

---

## Writing as Translation: African Literature and the Challenges of Translation

---

*Kwaku A. Gyasi*

Literature is about people, their society, their culture, their institutions. But it is also, and especially, about language, the medium through which the people's society, culture, and institutions are expressed. It can therefore be safely asserted, without any fear of contradiction, that to talk about literature is to talk about language. However, this simple assertion becomes problematic when it is applied to the situation of African literature written in European languages. For this reason, this form of African literature expressed in European languages occupies a unique position. Although oral narratives have existed abundantly in Africa for centuries, it is arguable whether there were novelists or novels in sub-Saharan Africa before the advent of colonization. Whichever way one looks at it, African novelists, since the colonial period, constitute a special kind of creators. Unlike traditional poets or storytellers with whom they are in contact, African novelists who express themselves in European languages acquired their art through the possibility of writing. Within the framework of literature, the immediate advantage that writing offered to the African was the means to participate in the development of the prevailing literary genre. However, because of the impossibility or difficulty for some African writers to write in their mother tongues, there arose the need for these writers to write in the languages of the colonizers. Because, historically, Africans found themselves placed in this linguistic situation, the early African writers started to write in the languages of the colonizers without considering all the implications involved in the use of such languages. In their zeal to destroy the stereotypical images of Africa and to project their African world view, these writers may have considered the colonial languages as mere tools or means to achieve their objectives. As Roland Barthes points out, however, "le langage n'est jamais innocent" since a people's social, political, and cultural institutions are reflected in their language.

If one considers what has been written on the language question in Africa, one realizes that the emphasis has especially been on the attitude of the African writer vis-à-vis the European language rather than on the creative use of the language. In fact, the classical question consisted in asking if writing in the language of the colonizer was problematic for African writers or if they felt comfortable in using this language. Thus, based on the declarations of some African writers,<sup>1</sup> Jacques Chevrier was able to observe:

L'attitude de l'écrivain vis-à-vis d'une langue non maternelle repose, semble-t-il, sur une certaine ambivalence, mélange d'amour et de haine, de saisie et de rejet, qui rend assez bien compte du sentiment du corps à corps avec le langage que provoque parfois la lecture des écrivains francophones. (49)

Vol. 30, No. 2, Summer 1999

It seems the attitude of the writer towards a language that is not his mother tongue rests on a certain ambivalence: a mixture of love and hatred, acceptance and rejection, which clearly accounts for the feeling of struggle with the language that is sometimes caused by reading the works of francophone writers.

Although Chevrier's observation is pertinent, it directs the reflection only onto the ideological aspect of this linguistic question. What has been neglected is essentially how the European language is re-appropriated and given expression in the imagination of the African writer. In a situation of diglossia and bilingualism, such as that which characterizes African countries, the use of a foreign language as a medium of literary expression raises a certain number of questions. Is any given individual capable of mastering completely his or her mother tongue as well as a foreign language? Although this question can be answered in the affirmative, it is still possible to share the doubt entertained by Todorov when he writes:

Je me demande si le bilinguisme fondé sur la neutralité et la parfaite réversibilité des deux langues n'est pas un leurre ou tout au moins une exception. (26)

I wonder if bilingualism based on neutrality and the complete reversibility of two languages is not an illusion or at least an exception.

Todorov's remarks are pertinent in any bilingual situation in view of the fact that there is always an unconscious interference of the mother tongue in any individual's actualization of a second language. This interference is often realized at the syntactic level where the structure of the second language is influenced by the mother tongue of the bilingual speaker. This linguistic interference which is most visible in speech is also perceptible in the writings of a bilingual writer. In the case of African writers, the writings of Nazi Boni, for example, manifest a clear example of the unconscious interference of the mother tongue in the European language of writing while those of Achebe and Kourouma, among others, demonstrate a conscious effort to represent this interference.

Another important question to ask is whether a given language is capable of perfectly expressing a foreign culture. More specifically, in the domain of literary creation, is a foreign language capable of translating in an entirely satisfactory manner an imagination that has its roots in an alien culture? These questions are very pertinent to African literature and the language situation in two ways: on the one hand, the ability of the writer to perfectly master the Western language in which he or she writes and, on the other hand, the ability of the Western language to translate the specific structures of the African imagination.

A novel like Nazi Boni's *Crépuscule des temps anciens* (1962) perfectly reveals this unconscious shift. According to Ahmadou Koné, Nazi Boni is, among the West African francophone novelists, "celui qui témoigne le mieux de la difficulté mais aussi de la volonté d'utiliser une langue qui tente d'exprimer de façon satisfaisante l'imaginaire de son ethnique qu'il

entendait valoriser" (80) 'the one who testifies best to the difficulty but also the will to use a language that attempts to express in a satisfactory manner the imagination of his ethnic group.' This is partly because Nazi Boni's ambition as set out in the Foreword to his novel is to describe African culture, more specifically the Bwamu culture. However, because Nazi Boni wanted to address a specifically European audience that had sought to deny Africa's history and culture, he felt obliged to write in French. Realizing that the French language was inadequate to convey his Bwamu imagination, Nazi Boni was obliged to use purely African expressions that come from his native language. Concerning Nazi Boni's use of his African language, Makhily Gassama writes:

Il n'y a pas une seule page de *Crépuscule des temps anciens* où l'on ne rencontre une expression ou un mot africain ou une tournure de langue maternelle judicieusement ou maladroitement transposée en français. Du point de vue de l'apport de notre littérature romanesque à l'enrichissement de la langue française, *Crépuscule des temps anciens* est certainement notre roman le plus riche. (223)

There is not a single page in *Crépuscule des temps anciens* where one does not come across an African word or expression or a turn of phrase from the mother tongue judiciously or clumsily transposed into French. *Crépuscule des temps anciens* is certainly the best example of all the African novels that have contributed to the enrichment of the French language.

Indeed, in a concrete way, Nazi Boni has tried to resolve the difficulty of rendering exactly his African ideas, thoughts and feelings in French by using, for example, French words whose meanings depend on the significations that these words have in his African language. For example, as Ahmadou Koné points out, after breaking an amphora as a testimony of his love for Terhé, Hakani, the heroine of the novel, reassured herself by saying that her mother would not scold her: "La vieille n'avait-elle pas fait son soleil?" (67) 'Hasn't the old woman passed her sun?' In this sentence, the word "soleil" obviously does not have the same signified in French and in the African language. In French it can be rendered by "temps, ère, époque." The use of "soleil" to mean "time, era, or period" exists in some African languages and it is this meaning that Sembène already uses in *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* and which we later encounter in the title of Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les soleils des indépendances*. Again on page 67 of *Crépuscule*, the narrator recounts: "Un devin, un jour, remit au jeune homme un oeuf. Il lui spécifia que cet oeuf contenait sa 'silhouette' c'est-à-dire son double, plus exactement Mako, son âme" 'One day, a seer gave the young man an egg. He made it clear to him that this egg contained his "shadow" that is, his double, more exactly Mako, his soul.' Realizing that the French synonyms were not enough to convey his African concept, Nazi Boni felt compelled to use the exact word in his mother tongue. Thus, the wish to reduce the distance between his native language and French leads Nazi Boni to simply translate the African words in an effort to convey his Bwamu

concepts as much as possible. Nazi Boni's writing is therefore an attempt to use the African word in French. For this reason he also attempts to translate forms, speech and thought patterns which come from a long African tradition. It can be argued that Nazi Boni's effort at imprinting the French language with the mark of his native language may have been an unconscious attempt at sustaining an authentic African discourse albeit in a foreign language, for, like many African writers of his generation, Nazi Boni saw a major role for literature as the expression of cultural authenticity. Yet, as almost all African writers recognize, language poses an apparent problem for this aesthetic program. Thus, despite the sometimes inappropriate turns of phrase in the French language, Nazi Boni still opened the way for a much more conscious attempt at literary decolonization through the language of writing.

It is therefore not surprising that some writers later became clearly aware of the problems with which Nazi Boni was trying to come to terms. In anglophone Africa for example, Gabriel Okara has tied theoretical reflection to the linguistic problem that confronts the African novelist in the practice of writing. In his essay "African Speech . . . English Words," Okara explains:

As a writer who believes in the utilisation of African ideas, African philosophy and African folk-lore and imagery to the fullest extent possible, I am of the opinion the only way to use them effectively is to translate them almost literally from the African language native to the writer into whatever European language he is using as his medium of expression. I have endeavoured in my works to keep as close as possible to the vernacular expressions. For, from a word, a group of words, a sentence and even a name in any African language, one can glean the social norms, attitudes and values of a people. In order to capture the vivid images of African speech, I had to eschew the habit of expressing my thoughts first in English. It was difficult at first, but I had to learn. I had to study each Ijaw expression I used and to discover the probable situation in which it was used in order to bring out the nearest meaning in English. I found it a fascinating exercise. (15)

Okara's remarks are clear. If one wants to benefit from African culture, if one wants to express the African imagination, one cannot put aside the African language in favor of an academic European language. Okara has tried systematically to adapt the European language to the African reality. More than Nazi Boni, he has tried an almost literal translation of his language into English and the result of this "fascinating exercise" can be seen in his novel *The Voice*. One need not understand Ijo, Okara's native language to understand that in this novel the mother tongue influences and disrupts the English language. What Okara has done in this novel is to let the Ijo tongue speak in the English language, as is evident from the following passage:

Shuffling feet turned Okolo's head to the door. He saw three men standing silent, opening not their mouths. "Who are you people be?" Okolo asked. The people opened not their mouths. "If you are coming-in people be, then come in." (26)

In the main, *The Voice* is written in this way. Of course, there are passages where standard English is written. However, when Okara makes his characters speak or think, he pushes them to literally translate their language. Contrary to the example of Nazi Boni, Okara's writing is a conscious attempt to use the words and expressions in the way he has chosen to use them. According to Chantal Zabus, Okara's syntax creates "a counter-value system which jeopardizes the English logocentric relation between word and referent, between signifier and signified" (125). In other words, in attacking and deconstructing the syntax of English through the translation of Ijo, Okara seeks to free the African text from its foreign domination.

Thus, following the tradition set unconsciously, perhaps, by Nazi Boni, other African writers seek, through their particular styles of writing, a way of giving prominence to the African word in their African text. What is common to all these writers, in varying degrees, is a form of translation that takes place from the African language into the European language. For, as Zairian critic Georges Ngal asserts, it is the African languages that give form and meaning to modern African writing in European languages:

S'il faut chercher une spécificité, disons une particularité de l'écrivain africain, c'est que son écriture est travaillée, fécondée par sa langue maternelle d'abord et par les langues africaines. Les romans . . . ne peuvent être compris avec profit que si l'on connaît le contexte linguistique de ces romans. Certains passages, les noms des personnages . . . sont une traduction . . . (118-19)

If one has to look for a distinctive characteristic or feature of the African writer, it is because his writing is shaped or enriched first of all by his mother tongue and then by other African languages. The novels . . . can only be really understood if one knows the linguistic context of these novels. Certain passages, and the names of some characters . . . have been translated . . .

In his review of the plays of Wole Soyinka and John Pepper Clark, Martin Esslin posed the problem of language in African drama. Even though Esslin's remarks concern drama, they can be extended to other areas of modern African literature and therefore need to be quoted at length:

But, it might be argued, the work of the two playwrights we are here discussing, Wole Soyinka and J. P. Clark, should be largely exempt from these considerations; for after all, they are writing in English. Far from being an advantage, in my opinion, this is a further handicap. Not that these two playwrights are in any way at a disadvantage in using the English language. On the contrary; both are real masters of all its nuances and, indeed, very considerable artists in English. Here again the problem arises from the nature of drama itself. These plays are by Africans about Africans in an

African social context. And they are, largely, about Africans who, in reality, speak their own African languages. It is here that the problem lies. We are here presented with African peasants, African fishermen, African labourers expressing themselves in impeccable English. Of course in reality they speak their own languages equally impeccably and the playwrights have merely translated what they would have said in those languages into the equivalent English. Precisely! Which is to say that these original plays labor under the universal handicap of all translated drama. (256; qtd. in Irele, *African Experience* 52)

Thus it can be posited that the problematic of modern African literature lies precisely in the issue of language and its relation to the notion of translation. This paper, therefore, attempts to examine how translation functions as a critical as well as a creative activity in African literature. In this context, to "translate" means, literally, "to carry across," and this implies all other forms which carry the prefix *trans*. It also means not only transportation or transmission or transposition but also transformation and transmutation, for all these activities take place when the African writer sets out to write in a European language. My approach to the notion of translation will be understood first in its most orthodox sense as the linguistic operation that consists in transporting meaning from one language to another. However, as Anuradha Dingwaney points out, if translation is one of the primary means by which texts written in one or another indigenous language of the various countries arbitrarily grouped together under the "Third," or non-Western, World are made available in Western, metropolitan languages, it is not restricted to such linguistic transfers alone. For Dingwaney, "translation is also the vehicle" through which "Third World cultures (are made to) travel—transported or 'borne across' to and recuperated by audiences in the West." As she rightly points out, "even texts written in English or in one of the metropolitan languages, but originating in or about non-Western cultures, can be considered under the rubric of translation" (4). Borrowing from Dingwaney, translation is also defined to encompass the process through which African writers incorporate oral and traditional literary techniques such as proverbs, repetition, folktales, etc., into the foreign medium. "An ex-native, French-speaking," Sartre reminds us in his Preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, "bends that language to new requirements, makes use of it, and speaks to the colonized" (10). With respect to translation, Sartre's notion of the "ex-native" who "bends the (French) language to new requirements" refers to the modifications that African writers, for instance, bring to the European language, modifications that do not come from within the confines of the European language but rather from without, that is, from their African languages and models.

While literary translation in Africa might be a novelty, there is no reason why it should not be governed by similar constraints which have influenced this kind of translation elsewhere. According to Charles Nama, even though literary translation in Africa has not been subjected to the



same kind of analysis as has been the case in the West, scholars are becoming more and more aware of the role of translation in African literature. It must be obvious, however, that questions of formal and dynamic equivalence introduced by Nida are major problems to the translator who works with African texts because of the multiplicity of meanings usually attached to specific words in African languages. For this reason, most of the Western-oriented, linguistics-based translation theories have shortcomings and therefore are not very applicable or relevant to African texts. The major weakness of these theories is that they do not take into consideration underlying sociocultural factors in works produced by African artists. A consideration of these factors in African literature will produce what Kwame Appiah has called "thick translation" and which he defines as

a translation that seeks with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context. . . . A thick description of the context of literary production, a translation that draws on and creates that sort of understanding, meets the need to challenge ourselves . . . to go further, to undertake the harder project of a genuinely informed respect for others. (817-18)

It is already this form of translation that Okot p'Bitek uses in his translation of *Horn of My Love*, the same approach that Wole Soyinka employs in translating the work of the eminent Yoruba writer Fagunwa. In his assessment of Fagunwa's works, Abiola Irele notes in *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology* that "Fagunwa's works belong then to the great tradition of allegorical and symbolic literature, set within the framework of a particular complex of cultural references. His achievement resides in his creation of a form in which the Yoruba imaginative tradition can be given a translation in modern terms, and in the process acquire new vitality . . ." (182). What Irele alludes to as "cultural references" in Fagunwa's works permeate those of several African writers and present special problems in the translation of modern African literature into European languages.

It is also the nature of these special problems that Simon Gikandi has termed the "epistemology of translation." In analyzing the translation of Ngugi's *Matigari Ma Njiruungi* from the Gikuyu into English, Gikandi notes that the relation between the two versions is not one of equality. According to him the two texts function in a political situation where English is more powerful than Gikuyu. This is because, as he points out, if Ngugi's intention was to make the Gikuyu text the great original to which all translations would be subordinated, this intention is defeated not only by the political repression of *Matigari*, but by the act of translation itself. By suppressing certain unique aspects of Gikuyu language that give it power and identity (for example, proverbs and sayings), Gikandi asserts, the translator of *Matigari* makes the novel read as if it was originally written in English, thereby defeating Ngugi's intention of restoring the primacy of the African language as the mediator of an African experience.

Although Ngugi did not translate *Matigari*, he has translated some of his works himself and makes a strong plea for translation to bridge the gap

between local and international languages. While dismissing one of the primary tenets of linguistic relativity, that of the untranslatability of languages, Ngugi calls translation, in *Decolonising the Mind*, a “dialogue between the literatures, languages and cultures of the different nationalities within any one country—forming the foundations of a truly national literature and culture, a truly national sensibility!” (85). As Katherine Williams points out, by arguing passionately for the mediating tool of translation and by assuming that translation is possible, Ngugi is propounding a double-edged solution to the opposition between relativity and universality. Ngugi preserves his particular culture by preserving his language, but he can also tap into a perfectly workable mode of “universal” communication by calling for a vital community of translators. For Ngugi, in translation lies the dialectical means to resolve the conflict between particular language and universal communication. In Ngugi’s translation model, the linguistic effects of colonialism’s displacement of the self are resolved both in theory and in practice.

If the translation of African literature from African languages into European languages is no easy task, the translation of this literature from one European language into another presents even more problems. This is because African writers are creative translators in the sense that in their works, they convey concepts and values from a given linguistic, oral culture into a written form in an alien language. Thus, according to Nama, the African writer is an “interpreter” of culture in the sense that the African writer is sometimes communicating ideas and meanings of several cultural artifacts in a given society. Consequently, while he or she indulges in the act of creative translation, the African writer is also evidently analytical and explains the norms of his or her society. Achebe, for instance, provides insights in his novels on how a society balances its norms, expectations, and the individual, and how complex relationships were in traditional society. Even though the African writer uses symbols and metaphors that touch on a real African situation to reflect or express an idea, he or she also goes beyond a particular time and place because, by writing in a foreign language, the final product is invested with meanings that apply in varying degrees to different people and societies.

Given Africa’s turbulent history marked by imperialist interventions, European languages have had to pay a certain price as vehicles of communication. The Africanization, or what Zabus prefers to call “indigenization” process, which is the ultimate effect of this hybrid of “new language,” makes literary translation in Africa particularly difficult in view of the fact that no theory of literary translation for this area has been articulated so far. In addition to the African specificity of the text to be translated, translating the narrative prose of African writers of French expression into English (and vice versa) presents additional problems. Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet explain that the most fundamental problem of all translation from French to English lies in the psychological differences between the two languages. While English is concrete and sees reality from the outside, French is more abstract and sees things from the inside. English defines movement and shape more clearly than French by its concrete verbs and its



particles. It has a more marked sense of evolution by reason of its continuous tenses. French is often more analytic and English more synthetic. English has a wider range of vocabulary but not so strict a usage as French, and whereas English words by their very structure suggest the ideas they express, French words often owe their meaning to associations. Therefore, any translation from French to English demands a certain modulation or change in the way of looking at reality. In the field of literary translation from French to English the translator also has to have an appreciation of the cultural differences between the two linguistic groups. A knowledge of the French literary background is essential, for, as Brenda Packman has pointed out, French writers tend to be influenced by their predecessors, to form themselves into "movements," and to be more preoccupied with literary form than their English counterparts.

In an article on the African writer and his public, Mahamadou Kane has remarked that whereas the literature of any European country is first and foremost national and expresses the intelligence and the sensitivity of one specific people, African literature claims to embrace the cultural realities of a large number of different countries and peoples. Moreover, by borrowing a language and a literary framework, the African writer is obliged to conform to the spirit of these elements. In other words, the African writer writing in a European language is expressing African realities in terms of the psychology, the collective experience, and the literary traditions of Europe. However, by successfully experimenting with African and non-African forms, writers like Achebe and Kourouma are able to transcend the non-African component to produce works that can be termed "African." African writing has therefore an essentially hybrid nature imposed upon it by the diversity of the African realities it represents, and the non-African form in which it is expressed. The translator of francophone African literature, for instance, has to go beyond the French expression to the other culture, the other psychology that lies beneath it, that is, to reach the African context which is its focus. Although the work to be translated exists in French or English, the translator has to make evident the African esthetic which informs the work of the author and which is its driving force.

This explains why Paul Bandia has observed that translating African creative works is a double "transposition" process: a primary level of translation, i.e., the expression of African thought in a European language by an African writer and a secondary level of translation, i.e., the "transfer" of African thought from one European language to another by the translator. The primary level of translation results in an African variety of the European language, and the translator's task is to deal with the unique problems posed by this so-called non-standard language. At the secondary level, the translator deals not only with the interlingual but also the inter-semiotic translation process, as both the content and formal characteristics of the African oral narrative are crucial to the full representation of meaning in the written target language. Since, for the most part, the African content and form have already been captured by the African author in his European language of writing, what the translator needs to do is to carry across into the target European language (L2) the same African content

and form. In other words, the critical translator has to be alive to the socio-cultural systems involved in the African text so that his or her translation will be able to carry the African esthetic into the other European medium of expression. Of course, finding "equivalent expression and register" implies that the translator, as pointed out, has to be sensitive to the psychological differences between the two European languages since these languages do not share the same world view. This divergence in perception often results in linguistic and cultural differences between the two language groups, which will thus add to the difficulty of "transferring" African thought from one European language into another.

Because of these factors, there is a subjective dimension to the process since the translation will have to depend on the translator's reading of the cultural and ideological concepts and social history that produced the African text. However, despite the obvious difficulties, the main aim of the translator of African literature is to preserve, as much as possible, the cultural value systems of African thought.

Obviously, writing in a foreign language has not been the exclusive pre-occupation of African writers. Many great literary figures have, at one time or another, expressed themselves in tongues other than their own. If Kafka, a Jewish intellectual living in Czechoslovakia and one of the few Jewish writers who spoke fluent Czech, Hebrew, and Yiddish, wrote in German, he never forgot the influence of his mother tongue on his other languages. In one of his journals translated into French he writes: "Voyez-vous, je parle toutes les langues, mais en yiddish" (207) 'See, I speak all the languages, but in Yiddish.' Writers like Nabokov, Borges, Conrad, and Beckett wrote some of their major works in foreign languages. These bilingual or multilingual writers continually confront their work in terms of what else it might be, and in fact, what it has to become when their works are translated into other languages. However, while the Nabokovs, the Conrads, and the Becketts who choose to write in a foreign language are few and far between, writing in a foreign language is a common plight for the many African writers who decided to "discard" their native languages in favor of that of the erstwhile colonizer. While the Becketts and the Conrads do not have to deal with the power relations that govern languages, while their choice of language may not be governed by a situation of diglossia, and while they may not be bothered by identity crises when they choose one language over the other, or when they express themselves in different languages, African writers, because of their past or present circumstances as (de)colonized persons, have to live and deal with all the difficulties, contradictions, and alienations in their use of language.

The analysis of the creative use of European languages in African literature shows very clearly how great is the debt owed to translation. It demonstrates that translation is significant in African literature in two senses: it explores the practice through which texts are transferred from one culture to another in the usual sense of the word and, what is more important, it explores the process whereby, as a result of the postcolonial legacy, writers in a "weakened" culture transpose and transform their languages and models into the dominant culture. The first sense of translation has come

to play an important role in the criticism and interpretation of African literature since more and more African works (in African or European languages) are being translated into other languages. As already noted, however, the translation of African literary texts involves more than the possession of a certain linguistic competence. The translator, in addition to his or her linguistic competence, must possess certain extralinguistic abilities that will help him or her in analyzing and interpreting the context of the African literary text. Unfortunately, because most translators of African works adhere too closely to the tenets of translation theories developed in the West, their translated texts give primacy to the European languages that the African writers had sought to subvert in their act of writing.

The second sense of translation, the sense that I refer to as creative translation by African writers, manifests itself in African writing in the authors' transposition of African oral and traditional literary techniques of storytelling into the European written genre. It must be pointed out that one difference between the modern African novel and its European counterpart is that of narrative form. For stylistic and ideological reasons, African writers tend to have been inspired by oral literature and tradition. This tradition has helped to shape the writer's conceptions of the world and his or her relationship to the external world. In the act of creative translation, oral literature is identified by the use of its elements: imagery, proverbs, myths, folktales, dramatic factors, and lyrical language. However, as Theo Vincent points out, it must be emphasized that the true significance of oral literature in modern African writing does not lie in how much of it is abstracted into any one literary piece. It lies rather in the deeper (spiritual) atmosphere that it provides for a work and the meaning and structure that its aggregate presence gives to a particular work. Thus, to paraphrase Irele, the major forms of the African oral tradition are employed in modern African writing to project structures of the collective mind that serve as explicative narratives of the world (see "Narrative, History"). Chinua Achebe and Ahmadou Kourouma are the grand masters in the transposition and re-creation of this verbal art form in the creative translation of African literature.

According to Bassnett-McGuire, just as literary study has changed its nature and methodology since its development outside Europe, so notions of translation have begun to lose their overly European focus. Thus, just as literary studies have sought to shake off their Eurocentric inheritance, so translation thinking is branching out in new ways, because the emphasis on the ideological as well as the linguistic makes it possible for the subject to be discussed in the wider terms of postcolonial discourse.

The African writer no longer considers the European language as the only viable means of narrative construction and expression. Faced with the charge (such as the one by Ngugi wa Thiong'o) that by writing in European languages that is spoken, let alone read, by just a few million speakers in Africa, African writers are in effect participating, however inadvertently, in the further canonization of European-language literature, contemporary African writers seek new ways to sustain a discourse that can be called African. Thus, their act of writing in the dominant European tongue is both

linguistic and political. Their writing reveals the stakes, conflicts, tensions, and the power struggles between the European and African languages. By choosing to "Africanize"—that is, translate—their languages and models into the European language, the African writers question the historically established authority of the European language and establish their languages as equally viable means of producing discourse.

---

## NOTE

1. Volumes 83-85 of *Notre Librairie* (1986), devoted to national literatures, contain some interesting statements made by African writers about writing in European languages.

---

## WORKS CITED

- Andrade, Oswald de. "Manifeste anthropophage: le modernisme brésilien." *Europe* Mar. 1970: 43-49.
- Appiah, Kwame A. "Thick Translation." *Callaloo* 16.4 (1993): 808-19.
- Bandia, Paul. "Translation as Culture Transfer: Evidence from African Creative Writing." *Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction* 6.2 (1993): 55-77.
- Barthes, Roland. *Le degré zéro de l'écriture*. Paris: Seuil, 1953.
- Bassnett-McGuire, Susan. *Translation Studies*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Belitt, Ben. *Adam's Dream: A Preface to Translation*. New York: Grove, 1978.
- Boni, Nazi. *Crépuscule des temps anciens*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1962.
- Chevrier, Jacques. "L'écrivain africain devant la langue française." *L'Afrique littéraire et artistique* 50 (1979): 49.
- Dingwaney, Anuradha. Introduction. *Between Languages and Cultures: Translation and Cross Cultural Texts*. Ed. Anuradha Dingwaney and Carol Maier. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1995.
- Esslin, Martin. "Two Nigerian Playwrights." *Introduction to African Literature*. Ed. Ulli Beier. London: Longman, 1967. 256.
- Gassama, Makhily. *Kuma, interrogation sur la littérature nègre de langue française (poésie-roman)*. Dakar: NEA, 1978.
- Gikandi, Simon. "The Epistemology of Translation: Ngugi, Matigari, and the Politics of Language." *Research in African Literatures* 22.4 (1991): 161-67.
- Irele, Abiola. "Narrative, History, and the African Imagination." *Narrative* 1.2 (Spring 1993): 156-172.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*. London: Heinemann, 1981.
- Kane, Mahamadou. "L'écrivain africain et son public." *Présence Africaine* 58 (1966): 8-31.
- Koné, Ahmadou. "Le romancier africain devant la langue d'écriture." *Francofonie* 22 (1992): 75-86.
- Nama, Charles A. "A Critical Analysis of the Translation of African Literature." *Language & Development* 10.1 (1990): 75-86.

- N'Gal, Georges. Interview with P. Herzberger-Fofana. *Ecrivains africains et identités culturelles: entretiens*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1989. 115-24.
- Ngugi, wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: Heinemann, 1986.
- Okara, Gabriel. *The Voice*. London: André Deutsch, 1964.
- . "African Speech . . . English Words." *Transition* 10 (1963): 15-16.
- Packman, Brenda. "Some Problems of Translation in African Literature." *Perspectives on African Literature*. Ed. Christopher Heywood. New York: Africana, 1968. 64-77.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. Preface. *The Wretched of the Earth*. By Frantz Fanon. New York: Grove, 1963.
- Todorov, T. "Bilinguisme, dialogisme et schizophrénie." *Du bilinguisme*. Paris: Denoël, 1985.
- Vinay, Jean Paul, and Jean Darbelnet. *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais*. Paris: Didier, 1958.
- Williams, Katherine. "Decolonizing the World: Language, Culture, and Self in the Works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Gabriel Okara." *Research in African Literatures* 22.4 (1991): 53-61.
- Zabus, Chantal. *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991.