Self-translation, code switching or adaptation? Some reflexions based on religious discourse in Burkina Faso

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ABSTRACT

In multilingual countries, languages are used according to specific functions granted to them within the society. This is the case in Burkina Faso, a west African country of 17 million people with more than sixty-six local languages and French as the official language. Translation in such a context tends to adapt each language to its functions. In this respect, many texts or speeches translated from European languages into local ones undergo changes in the contents, which can stand within adaptation, or be considered as code switching. In the functionalist theories in translation, adapting message to the audience and to the function of the communication is viewed as salutary because it takes into account the cultural concerns. However, this paper questions some of these translation practices drawn basically from religious texts and attempts to know whether they are unavoidable in multilingual contexts, inherent to self-translation or just code switching?

KEYWORDS

Introduction

Burkina Faso, a West African State with roughly 17 million inhabitants is home to more than sixty-six local languages in addition to French the former colonial and official language. The illiteracy rate is more than 70% (www.insd.bf, last accessed on 15 January 2016). No local language is spoken by the whole population and lingua franca are used as languages of wider communication: Mooré is used as such in the center, Dioula in the west and Fulfudé in the north.

In most multilingual countries, communication is carried out in different ways, from unilingual speeches to bilingual and multilingual ones. When languages are in contact, some social and linguistic phenomena occur. They include code switching, intra-lingual and extra-lingual translation. In Burkina Faso, during public addresses such as health, political or religious campaigns, use is made of translation and / or code switching, most of the time, from French into the lingua franca of the area where communication takes place. This attempt to convey the 'same message' in French and local languages is an attempt to bridge the gap of the functional repartition of the languages as explained by Napon (1998): local languages tend to be used for cultural and social matters and the colonial language is used for education, scientific, political and administrative purposes. There is a kind of complementary use of languages. The need for translation from French into local languages is growing fast in this globalizing world and for many specific purposes in Burkina Faso; and, as in any translation event, choices are unavoidable. Sanon-Ouattara (2004, 2005) showed how translation in the religious field in Burkina Faso obeys the different functions granted to the languages involved and builds different audiences. Although one can be satisfied with the use of functionalist theories in such a multicultural and multilingual context because they lay emphasis on the function of the translation, this paper intends to analyse how this is carried out.

The following questions will be addressed: What translation problems can arise between functionally different languages in Burkina Faso? How are these problems handled? Can the sociolinguistic repartition of languages justify all the choices made by translators? Do Self-translators practice translation or code switching?

1. Frame of the study, definitions and methodology

1.1. Frame of the study and definitions

The main frame of study used for this paper is the skopos theory, which is a translation theory created in the 70's. It advocates a shift from linguistic and formal theories of translation to a functionally and socioculturally oriented translation theory (Nord 1991). It is based on the theory of action which sees translation as
fulfilling an action and as such, is a goal-oriented task. The term skopos comes from the Greek skopoi meaning goal, which must be defined before every translation. Hence, in the same way as each action aims at a goal, translation also must aim at a goal or a result. So, depending on the goals assigned, choices are unavoidable in every translation event, because it is impossible to re-express all aspects of the source text (form, tone, contents) into the target text.

Code switching is the term used to refer to the change of language or code in a context of communication. It may occur in a formal or informal context. It is very common in multilingual communities. Grosjean (1982 : 59) defines it as “the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speeches belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems.”

Auto-translation and self-translation refer to the act of translating one’s own writings (or speech) or the result of such an understanding (Baker 1998).

1.2. Methodology

The method of analysis based on Nord (1991)’s model and adapted in Sanon-Ouattara (2005) is used in this paper. The relevance of Nord’s method lies in the fact that it applies to both oral and written texts and provides a good basis for intercultural analysis and a detailed list of questions which enables a pragmatic analysis of texts in context, hence a sociolinguistic analysis of translation. It is completed by the theory of action which is also a functionalist approach based on the goal of the translation. Two main considerations can be distinguished in this analysis: extra textual and intra textual factors. Here, extra textual factors analysed are the author of the source text, its translator, the place and time where and when the message was delivered and translated, the functions and purpose of the translation, the commissioner (s) or initiator (s) of the translation, his (their) intentions, the medium and motives of the source and target texts. Intra textual factors suggested by Nord (1991) aim at examining factors that may give clues on extra textual factors and provide a better understanding of the text: here, the subdivision of Leech and Short (1981) which includes the same items as Nord (1991) is followed. The lexicon and contents will be the main parts analysed. In this paper, only the comparison, which is the most relevant part will be presented. Sequences to be analyzed are drawn from the corpus of Sanon-Ouattara (2005). They are all oral texts and self-translations between French and Dioula and vice versa, delivered in 2003 in Bobo-Dioulasso, the biggest city in the western part of Burkina Faso.
The corpus is made of two oral texts, two religious ones delivered in catholic churches in Bobo-Dioulasso. For space constraints here, we cannot give all full versions. We are going to choose only the most relevant parts to carry out the analysis. The first corpus is presented as an oral translation from French into Dioula and the second one a translation from Dioula into French. Both are self-translations, delivered in Bobo-Dioulasso in April 2003, the first one at the Cathedral of Bobo-Dioulasso on Good Friday of the catholic liturgic calendar and the second one the following day on Easter eve in the church «notre dame de la Salette» another catholic church of the city. The author and translator of the first text was the bishop of the diocese, hence, the head of the catholic church in this region of Burkina Faso. The author of the second text was an ordinary priest of the diocese. Bobo-Dioulasso, where both sermons were delivered, is located at the western part of Burkina Faso where the dominant religion is Islam, often linked to the Dioula, a vehicular language mainly used for informal commerce. Dioula is closely linked to the Bambara, a language of Mali, originally spoken by the Islamic missionaries, which penetrated sub-saharan Africa. Therefore, Dioula, Bambara and their other variants are associated to Islam and spoken in Burkina Faso, Mali, Cote d’Ivoire, Guinea, Senegal, Gambia, Liberia, Sierra Leone by millions of people who do not have it as their mother tongue. For many people indeed, especially in Cote d’Ivoire, a neighboring country of Burkina Faso, Dioula and Muslims are quite synonyms.

Sermons in the catholic church are meant to explain the biblical texts read, sensitize on some current societal phenomena and show the stance of the catholic church on major ongoing issues. They are translated into “pastoral languages” to make it possible for non francophones to understand the message delivered in French and to sensitize them on issues of concern. Pastoral languages are the languages of wide communication in a given region. There is generally one language per region, in addition to French in Burkina Faso. It is often the most spoken language of the region, but it has to be discussed and chosen by the local hierarchy of the church.

The function or ultimate purpose of sermons is to cause a basic change in people’s behaviour in the light of biblical texts and the doctrine of the catholic church. Their commissioner and initiator are the hierarchy of the catholic church as institution, which, by the same way, provides for celebrants’ basic needs. The medium of communication is mixed; the text initially written in French is sometimes read orally, sometimes commented, and then translated orally into the pastoral language of the locality. The general international context here was Lent time, Easter and the war in Irak which had burst out two days earlier.
3. Results

For space constraints, we are not able to present the full analysis here, but the most relevant results, presented separately before the discussion.

3.1. Sequence I

The extra textual factors relevant for this study and presented in the previous part are the author of the source text, its translator, the place and time where and when the message was delivered and translated, the functions and purpose of the translation, the commissioner (s) or initiator (s) of the translation, his (their) intentions, the medium and motives of the source and target texts.

The intra-textual analysis gives the following results: the first notice is the length of the messages. The French message which was delivered prior to the Dioula one is by far longer. The strategies used by the author-translator are explicitation, an attempt of adaptation by the change in topics addressed. Explicitation is the fact of introducing in the target language precisions that are implicit in the source language, and, adaptation, the fact of taking into account the differences between cultural realities of the languages involved to express the same effect in the target language as the one expressed in the source language (Delisle et al. 1999).

Omissions and additions are also noticed. Omission is defined by Delisle et al. (1999 : 165) as “a translation error where the translator fails to render a necessary information from the source text” and addition as “a translation error where the translator introduces into the target text superfluous information or stylistic effect not present in the source text” (Delisle et al., 1999 : 115). These definitions that can be considered as mistakes in translation or mistranslations are debatable because some of the words used to explain them are ambiguous. This is the case of “necessary information” and “superfluous” whose limits are difficult to define.

Three translation problems arose: linguistic, pragmatic and cultural.

Differences at the lexical level are numerous. In French, the topics dealt with are judgements, tribunals, conviction, war in Irak, powerful nations of this world, weapons of mass destruction, etc. Expressions used are gens du Nord et du Sud (people from the North and from the South, meaning Westerners and people from poor countries), les produits chimiques, (chemical products), les armes de destruction massive, (weapons of mass destruction). These expressions are omitted from the Dioula version which, instead, used expressions like yafa lon (forgiveness day) (referring to a day instituted as such in Burkina Faso to calm down the people after the murder of a journalist allegedly by people close to the gouvernement), sesebew (CCB from a French abbreviation which means Basic Christian Community), Ala deli jenkuluw (prayer groups), Ouagadougou (capital of Burkina Faso) which are all locally known realities.
The Dioula version also deals with confessions, the country where Abraham is from (referring to Irak), and ends by advice given to the assembly on how the christian faith should be lived. The French version used topics and words connected to the western countries whereas the dioula version used locally known places, concepts. Referring to Irak, the Dioula version explained that it is the country where Abraham was born, assuming that this audience does not have this cultural background.

In addition to the differences in the topics addressed, different rhetorical styles are noticeable. Both texts were delivered in the same contexts to the same assembly, but they were drawn from different resources. The translation strategy used is an elliptical one and the tones of the messages also strengthen this fact. The French text seems more solemn and built on a narrative tone, relating facts, whereas the Dioula one is softer and built on an advisory tone. Many examples illustrate this fact: in French the author describes first the extreme love that led Jesus to sacrifice himself. Then, he presented the cross as the symbol of the North and the South before putting: ‘présentement en sa personne s’affrontent les forces du mal et la puissance de l’amour’ (presently, around him are fighting the forces of evil against those of love). Further, he spoke of Jesus as a ‘convict’ among others, a crucified person between two others, a dying person among this multitude of thousands of people dying every day’ before concluding by this rhetorical question: “Quoi de plus, quoi en plus en cette occasion douloureuse?” (what more can be said in addition to these current painful events)? These passages omitted from the Dioula text are a few examples of the committed tone of the French message. On the other hand, in Dioula, the following expressions are indicators of the advising tone of the message:

*N'I e kretiyen ye, a kanyi e ka* (if you are a Christian, it is good that you...)
*N'I be bamba janko ka gwere Yezu la ... a kanyi* (If you try to get closer to Jesus, it is good that you...)
*Ka ta komunyon ta, a kanyi I ka I dusu saniya* (to receive the communion, it is good that you clean first your heart)
*Ka gwere kruwa yiri la fana, a kanyi I ka I dusu saniya* (if you want to get close to the wooden cross, it is good to clean your heart)

All these expressions give moral advice that is omitted from the French text.

This tone is common in the African context of communication. Under the palaver tree, during community meetings, talks are carried out in a posed tone of dialogue and invitation to wisdom by proverbs, pieces of advice etc. The advisory tone of the Dioula message echoes this African context. It does not say anything about the seriousness of the issue discussed in French. The author translator attempts to adapt each speech to the supposed background of the audiences and refers to different frames. Indeed, the fact of translating the word ‘*iraki*’ by ‘*minw*
tun be Abraham ka dugu la, a tun bora folo folo dugu min na (the people from Abraham’s country, where he came from originally) can be considered as an explicitation or substitution, thus reinforcing the hypothesis of the different frames of references in the two languages. The meaning of the message is guided otherwise in Dioula. The detail about the native country of Abraham was implied in French but made explicit in Dioula. Audio tapes on the war in Irak, sold in Bobo-Dioulasso, qualified that war as one of religions between Islam and Christianity. So, the association of Abraham’s name to Irak can be understood as an attempt to correct the idea on a country presented as a Muslim and so a ‘terrorist’ one in the dominant media. This allusion shows that it is actually the native country of the father of Christianity, hence, the country of the father of both Christians and Muslims, so that both understand that they are not that different. This is understandable also because the dominant religion in Bobo-Dioulasso is Islam. This explicitation strategy is an evidence of the general background of both audiences, as assumed by the author: the French speaking audience was more likely to have access to this detail about Irak than the Dioula one.

3. 2.  Sequence II

The second sermon presents the same features as the first one. There are lexical gaps between the Dioula and the French versions. The same general context prevailed. The message in Dioula was the first to be delivered. It is much longer than the French version. The author, first of all, made a joke on the fact that people may feel sleepy and, gave them a piece of advice on how to sleep if they fail to stay awake. Then, he pointed out the importance of Easter in the history of human salvation, before telling a story received, he said, from the Bamana people two months before. Bamana people are from the west of Burkina Faso and they are mainly farmers and traditional religion practitioners. The story deals with a lonely child who had lost all his family, leaving him alone in the world. He heard about a very generous king somewhere in the world, who was very sensitive to whoever came to him and was always ready to help. The child walked forty days to reach the king’s house, where he was welcomed by the king himself who treated him as the other children of the house. He stayed many years and, one day, on his way back from farm, he saw many wild guineafowls that nobody seemed to hunt. Once at home, he asked the king why people do not hunt guineafowls. The king gave him a gun and asked him to kill one the following day. When he brought the bird, the king threw it on the roof.

Some time later, the king decided to send him off, and granted him a considerable wealth in addition to his own daughter who was to become his wife in exchange of only one formal prescription: it was, not to turn left, to avoid the road on his left. The child who grew to be a young man decided then to go back home with his wealth and wife but did not respect the prescription of the king.
He was attracted by a house where everything was shining and people were dancing *janjoba* and *Mapouka* (which are commonly known dances in Bobo Dioulasso). *Janjoba* is often associated with the women of Bobo-Dioulasso and *Mapouka* known all over West Africa. The young man did not observe the prescription and stopped exactly where he shouldn't have. The place and its owner were named “jealousy and destruction.” The owner cheated him by telling false stories about the guineafowl he killed one day, pretending that its feathers were very expensive. He decided to go back to the king's house to claim his due. There, the latter took back his presents and the young man lost everything. The closing formula for short stories in Dioula was used to end the story ‘*n’ya ta yoro min n’ya bla o yoro la*’ (I end my story where I started it).

The priest continues, saying that this story applies to every human being because people think that they know what is good even more than God. During the Lent time, he says, people walked for forty days to search for goodness and holiness. They received a lot; now he prays to God for them to keep goodness and holiness along and never forget that “jealousy and destruction” are on the way, waiting for them. The celebrant concluded saying that what God does, is by far better than what this king has done.

The speech in French is shorter than the Dioula one. The first topic addressed is the story of human salvation through the readings. Then another story is told but this time, about a Japanese painter who painted a very nice vase which fell down one day and got broken. Everyone was sad in the village but the painter succeeded in pasting the different parts and put a golden thread on it so that it became nicer. He used this parable to explain that humanity works the same way. In everyday's life, there are joys and pains but God renews everything. He then spoke of Easter, in the event of which people must rise again with Jesus Christ. For him, everyone knows inwardly how this story of the broken vase is his or hers and that only God's mercy renews everything. Through confessions, he added, priests know how God has been good to people by remaking many vases as the potter, with patience and love. For that priest, personal injuries are opportunities to forgive to other people, to love more truly because Easter is the celebration of forgiveness, of salvation which establishes peace and light. He then spoke of the pope who has been bearing a heavy cross for years, since he asked the world to avoid war, but nobody listened to him. The rest of the sermon is a kind on insistance on the story of salvation, broken vase renewed, the immensity of God’s love, etc.

The general observation here is also the different lengths of the messages. Both speeches relied on stories to convey messages. The Dioula one took the form of an African tale and the other one an ordinary story. The frames of reference are the following: the Dioula text seems to be the source text here and the French one the translation. Local realities referred to in the Dioula text are in the form of the story, its source ‘*Bamana*’, local references ‘*janjoba*’, ‘*mapouka*’, ‘*kongo kami*’ (wild guineafowl). These are absent from the French text. On the other hand, the
Both stories were then interpreted as a call for change. The common topic between the speeches are the importance of Easter, the importance of the immensity of God’s love, God who is able to show his goodness beyond human expectations.

There is also a similarity in the tones used. Stories were used as symbols to build arguments for the same goal.

4. Discussion

Considering both texts in their whole, can we speak here of compensation? This strategy is defined by Delisle et al. (1999 : 125-126) as

a translation procedure where translation encounters an element in the source text that cannot occur in the same place and cannot use the same form as in the target text, but where they can preserve the general tone of the text by replacing this element in another place.

From what precedes, one can assert that translation problems arising between functionally different languages are lexical, connotational and functional. The languages do not have the same canon and the audiences do not have the same background. In some fields for example as in politics, there are lexical and conceptual gaps to fill, lack of access to current issues for local language speakers.

There is an attempt to solve these translation problems by adapting each text to the function granted to it within the society. Different references are used in the attempt to fulfill the same functions. Indeed, the function of homilies is to thoroughly explain the gospel, taking advantage of the current issue of the moment and passing over a message to address a concern. Each priest self translator knows the languages involved in the translation process, but nothing is imposed on him as regards translation techniques. There is also the fact that self-translators tend to change the contents of the messages because they feel free to do so. He or she does not feel bound to the notions of fidelity and loyalty, for, he is the author and the translator.

In the first text, the author-translator builds whether consciously or unconsciously two types of audiences : a prestigious one, aware of the political current issues, a less prestigious and local one for whom he refers to local events to convey a message and create solidarity.

In the second text, the adaptation of the Dioula text to its audience consisted in using a story format used in Dioula language while the French version used a more westernized story about painters and ‘nice vase’ that means nothing to
the Dioula audience. Indeed, painting and the notion of beauty of a vase would sound strange in Dioula. The format of the Dioula story is the one used around the fire at night in many countrysides of Burkina Faso. In these parts, there is no electricity, so people tend to create their own entertainment and one of their favorite activities is to sit around a story teller and listen to his or her tales which most of the time end with a moral teaching. The time of delivery of the second message (night) and the closing formula “n ya ta nyoro min na, n’ya bla o yoro la” (I end my story where I started it) serve as reminders of this African practice.

In multilingual communities, languages are used in a complementary way. Connection between functionally different languages through translation reveals lexical gaps and the lack of correspondence of some notions. This leads to the reproduction of the sociological functions of each language, which can be qualified as code switching by linguists. Gumperz and Hymes (1972) described similar situations in their definition of ‘metaphorical code switching’ occurring among bilinguals, and resulting from a change in topic and setting the tone of the communication. Self-translation or auto translation is considered by some translation scholars as closer to bilingualism than translation (Grutman, 1998: 17). In auto translation, the author allows himself all kinds of liberty in reproducing the message, which would not be accepted, had it been done by another translator (ibid.: 18). The fact of considering these texts as a translation is debatable in many respects. According to the skopos theory, the aims of the translation determine the strategy of translation. Loyalty to the text’s author is also required from the translator (Nord 2001). In these cases, the author and the translator are the same people. It is thus very difficult to assess disloyalty to one’s own self.

What are the merits and drawbacks of the skopos theory for such a study? Since the basic criteria of this theory are the functions of the target text, the question as to whether these functions were achieved is paramount. If we consider the main ideas defended in both sermons in French and Dioula, we can assert that both texts aimed at the same functions.

The symbols used are different but they relate to the same idea. Each language used the resources granted to it to convey the message. In addition, as Nord (1991: 6) puts it:

Interpreting (or oral translation) is a form of face to face communication; both the sender and the recipient are present... All participants communicate in the same place at the same time, using the same medium and the same function.

So, the context helps to deduct the function. An empirical research, an interview or an observation of people’s behavior would be necessary to assert if the functions were fulfilled.

On the other hand, these strategies give clues to translators’ priorities.
The *skopos* theory based on the theory of action put emphasis on the goal aimed at by the translation. As such, if the strategy allows for similar goals in both source and target texts, then, the language transfer is considered in this theory as a translation. There is an implication of the cultural factor in the translation strategy, which is comparable to adaptation qualified by Vinay and Darbelnet (1958 : 52) as the “extreme limit of translation”. Nord (1991)'s method fits all text types. Here, in cases of auto-translations, it gives hybrid results because it is difficult to set a clear cut limit between translation and linguistic phenomenon such as code-switching as defined above “the use of different codes in the same context.” However, if one analyses the cases where code switching is used and the goals it aimed at, it is difficult to assert that we are in a situation of code switching. Indeed, in the different models of code-switching presented by Myers-Scotton (1993), there are marked and unmarked choices. In the marked choice, code-switching can be used to pass a message, to show closeness or distance with the person in front. It is presented as a personal negotiation of the orator in a given situation, to find out what is the better choice of language for him or her. The unmarked choice occurs where in a given environment, the speaker follows the expected choice in such a situation. In both cases, code-switching occurs in situations where the orator makes choices and mostly in informal contexts. Here, the situation is different because the change of language is carried out in a formal context.

Hence, although we are face with a case of language change, which is comparable to code switching if one relies only on the contents of the messages delivered in both languages, this practice can be defined as a translation and justified in the *skopos* theory which gives priority to the target text function and the effectiveness of the communication within the target audience. How does the researcher know whether the translation fulfills the function aimed at in the target audience? To be able to answer this question, as we mentioned before, an empirical research is needed. Even so, such a study may not guarantee a definitive answer.

The objectives aimed at by the translators seem to be the adaptation of the different messages to their languages and audiences, and to the effectiveness of communication, as assumed by the author. The functions prevailed to the detriment of the form and some semantic elements. To solve translation problems then, the authors translators chose to built somehow two different texts that fit the different audiences. One reason for this strategy could be that at the second Vatican council in 1965, cultural issues were discussed and among the outcomes, the use of local languages in African churches has been a compromise snatched from the hierarchy of the church. So, using African languages to render African canon and values can bear an ideological touch especially in Christianity where people from the South have often accused Westerners of trying to dominate them culturally through this religion. The authors translators adopted quite con-
sciously (we can assert) approaches keeping each text in its cultural and social usage by building two texts on separate topics. An interview with one of the self-translators confirmed most of our hypotheses (interview with Bishop Anselme Sanon on 6 December 2003 in Bobo Dioulasso).

On the other hand, this strategy of translation can maintain the gap between the French and Dioula speaking audiences. Are translators right to develop different topics according to the language in use? According to the traditional theories strictly oriented toward equivalence, these semantic shifts could be considered as mistranslations.

This study reveals a common practice in catholic churches as regards sermons translation. When self translations occur, celebrants tend to change the lexical contents and the topics dealt with, adapting each content to its language. Can this strategy be assimilated to the dynamic equivalence of Nida and Taber (1969)?

Functionalist theories in multilingual communities can help to solve cultural problems that may arise especially in diglossic situations. On the other hand, one may wonder whether they do not keep and deepen inequalities among French and local languages speakers, since the international topics are dealt with in an international language for an educated audience and local topics with local languages for a non-educated audience. In the same vein, the skopos theory can be seen as an obstacle to the development of languages that normally takes place when languages are in contact as shown by Delisle and Woodsworth (1995). Neologisms, newly coined words or expressions could have been used to enrich local languages even though there would be some difficulty in understanding them at the beginning. This issue of translation strategy in church is a very sensitive one in a quite sensitive domain. There is a dilemma between contents and goals or functions, and also a difficult choice to make between being truly African and Catholic or twisting one’s Africanity to match the culture of those who brought the religion in Africa.

Conclusion

The translation problems which arise between functionally different languages in Burkina Faso are lexical and conceptual ones. They are solved here by the adaptation of each text to its audience, thus creating a gap between the topics dealt with in each language and giving way to the assimilation of this strategy to a form of code switching. However the sociolinguistic repartition of languages in Burkina Faso can justify the choices made by translators here. Indeed, translation in a multilingual context where languages are related to functions imposes choices. The frames of references and the functions granted to languages in the society are different. According to the skopos theory, self-translators in this study achieved translation and not code-switching because both source and target texts aims at the same functions and occur in a context which is different from the one
commonly noticed in situations where code switching is practiced. The feeling of unfaithfulness between source and target texts can be reduced by the reduction of the gaps between language functions in society. These functions must be redefined by a national linguistic policy in order to fill the gap. This implies also, filling the gap between frames of reference and working on an effective development of local languages.
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