language, one of the translations would surely make a better sense than the other does.

Quine’s field linguist came into the field with the determinate meaning of ‘rabbit’ in his own culture. He did not assume that any English man could misunderstand it to mean rabbit tail or rabbit stage. This shows him coming from a determinate cultural background. If language cannot be used determinately, Quine’s attempt at communicating Indeterminacy of Translation to others would have failed, in that it



would be too complex to understand the meaning of his thesis in view of the numerous incompatible alternative meanings that would have been available.

A comparative analysis of two translations of a text by two authors would show differences in translation from the perspective of each of the translators. The second Yoruba novel of the renowned author, D. O. Fagunwa titled, *Igbó Olódùmarè*,<sup>24</sup> was translated by two different authors. The differences in translation by the two translators became evident right from the title of the book. While Ajadi Gabriel translated *Igbó Olódùmarè*, as '*The Forest of God*',<sup>25</sup> Wole Soyinka translates the title of the same book to be, '*In the forest of Olódùmarè*'.<sup>26</sup> As Gbadegesin notes, the differences in the translation reflect the goal each of the translators has in mind.<sup>27</sup> The aims of the two vary, such that their interests have effects on their approach and manner of translation of the intention of the author.<sup>28</sup>

The title of the book, *In the Forest of Olódùmarè* by Wole Soyinka is a fractional translation of Fagunwa's *Igbó Olódùmarè*. The translator substitutes the word "Olódùmarè", which he, among others, believes to refer to the supreme God in the cosmology of the Yorùbá. He also adds the preposition "in" so as to expose the connection of the nouns "forest" and "Olódùmarè". If the original title is back-translated, *Igbó Olódùmarè* would mean "The Forest of God". Soyinka consciously targets a well enlightened audience of his era. A critical evaluation of Fagunwa's *Igbó Olódùmarè*, and the translation of the novel into '*In the Forest of Olódùmarè*,' by Soyinka, clearly reveals the inclination of Soyinka's translation towards the target-oriented approach.<sup>29</sup>

From the translation of Samuel Ajayi Crowther, 'God' was translated as '*Olórun Olódùmarè*,'<sup>30</sup> However, scholars have observed the disparity between the conception of the Biblical 'God' and '*Olódùmarè*,' in Yorùbá conception. The controversy on whether '*Olódùmarè*,' is 'God' in the Yorùbá belief system has been seriously debated by scholars. The question of whether *Olódùmarè* is the same as God has been answered in three different ways by scholars. Among these scholars are the Western anthropologists who deliberately or not deliberately (mis)-translated *Olódùmarè*, as being lesser than God. The second group of scholars is majorly African Yorùbá theologians who have equated the status of *Olódùmarè*, with that of the Western God. Bolaji Idowu<sup>31</sup> posits that *Olódùmarè*, in Yorùbá belief, is not inferior in quality and

essence to the Western God that was brought to Africa. He claims that *Olódùmarè*, in Yorùbá cosmology, is supreme and almighty. Idowu gives the attributes of *Olódùmarè*, as being a creator, the owner of heaven and earth, omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the qualities attributed to *Olódùmarè*, He, *Olódùmarè*, also has some divinities that are given the responsibilities to carry out their individual assignments. The divinities were given almost absolute power to accomplish their tasks. Divinities such as *òbàtálá* were assigned with moulding the human body, *Èsù* was tasked with inspection of worship and *òrúnmìlá* was given the assignment of divination.<sup>33</sup> Idowu states that the functions that these divinities perform conferred upon them the authorities to be ‘almighty’ within their personal limits. Nevertheless their ‘almightiness’ is limited and totally subordinated to the unrestricted power of the maker Himself.<sup>34</sup>

Idowu has however been accused of promoting Western orientation and abandoning the African tradition that he set out to defend. He was said to have used the theoretical and intellectual instruments of the detractors of African belief system to promote Western value over African. The third group is a decolonisation school,<sup>35</sup> which has tried to divest *Olódùmarè*, of the foreign attributes imposed on his nature.

The conceptions of ‘*Olódùmarè*,’ by these three groups are at variance with one another. In the Quinean view however, the translations of ‘*Olódùmarè*,’ from each of these various perspectives fits into the structure of each conception. It would, therefore, be indeterminate. This is because there is no fact of the matter from which we can accept one or reject the other. Each will therefore be correct within its own considerations. According to Yorùbá traditional belief, *Olódùmarè* has the greatest knowledge. Despite this, there are accounts that some events occurred without his knowledge or exclusive of His direct perception. This is shown in the process of the practical phase of creation, the way it is sustained and the management of the universe, including even the realm of *Olódùmarè* himself, (*Òrun* or heaven).<sup>36</sup>

## The Nature of *Olódùmarè* and God

The connecting word between *Oló* and *marè* is *odù*; as we have in *odù Ifá*. In the Yorùbá mythology, *Ifá* is regarded as the *òrò* (word, speech) and *asírí* (secrets) with which *Olódùmarè* created the universe. If *Ifá* is regarded as the *òrò* (word, speech) and *asírí* (secrets) with which *Olódùmarè* created the universe; then, those very words and secrets constitute *odù*, properly so-called. It is instructive from the above that *Ifá* act of hermeneutics, translation and meaning is embedded in the hiddenness of *odù*. This immediately spells out how the act of translation is connected to the Yorùbá concept of *Olódùmarè*.

Some scholars conceive *Olódùmarè*, and God to have the same nature, while some believe the two are of different nature. While God is conceived as eternal, omnipotent, omniscience and omnipresent, *Olódùmarè* sometimes had the need to seek the assistance of *Orúnmilà*, one of the divinities to consult *Ifá*, who is believed to be the wisest one among the divinities. *Ifá* oracle is the channel of finding out the circumstances of events that is past, present, and also future. This insinuation regarding the restriction in the knowledge of *Olódùmarè*, is apparently one of the issues regarding the Deity, which is the subject of most disagreement among those who are used to the previous tradition that took its source from Idowu and supported by the cross-fertilisation of religion.<sup>37</sup>

In the writings of Idowu, one discovers the account of how some divinities were deployed to embark on the creation of the solid earth. There was the account of initial inability of the individuals detailed to do the task. Others however, eventually successfully performed the creation of the solid earth. The information about this breakthrough was then taken to *Olódùmarè*.<sup>38</sup> He was said to have at a time consulted an oracle to have knowledge on the possibility of his death. An *Ifá* passage says that ‘*Kòròfo*,’ the cult of the underground was the person who did the consultation of the oracle on behalf of *Olódùmarè* and affirmed that, nobody would ever hear of *Olódùmarè*’s death.<sup>39</sup>

A different tradition gave the account of the efforts *Olódùmarè* made to achieve immortality. According to this tradition, *Olódùmarè* massaged his head, using a substance called *Ìyèrosùn* (bar-wood dust). He did this so that he may never taste

death. Every part of his head then becomes extraordinarily gray.<sup>40</sup> Bolaji Idowu recorded these accounts in 'Ogbè (Ọ) yẹkú'.<sup>41</sup> Bewaji notes that the English translations made available by Idowu seem less than being the most suitable, the most precise or faithful.<sup>42</sup> According to him, the second line cited in the *Ifá* verse, conversed like *Olódùmarè* did not personally conferred with the *Ifá* Priest of the Underground. It looks as if the priest of *Ifá* had the consultation, devoid of any demand by *Olódùmarè*. The second one also talks to show that the oracle supports the immortality of *Olódùmarè*. However, if the passage is well analysed, it will be so clear that *Olódùmarè* himself consulted his wise men. Similarly, *Ọkànràn Ọsà*, a passage of *Ifá* states that nobody will ever hear that Olodumare is dead.<sup>43</sup>

One of the important analyses that Idowu made that is of crucial significance in the reflection on *Olódùmarè*'s qualities is that, *Olódùmarè* himself was the one who personally looked for the means of immortality. Due to the request, he was asked to perform certain rituals, to make for himself a bulky chunk of white cloth. After the essential sacrifice had been carried out, the white fabric was stretched over him, thus, he was totally sheltered from death. Since then, he has become immortal.<sup>44</sup> Idowu did try to divest himself of the persuasion of Christian theological demands and ontological categories. Thus, Idowu says there is a legend that claims *Olódùmarè* at a period in time was at a loss over a very crucial issue. Several attempts were made by other divinities but they failed to acquaint him with the cause of his bewilderment. *Ọrúnmìlà* alone had a breakthrough at discovering and showing on the cause of the problem.<sup>45</sup>

This indicates that, even though, *Olódùmarè* is embedded with the primacy of wisdom, still he has assigned to a divinity the duty of revealing the sources of problems, administering therapies or prescriptions and counselling. To reduce the total implication of this reality, Idowu observes that this account was made up to boost the esteem of *Ọrúnmìlà*, not taking into consideration the implication that it might reduce the attributes of *Olódùmarè*'s who is regarded as "all-wise".<sup>46</sup>

Bewaji, however, observes a contrary view to Idowu. For him, the attribute of Olodumare is not reduced just because *Olódùmarè*' endowed wisdom to a divinity. He states that empowering a divinity to take up a task does not have any negative impact

on the belief of the Yorùbá, neither does it portray any absurdity in their view of *Olódùmarè*. Furthermore, it is in no way, however little, subtract, from the "all-wiseness" of *Olódùmarè*. To say that because *Olódùmarè* created *Ọrúnmìlá* and his wisdom, therefore, using from the assets of a being that was created implies a diminution in the characteristics of the creator, is an irrelevant inference.<sup>47</sup> *Olodumare* can and does tap from the resources he created. Wande Abimbola also supports this point. He states that according to some Yorùbá myths, there were instances when there was no physical obstacle between heaven and earth, *Ọrúnmìlá* was called upon by *Olódùmarè* to employ his immense wisdom to proffer solutions to some challenges for Him.<sup>48</sup>

Abimbola's faithfulness was as a result of the fact that he was only bordered with the corpus of *Ifá* as the personification of the wisdom *Olódùmarè* bestowed on *Ọrúnmìlá*. He was not bordered with a characterisation of the features of *Olódùmarè*. Abimbola later narrates a story of a disagreement between an *Ifá* priest and *Ọrúnmìlá*, and how *Olódùmarè* decided to inquire from both sides to the dispute.<sup>49</sup> The implication of this claim is that if *Olódùmarè* is omniscience, there would be no need for Him to ask each party in a dispute to state his/her own side of the story. All that would have been needed was judgement based on his observable evidence.

This shows that *Olódùmarè*, in these regards, displays a different quality from the biblical 'God'. Similarly, some of the characteristics of *Olódùmarè* are completely in contrast to those of the Christian God. As a result, some theoretical and doctrinal challenges that crop up in Christianity do not come up for the Yorùbá traditional religion. The God of the Christian is shows profound mercy. He is slow to anger, but easily and quickly forgive those who did wrong, repent and ask for forgiveness. He is not interested in the death of the sinner but that he turns back from his wicked way and be saved. Whereas, *Olódùmarè*, in the conception of the Yorùbá, is a morally upright God. He implements and dispenses justice here on earth and does not necessarily wait for the life after death. This is because, justice on earth serves the function of being a deterrent to others, but it is not certain anybody will observe and learn from after-life punishments.<sup>50</sup>

Contrary to Quine's indeterminacy thesis, therefore, the difference in the conception of *Olódùmarè* and God by the adherence of Yorùbá traditional religion and the Western missionaries respectively shows that translating one to mean the other would be a category mistake.

### **Èsù and the Devil (Satan): Conflicting Interpretations**

There is the controversy whether translating 'Èsù' in Yorùbá to Satan or Devil is acceptable. While some scholars accept the resemblance between the two, some do not. There is the understanding that, in Christianity, there exist structural antagonism between God and Satan (Devil). The evil hosts of darkness frequently oppose the work of God work to obliterate it. Some scholars have stated that there is no real structural opposition in the Yorùbá religious conception.<sup>51</sup> According to them, Èsù in the Yorùbá cosmology could not satisfactorily symbolise the Devil or Satan in the Christian doctrine. 'Èsù', in the context of Yorùbá belief, is not rebellious to the work of God.<sup>52</sup>

The usual understanding and interpretation of Èsù, among the traditional Yorùbá, is as one of the major divinities. As Idowu emphasized, Èsù is principally a "special relations officer"<sup>53</sup> between heaven and earth. He is the superintendent general who frequently gives intelligence reports to *Olódùmarè* on the activities of both the other divinities and men. He checks and ensures he gives reports on their adequacy of worship in general. He monitors whether others perform the sacrifices required of them in particular. This shows evidently that as a divinity, he has the ability to do his task as assigned by *Olódùmarè*. Èsù inhabits a very important and unique office among the divinities. He effectively carries out his obligations devoid of fear or favour. Therefore, Èsù is a 'good' servant of *Olódùmarè*. He is the law enforcement officer who makes sure that adequate recompense and retribution follow any deed. His favour is, thus, curried and he is sometimes bribed by many. It is when such offer did not prevent or fail to lessen penalty for their misdeeds that Èsù is called a bad name. Especially by those who took offence at his not doing all that is necessary to assist them despite their readiness to play ball with him to curry his favour.

Idowu states that this act of given a bad name to Èsù becomes more pronounced with the introduction of Western religions. These new religious beliefs sought for correspondence of the Devil or Satan and discovered some attributes associated with

*Èsù* which made it a convenient substitute. This is due to the fact that any individual who compels others to do the right things, are not usually popular.<sup>54</sup> Despite the claim above, Idowu was still inclined to maintain the ambivalent perception of *Èsù*, when he stated that there was an unambiguous feature of evil in *Èsù*, and on that ground, he has been principally connected with evil things.<sup>55</sup>

Some scholars have supported the notion that the principal task of *Èsù* in this universe is to ruin things. However, despite this claim, some believe we cannot still equate him with the Devil. This is due to the understanding that whatever degree of 'evil' is found in *Èsù* can also be established to some extent in many of the other divinities.<sup>56</sup> The inability to take a definite stand which reverberates in the many passages in the work of Idowu, has made it an available composition for much 'fanciful interpretation and reductionism.'<sup>57</sup> Dopamu also laboured extensively, despite the fact that he displayed intellectual competence and erudition, to accomplish to a large extent the preferred Christian and Muslim translations of making *Èsù* the equivalence of Satan.<sup>58</sup> However, this is seen as a misinterpretation by some scholars.

This inclination was also available to some extent in the previous work Dopamu and Awolalu co-authored. Both of them lend credence to Idowu's ambivalence concerning *Èsù* in Yoruba religion.<sup>59</sup> The discontentment with the stand of Idowu and Awolalu on this inadequate ambiguity of the concept of Satan and *Èsù*, makes Dopamu to give an absolute correspondence of *Èsù* with Satan in his personal work. Therefore, he asserts that in Yorùbá belief, *Èsù* is often linked with the tendency and power of evil and it is in this sense that he regards *Èsù*, his figure, nature and character as the Devil or Satan.<sup>60</sup>

It is observed that Dopamu's project to equate *Èsù* with Satan or the Devil is not accepted by some scholars. Bewaji reiterates that if Dopamu's project had accomplished its purpose, it would have given a logical validation for an originally unwarranted and malevolent translation of '*Èsù*' as the Devil or Satan and the associated launching of the problem of evil into an unfamiliar cultural and religious background. Secondly, it would have offered the foremost precise management of a subject of interest across inter-disciplinary inquiries.<sup>61</sup> Dopamu's reasons for associating Satan with the Yorùbá divinity called *Èsù*, is his acceptance of the



authorities of the Christians and Muslims Holy Books. They both make reference to Èsù as Satan. Also, his allusion to the Yoruba cosmology that refers to Esu as having some elements of craftiness or evil in his nature.<sup>62</sup>

The claims above are seen to be deficient. It does not seem to be a convincing ground for such a significant inference. The conclusion that Èsù is Satan has untoward influence on the metaphysical, religious, moral, cultural, and linguistic understanding of a people. It has displaced and misplaced the actual understanding of the Yorùbá concerning this deity called Èsù. To begin with, that the foreign religious books equate Satan with Èsù and translate as such does not make the translation to be justified. As the Western religionists look for a suitable equivalence of Satan, the divinity with the closest features was imposed upon, not considering the disparities, and without any previous notification that such a translation is completely subjective and one of simple convenience.

From the foregoing, it is clear that Èsù is best regarded or comparable to the Greek hermes, because its basic role is to act as the medium between the invisible and the visible worlds. It is in this sense that Èsù is regarded as the messenger of both *Olódùmarè* and *Ifá*, being a messenger, it is the conveyor of messages from the visible realm to the invisible realm and vice versa. What this means is that Èsù is the agent that catalyzes interpretation, translation and meaning in *Ifá divination*. Instructive from the above are the acts of duality and complementarity, which form the core of interpretation, translation and meaning in Yoruba worldview.

There have been various other Yorùbá terms that have been translated in a similar manner, leading to further commission of the error of misconstruction, misconception, and misunderstanding. Scholars like Sodipo and Hallen have cautioned against such error.<sup>63</sup> In line with Quine, they argued in opposition to careless word-for-word translation of a linguistic expression into another due to the indeterminacy of meaning that may occur between the initial and the other language.

Also, the acceptance of the translation made available by the adherents of the new religions by the Yorùbá does not mean that their translation is precise; when a lie recurs again and again, it effortlessly puts on an apparel of truth. This is usually the case since most different teachers of religions continue stressing it everyday into the



hearing of the Yorùbá, that they were erroneous in their conception of Èsù, while the foreign holy books conceptions were right.<sup>64</sup>

In difference from the obstinate Satan of the religions holy books, both *Olódùmarè* and *òrúnmìlá* possess sufficient power to subdue Èsù and they have always put him to check.<sup>65</sup> From the Yorùbá tradition, Èsù is conceived as being a necessary friend of all the other divinities. He was regarded as an intermediary between heaven and earth. As a result, the equivalence between the Yorùbá Èsù and Satan could not be absolutely the same. However going by Quine's indeterminacy of translation, one cannot be an arbiter between those who translate Èsù as Satan or devil and those who do otherwise, because fact of the matter is not accessible.

### **Indeterminacy in the Translation from Yorùbá to English Language**

Soyinka's intention is to translate Fagunwa's novels to make the latter's works accessible to the non-Yorùbá speakers. He states that Fagunwa's style makes his work not so easy to translate. Therefore, to make it comprehensible to his target audience, he decided to look for the English equivalence of the expressions used for the people living in Fagunwa's corporeal world. Majority of the characters in Fagunwa's novels are strange to the English and other languages.<sup>66</sup> In order to make it easier for his targeted audience to understand Fagunwa, Soyinka adopted a method he said to be a tradition of inventive naming ceremonies and neologisms.<sup>67</sup>

There is the need to consider the translation of a text by three different translators. There is a clear case of indeterminacy as posited by Quine in these three translations of the same source manuscript, '*Igbó Olódùmarè*'. As Gbadegesin observes, the approach each individual takes in translating the title of the book, offers an indication on the substance that is fascinating to the mind of the translators; whether it is the grammatical constructions or the thematic outlook of the whole novel. Ajadi's adaptation of '*Igbó Olódùmarè*' is '*The Forest of God*'. He substitutes "God" (popularly used in foreign religions, especially among the Christian fold) for "Olódùmarè". He takes this from the common understanding of Yorùbá name for the Supreme Being as "Olódùmarè." The narratives in the book in no way discuss the forest as being the habitat of God or of his spiritual ministers. It is a place occupied by numerous incredible bizarre and strange spirits. The version of Soyinka's translation

is, *In the forest of Olódùmarè*. This permits the reader of this English translation to either accept “Olódùmarè” as the personification of all the elements in the fable or as an extraordinary being who operates as an unseen figure in the forest.<sup>68</sup>

Let us have a comparative analysis of the extracts of Fagunwa’s *Igbó Olódùmarè* by two English translators of this same text. Adebawo Modupe’s<sup>69</sup> translations compared with Soyinka’s translations in the chapterisation of the novel, *Igbó Olódùmarè*,

i. **Fagunwa:** *Ọjọ kejì lódò bàbá onírùngbòn yéúkẹ ẹnití ngbé ibi gegele òkúta.*

**Adebawo:** The second day with the bushy bearded man, who lives on the tip of a stone.

**Soyinka:** The second day with the furry-bearded one who lived on the rock promontory.

ii. **Fagunwa:** *Ìpínýà pẹlú bàbá onírùngbòn yéúkẹ ẹnití ngbé ibi gegele òkúta.*

**Adebawo:** Departing from the bushy bearded man, who lives on the tip of the stone.

**Soyinka:** Leave-taking from the furry-bearded one whose dwelling is on the promontory of rocks.<sup>70</sup>

Let us have a comparison of translations of Ajadi and Soyinka of Fagunwa’s novel *Igbó Olódùmarè*.

**Fagunwa:**

*Lòsàngáangan Ìjósí, nígbàtí mo jẹun ẹkejì tán, mo kúrò ní ilé mi, mo bó sí ẹhìn odi, mo jòkó mo lé góngó...*<sup>71</sup>

**Ajadi:**

It was on a sweltering afternoon, after I had eaten the second meal of the day, that I left my house and strolled to the outside of the city wall... I sat down... hugging my legs to my ches...<sup>72</sup>

## Soyinka:

One bright afternoon a long while past, after I had lunched, I left my home, strolled outside the fence of my compound... I sat...perched like the lord of all he surveyed...<sup>73</sup>

'*Lòsàngángan*' was translated by Ajadi as, 'on a sweltering afternoon'. This is to indicate the unfavourable weather condition that made the author to remove his cap, to allow fresh air blow on his head. This was, however, translated by Soyinka as 'one bright afternoon'. This translation would not justify the reason the author had to be 'forced to toss the covering' of his skull. While Soyinka translated '*jẹun èkejì*' as 'had lunched', Gbadegesin notes that *jẹun èkejì* (ounje èkejì) means more than the second meal as translated by Ajadi. The major meals taken by the Yorùbá are divided into three per day. They divide the day into three parts of a continuum; morning, afternoon, and evening. Breakfast is the meal taken in the morning; lunch is taken in the afternoon. Dinner is eaten in the evening.

The author's focus is not to discuss taking food repeatedly at a specific period of the day. The starting expression, *Lòsàngángan* (sun-drenched afternoon) removes the uncertainty doubt that may come with "*jẹun èkejì*". The meal that the author refers to is the "lunch". In another culture in which four mealtimes are observed daily, "the second meal of the day" would be translated beyond the purposeful meaning of the author.<sup>74</sup> This would not be due to the problem of language, but that of the inability of the translator to key into the correct understanding of the author's cultural reference.

Also, Soyinka's rendering of '*èhìn odi*' as 'outside the fence of my compound' damages the spirit of the original. This has put aside the ancient traditions of constructing very high walls for fencing round the town, in Yoruba culture, as a process of securing the people against foreign attacks whenever there were wars. In addition, the traditional Yoruba cohabit together in the community. '*Èhìn odi*' therefore goes beyond a common fence of a compound. It is therefore the "city wall".<sup>75</sup>

Gbadegesin observes that "*Jóko lé góngó*" is a self-exalted proud sitting position. The manner in which the man sat shows how important he felt or considered himself. Ajadi translates this as, "hugging legs to the chest". This may be understood as a form of punishment or sitting in an uncultured way. Soyinka on the other hand in his version

translates the same as “perched like the lord of all the surveyed”. This is closer to the original sense of the expression.<sup>76</sup>

Consider these translations from the same source text,

**Fagunwa:** “*Mo nmí hẹ́hẹ́hẹ́, bí ẹ̀nítí nsáré ìje, tí ọ̀kàn mí nlù kíkì bí ọ̀kò òfurufú*”<sup>77</sup>

**Ajadi:** “I was panting like one who was running race and my heart was beating very loudly like an aero plane”<sup>78</sup>

**Soyinka:** “I was panting heavily as if I was on a sprint field, my heart pounding like the engine of an airplane”<sup>79</sup>

The translation by Ajadi, literally considered, seems closer to what Fagunwa has written. This however, is not likely to make much sense to the foreign reader. Soyinka on his part shows vividly that it is the engine of an aeroplane or airplane that makes the kind of ‘beating’ or ‘pounding’, like the heart that the author talks about. Unlike Quine, any reader of the two could make a choice of which is better between the two alternative translations.

**Fagunwa:** ...*inú bí mi gidigidi, mo fa ojù ro bí ẹ̀niti ebi npa, mo npòsé bí ẹ̀nítí*  
*iyà nje...*<sup>80</sup>

**Ajadi:** ...I was angry at him, and I frowned like a hungry person: I was sighing like a man under stress...<sup>81</sup>

**Soyinka:** ...I was furious, my face was concerted by a frown like the face of a starving man, I sucked in breath as one in pain, tighten...<sup>82</sup>

These two translations above have watered down the spirit of the original in the use of the adverb, “*gidigidi*” which is for emphasis. The adjective (*gidigidi*), portrays moral depiction of the high level of displeasure prompted by an unwanted disruption.<sup>83</sup> This shows that contrary to Quine’s indeterminacy, translations may be judged as good or bad and one form may be seen as better than the other.

In the translation of another novel of Fagunwa, *Àdìtù-Olódùmarè*, (*The Mysteries of God*) the translator, Olu Obafemi writes in the preface his intention for translating the novel.<sup>84</sup> He informs the recipients the rationale behind the translation, the method of

the translation, the type of recipients the translator focuses on at the assumption of this translation enterprise and the difficulties he came across in the process of his translation.<sup>85</sup> As Obafemi stated, he had developed interest in the literary work of Fagunwa and was fascinated with his fictional novel right from his formative years. He stated further that he had wished during those years of innocence to find a way of giving people with different backgrounds, who are alien to Fagunwa's world, in reality and in fantasy, opportunity to have access into his imagination. However, he never expected that the journey of translation he embarked upon would lead to a translation for native speakers who have turned out to be the targeted audience.<sup>86</sup>

He acknowledges the impetus of Soyinka's translation of the first novel of Fagunwa titled, *Ògbójú Ọdẹ nínú Igbó Irúnmọlẹ̀*, which, he said, increased his yearnings to follow his footsteps in the translation of Fagunwa's literary work. Like his predecessors who had earlier translated Fagunwa's novel from Yorùbá into English, he also emphasised the challenges he faced in the process of translating Yorùbá into the English Language. These challenges came up mostly because of the style in Fagunwa's work. Some of the challenges Obafemi encountered were due to the reason that he did not have the privilege to study Yorùbá language in a formal school setting in spite of being a Yorùbá child.<sup>87</sup> This is because he was brought up and studied in the Northern Nigeria which is not a Yorùbá community.

He also acknowledged the fact that he was not formally trained in the act of translation. He stated that he did not have any educational instruction or practice in the art of translation. He claimed to be practically inexperienced in translation as a discipline. He sees the process of translation as intricate, due to its nuances, contextual matters and the behaviours of grammar of two different languages. He also sees himself as not possessing the capability to avoid inter-linguistic spillage.<sup>88</sup>

Knowing the importance of adequate skill in the art of translation, Obafemi therefore, prepares the minds of his audience that his translation could not be perfect. It could at best be an intermediate point between a result of an inexact science and the outcome of an individual who has imbibed two cultures. He is, thus, a bi-cultural individual, under pressure to have an equilibrium between fidelity to the source text in Yorùbá and plausible translation for English as the target language.<sup>89</sup>

The inter-linguistic spillage which may be avoidable if adequate skill is acquired, is not acknowledged by Quine as one of the major factors that may make different translations of the same text to have wide variations rather than being indeterminate. The fact of the matter would then be that some translations would be far from the centre of the continuum whether on the positive side or of the negative.

### **Fagunwa says**

*...ètè mí gbẹ, itó ẹnu mí yi, ikùn mi ri pẹlẹbẹ, ojú mí rí kán-ndó, mo lé góngó lórí igi....*<sup>90</sup>

Soyinka translates as:

...my lips parched, my mouth desiccated, my stomach flattened, my eyes bulging like eggs. I was suspended from the tree...<sup>91</sup>

### **Ajadi's version**

...my lips dried, the saliva in my mouth became sticky, and my stomach was flat; my eyes saw a lot of trouble. I sat roundly on the tree...<sup>92</sup>

There is the clear evidence of translation differences and contrariness in the two translations of the above text. Quine would want us to see this as an evidence of indeterminacy, whereas there is a vivid error of misjudgement of the meaning of the source text and malapropism on the part of one of the translators. It is observed that *Ojú kán-dó* (hollowing eyes) in Yoruba language is not one and the same with *ojú kàndò* (big/protruding eyes), the meaning of "eyes bulging like egg" that has been translated by Soyinka. This is a mistaken interpretation of the author's sense of using the expression. The word "kán-dó" is an adjective. It describes what those eyes have become after battling with long hours of exposure to starvation and distress during the period the narrator was on the top of a tall tree.<sup>93</sup> Ajadi's translation "my eyes saw a lot of trouble" is closer to the author's use of the words. In this case, Ajadi's translation can be adjudged better. However, this would be against the spirit of indeterminacy thesis of Quine, where facts of the matter cannot exist. Of course where there are competent individuals, facts of the matter will be available.

There are words or concepts in Yorùbá language that are not readily available in other languages. For instance in *Igbó Olódùmarè*, Fagunwa writes

... *Bí ó ti nbò ni ẹ̀sẹ̀ rẹ̀ ndún jìnwinjìnwin nítorí  
òpòlopò ìkaraun ìgbín ni wón gé wéléwélé tí etí  
òkòkan wón sì rí kiribiti bí etí owó sílẹ̀*<sup>94</sup>

This was translated by two scholars,

**Adebawo:** *As he was coming his legs were tinkling because they are made from broken snail shells ...*<sup>95</sup>

**Soyinka:** *As he approached, his legs kept up a tintinnabulation from snail shells which had been broken into little pieces ...*<sup>96</sup>

In the above text extracted, from *Igbó Olódùmarè*, the word “jinwinjinwin” is an idiophone in Yorùbá Language. “Jinwinjinwin” is a sound made when objects such as broken shells of snail are tied together with strings to produce a tinkling sound. This sound is a description of the outcome of the cymbal sound made when a mythical being in the novel was moving. The objects tied to the legs of the creature are made from shattered snail shells. Soyinka used a loan-word from Latin “tintinnabulum” (wind-chime) to get the word “tintinnabulation” in an effort to derive a translation of this extract in his target text.

By translating “*jinwinjinwin*” as “tintinnabulation,” Soyinka has been able to rigmarole a way out of the untranslatable feature of the sound that does not have direct replacement in English language.<sup>97</sup> However, the reductive tendency which manifested in this translation can be considered as qualitative impoverishment, as this extraction “tintinnabulation” seems to lack the sonority or “iconic richness” and the cultural connotation intrinsically embedded in the primary expression “*jinwinjinwin*” as apparent in the original text.<sup>98</sup> In like manner Adebawo’s description of ‘legs were tinkling’ has watered down the meaning of the sentence. In as much as it is not actually the legs making the sound, but the snail shells attached to the legs. Despite the inherent reduction in the two translations, Soyinka’s translation may be considered better for formulating the sound made by the snail shell while Adebawo did not.

## **Alternative Perceptions of the Yorùbá to Indeterminacy Thesis**

Apart from the fact that indeterminacy features in the perception of the Yoruba in the consideration of translation, there are other perspectives from which the Yoruba look at this issue. These include; incommensurability, empirical observation and the contextualist approach.

### **Incommensurability**

In the proverbs and words of wisdom of the Yorùbá, there are many sayings pointing to incommensurability of paradigms. For instance there is a saying that,

*Ajá 'wòyí ló mo ehoro 'wòyí lé (It is the dog of nowadays that knows how to pursue the rabbit of nowadays').<sup>99</sup>*

The literal meaning of the above proverb indicates that a dog that had the skill to pursue and catch hares in the previous years (eras) would fail to perform, if it is to be brought into the present period to pursue the modern hare of this era. This is because the modern hare is more likely to have developed new strategies of escape different from the ones the dog from the previous era is aware of and could cope with. It is therefore necessary to train a new dog, in the new techniques, to cope with pursuing the modern hare.

This indicates that modern strategies are needed to solve modern problems. In language, therefore, modern usage of a word or concept may be different from the use in the earlier time. There is the possibility for there to have been a paradigm shift. The Yorùbá somehow partially agree with incommensurability of paradigm. They agree that there is most likely to be a difference in attitude and understanding between language and experiences that have been divided by time and space. The tools used to solve problems in the earlier period may be outdated and no longer useful in dealing with the present challenges. As such, the meaning of words in the previous period may no longer be acceptable as the meaning of such words in a new era.



## Empirical Observation

An individual can gain knowledge from empirical observation, according to the Yorùbá. Keen observation of events and actions could be a basis for evaluation. The Yorùbá say

**Proverb:** *Òró jọ gáté kò jọ gáté, wọn ní ẹranko ẹlẹsẹ kan sá wọ 'gbó, ènìyàn ẹlẹsẹ kan jáde níbe.*

**Translation (literal):** (Word resembles unreliable talk, it does not resemble unreliable talk, they said one-legged animal ran into the bush and one-legged person came out of the bush).<sup>100</sup>

The proverb implies that if people are talking about a particular event, one needs to confirm the empirical observation of the event. This is to emphasise that when there is an argument over a matter, words can then be corroborated with action (observation) of the event. The Yorùbá believe in the empirical observation as a means of verification. This could be deduced from this Yorùbá proverb that, if one observed that one-legged animal ran into the bush and a one-legged human being comes out of the same direction where the one-legged animal entered the bush. Then we should begin to suspect that the animal that ran into the bush is the same person that comes out as a human being. This emphasises that physical observation as a means of verification can be used to justify a statement. This in a way agrees with Quine. However, physical observation as much as it is necessary in some cases, is not considered by the Yorùbá to be a sufficient condition for sound judgement.

## Yorùbá Contextualist's Approach

Yorùbá say

*Gáangan l'òrò ayé, ó kojú kan s'ẹ̀nikan, ọ̀tò ló kọ sí ẹ̀lòmíràn*

Translation (literal): The world issue is like two-faceted tom-tom native drum, it faces one on a side, and faces another person at the other side.<sup>101</sup>

This Yorùbá proverb gives the indication that perceptions of worldly phenomena sometimes are relative. The way individuals perceive the world are different from one

another. This also affects translation, as the way a translator would translate a given text depends on what he perceives and considers to be its meaning, based on his personal perception and judgement. The environment, personal experiences, economic and socio-political status, all contribute to the way an individual would interpret an occurrence. For instance, in the Yoruba culture if an individual is struck by thunder and eventually died, the interpretation of the occurrence would vary. While traditional religious worshippers would interpret that *Sàngó*, the god of thunder is angry, others with scientific inclination would see it as a natural occurrence. This will lead each to record and translate the event based on the context of their circumstances.

This informs the Yorùbá saying that,

*Gbogbo wa ò lè sùn ká kọ orí sí ibi kan.* (We cannot all sleep and place our heads in one direction).<sup>102</sup>

This shows that we cannot all think alike. Therefore, there cannot but be variations in the translations that we give to experience and our perceptions of objects and experience. Yorùbá expressions are full of idioms and proverbs. Idioms are not a separate part of a language which one can choose either to use or omit, but they constitute an indispensable part of the general expressions. These idioms have many sources, which include common sayings, proverbs, and jargon phrases, all of which are interwoven with the people's national cultural background. The national cultural background of each nation consists of its history, culture, religion, customs, literature and even such peculiarities as climatic condition, weather and nourishments.<sup>103</sup> An idiom is a sequence of lexis that when brought together means something not directly associated with the specific words of the idioms when they are isolated. The words are usually put together, often in odd, illogical, or even grammatically incorrect way. This is the reason one must adopt idioms and proverbs as a whole. One cannot change any part of them and they cannot be translated word-for-word.<sup>104</sup> If any part of the idiom is changed, the meaning would change accordingly. Similarly, if the words are isolated, it would give a totally different meaning hence, a different translation.

## **Problem of Translation**

To translate a text is considered by the Yorùbá to have its associated challenges. These include translation in excess of what the author has in mind or subtraction from the intending meaning of the source text. To acknowledge this challenge, there is a saying in Yorùbá,

*Òrọ̀ òkèrè, bí kò lé 'kan, á dín 'kan (Distant conversation, if one word is not added, one word will be subtracted from it).*<sup>105</sup>

This shows that there cannot but be differences in re-told stories or speeches. When a text is interpreted or translated, there is the more likelihood that there would be excesses or remainder in the meaning attributed to the source text. Similarly, if an author is different from the translator of the text, the tendency for the translator not to understand the motive behind the text is high. Also, if there was a gap between the source culture and the target culture, a distance in time and space, there is the likelihood that the translation would have added inputs from the translator that were not in the initial text. Furthermore, there is the possibility of a subtraction from the source text, in what is being translated into the target language. This is one of the challenges that require special skill in translation to overcome

## **Yorùbá on Education and Skill Acquisition**

Yorùbá people had their own indigenous notion of education before they made contact with the Western world. Even though the conception of education of the traditional Yorùbá is not the same with the Western understanding of it. Education is a life-long process for the traditional Yorùbá. It is regarded as any act or experience that has a moulding and influential outcome on the mind, physical and spiritual abilities, character and skills of a person, to allow him/her cope efficiently and reliably in the society.<sup>106</sup> In agreement with the perception of the Yorùbá, Babatunde Fafunwa gives the definition of education as, the totality of all the progressions by which a child or young adult build up abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour, which are of constructive value to the society in which he lives.<sup>107</sup>

The word “education” means *ẹ̀kọ̀* in Yorùbá language. The word *ẹ̀kọ̀* is broader in meaning than *ìmò* (knowledge), *ìwé* (literacy), *ilé-ìwé* (schooling), *ogbón*

(understanding), and *òye* (wisdom). Though these words are related. The word *ẹ̀kọ́* refers to the real exhibition and constant manifestation of the epistemic characteristics of knowledge, wisdom, understanding and other moral ideals of excellence. These ideals include; temperament, integrity, modesty in mind-set and self-discipline, in words and deeds. The word *ẹ̀kọ́* can be divided into two morphemes *ẹ̀* and *kọ́*. The first morpheme *ẹ̀* is a plural pronoun in Yoruba language which refers to many people. It connotes that a substantial number of people are involved in the training of an individual in the society. The morpheme *kọ́* means 'to learn'. *Ẹ̀kọ́* (education) then implies that an individual must learn from so many people with diverse knowledge and experiences before he/she can attain the level of education needed to be a functional member of the society.

The parents are the first set of teachers in the traditional *Yorùbá* society. It is the responsibility of the parents, the relatives and the community at large to be involved in the training of an individual. However, if a person refused to be educated, the blame for not being educated belongs more to the individual rather than the parents and the society at large. Therefore, education was a lifetime process for the *Yorùbá*. It involves inter-relationships among diverse occurrences that had shaping and determining impact on the whole character of a person in relation to his/her society.

The *Yorùbá* cultural understanding of education can be properly evaluated only in relations to being a good personality of integrated character. An educated person is expected to display reasonably well the constructive use of the physical, mental and psychological nature of the human being, and the ethical decency in his/her life in the society.<sup>108</sup> In as much as education is important, a person who is well trained is the one that other individuals want to follow his/her footsteps as a role model. Such individual has dignity, integrity and commands respect.<sup>109</sup> It is believed by the traditional *Yorùbá* that a person needs to be adequately trained to understand the cultural standard and values of the society and be prepared to always learn from the wisdom of both the old and the young in the community.

This shows that acquisition of skill is a means to an end and not just an end in itself. As a result, nothing could necessitate calling-off the pursuit of learning from other people's experiences. J. A. Akinpelu says of *Yorùbá* education that, the man who is

educated can be illustrated as a person who has acquired skills in some particular economic areas, combined with reliability of character and with prudence in judgement. He is the one who is well prepared to cope effectively with the challenges associated with living in the nuclear and extended family. He is well-informed in the myths, legends and genealogies of his ancestors. He also has expertise in handling health challenges that are minor and could give direction on the place to access counsel and assistance in major ones. He is an individual who is conversant with the ancestral spirits of the family. He is familiar with how to worship them. He has the capacity to carry out his communal and political duties. He is prudent and clever in judgement, speaks not in many words but instead communicate in proverbs and analogies, placing his audience in the position to find an answer to the puzzle of his thoughts. He is temperate and calm when others annoyed him. He is distinguished in sorrow and reserved in success. Finally and most significantly, he is generally of outstanding character.<sup>110</sup>

### **The Philosophical Foundation of Traditional Yorùbá Notion of Education**

Among the major philosophical ideology that lie beneath the Yorùbá notion of education is that the African notion of an educated personality, when compared with the Western idea, is characterised by the ideology of functionalism, social accountability, skill acquisition, political contribution and understanding, moral and spiritual values.<sup>111</sup> Education was not a formal structure in traditional Yorùbá culture, in disparity with what obtains in the Western education of the modern world. Instead, the process was informal and functional. It aimed at producing straightforward, upright, skilled and communally accountable manpower that would do the accepted things to maintain the societal stability and enhance the development of the community.

The people were given orientation to acquire skills of different kinds, based on the particular areas of social and physical needs of the community and natural world in which they inhabit. For example in the coastal and riverine areas, skills acquired included swimming, construction of canoe, navigation, fishing and netting of fish, among others. In areas within the rain forest, with vast expanse of agrarian land, the skills acquisition trainings were essentially based on farming, food preservation, weaving, building, hunting, blacksmithing and communication among others. The

natural environmental factors in each Yorùbá community influenced the type of educational instructions given to its associates. Thus, the traditional Yorùbá people did not have a universal operational curriculum.

The traditional Yorùbá notion of education is also different from the Western education in that it has a social side. It is different from the individualistic orientation of Western education. In the Yorùbá understanding, education does not exist alone detached from the society. Since the entire community serves as the school, education derives motivation and sustenance from the social principles of the community; and in a cyclic manner, the educated person is required to use the skill and knowledge he has acquired for the expansion, advancement and improvement of the community.<sup>112</sup> This aspect of social accountability is very obvious, based on the communal life of the traditional Yorùbá society.

The individuals, who were educated, were required to add value to the general well-being of the society. This is the progressive attitude of the Yorùbá principle of education. This concept of education involves a procedure of resolute and constructive revolution in a specified direction, which is directed by common and united spirits. It is a show of a powerful interconnectedness between the nature of man, the good of man and the physical and social environment. The principle implies that human beings are inclined towards making themselves perfect, to develop and progress in definite bearings that are more superior presently than they had been in the past; and for a better future. The principle of progressivism is a support pillar of the traditional Yorùbá idea of education. It specifies that skill and knowledge need be appropriated to generate feasible communal structures for systematic social transformation.<sup>113</sup>

Another essential principle that is fundamental to the Yorùbá indigenous system of education is moral conduct. Instruction on positive character development is pivotal to the Yorùbá practice of education. In contrast with the Western concept of education in which prominence is most often given to the cognitive feature of human being and the inherent importance of knowledge, to the detriment of the ethical and other potentiality of man; the Yorùbá view of education is shaped by the interest in morality and the tacitly accepted standard and values of the society. Ethical principles are taught, learnt and lived. Consequently, courage as a norm, is not just taught, it is exhibited.

Likewise, resilience and dedication to duty are not merely taught, but are also demonstrated. A person is taught morals by exemplars from childhood to adulthood, through direct instructions, songs, moon light folktales, proverbs, myths and other related means. Hence, on the whole, the principles that guided traditional Yorùbá education were; functionalism, progressivism and moralism.<sup>114</sup>

As Obanya, has appropriately elucidated the Yorùbá education has a purpose directed at two related important goals, which are; conservation and transformation.<sup>115</sup> For him, conservation involves acculturation - the alertness at transferring a community's values, skills, attitudes and knowledge from one generation to the other. Conservation also entails utilisation of indigenous educational principles of the Africans, to meet the contemporary requirements for the development of the continent.

The importance of skill acquisition to enable a person perform a task successfully cannot be over-emphasised. What comes easily to a skilled individual would be difficult for someone who lacks the necessary ability to perform the task. The perspectives of the Yorùbá on a wide range of issues are most often found expressed in proverbs. These also include their thoughts on language and translation. The saying goes that;

*Àkàrà d'enu akáyín ó de'egun* ('Bean cake gets to the mouth of the toothless and becomes bone').<sup>116</sup>

The Yorùbá believe that the task that is easy for an individual with an adequate skill may be a difficult task for another individual without a well-equipped skill. An important value in the traditional Yorùbá society, that influences their thoughts and behavioural pattern, is education. It may look odd initially to assert the interest of the Yorùbá society in education, due to the ethnocentric belief of some early modern anthropologists that Africans were primitive, "uneducated" and unenlightened. Education equips and prepares a person from childhood. A Yorùbá adage says

*Bí ọmọ ẹni kò bá gbọ ẹnà, a kì í fò ẹnà sí i* (If one's child does not understand signs or coded language, one does not communicate it to him).<sup>117</sup>

There are signs and coded language that a smartly educated individual is expected to understand. This indicates that sometimes words and concepts may be loaded with more than the surface meaning. The meaning attached to concepts may go beyond what a third party can easily decipher. It may be loaded with stories and histories behind them. The saying goes that

*A wítélè òró ló nǹé ọmọ mí gbó ẹ̀nà* (Previous discussion on a matter brings about ‘my child understand signs, codes or concealed sentence’).<sup>118</sup>

This is to express that parties in conversation understand the details of the case under discussion due to profound previous learning. The details may however not be available to the third party who may be lost in the discussion.

### **Competent Authority**

A person who has acquired a skill is seen as an authority in that wise. His words are taken to carry much weight. This informs the saying that,

*Òró tí Akúwárápá bá sọ, ará ọ̀run lo sọ ó* (The word mentioned by the epileptic is delivered by a heavenly personality).<sup>119</sup>

An epileptic individual is regarded as someone who shuttles between heaven and earth. Any claim made by such individual about what he/she saw in heaven when unconscious, cannot be faulted by those who have never made such journey. He /she is therefore seen as an authority on the after-life experience. This Yorùbá proverb directs attention to the importance and the need to accept as correct something said, or a speech delivered only by someone who is expected to be knowledgeable in the field. This ascribes importance to a thing or a speech delivered by one expected to be knowledgeable in the field. Such a person must have been seen to make conscious effort to acquire knowledge and must have demonstrated the impact of the knowledge attained in the recent past. It is believed that the speeches or utterances of some people cannot be taken serious. However, some people who are knowledgeable are regarded as authorities and their description cannot be faulted. A translator as well who have necessary training would become an authority in translation. His translation would therefore be far better than the ones who are not well trained.



In the education of individuals, such a person who has been educated is expected to be innovative. *Ọmọlúàbí* in Yoruba cultural understanding is a person who has passed through the basic training of the community and has been found to be responsible and exhibit high moral virtues. He / she should be able to develop the potentials in him / her to improve on the skill acquired. This reflects in the proverb that,

*Ọrọ̀ diẹ̀ là á sọ́ fún ọmọlúàbí, bí o ba de inú rẹ̀ a di odindi* (Few words are said to the wise or nice fellow, when they get into his mind, they shall be whole).<sup>120</sup>

In translation this implies that the translator is responsible to add or subtract, in a responsible way. In as much as it is recognised that few words can be spoken that would go beyond the mere expression, partial understanding of an expression is also regarded as a source of confusion. It is part of the responsibility of the translator to clear any confusing text and divest it of whatever is causing ambiguity or vagueness. A translator should be able to develop the text into what will meaningfully fit into the recipients' culture.

### **Being Concise**

The Yoruba recognise that anyone who is to take up the task of translation should have a firm grasp of the languages involved. The Yoruba say,

*‘Àgbòìgbótán èdè, tí díjà silẹ̀’* (Half understanding of a language that causes confusion).

If a translator did not understand the text to be translated, the outcome of the translation would not achieve its purpose. The translator should understand the cultural background of both the source and the target languages before proceeding on the mission. This will enable him / her to know how and when the text should be literally translated and when it is to be adapted. What creates a positive emotion in a culture, if so translated into another culture might cause a negative one.

### **Clarity**

Another important factor that the Yoruba believe is necessary for translation is clarity. Both the speech and its translation must be unambiguous. This is established in the Yoruba saying that,

*Àsòrò àìlà á l'ó pa Elémpe*<sup>121</sup> *ìsáájú t'ó ní igbá wúwo ju àwo lẹ.* (Making a statement without explanation killed former Elempe who said that a calabash was heavier than a ceramic plate. (He meant a complete calabash before it was cut and its seeds removed).

*Elémpe*, in Yoruba mythology was regarded by the people in his community as an embodiment of wisdom. He, however, made an unclarified statement that a calabash was heavier than a ceramic plate. While the king of the community corrected him that it was not the case, *Elémpe* decided to prove it, putting his life at stake. He was invited to come and proof his statement before the members of his community. The king brought out a ceramic plate and a complete calabash fruit, with seeds in it. *Elémpe* was asked to lift the two objects to show how calabash was heavier than ceramic. It was then it dawned on him that he did not specify that he meant dry processed calabash. This led to the order for *Elémpe* to be executed, for trying to mislead the community through his wrong teaching. This would also prevent him from corrupting the communal wisdom of his society. It was expected to serve as a lesson to others to propagate correct and adequate teaching for proper functioning of the society.

The implication of this for translation is that, a translator should always divest his / her work of any equivocation. It is only when the message in a piece of writing is succinctly put that it can generate the expected effect on the recipient. The same factor of clarity is emphasized in a similar saying that;

*Àìlè sòrò jálẹ lo pa baálẹ Ajẹkókóró ó ní déédé ibi tí mo bá ju isu sí ni kí ẹ wó l'ódó* (Failure to express himself clearly lead to the death of the Chief who ate a slice of yam, he said, pound with pestle the exact spot where I throw the yam).<sup>122</sup>

Chief *Ajẹkókóró*, in Yoruba mythology, wanted to prepare pounded yam. He instructed his children to use pestles to pound the precise spot wherever he put any piece of the yam. Unfortunately for him, at a point, he felt like eating a piece and throw it in his mouth. The children obediently pounded the mouth of their father, being the exact spot where the yam was thrown. This led to the death of the Chief. This is used as a warning for the danger of not expressing one's intention clearly without ambiguity. Translators are required to convey their messages in such a manner that the recipient would find it easy to absorb the intending message without error.

## Skilled translator

An important quality that the translator must possess is the capability to understand the message from the source, correctly interpreting the message and translating it accurately to the target audience. Thus, the Yoruba say,

*Òpèlè kò sèké, Oníkin ni kò gbó 'fá, ohun tí a bá da ifá sí ni ifá nsọ.* (The god of divination does not lie, it is the reciter who does not understand the god's message, it is what one consults the god of divination for that the god speaks on).<sup>123</sup>

Whenever (*Òpèlè*) the god of divination was consulted, the deity would always give an accurate prophecy. The deity usually relayed the prophecy through an intermediary (*Oníkin*), who had been trained and was expected to understand the language of the deity. *Oníkin*, therefore, served as the interpreter of the deity's message. However, it was discovered that some of the prophecies given by the deity were not correct or sometimes turned out to be outrightly false. The deity was, thus, accused of being a peddler of false prophesy. Other older and wiser priests of the oracle, however spoke in defense of the deity. Their discovery was that the oracle's prophecies were not false, but it was the interpreter that did not actually understand the message of the god and relayed contrary messages.

The above Yorùbá proverb emphasises that even when the message from the source is clear and unambiguous, the translator who is ill equipped to give adequate translation is most likely to distort the intended message to the target audience. Therefore, the possibility of a translator giving a wrong, confusing and ambiguous translation cannot be over-emphasised. As such any would be interpreter is expected convey the message in a simple language that would be easily understood by the recipient. Thus the Yoruba saying that,

*Èlà l'òrò, ibèpẹ ko sé jẹ lódidi* (Speech must be split; the pawpaw cannot be eaten as a whole without being split).<sup>124</sup>

This indicates that speeches should be well explained for unambiguous understanding. The competence of the speaker or translator in 'splitting' explaining the meaning of the speech would determine whether the intended message would reach the target

audience. This emphasises that the Yoruba consider congruency as an important factor in communication. It is expected that tone of the words of the speaker and his/her body language need to convey the message that is the same.

Indeterminacy states that one cannot be certain of communicating any expression, at least, not in a precise sense. As Anthony Pym points out, one cannot take for granted that there is a meaning that is encoded on a side and then decoded on the other. The contrary to indeterminacy would be a view that assumes “codes transmission” or “meaning transfer”, somehow able to guarantee equivalence.<sup>125</sup> The specific features and peculiarities of Yorùbá idiom make it either untranslatable or make its translation indeterminate, especially when its meaning has no association with the original meaning of the separate words when they are isolated.

The manner in which the Yorùbá translate is principally grounded on convention or tradition, and not only on observable facts. As such, the indeterminacy of radical translation extends into non-radical translation, in addition to translation within a single language.<sup>126</sup> For instance, considering the literal translation of these Yorùbá idioms:

*Ọbá ti w'ájà* – The king has entered the roof.

*Ọbá ti papòdà* - The king has changed position.

*Ọbá ti re ibi àgbà òrè* – The king has gone to the place the elderly go.

*Ọbá ti re 'wàlẹ̀ ọsà* - The king has gone into the cultural place for men.

*Àkùkọ ti kọ lẹhin Ọbá* - The cock has crowed behind the king.

*Ọbá ti filẹ̀ bora bí asọ* –The king has covered himself with the ground like cloth.

All these mean the same in Yorùbá, that is, ‘The king is dead’. These idioms cannot be literally translated into English meaningfully, as the meaning cannot be associated with any of the unique meaning of each specific word. Yorùbá idioms and proverbs cannot be translated into English, but can be pragmatically translated through mutual replacement by equivalent ones in the Target Language (TL). Thus, *Ọbá ti w'ájà* (the king is dead) or any of its equivalence in Yorùbá can be translated as, ‘the king has kicked the bucket.’ The English version when translated into Yorùbá language would

be ‘*Ọbá ti ta kolobá ní ìpa*’, which could not make much sense but could only be understood literally in Yoruba language. Hence, in such translation, a language would lose its national character, as the Yorùbá historical and cultural environment is automatically replaced by English history and culture.<sup>127</sup>

However, where there are no similar or equivalent translations of an idiom, it can be paraphrased in plain language, even though this may not be satisfactory. So the task of a translator to preserve the spirit of the original and produce something which functions in the same way as the original is not fulfilled. The mono-linguistic Yorùbá translator is also in a way deficient in many autonomous controls in which the jungle linguist was lacking. Some scholars have also argued that even a single individual lacks the ability to neutrally decide between probable interpretations of utterance made in his /her own idiolect at different point in time.

From the Yorùbá proverbs, it could be deduced that the Yorùbá agree with the notion that there are some words that may be intractable and not easy to translate. The Yorùbá say,

*Òwe lẹsin òrò,  
Òrò lẹsin òwe  
T’órò bá sọ̀nù  
Òwe la ó fì wa*

This could be translated thus:

Proverb is the horse or powering machine of speech  
Speech is the horse of proverbs  
When any discussion is lost  
We use proverb to find it out.<sup>128</sup>

However, no matter how intractable a word or concept may be, it could be found through the use of proverbs. This means there exists in Yorùbá parlance that there is always a way to circumnavigate the challenges of words or concepts that seem inadmissible to translation. The Yorùbá have made efforts to ‘unwrap’ meaning of alien words and concept such as;

artificial- *àtọwọ́dá* (Created with hands);

police - *Ọlọpàá* (One with rod /staff);

bargain- *Idunadura* (Haggling before purchase);

basic - *Ibèrè -pèpè* (From the scratch/ beginning);  
 barrack – *bárékè*;  
 battery- *bàtìrì*;  
 bequeath - *Fi sílẹ́ bí ogún* (Left behind like an inheritance);  
 blackboard- *Pátáko ikòwé* (Plank for writing books);  
 Agnostic - *a siyè-méjì-nipa-ohun-merírí* (One who doubt what he has not seen before);  
 Economics- *Ìmọ̀ ìsúná –owó* (Knowledge of trading with money);  
 Algebra - *àjìbìrà*;  
 Allegiance - *Ìwà ìfòtító -inú –sìn* (Acts of rendering service with inner truth);  
 aluminium – *alumínìo*;  
 allegory - *Ìtàn-olówe* (story with proverbs);  
 alumnus - *Ọkúnrin akàwé jáde* (A male who has graduated from an institution);  
 ambassardor - *asojú ìjoba nìlẹ̀ òkèèrè* (Representative of government in a foreign land);  
 ammunition - *Ohun ìjà olóró* (Poisonous fighting weapons);  
 application - *Ìwé ìwá nkan* (Letter for searching something);  
 appeal - *P'ẹ̀jọ̀ k ọ̀tẹ̀mi-lórùn* (Make a case for expression of dissatisfaction).<sup>129</sup>

The criteria that determine equivalence in translating these words and concepts are the nature of the words and concepts which need to be preserved in any translation that is successful. Thus, the type of equivalence required, between the source text and the target translation, is not the same in all cases. While in some cases concepts are borrowed from the foreign culture, in some other cases coining of concepts are evolved.

The words that are culture based are more influential towards indeterminacy. This depends on whether the structure or format in which the statement is presented is figurative or literal. The more the complication and complexity of the statement, the more it is inclined towards indeterminacy. A text that has more likelihood of ambiguities and absurd of meaning, in the use of language, becomes indeterminate. However, determinacy does not warrant any further translations. Translations are usually not uniformly determinate or indeterminate in as much as language usage in different culture is not the same. Translators of the same text are mostly inclined to

translate the passage differently in terms of their personal experience, educational standard, language competence, and cultural background. A source text would be very demanding to translate (indeterminate), when it is out of the conventional cultural context. As Francis Offor observes

Theoretical and metaphysical claims involve beliefs, worldviews, and social values, and there is the tendency for the meaning attached to such concept in the language of a group to be defined by the totality of the culture of that group in question. And just as the meaning of concepts in the language of a group is defined by the totality of the culture of the group, so also is language the vehicle through which the cultural beliefs of any group are transmitted.<sup>130</sup>

The translator would, for this reason, be pessimistic of whether the translation provided is accurate, considering that it is not in conformity with the cultural practices and language expression of the targeted recipients.

A translator needs to exercise caution in a situation where we have the same concept in different cultures but different conceptions of the concept, where a conception in one is seen as a misconception in the other. For instance, 'Cow' is a concept familiar to both Yorùbá and Hindu cultures. A Yorùbá man sees a cow and says, 'this is a cow'. The Indian agrees and says, 'this is a cow'. Let us consider this dialogue between them:

Yorùbá: This is meat.

Hindu: This is a god.

Yorùbá: When it is slaughtered, it is fun and entertainment.

Hindu: When it is slaughtered, it is a sacrilege and abomination.

Yorùbá: It is for food, to be eaten.

Hindu: It is a god, to be worshipped.

Whereas the concept 'cow' is the same in both cultures, the conceptions (functionalities) are different. A Yorùbá author describing a ceremony where cows were slaughtered to portray the wealth of a family in a Yorùbá cultural setting would 'misfire' if he should assume same conception of cow in Hindu culture and translate as

such. There is then the need for fidelity to ensure that what X means is what Y understands. As George Steiner points out, to deny the validity of translation because it seems impossible in some cases, is ridiculous. What one needs to clarify is the level of fidelity to look for in each case.<sup>131</sup> If we are not to confine ourselves to translation in the narrow sense (by restricting ourselves to pairs of texts in separate language, connected in some way), but leap into greater adventure towards communication with all cultures, then we need to have “shifting of meanings and dynamic hybridities as our object and state.”<sup>132</sup>

From the understanding of the Yorùbá, some sorts of error may occur in translation. These include not understanding the meaning of a term in the language from which the translation is made. There is the saying that: *Wón l'ómódé kò m'èlà, o sọ wípé òun mọ èlà fàla fàla, ní àìmò wípé èlà fàla fàla ọba ijà ni.* [A child was told he does not know èlà (Chief of peace), he brags that he knows 'èlà fàla fàla' (so many 'èlà')], he does not understand that 'èlà fàla fàla' is the chief of crises. (*Èlà* in Yorùbá mythology stands for peace, but its multiple, *èlà fàla fàla*, means crises.). While the child boasts he knows a lot of peace, what he said actually connotes knowing a lot of crises.

Another error that may occur is the inability of the translator to understand the meaning of concepts in the language into which the translation is being made (the same name may mean different things). Also, the interpretation of a specific expression using a general equivalent and misleading literal translation.<sup>133</sup> A text that contains proper name may be very difficult to translate. In Yorùbá culture, proper names are full of meanings. The Yorùbá say/s *Ilé ni à n'wò kí á to s'omọ l'órúko.* 'Ayandele', used in *Tal'ó pa Omọ Oba*,<sup>134</sup> is a person who takes drumming as a profession and the name is used to denote drummers in Yorubaland.<sup>135</sup> How can one translate a proper name? With what does a person replace it or what sort of equivalence can one find for it in any language, most especially when such is loaded with meaning and visibly reaches beyond its individual bearer?<sup>136</sup> This in a way could not but affect the smooth flow of translation.

The Yorùbá language is sometimes very esoteric to nature and interprets natural phenomenon spiritually. While Yorùbá language is very versatile in given name to elements close to natural environment, it does not have some of the words to translate scientific and technological concepts of the Western world. Words such as 'atoms',



‘molecules,’ ‘neutrons’ are alien to Yorùbá language and culture. Therefore, there is the need for a pragmatic way of understanding that will take care of the factors limiting the adequate process of cross-cultural translation and understanding.

### **Yorùbá Pragmatic Way of Translation**

Interpretations and translations are interrelated. All interpretations are translations in the broad sense. We translate one phenomenon into another, one interpretation into another, one translation into another and one text into another. There is a synergy between translation and interpretation within Yorùbá pragmatic cultural hermeneutics, which bridges the gap between translation and interpretation. This synergy is achievable within the Yorùbá perspective because Yorùbá cultural hermeneutics operates on the principle of complementary dualism or duality for short, as opposed to the antagonistic dualism of Quine and others.<sup>137</sup> This complementary duality between interpretation and translation promotes pragmatic interdependence of language genres, making it a mean between determinacy and indeterminacy. As noted by Oluwole, the Yoruba nation has made one of the greatest contributions to world intellectual heritage, being one of the first people in the world to articulate, develop and adopt Binary Complementarity as a strong intellectual structure within which science, philosophy, and the social sciences, severally and mutually locate an existence that is both rational and scientific.<sup>138</sup>

Yorùbá linguists have proposed some devices for formulating Yorùbá terms. These include;

- i. **Composition:** This has to do with two or more items like morphemes, words phrases and others, for the purpose of expressing foreign concepts or objects based on the qualities or features that such concepts manifests. For instance,

**English:** Bill

**Yorùbá:** Àbá - òfin (This means literally suggestions)

- ii. **Explication:** It involves making explicit information available about foreign objects or concepts in Yorùbá

**English:** Imprisonment

**Yorùbá:** Ìsẹ̀wọ̀n (The acts of being put in chains)

- iii. **Semantic extension:** This has to do with extending the meaning of a concept, term, or word in Yoruba language for the purpose of expressing or describing a foreign one that is not available in the language. For example;

**English:** President

**Yorùbá:** *Ààrẹ* (An official title of a war high Chief, who is first in rank). This is extended in translation to the President of a Federal Republic.

- iv. **Idiomatisation:** This involves the use of idioms as a means of expressing or describing foreign concepts or objects.

**English:** Veto

**Yorùbá:** *Ìgbẹ̀sẹ̀-lé* (Literally – the act of putting legs on something).

- v. **Loanwords:** It involves the adoption or borrowing of words from a foreign language (mainly English) for the purpose of expressing concepts or objects for which either there are no equivalent Yorùbá terms or the available Yorùbá terms are inappropriate. For instance;

**English:** Budget      **Yorùbá:** *Bójẹ̀tì*

**English:** Bail      **Yorùbá:** *Béèlì*

**English:** Committee      **Yorùbá:** *Kòmitì*<sup>139</sup>

These pragmatic steps include; ‘coining,’ ‘borrowing,’<sup>140</sup> description of reference as it can be visualized or imagined by the speakers of these languages; and ‘adaptation’ in such a way that the words will enjoy acceptability, harmonization, uniformity and consistency in their orthography,<sup>141</sup> to take care of the different levels of equivalence that exist. Equivalence in translation should not be word-for-word translation. However as identified by G. P. Baker,<sup>142</sup> different levels of equivalence should be considered. These include (i) Lexical word (ii.) Grammatical differences in Language (iii.) Difference in language information structure (iv.) Textual cohesion (v) Pragmatic issues; original writer’s intention or implied meaning.

However from the perspective of Yorùbá, we would like to conclude that while total, exact translation may be difficult to reach, adequate cross cultural understanding is achievable. The implication of this is that consideration must be given to the

immediate cultural context of the situation of the Source Language for it to be matched with that in the Target Language text.

### **Conclusion**

Quine states that words in our language get their meaning from their relationships with every other word in the language, there is a vast network of meaning, therefore there is no way of identifying the sentences that are solely a matter of meanings from the ones that attach to experience. The Yorùbá also believe that the meaning of a word could not be isolated from its relations with the other words in the language. However, there is a group mind that is expected to capture the essence of any concept or word, in as much as it is an outcome of the culture, custom, tradition and way of life of a community, which is most often passed from generation to generation through socialisation and enculturation. There is nowhere this is codified or documented, but is engraved in the minds of the community.<sup>143</sup> This could be accessed through education and acquisition of skills. Thus an individual could not be competent in translation without adequately passing through the socialisation and enculturation of the community. It is discovered that the Yorùbá approach is pragmatic and functional in nature. The next chapter shall therefore focus on pragmatism as a way out to achieve a better translation.

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## CHAPTER SIX

### TOWARDS A PRAGMATIC UNDERSTANDING OF MEANING AND TRANSLATION

#### **Introduction**

In the preceding chapter, we examined the perspective of the Yoruba on indeterminacy. This was used to interrogate Quine's indeterminacy of translation on how translation is achieved and the extent to which the systems of translation by the Yoruba have been adequate. The focus on instability of concepts was shifted to the efficiency of skill acquisition of the translator in dealing with the subject matter. The translator as an agent of translation is expected to decide which of the diverse alternative translations is suitable for the present source text. It is expected of the translator to take into consideration the cultural differences or disparities of the target culture. This chapter shall focus on pragmatism as a way out to achieve a better translation. Skopos theory of Hans Vermeer shall be discussed to reflect a general movement from principally linguistic and formal translation theories to a more functionally and socio-culturally inclined concept of translation.

#### **Pragmatism and the Difficulties Involved in Translation**

Pragmatism is a theory held by philosophers such as C. S. Pierce, F. C. S. Schiller, John Dewey and William James. Schiller says an assertion is true if and in so far as it satisfies or forwards the purpose of the enquiry to which it owes its being.<sup>1</sup> The word pragmatism originated from 'pragmaticus' - a word from Latin language, and 'pragmatikos', a Greek word, which means 'deed.' It evaluates assertions based on the practical consequences on situations of human interests. Pragmatics is the branch of linguistics which has to do with language in use.<sup>2</sup> Pragmatism states that inquiry is social, as well as knowledge. As such, preserving, sustaining and renewing knowledge

is a collective task. Pragmatism has been considered by various researchers as a useful theory of translation.

Translation is described as “an inescapable necessity.”<sup>3</sup> There are multifarious and multi-dimensional difficulties in translation, most especially from one language to another. The problems in translation include the challenges faced in isolating the intervention of the unconscious into the act of translation. That is, a mistranslation “out of subconscious motives.”<sup>4</sup> Translation is expected to change language and at the same time remain intelligible. Most translations have been discovered to be in excess of human intentions. What is expressed in translation often times is more than what the translator intends to express or sometimes less than the intended meaning.

Translation is not expected to be just an act of interpretation that only repeats the original in the new language, but is at the same time expected to communicate meaningfully to others. Translation challenges may occur due to the error in understanding the meaning of a concept in the language from the source language. Each language has a degree of combination of words that made it possible and easy to achieve accuracy, precision and vividness in expressing certain ideas. Such word combinations sometimes have meanings that are inseparably bound together and are used figuratively, these are called idioms.<sup>5</sup> An idiom is a sequence of words which are often combined in illogical, odd and sometimes not even grammatically correct manner. There are several idiomatic sentences that the reason for their being put together could not be explained, but have been accepted over a long usage.

There is difficulty in the translation of such idioms, most especially when their background knowledge is necessarily needed to determine their meaning. This background knowledge may not adequately fit into a target culture. This makes translation from any culture to another to be a complex task. In translation, there is the necessity to seek ways of understanding the experiences of others without falling into the conceptual snare of absorbing it dogmatically.<sup>6</sup> The differences in individual experiences which enabled each individual to have unequal background knowledge of concepts also make translation to be difficult. As such, Ofelia Schuttle has argued for a principle recognising remainder of meaning that will not be transferred in cross-cultural enterprise.<sup>7</sup>

Plurality and diversity of culture account for different perspectives of individuals across culture. However, there are still available points of intersection.<sup>8</sup> That is, there are points in which a culture may intersect with some other cultures. This intersection allows an individual to negotiate between different culture and this enables the fostering of new ways of thoughts concerning the world. Another difficult task of translation is seen in the relationship between language and the world, which are fused together and mutually dependent.<sup>9</sup> Many theorists have argued in favor of 'foreignisation'<sup>10</sup> in translation, in which all the normal beauties a reader was expected to discover in a translation is necessarily given up for the accurate rendering of contextual meaning. A translator may have the focus of bringing the thought of an author closer to the standards of the target culture,<sup>11</sup> while other translation may proclaim the need to get closer to the unadulterated original. Some translations may of necessity be a way that might shock the reader of the target language through the exposure to the roughness of the original.

Translation throws up both ethical and epistemological dilemmas. Communication with a dissimilar language and context may impress other conceptual schemes on the thought of the targeted audience.<sup>12</sup> The epistemological problem of translation is grounded on the fact that if an individual accepted that words and conceptual schemes are placed in their cultural context; and that every language possesses its own conceptual scheme, then logically, the individual may hold the idea that translation is not possible.<sup>13</sup> The fact that language can grow or develop shows that translation is not an impossible task of comparing two separate inaccessible schemas. Language continues to evolve according to the need for its use.

Translation is a way of building 'bridge' across various cultures of the world. This allows mutual interactions and beneficial relationship between people of different cultural milieu. The diversities in the language of the world make it necessary to find a way of not only interpreting one tongue into another, but also one written text of a language to the other. This can be achieved through pragmatic consideration of the needs of the targeted readers. While interpretation deals with oral form of communication, translation deals majorly with the written texts.

Since the autonomous languages of the world are more than 4,200, if the different cultures of the world would interact, understand one another and cooperate to

exchange ideas that are beneficial to humanity, then there would of necessity be a need to translate language from one culture to another. This will not only narrow the wedge between different cultures of the world, but also erase the misconceptions about the other people and their ways of life.

There are various perspectives to translations. Among these are the scholars who believe translation is not possible. The scholars of this inclusion as enumerated by Abioye,<sup>14</sup> include George Borrow who states that translation is, at best, an echo. Dante, an Italian scholar, says,

Hardly can any of those things harmoniously  
strung through poetical arrangement be expressed  
in any other tongue without wreaking some  
havoc on its original beauty and sensitivity ...<sup>15</sup>

This is to say that in translation, the work cannot be undertaken without either the loss of the original ideal or misconception on the part of the translator or a deliberate betrayal of the intention of the original author through a mistaken belief or distortion of the intention of the author. However, the question of faithfulness or fidelity in translation is of serious importance in translation.

### **Categories of Translation**

Some categories of translation can be identified. These are;

*General Translation* - This could be on any subject or topic.

*Literary Translation* - This has to do majorly with subjects that are technical in nature. These include texts in Science and Technology, and other arts and social sciences.

*Poetic Translation*: This has to do with poem or metrical verses.

*Free Translation*: This is a paraphrase which recreates the matter without the method, or the content without the form of the original. The translation is most usually far longer than the original.<sup>16</sup>



The technique of translation for these categories of translation could not but vary. This is because the goal meant to be achieved is not the same in each case.

### **Methods of Translation**

Some of the methods of translation that can be identified include: word-for-word; semantic; literal; adaptive; faithful; communicative; and idiomatic translation.

**Word-for-word translation:** In this form of translation, the structure of the Source Language is maintained and the translations of words are done by using the meanings universal to them most. Words that are culturally inclined are literally translated.

**Semantic translation:** It puts into consideration the aesthetic value of the Source Language text, in addition to faithfulness in translation. It compromises on meaning where necessary such that no word play or repetition comes in conflict with the refined version. It does not rest on cultural equivalence and makes very little compromise to the recipients. Semantic translation is however much more flexible relative to 'faithful' translation which is dogmatic.

**Literal translation:** The grammatical constructions of the Source Language (SL) are altered to their nearest equivalents in the Target Language (TL) but the lexical items are somehow translated out of context. It sometimes serves as a pre-translation process that directs attention to problems to be solved. When translation is done literally, effort is made for a direct correspondence of words between the source and the target languages.

**Faithful translation:** It makes efforts to replicate the accurate contextual meaning of the original text within the confines of the Target Language (TL) grammatical structures. It conveys cultural words and conserves the degree of grammatical and lexical deviation from (SL) norms. It tries to be totally faithful to the purpose and the text-realisation of the author of the Source Language (SL) text. When we translate things culturally, we try to recreate the same effect that the expression produced in the Source Language text readers in the target people, through their culture.

**Communicative translation:** It makes effort to supply the precise contextual meaning of the original such that both language and content are easily intelligible and agreeable to the targeted reader.

**Idiomatic translation:** It recreates the message of the original text through the use of idioms and colloquial words.<sup>17</sup>

**Adaptation:** This is the freest form of translation in which the Source Language (SL) culture is transformed to Target Language (TL) culture and the text is rewritten.

Translation could be seen as an 'instrument' for 'propagation' of knowledge from culture to culture. For instance, some aspects of Yoruba culture would not easily be understood by a foreign reader of Fagunwa's translation if the work is literally translated. The Yoruba traditional society uses of the 'cock-crow' and the 'second cock-crow,' will be meaningful when being read in Yoruba cultural context, but not by a foreigner. As each 'crow' indicates a particular time of the day.

This study, therefore, was structured to discover general procedure to arrive at pragmatic modifications which would make the target text acceptable and comprehensible as much as possible. When a text is written and translated by the same individual for two different targeted audiences, the type of pragmatic adjustment which will take place in the text that is translated may be different from when the it is translated by a another translator different from the author, the adaption may likely diverge from the author's intention.

### **Equivalence Paradigm**

Equivalence paradigm examines the probable foundation of equivalence within the source language context. It wholly rests on the source text. Many theorists have worked on this paradigm.<sup>18</sup> Equivalence paradigm in most cases look for equal value between the segment of a source text and that of a target text. The suggestion being made by equivalence paradigm is that a source language does has no precedence above the target language. Equivalence paradigm is a group that is in opposition to structuralism. This is because it studies the relations among variables. Those who subscribe to Equivalence paradigm believe that each language convey its unique views of the world. If a general inference is drawn from these descriptions, one could not but conclude that the procedure of translation by nature is not a feasible undertaking to accomplish. The translator then needs to 'trans-create' instead of translate. The reason being that equivalence is a static part in their minds. Equivalence is usually a serious mission of the translator.

It should, however, be noted that a translator is like an intermediary whose mission is to unite the language of the original text to the targeted one through some procedures.<sup>19</sup> Reconciling the source to the target is the major responsibility of the person who has taken up the translation of the text. As a result, she/he needs to understand, as much as possible, items in the two divide. That is, he/she should be accustomed with both the source and the target languages in translation.<sup>20</sup> Generally therefore, before embarking on the task of translation, the goal of the source and the target texts should be understood, in order to communicate the message in such away that it captures the essence of the source text. A Translator can perform the act of restructuring, amending and improving a piece of writing. He/she may either merge or dissolve the source language into the target one. Thus, seeking for accurate equivalence is very essential in translation.

Equivalence paradigm can be sub-divided into two subcategories. These are: Natural equivalence and Directional equivalence. For Natural equivalence, the translator takes the challenge and brainstorm on the probable correspondence in the source language and discovers the possibilities of connecting them.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, in equivalence paradigm, languages that are more prominent are given much more attention, in that, most of the advanced countries have the benefit of equivalence theorizing. Such that, they can add more value to the target language in any manner they deem it fit. The 'principle of charity' of Davidson will however not agree with this. Thus, charity demands that the less prominent language should be given the benefit of initial consideration.

Catford gives the definition of Directional equivalence as a "replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent material in another language (TL)."<sup>22</sup> The definition indicates that textual substances present in the source language do not coincide totally with those of the target language. As Chesterman<sup>23</sup> points out, directional equivalence takes a divergent position in translation in that an element in the source may have two or more elements in the target language to illustrate or explain a term in language contexts. Thus, it may have one to two or more correspondences. It is in a situation like this that Quine's indeterminacy seems to occur. There is the need to state that directional equivalence may be carried-out at some points in the real process of translating. Therefore, the translator has to convey

and portray the genuine intention based on the understanding of the target culture. This can clear some of the obstacles to translation. It is, in particular, has to do with the translator's ethics, that is, manner an individual translator goes about his task.

### **Skopos Theory as a Veritable Tool of Translation**

Skopos theory is a form of pragmatism. It emerged in the late 1970s through Hans J. Vermeer.<sup>24</sup> It is seen as a "framework for a general theory of translation."<sup>25</sup> Vermeer was motivated by the need to discover a general approach to translation which is not depending on only linguistics level.<sup>26</sup> Vermeer states that, translating is not just a linguistic procedure and that linguistics is yet to formulate the right questions to deal with translation challenges. Therefore there is a need to look at somewhere else for solution.<sup>27</sup> This can be found in Skopos theory. According to Vermeer,

...what the Skopos states is that one must translate, consciously and consistently, in accordance with some principles respecting the target text. The theory does not state what the principle is; this must be determined separately in each specific case.<sup>28</sup>

Skopos theory, is another dimension to the functionalists approach to translation which is developed to be more target-reader oriented.<sup>29</sup> The theory is inclined towards a paradigm shift, from linguistics to functionalism. Its focus on translation, has its position between extra-linguistic factors (client and culture) and the textual factors (the purpose or intention of a text).<sup>30</sup> Vermeer borrowed the word 'Skopos', from a Greek language. 'Skopos' literally means 'a purpose'. It is a technical expression which emphasises that any translation is an action that is intentionally directed towards achieving a goal. As a result any act of translation must have a purpose or skopos,<sup>31</sup> which performs a function as the major principle guiding any translation process.<sup>32</sup> The need to possess a purpose has led to a major contemplation in the Skopos theory, which is a dire need for a translator to possess practical experiences necessary for the perception of what the translator intend to achieve in the target text.<sup>33</sup>

The theory is one of the famous theories which have emphasised the communicative principle in translation. The theory asserts that there is no more limitation of translation by the conventional views which are source-text oriented. It provides

explanation for diverse strategies in peculiar contexts. It is not only the source text that is a factor to be involved in the consideration. What determines the strategies to be used for translation is rather, the purpose of a text.<sup>34</sup> This is the reason pragmatic adaptation is necessary in translation.

Skopos theory is a functionalist approach to translation which aims is to unseat the source text (ST).<sup>35</sup> This action is performed by stressing the part played by the translator as a moulder of the target text (TT). In doing this, precedence is given to the purpose (skopos) of bringing the target text (TT) into existence. Functionalism is an important movement from a linguistic equivalence to functional adequacy.<sup>36</sup> When culture is mentioned in the context of translation, it is to be considered as a wide conception which includes customs, history, ideology, politics, and tradition. It also consists of political tradition, social values and mentality pertaining to a specific people.<sup>37</sup>

Different Skopoi, (purposes) are allowed in translation. The purpose of a text may be expressed on one hand, according to the impression it is expected to make, that is, the significance, uniqueness, and intelligibility. On the other hand, the purpose may be described in terms of the attraction, that is, the harmony, wholeness, suitability, and circumstances of the communication. The decision taken rests upon the purpose for which the translation is meant. The mission of the translation may need a 'free' or 'faithful' translation.

Bernardoe elucidates that there exists new concerns about target recipient, the prejudice of the translator which may be inevitable, as well as, the purpose and use of the translations.<sup>38</sup> For example, as Xiaoshu and Dongming<sup>39</sup> stated, literary translation is expected to replicate the spirit and characteristics of the original. As a result, the recipient is the major consideration in determining the Skopos of the target-text.

### **Skopos Theory and the Translation Brief**

The cultural features of both the source and the target language are put into consideration within the structure of Skopos theory, despite the theory focusing more on the target culture. Vermeer explains that a 'translation brief' is an instruction, given by oneself, by another person or by a translation commission, to perform a given

action, in this wise, to translate.<sup>40</sup> It is however, possible for a translation brief, to be explicitly stated or not so explicitly stated<sup>41</sup> and may be in written or spoken form.<sup>42</sup> In a nutshell, a translation brief is considered to be a necessity in the Skopos theory. It stands as a manual for translators.<sup>43</sup> A translator can establish the skopos (purpose) only through a translation brief.<sup>44</sup> It is then s/he may come to a decision on what technique or approach s/he should adopt in the translation process of a text in consonance with the projected skopos.<sup>45</sup>

When translating scientific terms, information for educational use, guides for tourist, contracts and other similar items, the contextual factors surrounding the translation cannot be overlooked. These are factors that have to do with the culture of the anticipated recipients of the target text and also the client who has commissioned it. It also includes, specifically, the task which is set for the text to achieve, in that culture and for those readers. Skopos theory is entirely directed with regards to this function. When considering translation, it is not as a procedure of trans-coding, but as a definite system of human action. In the manner of every other human action, translation contains a purpose. Skopos has to be made clear prior to undertaking translation. The product of an action of a translation is a *translatum*,<sup>46</sup> which is a particular variety of target text. In skopos theory, Vermeer posits that there is a universal rule that, it must be the anticipated purpose of the target text that influences the translation techniques and strategies.<sup>47</sup> It is from this postulate that he derives the skopos rule: Human action (and its subcategory: translation) is determined by its purpose (skopos), and therefore it is a function of its purpose.<sup>48</sup>

Two other general rules are those of fidelity and the coherence. The fidelity rule has to do with inter-textual coherence between *translatum* (the product of translation) and the source text. It requires that some connection must be present between the two in as much as the prevailing skopos principle and the rule of (intra-textual) coherence have been complied with. The coherence rule states that the target text must be sufficiently coherent to enable the anticipated end users have a grasp of it. The background knowledge of the recipient which is different from the source text must be taken into consideration.

Translation is, by definition, inter-lingual and inter-cultural. It entails both linguistic and cultural transfer. In other words, it is a culture-transcending process.<sup>49</sup> While skopos differs with text recipients, the purpose of the target text and that of the source text may vary. In situations where the purpose is similar for both texts,<sup>50</sup> Reiss and Vermeer speak of functional constancy. In situations where the purpose varies between both texts, there is, however, a modification of function. In situation of the latter type, the criterion for translation will not be inter-textual coherence with the source text, but suitability or appropriateness to the skopos (purpose). This also leads to the decision on the choice and arrangement of the subject matter. Even though a *translatum* is not directly, by that very fact, a faithful replication of the source text, fidelity or faithfulness to the source text may not be totally possible for justifiable skopos. One should not, therefore, consider Skopos theory as encouraging extremely free translation in all, or even in most of the cases. It gives justification for a variety of techniques in disparate contexts, where factor involved is not only the source text. Instead, the aim of a text influences the techniques used for the translation.

#### **Status of Source Text and Target Text**

The purpose of a translation may be to adapt the text to the target culture. It may also be to let the reader in the target language be familiar with the culture of the people from where the source text originated. However, it should also be emphasised that any goal that is stated is not the only possible goal available, but one among many other possible goals. The essential point is that no source text has only one correct or adequate translation<sup>51</sup> and that, consequently, every translation commission should explicitly or implicitly contain a statement of skopos. The purpose of a translation would therefore determine the choice of a translation which best fit into the target culture out of the various alternatives. The skopos for the target text need not be the same with that ascribed to the source text. Until the skopos for the target text is identified, translation cannot, properly speaking, be achieved at all.

**Pragmatic Adaptation** is an important strategy employed to ensure that the intention of the text is communicated to the target language in the most suitable natural manner. Adaptation can be described as translative commitments which produce in a text what is not usually seen or acknowledged as a translation, but nonetheless accepted as representing a source text.<sup>52</sup> The term 'Pragmatic adaptation' is a concept used for



describing how to accomplish the communicative objective of translation. Various definitions have been given to this term. It thus refers to those elements in the source text which when translated literally, would not work well to reproduce what it signifies in the target language. They are instead adapted, recreated or modified to enable them satisfy the requirements of the new linguistic and cultural environment. Klaudy<sup>53</sup> in his own definition describes pragmatic adaptation according to the desires of the target language audience, while Zauberga<sup>54</sup> sees pragmatic adaptation as the adjustment of the content or structure of the source text so as to bring into being a target text that is suitable to the experiences of the new audience.

Chesterman's model recognised some pragmatic strategies.<sup>55</sup> The model enumerates nine approaches. These include: visibility change, information change, cultural filtering, explicitness change, coherence change, interpersonal change, illocutionary change and partial translation. These changes in the process of translation are acceptable on the ground of the Skopos theory. Vermeer argues for this theory that as stated by the action theory, every action has a purpose in view.<sup>56</sup> The purpose of translation is to communicate an exact message. This includes, along with other factors, the relationship with the extra-linguistic world which makes a translation to be well delivered.

Delivering a message from person to person goes beyond merely exchanging the language of a text to the other. Also, there is a need to re-emphasise that translation does not occur in a vacuum; rather it is also influenced by a variety of extra-linguistic factors, most especially the agents involved in translation. Therefore, in a translation, the translator sometimes needs to modify information, omit some information and redistribute information through a number of pragmatic techniques to facilitate the fulfillment of the mission for translating to the target language (TL) readers.<sup>57</sup>

Vinay and Darbelnet point out that if a translator methodically declined to adapt, it will ultimately lead to a deterioration of the target text.<sup>58</sup> Adaptation then aims to bridge the temporal distance between the source and the target texts. This clearly shows the communicative quality of adaptation exposing the impetus that set translators in motion to apply it. In spite of the prominence given to the impact of the target



circumstances and the expectations of the target language readers in modern approaches to translation, the pragmatic feature of the procedure is often ignored.

### **Criticism of Skopos as a Pragmatic Theory**

Despite the advantages apparent in Skopos theory, the theory has various criticisms against it. The theory has been subjected to rigorous criticism by the advocates of linguistic and equivalence rooted theories. However, there have been responses to these criticisms. Some of the points raised include obscurity in this concept of translation. The criticisms focus majorly on how translation is being defined and the perspective of the Skopos theory towards the source text, its taking over of the source text or the 'dethronement' of the source text.<sup>59</sup> The issue includes too much simplification and inability to attain equivalence text that are literary and religious in nature. It is also disputed that there is no precise procedure to accomplish the theory.<sup>60</sup>

The Skopos translation theory, however, gives good reason for the modification made to the way and manner information from the source language is presented in the target language (TL). The translator understands his personal intentions which necessitate him to initiate the translation process and the requirements of the target text (TT) readers also. Therefore, he makes alterations that are necessary in communicating the information in the target text to fit into the situations and circumstances of the recipients, through pragmatic adaptation.

Another criticism leveled against Skopos theory is that it is a bulky standard. The translator needs to comprehend a lot of principles and vigorously consider their suitability for the situation or context. Nord addresses some of the arguments that have been put forward against the theory.<sup>61</sup> Among the most fundamental points raised against the theory is that, it is not all actions that have intentions. This critique is directed against all action-based theories of translation. Vermeer defended the action theory through his definition.<sup>66</sup> According to Him, action is always intentional. He also states that to be interpreted as purposeful, a particular action (or inaction) must be triggered by a decision that is free. Every translation is therefore a purposeful action.

Despite this, it is also the case that a writer may manage to write something without a definite intention or with no purpose in mind. However, the translator, before deciding

to engage himself in the translation, would have an intention directing or motivating him towards the translation. Another criticism is that Skopos theory is not being original. Nord acknowledges that a translator may have thought that is in agreement with the Skopos theory already for some time earlier, but points out that this does not indicate that a formal theory which is explicit, is irrelevant.<sup>62</sup>

Despite a number of objections, Skopos theory could be considered to be a rather useful approach to be used in the translation exercise. The Skopos theory presents a new perspective on the way a translator should carry out a set task. It brings to bear the Yoruba pragmatic approach of dual complementarity. It emphasizes the relationship between the purpose the translator has in mind and the skill possessed by the agents of translation to achieve the specified goal. The fact that a translator is presented with a translation brief is a suitable answer for every criticism levelled against this theory. Nord has made a clearly stated motion to tackle these issues that any “form of equivalence required for an adequate translation” can be got through “the skopos of the translation.”<sup>63</sup>

It is natural that before one can have the skopos, one needs to have obtained the translation brief. It is only after the translation brief is available and adequately stated, that it can then facilitate the translation guidelines and scheme when translating. However, it should be noted that the strength of will for the translation choices rests with each translator. Further, Vermeer also emphasises that the Skopos theory does not put any constraint on the choice of strategies for translation. In other words, it permits the freedom in translator’s actions and that also comes with a definite responsibility.<sup>64</sup> Going by Vermeer’s and Nord’s elucidation of the theory, it is apparent that this translation brief is a fundamental factor in the translation activities.

Skopos theory’s appeal to common sense can rather be seen as a merit, not a weakness. Some critics of the functional approach have also argued that within this approach, translators exercise the liberty to treat the source text in any manner that they are commissioned to do by the client.<sup>65</sup> This has to do with the concept of loyalty. In response to the critics, Nord points out that the translator must be loyal, towards the client on one hand and towards the source text author(s), and the target audience on the other hand.<sup>66</sup> This implied that in the first instance, the purpose (skopos) of the target text should be in agreement with the intention of the author of the source text.

Secondly, the translator should take into consideration the nature of the translation being expected by the target audience.<sup>67</sup> It should be found out if the function of the product of a translation contradicted the intentions of the source text author. It should also be determined if the translator produced a text which deviates from the expectation of the target audience without duly notifying them about it. If the latter was the case, the translator has in a way deceives one of the two agents of translation. There is a need to emphasize that the idea of loyalty usually has to do with people, that is, the translation agents, unlike the concept of fidelity which has to do with texts.

### **Conclusion**

The Skopos Theory is a functional communicative theory. It is not an equivalence theory. Scholars in the field of translation have understood that cultural differences exist and there is the necessity for pragmatic changes in translation. As a result if equivalence is to be the goal of translation, direct or formal equivalence cannot always achieve the purpose of translation. There are major changes that are sometimes necessary for there to be adequate transfer of information from the source to the target language. In the process of moving from the source to the target language, there are different types of adaptations that can be made on the basis of source texts which may not be considered to be translations because they are seen as being less valuable than actual translations. Some scholars, however, have considered that these abridged versions or adaptations need to be included in a theoretical framework of translation and this is the essence of Skopos' theory. The skopos (the function or the purpose of the translation) is the main factor in translation. This purpose may, however, be different from the function of the source text. That is, the target of the translation may be for a radically different purpose than the source text. Likewise, it may be for people of a radically different culture. The essence of translation, therefore, is for it to achieve its purpose, whatever this may be. This purpose can only be realised by the translator who is well equipped, with adequate skill for the task required.

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## CONCLUSION

The basic aim of this dissertation is to postulate a re-alignment of worldviews that will be efficient for cross cultural translation. We emphasised the need to recognise the skill of the translator and the purpose of the translation as key elements of paramount importance to a workable theory of meaning and translation. This will show that the meaning of a word must always be considered not from a passive contemplation of the word, but from the analysis of its functions, with reference to the given culture. The fundamental aim of the study is achieved through Yorùbá complementary pragmatic approach to translation, which is interpretative, dualistic, symbiotic and comprehensive in nature.

Chapter One is a general introduction. An overview of the thesis was given. We gave background information into the study and made a review of the Literature scholars have written on interpretation, translation and indeterminacy.

In the Second Chapter, we analysed the concept of language and meaning. Three aspects of language were examined. These are: syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Syntax Studies the way in which word and other elements are brought together to form grammatical units without taking into consideration the meaning of the sentence. Semantics studies the meaning of words and sentences. It represents the relationship between language and the world. The determination of what this relationship is has been a subject of debate among scholars. Pragmatics studies how language is used. It encompasses social language skill that is used in daily interaction with others. These three aspects of language were shown to enhance communication.

Language and communication were emphasised as two aspects of a culture which cannot be separated. Communication is identified as being dynamic and complex. Based on this premise, we argued that human language differs in kind, rather than degree, from other languages. It is also sometimes very difficult, if not impossible, to specify exactly the message that is being conveyed to others. Contemporary theories of translation were reviewed. We espouse the understanding of the function of language as the human facility that makes it possible for us to exchange meaningful messages with other people within and across cultures. This is done through the process of

discourses and texts, which are ordered according to the rules and conventions of the specific language that we share with other human beings.

Chapter Three critically examined the perspective of W. V. O. Quine on meaning and translation. His theory of indeterminacy of translation was analysed to determine the extent to which it can be useful to achieve cross-cultural understanding. His attack on 'the two dogmas of empiricism' was reviewed. Quine's 'Radical Translation' is a term coined to refer to a hypothetical situation in which a linguist dwells into a completely isolated linguistic community. In such kind of situation, all within the possession of the linguist to make incursion into the understanding of their language is the behaviour of the people. Thus the translation manual that the linguist ends up constructing captures only such behavioural data. An important claim of Quine is that the outcome of interaction in this kind of setting impacts on linguistic interaction in general. His view is that when understanding each other's speech we correlate linguistic behaviour with our experience of the world around us, and that there is nothing to linguistic meaning beyond such correlation.

Quine claimed that there is no one scheme of translation between natural languages which can be accepted as the right or correct one. He stated that one may speak of correctness in translation relative to a particular accepted scheme, but to question the correctness of a whole scheme relative to another is meaningless. He stressed that meaning is grounded on the behaviour of the speakers. However, there is nothing in ostensive behaviour to solve the problem of ambiguity between two speakers from different cultural background. There are usually many competing alternative manuals available for translating the meaning of a foreign sentence. Thus, the meaning of the translation cannot be attributed to any of the competing manuals. There is no fact of which manual is the correct one. There have been criticisms of Quine's skepticism on the idea of meaning. He says the notion of analyticity is not sufficiently clear, however, the standard of clarity he is employing is also not clear. Also, if our words do not have determinate meaning, it would be difficult to understand one another, even in the same culture and language.

In Chapter Four, we analysed the work of scholars such as Donald Davidson who considered the situation of 'radical interpretation' instead of Quine's 'radical translation'. Thomas Kuhn' posited 'incommensurability of paradigm', relative to

Quine's 'indeterminacy of translation'. Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf postulate relativity of concepts, while Kwasi Wiredu suggested that what is called conceptual relativity may actually be taken to be conceptual disparity. Austin and Searle posited 'Speech acts theory. Some of these scholars focused on the problem of compatibility in the use of concepts among individuals and groups. In this chapter we argued that interpretations and translations as posited by each of these alternative views are liable to be contested. Some take the 'relativity approach' to show that words and concepts have peculiar meanings depending on the cultures and context in which they are used. Others take 'universalists approach' to show that concepts are similar and their translations are possible across culture. We argued that each of these alternatives' however, has its limitations.

In Chapter Five, which is taken to be the thesis chapter, we discussed a perspective of the Yorùbá on indeterminacy of translation. The Yorùbá word 'Ìtumò' suggests that the Yorùbá believe that knowledge is a difficult task to accomplish and it is not accessible to everybody but 'wrapped'. To have access to it, it has to be "unwrapped." "Ìmò" is also regarded as 'know-how' in Yorùbá, which shows that 'Ìtumò' not only means unwrapping knowledge, but also expertise or skill in unwrapping knowledge. It implies that it is not everybody that could attain the feat of unwrapping knowledge, but the skillful ones. By implication, translation, from the Yorùbá perspective, could be achieved only by those who are adequately skilled.

We also made a comparative analysis of different translations of texts, which showed differences in translation from the perspective of each of the translators. Similarly, concepts such as *Olódùmarè*, which were translated by three different groups of scholars, each with different signification, were examined. Among these scholars are the Western anthropologists who conceive *Olódùmarè* as a lesser being than God, the second group of scholars are mainly African Yorùbá theologians who have imposed the Western conception of God on *Olódùmarè*, and the third group is a decolonisation school which have tried to divest *Olódùmarè* of the foreign attributes imposed on His nature. According to Quine, the translation of '*Olódùmarè*' from each of these groups would be correct because they fit into the structure of each conception. He therefore regarded such translation as indeterminate. This is because there is no fact of the matter from which we can accept one or reject the other. Thus each conception will be

correct within its own framework. We however argued that there are vivid category mistakes in some of these translations rather than being indeterminate. Only translators who are firmly grounded in the Yorùbá culture and who have acquired sufficient skill for translation could, in actual fact, detect the error. Alternative views of the Yorùbá to indeterminacy were considered. We concluded that a translator who has necessary required training would therefore produce a far better translation, through the Yoruba complementary pragmatic approach, than the ones who are not (well) trained.

Chapter Six, which is the last chapter, focused on pragmatism as a way of achieving a better translation. Skopos theory of Hans Vermeer was discussed to reflect a general shift from principally linguistic and formal translation theories to a more functionally and socio-culturally oriented concept of translation. Translation generates both ethical and epistemological dilemmas. Communication with a language, other than one's own and in different context, may impress other conceptual schemes on the thought of the targeted audience. The epistemological problem of translation is grounded on the fact that if an individual accepts that words and conceptual schemes are placed in cultural context, and that each language possesses its own conceptual scheme, then logically, the individual may be committed to the belief that translation is not possible. The fact that language can grow or develop shows that translation is a possible task. Language continues to evolve according to the need for its use.

Many theorists have worked on the paradigm of Equivalence paradigm. In most cases, they look for equal value between the segment of a source text and that of a target text. The suggestion being made by equivalent paradigm is that a source language does not have the priority over the target language. The conclusion that could be deduced from equivalence paradigm is that, since different languages present varied perspectives of the world; and since the concepts in a culture are not equivalent to those of the other cultures, therefore translation across culture is impossible. We however argued against this position. We considered 'functionalism' as a necessary movement from a linguistic equivalence to functional suitability. Therefore, translation is considered, first and foremost, as a progression of intercultural message transfer, the final result of which is a text that has the capacity to function fittingly in particular situations and framework of use. Pragmatic adaptation that is employed to attain the communicative purpose of translation is regarded as the adjustment of the substance or form of the

source text so as to produce a target text that is in accord with the desires for the new audience. Skopos theory makes effort to keep the equivalence between the source and the target text. However, it only regards a source text as an 'offer of information' to which it will then be adopted wholly or partially, into a target text by specially taking into consideration the target language and culture.

Some scholars, however, have considered that these abridged versions or adaptations need to be included in a theoretical framework of translation and this is the essence of Skopos' theory. We concluded that the skopos (the function or the purpose of the translation) is the main factor in translation. This purpose may, however, be different from the function of the source text. That is, the target of the translation may be for a radically different purpose than the source text. Likewise, it may be for people of a radically different culture. The essence of translation, therefore, is for it to achieve its purpose which, in the final analysis, is determined by the competence of the translator.

### **Contributions to knowledge**

A lot of researches have been carried out in the area of translation and cross cultural understanding; however this research aims at providing a theoretical framework for translation across culture through a critical look at an African language as a model, to have a general overview of how limitations in a culture could pose a challenge to language and translation on one hand, and how acquisition of necessary skill by the agents of translation can aid in surmounting the challenges on the other hand.

The study is a quest for solution to the limitation placed on translation on one hand and cross cultural understanding on the other. It argues for the possibility of total understanding of materials across cultures when texts are adequately translated. It makes a case for transference and localizing of scientific terms, concepts and knowledge from one culture to another. The engagement of the Yorùbá pragmatic (functional) approach is based on the dual complementarity between hermeneutics (interpretation) and translation. The fundamental aim of the study is achieved through this Yorùbá complementary pragmatic approach to translation, which is fluid, dynamic, flexible, interpretative, dualistic, symbiotic and comprehensive, putting into consideration the ability, capacity, skill and character of the translator. The use of explication, coining, borrowing, semantic extension and adaptation, broadens our

knowledge in the field of philosophy and gives room for further research into the intellectual foundations for the introduction of new ideas for not only the development of our language and culture, but also to bring scientific and technological development closer to all cultures.

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