

Article

Chinua Achebe's *The Flute*: Unpacking the Dynamics of Language Acquisition and Communication in Children through Translation

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Abstract

Acquiring new languages is crucial in today's globalized world. It enhances personal relationships, and promotes professional growth while broadening perspectives. It also fosters empathy and cultural sensitivity as we are currently in an era of inter-cultural communication. The objective of this study is to explore the role of translation in acquiring new languages as a contemporary necessity in this era when mankind is faced with the need to reach out to one another. Emphasis specifically, is on how it aids the acquisition of a second or multiple languages. Emphasis on situational/contextual teaching/learning of a second language (communicative approach), makes contextual translation suitable for this purpose. The core of the article is to establish the nexus between the trio: translation, communication, and language acquisition. A detailed review of the available literature on the above concepts is presented. This role is examined through the use of one of Achebe's literary works for children, *The Flute*. The analytical frame work is grounded in the interpretative theory of translation and it elucidates the effectiveness of translation in the acquisition of a second language, especially in young children. The conclusion attests to how children can easily acquire a second language and also communicate appropriately through the use of pedagogical translation.

Keywords: Communication, language acquisition, children, translation, interpretative approach

Introduction

The relationship between translation and communication cannot be overemphasized. From its origin, translation was born out of the need to communicate. The introduction of multiple languages on earth according to the Babelian theory of language made translation imperative as the medium of communication between different linguistic groups. Therefore, the acquisition of language is paramount for effective communication to take place. Researchers in early childhood education and linguistics recommend the teaching/learning of multiple languages to children because their brains have not been loaded with thoughts and worries which most of the time act as hindrances to the smooth acquisition of a second language in adults. Translation has a role to play in the second language acquisition in children. In as much as the old 'Grammar-Translation Method' has been criticized by many, thereby making translation for second language acquisition unpopular, however, with the turn of events, one has discovered a wealth of potential in that method. At the time of the acquisition of classical languages, translation was very present where learners were made to translate from their mother tongue into their language of study and vice versa. This is regarded as a translation for language acquisition (pedagogical translation). Translating a text that is written in the children's language of communication into their language of study should be of great value because this is in line with the normal process of learning: "From known to unknown and from simple to complex". This becomes a very effective learning tool when the translator adopts

the right theory of translation. Leonardi (2009) enumerated the reasons why the 'Grammar-Translation Method' was criticized, the second reason being that "vocabulary was taught through isolated word lists and so it was difficult for students to see that words may be used in different ways according to context because no context was actually provided" (p. 142). Therefore rendering the contextual meaning of the text has been encouraged and this is in line with the language learning method that adopts the communicative approach. The choice of *The Flute, a Children's Story Book* by Chinua Achebe is not out of place for Chinua Achebe represents African culture and civilization since the translation of literary texts involves the translation of culture. The guiding theory in this work is the interpretative theory of translation which insists on interpreting the meaning of the text and not comparing the languages.

The first part of this work deals with translation and communication to show the relationship between the two. Part two tackles the language acquisition question which elucidates the imperativeness of acquiring a language as a *sine qua non* for effective communication and why this second language acquisition should be encouraged in children. The later part elucidates the role of translation in language acquisition. The fourth part presents an overview of the translation theories while the next part presents *The Flute* and its translation. Part five analyses the thesis and the next part presents the conclusion.

Translation and Communication

The relationship between translation and communication forms our top priority in this part of the paper. Nevertheless, before engaging in the quest for this relationship, let us first of all, throw light on their meanings.

Translation

For Bassnett (2005), "translation involves the rendering of a source language (SL) text into the target language (TL) so as to ensure that the surface meaning of the two will be approximately similar and the structures of the SL will be preserved as closely as possible but not so closely that the TL structures will be seriously distorted" (p. 12). Catford (1965) defines translation as "the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)" (p. 20). Delisle (1984) reiterates the fact that translating does not mean comparing languages; he emphasizes its fundamental role of transmitting the message of the author and its communicative function. According to him,

Traduire n'est pas comparer, mais fondamentalement réexprimer un vouloir-dire manifesté dans un texte doté d'une fonction communicative précise. (p. 16)

(Translating does not mean comparing the languages in question, but it is fundamentally re-expressing the message of a text endowed with a precise communicative function.)

Translation as a tool for communication involves rendering the contextual meaning of the source language text into the target language to ensure that the translated version creates the same feeling in its audience as the original text in its audience.

Communication

“Communication is the process of sharing ideas, information, and messages with others in a particular time and place.” Communication includes writing and talking as well as non-verbal communication (Encarta, 2024). Ntara and Evans (2023, “What is Communication,” para.1) define communication as “the actionable transfer of information from one person, group, or place to another by writing, speaking, or using a medium that provides a means of understanding.” They also add that every communication consists of a minimum of one sender, a recipient, and a message (Study.com). According to Richards as quoted by Gordon (Communication, Introduction, para. 2),

Communication takes place when one mind so acts upon its environment that another mind is influenced, and in that other mind, an experience occurs which is like the experience in the first mind, and is caused in part by that experience.

The Relationship between Translation and Communication

The relationship between translation and communication cannot be over-emphasized. Translation is a special case of communication. It implies indirect communication for the translator expresses another person’s views. Translation has become a vital tool for communication since the introduction of Babel of tongues on earth, among men, according to the Bible in Genesis (11:1 – 9) where God almighty multiplied the languages of his people so that they could no longer understand one another. Therefore, for communication between two linguistic groups to take place, the services of somebody who understands the two languages are needed.

Linguistic barriers have been a very serious communication problem. Translation is the only way out of this problem. In as much as globalization has taken over the whole world reducing it to a global village, ancient linguistic barriers still exist, thereby making translation more and more imperative. Translation is the means of communication among different cultures of the world. We are aware of the exponential roles that translation plays in communication: technological and scientific transfers are only achieved through translation. Translation is omnipresent in all spheres of human endeavours. Cordero (1984) has this to say,

The need for translation is especially acute in our modern world. Not only do nations depend on it to bridge what would otherwise be an impossible communication gap, but it also affords access to a wealth of scientific and technical information, as well as the ideas that help shape our society. (p. 350)

For Precup-Stiegelbauer et al (2012)

Translations are of common interest, as they imply communication between people of different languages. Nowadays, more often than not, everywhere we go, we get in contact with foreigners, and interpreting or translation is the only means by which we communicate with them if we cannot speak the same language. (p. 166)

Translation involves language so does communication. Having established the relationship between the two terms, it becomes necessary to talk about language acquisition since no effective communication can take place in the absence of

language.

The Language Acquisition Question

The term language acquisition refers to the different ways through which human beings acquire different skills for communication through the acquisition of registers of a given language which serves as a medium of communication in a given environment. Language acquisition is principally used to refer to the process of acquisition by a child, of his/her mother tongue which differs in process from the acquisition of a second language (SLA). The former involves the natural process of language acquisition which unfolds alongside other developmental processes in a child while the latter involves learning a second language by a child or an adult who has already learnt the communicative skills in his/her mother tongue. As Leonardi (2010) reiterated, "SLA is a term used to refer to the process of learning a second language (L2) after a first language is already established. It is interesting to note that by 'second' also a third or a fourth language is meant" (p. 35). The second language acquisition takes place in relation to the existing language(s). The learner's worldview has already been formed around the concepts and ideas existing in the mother tongue. This existing language always exercises some influence on the acquisition of this second language. This influence is known as language interference.

However, Teachingenglish.org.uk tried to distinguish between second language acquisition (SLA) and second language learning, the former is the name of the theory of the process by which we acquire or pick up a second language which is mainly a subconscious action while the latter describes how formal language education helps us learn language through more conscious process. Nevertheless, Leonardi (2010:35) affirms that "foreign language teaching is sometimes referred to as second language acquisition."

Language acquisition and communication

The need for communication leads to the quest for language acquisition. Whenever we talk about communication, language comes to mind. In as much as there exists the non-verbal form of communication, verbal communication which involves the use of a particular language is the most effective and developed form of communication. This allows communication to take place using a system of signs that are combined following some rules to form a medium of communication.

Language has played a commanding role as a means of communication. People depend more on this means because it conveys messages conveniently and directly. No other form of communication can be distinct, organized, complete, and effective in conveying a message.

Children and the acquisition of multiple languages

Some people have the fear that teaching multiple languages to their children may hinder their development. According to Hall and Beckman (What's the best age...?) at the Brainscape Academy, "Until the 1990s, many American parents refrained from teaching their young children a second language for fear of confusing them." Nevertheless, researchers recommend teaching multiple languages to children

because this is the time for them to learn them without interference. Cumba Raquel, clinical expert, and Cortese Rachel, speech-language therapist at Child Mind Institute have this to say, "From birth to about three years old they are very ripe for receiving new information." Hall and Beckman explain further:

"However, most current research suggests this fear is unfounded, and some evidence suggests that we may *never* be able to become *perfectly* bilingual if we start learning the second language after age 10." They added, "All that is to say that children *can* learn two languages at once and there are many benefits to learning a second language as soon as possible." This is because according to them, between the age of six and eight months, the brain is at its peak of synaptic connections and after this age, it begins to pare down the connections that are not often in use and strengthen the ones that are often in use. Then at the age of 12, they have this to say,

Prior to this age, the brain was a sponge for language. It is during this period that the foundations for thinking, language, vision, attitudes, aptitudes, and other characteristics are laid down. After this stage of development, the windows close; the fundamental architecture in the brain for language is complete.

For Neil Robert at the British Council, the 'Critical Age Period' for learning a second language should be before the age of puberty, at the age when the children are growing and the brain is predisposed for success in language learning and they are more reliant in learning innately. He concludes, "One area that does seem clear is that children who learn a second language before the age of 15 are far more likely to gain a 'native-like' fluency in that second language."

Sophie Hardach shares her experience at the Spanish Nursery, a bilingual nursery school in north London, where according to her, parents help their toddlers out of cycling helmets and jackets and teachers greet the children with a cuddle and a chirpy "Buenos dias!" Then in the playground, a little girl asks for her hair to be bunched up into a "coleta" (Spanish for 'pigtail'), then rolls a ball and shouts "Catch!" in English. To sum up the enviable effortlessness of the little polyglots around her, the school's director Carmen Rampersad says "At this age, children don't learn a language - they acquire it," For many of the children, Spanish is a third or even fourth language. Mother tongues include Croatian, Hebrew, Korean, and Dutch.

Then she concludes, "Compare this to the struggle of the average adult in a language class, and it would be easy to conclude that it's best to start young."

From the on-going, one concludes that exposing a child to multiple languages at an early age does not harm the child; rather it helps the child to learn the language without much interference. How much a child copes with languages depends on how the teacher handles the situation.

The role of translation in language acquisition

Generally speaking, pedagogical translation as the term implies involves to a large extent, the acquisition of another language other than that of the learner. In as much as the old 'Grammar-Translation Method' was largely criticized, recently, researchers have come to appreciate its potential in the acquisition of a second

language. As Leonardi (2010) rightly puts it, "...with increasing globalisation, there seems to be the need to look for new and challenging ways to teach languages and translation can be, *ipso facto*, a very good example of how to improve teaching quality" (p. 35). It will therefore be interesting to note that those who seek to acquire a new language will do so through a process of comparison of the languages involved. The reasons for the acquisition of new languages cannot be limited to the desire to get to know a particular language and culture better. It also has to do with understanding the worldview of the new language users in a world that has become highly globalized.

To find a meeting point between pedagogical translation and language acquisition, we would have to state the following: firstly, the two activities are geared towards enhancing communication as well as passing across ideas from one culture to another. The two activities also involve a lot of mental activity which by nature occur naturally in the minds of the learners. This is the more reason why the learner of a new language or even a translator can hardly avoid the use of the resources already available in the language from which he/she is migrating. Therefore, whether it is a translation or the acquisition of a new language, it is easy to notice an increasing need for the removal of communication barriers that come from the lack of a deeper appreciation and understanding of the local content of the language being translated into or acquired.

With the aforementioned, one will appreciate better the exponential role translation plays in the acquisition of a second language. This is because as a pedagogical tool, translation enhances the competence of the learner in terms of the four communication skills: *reading, writing, listening, and speaking*. As Leonardi (2009) puts it, "translation is an activity which includes them and is, to a certain degree, dependent on them" (p. 143). Then she went further to analyze how the process of translating helps in improving these skills. Pedagogical translation also helps the learner of a second language to compare the structure of his/her language with that being acquired. Therefore, knowledge acquired through such a medium can be put to better use in the acquisition process of the second language. It can also be deduced that translation as a method of acquiring a new language is generally a natural one, although grammar in use must form the basis to enhance situational communication. This will be evident as the different aspects of language acquisition like syntax, lexical items, and sentence formation constantly interact in the process. Leonardi, (2010:) puts it better this way; "L1 and L2 are constantly and automatically interwoven in the learners mind at all levels, such as phonology, syntax, lexis and pragmatics" (p. 62 - 63). It is therefore obvious that translation is involved in the acquisition of a new language, particularly when the knowledge of L1 is applied in the teaching/learning of L2. Indeed, pedagogical translation makes the learner more flexible and analytical in the use of languages as well as the resources inherent in the host culture.

It is also interesting to note that both translation and language acquisition involve complex processes and can therefore not be said to be simple linguistic exercises. This is because the more the learner tends to make use of pedagogical translation tools as a tool for acquiring a second language, the more he/she will become aware of the socio-cultural and historical evolution the language would have undergone.

This therefore means that in addition to acquiring a new language, the learner should be equipped with the linguistic capacity to understand the evolutionary trend of languages. This in itself enhances the learner's functional communicative capacity.

As a pedagogical activity, translation can be used in the teaching or acquisition of new languages. This is basically because pedagogical translation is learner-centred. Thus, in using translation as a means of teaching or acquiring other languages, the learner is actively involved thereby bridging the gap in terms of the negotiations involved in the process. When we talk of negotiations at this point it simply means that in the acquisition of new languages, there is usually a dialog of cultures. This is because the learner is coming from a particular culture and is to be introduced to another. For this to be possible, there have to be points of convergence as there would be those of divergence. This can be demonstrated thus in the case under review in this study. The learners here (children) will usually have the natural urge to compare what they already know in their L1 with what they are acquiring in the L2. This has an advantage in the fact that the things that they already know in their L1 will become more familiar to them whenever they encounter the same in the L2. To put it better, Leornadi (2010) thinks that through the translation process of comparison, learners of a new language will eventually become "mediators between two languages and two cultures" (p. 63).

Generally speaking, in terms of comparison which can hardly be avoided in the language acquisition process, it would be very difficult if not impossible to meet situations of double exact in both the L1 and L2. This is because both languages may not be narrowly related in terms of evolution and linguistic origin. It therefore behooves the learner to fashion out a way of acquiring critical reasoning. This will be of great need to help the learner understand the point at which the structure he is used to in his L1 can be merged with that he is acquiring in the L2. It is even inferred that languages acquired through pedagogical translation help the learner to understand better the morphological, lexical, and syntactical similarities and differences between the language of departure (L1) and the target language (L2).

Translation theories: an overview

Translation as we know it today is an activity that is as old as humans living on the planet Earth. For centuries, the pedagogical aspect of translation has always been used as a means of acquiring other languages. It is also used to pass across ideas and information inherent in different cultures. Therefore, translation as the name implies suggests the rendering of a message understood in one language into another. This notwithstanding, some of the brightest names and professionals associated with it have differed in terms of what constitutes its definition. This is because each tends to approach the subject from his or her discipline. With so many theories and approaches in translation comes the translation question.

If we critically look at the term, we will discover that it comes from the Latin word "traduce" which implies to render into or pass across from one place to another. Although the above explanation can be interpreted differently in different professions, in the linguistic domain it has to do with facilitation of communication as well as the passage of information and ideas from one culture into another. From

what most theorists in this field posit, it becomes clear that translation is first and foremost a linguistic exercise bringing together different languages. However, given our current experiences and the recent trend of globalization, one discovers that translation as a concept has become increasingly interdisciplinary. This has made translation like any other activity, to be constantly changing.

Since the 60s translation theorists (Vinay and Darbelnet (1958), Edmond Cary, Federov (1959), George Mounin (1963), Cartford (1965), etc., have been pitched against one another as to whether to approach the activity from a literal angle or by way of interpretation to extent of concluding that translation was not possible. However, in the early 70s, new experiences changed drastically the perspective of theorists in the direction of solving the problems associated with the activity of translation. This has generally borne better fruits rather than the previous approach aimed at handling isolated questions. Amongst those we can single out are Edwin Gentzler, Jeremy Munday, Lefevere, Danica Seleskovitch, Marianne Lederer, Jean Delisle, Fortunato Israël, and Amparo Albir.

For a translation theorist like Gentzler, he reenergized translation studies with his *Contemporary Translation Theories* (2001). Gentzler believes that a true translation theory should be guided by philosophical questions. This is because there still exists the argument that translation is a literary activity whereas another school of thought puts it at the doorstep of linguistic exercise. Of course, the second group thinks that it is appropriate to consider translation seriously in the dimension of the science of languages. According to Gentzler, theories of translation should seek ways to resolve philosophical questions associated with rendering a message from one language into another in order to ensure that meaning is not compromised. He is also of the opinion that translation as the name implies can neither be considered strictly as an art or science but more precisely as an activity that has a multidisciplinary dimension.

For another translation theorist, Lefevere, his thought on this subject matter is communicated in his essay, "Translation: The Focus of the Growth of Literary Knowledge", which according to Gentzler in his "Foreword" to Bassnett and Lefevere (1998), "traces the linguistic, literary, and cultural components of translation studies."

The interpretative theory or the theory of meaning was propagated by Danica Seleskovitch and Mariane Lederer, translators and translation theorists in *L'ESIT* in France, with Jean Delisle (pragmatic translation), Amparo Hurtado Albir, Fortunato Israël (literary translation) and Christine Durieux (technical translation) as their disciples. The theory was summed up in their book, *Interpreter pour traduire* (1986). The theory emphasizes the transfer of contextual meaning which forms the message of the original author through the medium of language and not comparing the languages per se. It emphasizes the interpretation of the text and discourages word-for-word rendering which is not translation but a part of it and is used when and where it is necessary. For the adherents of the theory, understanding the text to be translated is paramount to the successful rendering of the meaning. Therefore, nothing is untranslatable since the translator is engaged in rendering the contextual meaning of the text. It is considered as translation by equivalence, as Lederer (1994)

puts it, “*La traduction interprétative est une traduction par équivalence...*” (p. 50). The knowledge of the languages in question, the subject matter, and the culture and tradition of both societies is of utmost importance in the effective rendering of the text. This theory forms the basis for the analysis of this work.

Presentation of the *The Flute* and analysis

The Flute: A Children’s Story Book by Chinua Achebe

Long, long ago there was a man who had two wives. The senior wife had many children but the other had only one son. One day, as the season of the rains drew near, the man and his family set out to work on their farm. They left their home at the first light of dawn because they had a long journey ahead of them. Their farm was at the boundary between the land of men and spirits.

They got there at last and worked hard and long planting their yams. But as evening approached, the man looked up constantly to watch the sun’s position in the sky. He looked one last time and called out to his family to get their things quickly together and ready to take home. They gathered their hoes and matchets and baskets together and hurried away because they knew that soon darkness would descend and the spirits would come out to work on their own yam fields.

They passed seven forests and crossed seven rivers and returned to their home. It was then that the only son of the man’s younger wife discovered that he had forgotten his flute in the farm. This flute was the only thing he could call his own; he had made it himself from a bamboo stalk. He rose with great sadness and said he was going back to the farm in search of his flute. His mother begged him in tears not to go and promised to buy him a new flute on the next market day. But the boy did not want a gift flute in place of the one he had made with his own hands. His father pleaded with him at first gently and then in anger for his stubbornness. When father and mother found they could not move him, they let him go.

He crossed the seven rivers and seven wilds and came at last to the farm. And surely the spirits were there bent over their work planting ghost yams. At the boy’s approach, they all straightened up and regarded him with anger in their eyes. Fear froze the boy where he stood; everywhere was silence. And then the leader of the spirits spoke. His voice

Translation of *The Flute*, a Children’s Story Book by Chinua Achebe La Flûte, conte pour les enfants par Chinua Achebe

Il était une fois, un homme avait deux femmes. La première avait plusieurs enfants et la seconde avait seulement un fils. Un jour, quand la saison de pluies s’approchait, l’homme et sa famille sont allés travailler aux champs. Ils ont quitté à l’aube parce que la distance était loin. Leurs champs étaient à la frontière de terre des hommes et celle des esprits.

Ils y sont arrivés enfin et ils travaillaient dur et pour longtemps, plantant des ignames. Mais quand le soir s’approchait, l’homme regardait constamment vers le ciel pour savoir la position du soleil. Il a regardé une dernière fois et dit à sa famille de se préparer pour le retour à la maison. Ils ont ramassé leurs hoes, machettes et paniers et ils ont quitté en hâte parce qu’ils savaient que la nuit tomberait bientôt et les esprits passeraient travailler dans leurs champs d’ignames.

Ils ont traversé sept rivières et sept forêts pour retourner à la maison. C’était à ce moment que le fils unique de la seconde femme a découvert qu’il a oublié sa flute aux champs. La flute était la seule chose qui lui appartenait ; il l’a fabriquée d’une tige de bambou. Il était triste et disait qu’il allait retourner aux champs pour chercher sa flûte. Sa mère lui priait en larmes de ne pas retourner aux champs en lui faisant une promesse de lui acheter une nouvelle flûte le prochain jour du marché. Mais le garçon ne voulait pas un cadeau de flûte à la place de celle qu’il a fabriquée lui-même. Son père lui priait d’abord doucement et ensuite en colère à cause de son entêtement. Quand son père et sa mère ont découvert que c’était difficile de lui convaincre, ils l’ont laissé d’y aller.

Il a traversé les sept rivières et les sept forêts et il est arrivé enfin aux champs. Evidemment, les esprits étaient là-bas, entraînant de planter des ignames fantômes. Quand le garçon s’approchait, ils se sont tous mis debout en le regardant avec colère aux yeux. Le garçon

was like the dry bark of thunder through a throat of iron:

“Taa! Human boy! Who sent you here? What are you looking for? Foolish fly that follows the corpse into the ground, did nobody tell you that we are abroad at this time? Answer me at once!”

“I have only one flute in the world,” said the boy gently but boldly, “and I forgot it under that dead tree over there. I did not mean to offend you but only to take back my flute.”

“Flute? Hmm. Tell me, will you recognize this flute of yours if you see it, human boy?”

The boy said, “Yes.” Then the spirit reached down into his goatskin bag and brought out a flute shining like gold.

“Is this it?” The boy shook his head.

“Now, what about this?” he held up another flute shining like the kernel of the water heaven. The boy said, “No,” and shook his head.

Finally, the chief of the spirits brought out a miserable-looking bamboo flute and before he could ask, the boy jumped up and down with joy and said, “That’s my flute.”

The spirits said, “All right, take it and blow for us.”

And this was the song the boy blew on his flute:

*Chief of the spirits, undisputed
Lord by night of this estate!
Father told me death awaited
All who wondered here so late.*

*“Please, my son, please wait
till morning,” cried my mother,
But her warning fell unheeded.*

*How could I contain myself
and sleep till dawn
When my flute beneath the sky
Lay forsaken and forlorn?*

The spirits were delighted with the boy’s playing and they laughed *haw-haw-haw* through their noses.

s’est figé sur place avec peur ; il y avait du silence partout. C’est le leader des esprits qui a pris la parole, sa voix éclatait comme le tonnerre à travers sa gorge d’acier.

« Taa ! Garçon humain ! Qui t’a envoyé ici ? Qu’est-ce que tu cherches ? La mouche idiote qui accompagne le cadavre jusqu’au tombeau, est-ce que personne ne t’a averti que nous sommes dehors à ce moment ? Réponds-moi tout de suite ! »

« Je n’ai qu’une flûte dans ma vie, » dit doucement le garçon mais avec confiance, « et je l’ai oubliée au dessous de cet arbre mort-là. Je n’ai aucune intention de vous offenser mais seulement de reprendre ma flûte. »

« Flûte ? Hmm. Dis-moi garçon humain, est-ce que tu va reconnaître cette flûte si tu la vois ? »

Le garçon a dit, « oui ». Alors, l’esprit cherchait dans son sac en peau de chèvre et il a sorti une flûte qui brillait en or.

« Est-ce que c’est ta flûte ? » Le garçon a dit non de la tête.

« Alors, celle-ci ? » Il lui a montré une autre qui brillait comme la neige. Le garçon a dit « non » de la tête.

Finalement, le chef des esprits a sorti une flûte à l’air misérable et en bambou et avant qu’il ne lui demande, le garçon sautait en joie en disant, « C’est ma flûte. »

Les esprits ont dit, « Bon, tiens et joue de la flûte pour nous amuser. »

Et voici la chanson que le garçon a jouée :

*Chef des esprits, incontestablement
Seigneur de la nuit dans ce domaine
Papa m’a dit que la mort attendait
Tous ceux qui erraient ici très tard.*

*« S’il te plaît mon fils, attends
Jusqu’au matin, » suppliait ma mère,
Mais je n’ai pas suivi son conseil.*

*Comment pourrais-je me contrôler
Et dormir jusqu’à l’aube
Quand ma flûte, au dessous du ciel
Se trouve abandonnée et délaissée ?*

Les esprits étaient satisfaits de la

"We like your playing," said the leader to the boy. "But tell me something, little boy. Did your mother not promise to buy you a new flute from the market?"

"She did," said the boy; and he lowered his gaze to the ground. There was silence for a while and then he looked up and spoke again.

"I do not want to be given things. I like to make things. I made this flute."

"You shouldn't have disobeyed your mother and your father," said the chief of the spirits. "But we forgive you because we like your spirit. And because we like you we will make you a present for your parents."

He made a sign with his left hand and two youngster spirits brought forward two pots, one large and the other small, and both firmly sealed.

"Take one of these," he said and the boy took the smaller pot.

The spirits nodded to one another in satisfaction.

"Go well," said their leader to the boy. "When you reach home, call your mother and your father and break the pot before them."

The boy thanked him and set out for home.

"If you hear *doom-doom* on your way, run into the bush; but if you hear *jam-jam*, come back to the road."

On his way, the boy heard *doom-doom* and hid in the bush. Then he heard *jam-jam* and came out again and continued his journey. He passed the seven rivers and seven forests and reached his father's compound.

He called his parents together as the spirit had told him and broke the pot in front of them. Immediately the compound was filled with every good thing: gold and silver and bronze, clothes and velvets, foods of all kinds, sheep and goats and cows, and many other things of value.

The boy's mother filled two baskets

chanson du garçon et ils riaient *haw-haw-haw* à travers leurs nez.

« Nous aimons ta chanson, » dit le leader des esprits au garçon. « Mais dis donc, petit garçon, est-ce que ta mère ne t'a pas fait promesse d'une nouvelle flûte le prochain jour du marché ? »

Elle m'a fait cette promesse dit le garçon ; et il a baissé son regard. Il y avait du silence pour quelque temps et il levait son regard et dit une fois encore.

« Je n'aime pas qu'on me donne des choses. J'aime les produire moi-même. J'ai produit moi-même cette flûte. »

« Tu ne devrais pas désobéir à ton père et à ta mère, » dit le chef des esprits. « Mais nous te pardonnons parce que nous aimons ton esprit. Et parce que nous t'aimons, nous allons t'offrir un cadeau pour tes parents. » Il a fait signe de la main gauche et deux jeunes esprits amènent deux marmites – une grande et l'autre petite, les deux étaient bien fermées.

« Prends une marmite, » dit-il et le garçon a pris la petite.

Les esprits ont fait les uns aux autres l'affirmation de la tête.

« Bon voyage, » dit le leader au garçon. Quand tu arrives chez toi, rassemble ton père et ta mère et casse la marmite devant eux. »

Le garçon l'a remercié et il s'est mis à retourner à la maison.

« Si tu entends *doom-doom* sur la route, » le chef des esprits le hélait, « sauve-toi dans la brousse, mais si tu entends *jam-jam*, reprends la route. »

Sur la route, le garçon a entendu *doom-doom* et il s'est caché dans la brousse. Puis, il a entendu *jam-jam* et il en est sorti et continuait son voyage. Il a traversé les sept rivières et les sept forêts et il est arrivé finalement chez son père.

Il a rassemblé ses parents comme dit l'esprit et a cassé la marmite devant eux. Tout d'un coup, la maison était remplie de toutes meilleures choses de la vie : de l'or, de l'argent, du bronze, des vêtements, des velvets, des nourritures de toute sorte, des moutons, des

with gifts and offered them to the senior wife. But she was so jealous that she rejected the gift. That night she did not sleep.

At the first crow of the cock in the morning she roused her first son from sleep.

“Go and get your flute; we are going to the farm,” she ordered.

When they got to the farm there was no work for them to do because all the work had been done on the previous day. But they hung around until sunset.

Then she said,
“Let us go home.”

They picked up their baskets and the boy picked up his flute.

“Foolish boy,” said the woman boxing his ears, “don’t you know how to forget your flute?”

So the boy dropped his flute and they set out for home. As soon as they entered their hut the woman said to her son,

“Now, go back for your flute.”

He cried and protested but she pushed him out of the hut and told him not to come back without his flute and a pot of presents.

He passed the seven streams and seven forests and arrived at the farm where the spirits were bent in work.

“Mpf! Mpf,” he sniffed in disgust. “I choke with the stench of the spirits!”

The king of the spirits asked him what he came for and he replied,

“My mother sent me to bring my flute and a pot of presents. Mpf! Mpf!”

“Will you recognize the flute if you see it?”

“What sort of question is that? It is my flute, isn’t?”

The spirit reached into his bag and brought out a flute of shining gold and promptly claimed it as his own. All the spirits growled in displeasure.

“Take it and blow for us,” said their leader to the boy.

“I hope you have not been spitting into it,” said the boy, wiping the mouth of the flute against his flank. Then he blew this song:

King of Spirits, he stinks

boucs, des vaches et plusieurs choses de valeur.

La mère du garçon a rempli deux paniers de cadeaux et les a offerts à la première femme. Mais celle-ci était si jalouse qu’elle les a refusés. Cette nuit-là, elle n’a pas dormi.

Au petit matin, elle a réveillé son premier fils.

« Va amener ta flûte ; nous irons aux champs, » ordonnait-elle.

Quand ils sont arrivés aux champs, il n’y avait pas de travail à faire parce que tout a été fait le jour précédent. Mais ils trainaient jusqu’au couché du soleil.

Alors, elle dit, « rentrons à la maison. »

Ils ont repris leurs paniers et le garçon a repris sa flûte.

« Idiot, dit la femme en giflant le garçon, « est-ce que tu ne sais pas oublier ta flûte ? »

Donc, le garçon laissait sa flûte et ils se sont mis à rentrer à la maison. Une fois arrivés à leur hutte, la femme a dit à son fils,

« Alors, rentre aux champs pour reprendre ta flûte. »

Le garçon résistait en pleurant mais elle l’a poussé hors de la hutte en lui disant de ne pas retourner sans la flûte et une marmite pleine de cadeaux.

Il a traversé les sept rivières et les sept forêts et il est arrivé aux champs où les esprits étaient entrain de travailler.

Mpf ! Mpf ! Il a flairé en dégoût. « Je m’étouffe de l’odeur des esprits »

Le roi des esprits l’a demandé ce qu’il cherchait et il a répondu,

« Ma mère m’a envoyé de venir prendre ma flûte et une marmite de cadeaux. Mpf ! Mpf ! »

« Est-ce que tu reconnaîtras ta flûte si tu la vois ? »

« Quelle sorte de question est-ce que tu

Mpf! Mpf!
Old Spirit, he stinks
Mpf! Mpf!
Young Spirit, he stinks
Mpf! Mpf!
Mother Spirit, she stinks
Mpf! Mpf!
Father Spirit, he stinks
Mpf! Mpf!
Seven rivers water their town
Mpf! Mpf!
But nobody as much as to wash
Mpf! Mpf!

When he had finished, all the spirits were silent. Then their leader ordered two pots brought forward and the boy grabbed the bigger one without waiting to hear anything about them.

“When you get home,” said the spirit, “call your father and mother and break the pot before them.”

“I know that,” said the boy.

“On your way, if you hear *doom-doom*, go into the bush; but if you hear *jam-jam*, come out again.”

Without stopping to thank the spirits, the boy lifted the pot on his head and walked away. He came to a certain place and heard *doom-doom* and stayed on the road looking this way and that way to see what it was.

Later he heard *jam-jam* and went into the bush.

He reached home, at last, having crossed the seven rivers and seven forests. His mother who had been waiting outside the compound gate all evening was happy to see him carrying such a big pot.

“They said I should break it before my father and yourself,” said the boy.

“What does your father know about it?” she snapped back and steered him to her hut.

She shut the doors and then filled in every crack in the wall so that nothing might escape to the other huts in the compound. When everything was ready, she broke the pot.

Immediately leprosy, smallpox, yaws, and worse diseases without names and every evil and abomination filled the hut and killed the woman and all her children.

In the morning, as there was no sign of life in her hut, her husband forced open the

me pose ? C’est ma flûte, n’est-ce pas ? »

L’esprit cherchait dans son sac et il a sorti une flûte brillante en or et le garçon assumait sa propriété. Tous les esprits grognaient avec mécontentement.

« Prends et joue pour nous amuser, » dit le leader des esprits au garçon.

« J’espère que tu n’as pas craché de la salive dedans, » dit le garçon en essayant la flûte contre son flanc. Alors, il jouait ainsi :

Le roi des esprits, il pue
Mpf! Mpf!
Le vieil esprit, il pue
Mpf! Mpf!
Le jeune esprit, il pue
Mpf! Mpf!
La mère des esprits, elle pue
Mpf! Mpf!
Le père des esprits, il pue
Mpf! Mpf!
Sept rivières arrosent leur ville
Mpf! Mpf!
Mais aucun d’eux ne connaît comment se

laver

Mpf! Mpf!

Quand il a fini, tous les esprits étaient silencieux. Leur leader a ordonné qu’on apporte deux marmites et le garçon a saisi la grande sans attendre que les esprits lui donnent des informations sur elles.

« Quand tu arrives à la maison, » dit l’esprit, « rassemble ton père et ta mère et casse la marmite devant eux. »

« Je le sais, » dit le garçon.

« Sur la route, si tu entends *doom-doom*, cours dans la brousse, mais si tu entends *jam-jam*, reprends le chemin. »

Sans dire merci aux esprits, le garçon a placé la marmite sur la tête et il s’en est allé. Il est arrivé à un endroit et il a entendu *doom-doom*, il restait sur la route, regardant çà et là pour savoir ce qui se passait.

Plus tard, il a entendu *jam-jam* et il a couru dans la brousse.

Finalement, il est arrivé à la maison, après avoir traversé les sept rivières et les sept

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>door and peeped in. That peep was more than enough. He struggled with the hideous things fighting to come out and luckily managed to shut and secure the door again. But a few of the diseases and abominations had escaped and spread through the world. But luckily the worst of them – those without a name – remained in that hut.</p> | <p>forêts. Sa mère qui l’attendait tout le soir, au portail était contente de le voir avec la grande marmite.</p> <p>« Ils m’ont dit de casser la marmite devant mon père et toi, » dit le garçon.</p> <p>« Qu’en connaît ton père ? » elle lui a répondu brusquement en lui dirigeant vers sa hutte.</p> <p>Elle a fermé la porte et tous les trous qui sont dans le mur pour que rien ne s’échappe vers les autres huttes dans le domaine. Quand tout était prêt, elle a cassé la marmite.</p> <p>Tout d’un coup, la lèpre, la petite vérole, le pian et d’autres maladies terribles n’ayant pas de noms, tous les maux et abominations remplissaient la hutte et tuaient la femme et tous ses enfants.</p> <p>Le matin, parce que personne n’est sorti de sa hutte, son mari ouvrait la porte par la force pour jeter un coup d’œil dedans. Ce coup d’œil suffisait pour savoir ce qui s’est passé. Il luttait avec les maux qui voulaient sortir de cette hutte et il a enfin réussi à fermer la porte de la hutte. Mais quelques maladies et abominations avaient déjà échappées et se sont répandues dans le monde entier. Mais, heureusement, les plus mauvaises qui n’ont pas de noms, restaient dans la hutte.</p> |
|---|---|

4.1. Analysis of the translation as a tool for second language teaching/learning

Pedagogical translation was criticized as a method of translation because of its tendency to emphasize the comparison of the two languages and not communication. The practice then was to translate from the language of learning to the mother tongue. The Communicative method of language teaching/learning gives priority to learning a language as a means of communication. The interpretative approach to translation emphasizes the transfer of contextual meaning of the original text. Then from the perspective of the interpretative theory of translation, we were able to note some instances of contextual rendering of the text where one word can have different realizations in different contexts. This forms an important tool for teaching/learning the French language.

- The word ‘only’

| | English version | French version |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | ...but the other had only one son. | ...et la seconde avait seulement un fils. |
| 2 | “I have only one flute in the world,” | « Je n’ai qu’une flûte dans ma vie |
| 3 | It was then that the only son of the man’s younger wife. | C’était à ce moment que le fils unique de la seconde femme |
| 4 | This flute was the only thing he could call his own | La flute était la seule chose qui lui appartenait |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| 5 | I did not mean to offend you but only to take back my flute.” | Je n’ai aucune intention de vous offenser mais seulement de reprendre ma flûte. » |
|---|--|--|

1. **Seulement** (adverb) modifying the verb ‘avoir’
2. **Ne ...que** (adverb) modifying ‘avoir’
3. **Unique** (adjective) qualifying the noun ‘fils’
4. **Seule** (adjective) qualifying the noun ‘chose’
5. **Seulement** (conjunction) of opposition

- Expressions with their contextual rendering

| | English version | French version |
|----|--|--|
| 1 | Long, long ago | Il était une fois, ... |
| 2 | ...the spirits were there bent over their work | les esprits étaient là-bas, entraînés de planter ... |
| 3 | Fear froze the boy where he stood | Le garçon s’est figé sur place avec peur |
| 4 | Foolish fly that follows the corpse into the ground, | La mouche idiote qui accompagne le cadavre jusqu’au tombeau |
| 5 | I did not mean to offend you | Je n’ai aucune intention de vous offenser |
| 6 | ...flute shining like the kernel of the water heaven | une autre qui brillait comme la neige |
| 7 | a miserable-looking bamboo flute | une flûte à l’air misérable |
| 8 | <i>“Please, my son,</i> | <i>« S’il te plaît mon fils...</i> |
| 9 | <i>...till morning</i> | <i>Jusqu’au matin</i> |
| 10 | <i>...contain myself</i> | <i>Comment pourrais-je me contrôler</i> |
| 11 | The spirits were delighted with the boy’s playing. | Les esprits étaient satisfaits de la chanson |
| 12 | At the first crow of the cock in the morning | Au petit matin |
| 13 | But they hung around until sunset. | Mais ils trainaient jusqu’au couché du soleil. |
| 14 | ...and they set out for home | ils se sont mis à rentrer à la maison. |
| 15 | As soon as they entered their hut... | Une fois arrivés à leur hutte, |
| 16 | ... looking this way and that way to see what it was. | regardant çà et là pour savoir ce qui se passait. |
| 17 | ...she snapped back... | elle lui a répondu brusquement |
| 18 | Immediately, ... | Tout d’un coup |
| 19 | But luckily the worst of them ... | Mais, heureusement, ... |
| 20 | ... “run into the bush | ... sauve-toi dans la brousse, |

1. This is the expression used in starting a story, just like ‘once upon a time’ and the French version serves the purpose.
2. The spirits are already working and the French version expresses the same situation.
3. This expresses the psychological situation of the boy at the time and the French version expresses the same situation.
4. ‘Into the ground’ means ‘into the grave’ and the French version expresses the situation.
5. Here ‘mean’ expresses intention which shows in the French version.

6. The expression means the blocks of ice that fall during a very heavy rain and this is better expressed as *la neige* (the snow).
7. 'Looking' here expresses the condition of the flute and this is expressed in the French version.
8. This is a plea and the expression in French is *s'il te plaît* or *s'il vous plaît* but in this case, the mother has to address the son with 'tu'.
9. The same expression fits in this situation.
10. This has to do with controlling one's emotions which is also expressed in French.
11. Here 'delighted' expresses satisfaction and this is expressed in French.
12. Here, the 'first crow of the cock' is in the early hours of the morning and this is expressed in '*au petit matin*'.
13. The expression goes in both languages.
14. The expression means bringing oneself to do something which is expressed in the French version.
15. The expression of time showing that no time was lost also rendered in French.
16. '**Looking this way and that way**' shows a sign of confusion and inquisitiveness and this also is expressed in French in '*regardant çà et là*'.
17. This shows the brisk manner with which the woman responded and this also is expressed in French with an adverb of manner.
18. This expresses the speed with which the action took place and it is rendered thus in French.
19. The favourable situation is also expressed with an adverb in French.
20. This expression indicates looming danger which warrants the action of running into the bush and this is also expressed in French.

Grammar: verbs, tenses, and usage

Here the concern of the learner is not only to learn how to conjugate the verbs but more importantly to learn how to use these past tenses in narration. The focus here is on *imparfait* (the imperfect), *passé composé* (the perfect), and a little *passé simple* (past historic) tenses. In as much as the past historic replaces the perfect tense in literary works, we considered the young audience of the translation and limited the tenses to more common ones. Let's have a look at the first paragraph :

Il était¹ une fois, un homme avait¹ deux femmes. La première avait¹ plusieurs enfants et la seconde avait¹ seulement un fils. Un jour, quand la saison de pluies s'approchait¹, l'homme et sa famille sont allés² travailler aux champs. Ils ont quitté² à l'aube parce que la distance était¹ loin. Leurs champs étaient¹ à la frontière de terre des hommes et celle des esprits.

1. *Imparfait* – describing the state of affairs
2. *Passé composé* – recounting the events

Conclusion

Communication is a vital tool in human relations to maintain a sustainable human existence. Language acquisition is sine-qua-non in communication in humans. In this globalized world, translation plays a role in the acquisition of new languages for facilitating human relations and technological transfer. Language

acquisition/learning is proven to be more effective in children for the children's brain can pick up languages faster than the adult brain. Communicative approach to language teaching/learning advocates the learning of a language for the purpose of communication. Pedagogical translation with a focus on the contextual/situational meaning of the text makes the interpretative theory of translation very useful in the teaching/learning of a second language. Translating an existing text in the learner's language of communication into the new language makes it easy for the learner; this explains the principle of learning from known to unknown and from simple to complex. Translating *The Flute*, a Children's Storybook by Chinua Achebe into French offers the learner of the French language with a high range of opportunities to learn the language and at the same time learn how to use the language. It showcases some words with different realizations in different contexts, expressions with their contextual renderings as well as verbs in different tenses in the past to enhance the learner the ability to tell stories and narrate past events.

These findings reiterate the indispensable role translation (from the learner's language of communication to the language of learning) plays in the teaching/learning of a second language.

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