

4<sup>th</sup> IBBY AFRICA REGIONAL CONFERENCE

22<sup>nd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> August, 2017, Kampala, Uganda

# **TRANSLATING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN AFRICA**

*'AFRICAN CULTURE CONVEYANCE THROUGH  
INTERCULTURAL ADAPTATION'*

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*Bakame Editions*

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## **Introduction**

Children's literature is often the subject of translations because the child is still less able than the adult to read in a foreign language and that certain countries, have a richer heritage in children's books than others. Enrichment of literature in some countries is done through translation. To the question "how to write for children?" arises its twin "how to translate for children?", raising with it questions about methods, different practices and techniques to apply in translating the literature in general, and specific constraints to be taken into account during the process of translating.

The child is referred to as "a light-brained reader" because he/she does not possess the same knowledge and the same cultural, linguistic and affective abilities as an adult. Therefore translating and writing for children have the same requirements of being for "Target-specific reader".

The necessity for translating children's literature in an African context is explained by the existence of a diverse and rich oral African traditional literature dedicated for children. This facilitates culture exchange and particularly extend the African culture to the other part of the world.

## **Importance of translating children's literature**

- The first translation attempt of children's literature consists of the reproduction of an oral literature into a written form.
- Translation of children's literature is a constant feature in the production of African children's books. Africans need to share their rich literature throughout the continent. In addition, all African countries are not on the same level as regards writing for children. Some countries need to translate what others have written and for a good reason to enjoy same stories in various respective languages.
- In Africa, literature for children is very commonly the subject of translations in particular the picture book. The market is buoyant, it is to satisfy the demand of the readership of some countries less present in this literary category.
- Writing in African languages and translating African Stories into various African (and European) languages enable culture exchange and preserve the rich oral African tradition that has been a bit dormant for long when it comes to translating it.

## **Purpose and propositions of children's literature**

- Entertainment for the child;
- Stimulation of his or her creativity and imagination as well as his or her cultural flourishing;
- Enrichment of language and culture while creating a cultural and contextual environment around the child;
- In order to better transfer and disseminate culture in to children, the translation model is unavoidable;
- The translation process of children's literature requires the translator to reproduce the same charm, effect in the reader of the original version as in the reader of the translated version;
- When translating for children, the translator should be able to recreate the cultural context relative to the culture of the target reader under linguistic, social, historical and national conditions.

## **Children's literature and literature for children**

- What is children's literature and what does it stand for?
- The definition of children's literature can be viewed from two perspectives: that of the reading child and that of the adult;
- Children's literature can be seen either as literature produced and intended for children or as literature read by children;
- Children's literature is more directed toward its readers;
- Some specialists in children's literature describe it as a literature produced specifically for children but here, they exclude all other writing and pictures that children may read;
- While defining children's literature from a sociological or psychological angle, children's literature is anything the child reads or hears, anything from newspapers, series, TV shows, and radio presentations to what we call books.

## Children's literature and literature for children (Cont'd)

- Seen from a very wide perspective, children's literature could be anything that a child finds interesting. For a baby of a few months, a leaf, an ant, or a piece of paper can be "literature".
- Distinction: If a story is written to children, then it is for children, even though it may also be for adults. If a story is not written to children, then it does not form part of the genre writing for children, even if the author, or publisher, hopes it will appeal to children."
- Let us look at the "Kirikou et la sorcière", Snow white, Tintin. Are they children's books, are they written for children? It is to note that adults read and like them too.
- We talk about translating for children instead of the translation of children's literature, as translators are always translating for somebody and for some purpose.
- Translating for children refers to translating for a certain audience and respecting this audience through taking its will and abilities into consideration.

## **TRANSLATING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND TRANSLATING FOR CHILDREN**

- Translating for children involves adapting the text to their level of understanding, their cultural knowledge and beliefs;
- Children are dynamic, imaginative, experimental, interactive and unstable;
- A translator for children should take into account the “extra linguistic” aspects of translation such as illustrations, formulae, and even music and drama, all of which are central issues in translating for children, especially in translating picture books for children who cannot read.

## **TRANSLATING FOR AFRICAN CHILDREN: AN INTERCULTURAL ADAPTATION MODEL**

### **➤ What is Intercultural adaptation?**

The process through which persons in cross-cultural interactions change their communicative behaviour to facilitate understanding.

The adjustment of communicative behaviour to decrease the probability of being misunderstood when speaking with someone from a different culture.

Intercultural adaptation is goal driven. Understanding occurs when individuals can interpret messages such that the communicative goals of interactants are attained.

Intercultural adaptation in the translation of picture books means translating whole situations including the words, the illustrations, and the whole (imagined) reading-aloud situation.

## TRANSLATING FOR AFRICAN CHILDREN: AN INTERCULTURAL ADAPTATION MODEL (CONT'D)

- Every act of translating for children has a purpose, and all translations should be domesticated according to this purpose;
- Translators, especially those translating for African children, translate for some special audience(s), "super addressees".
- African children are referred to as "Super addresses" in the sense that their social category and their cultural context is very particular. In this case, translators should ask themselves a question: am I translating for the reading children or the listening children? For literate or illiterate children? Africa still has all of these sorts of categories.
- When translating for children, a stress is put on the role of the "client" of a children's book. Who is really this client? Is it an adult / parent reader, is it a child reader-listener?
- The most element to take into account when translating for children is "loyalty to children", that is adapting the text to their specific constraints, respect.

## AN INTERCULTURAL ADAPTATION MODEL (CONT'D)

- Some consider Intercultural adaptation as an abridgement of the original, a new copy, a misleading version or just an imitation;
- Adaptation simply means “cultural reinterpretation”. We can argue in this context that “all translators, if they want to be successful, need to adapt their texts according to the presumptive readers.”
- When translating for African children, we should be able to adapt or translate all cultural elements that can mislead or create a confusion in the African child reader’s mind.
- How can one translate cheese for African children? How about snow, bait, or in general how to translate a concept that does not exist in African context/culture?

## **AN INTERCULTURAL ADAPTATION MODEL (CONT'D)**

- When translating for children, our translation should be objective: either we want to transfer the content as it is in order to let children learn the new worlds, or we want to completely adapt an enjoyable story or literature in another context so that it can well fit in it and enable our readers to read it naturally and comfortably.

## WHY AND HOW TO TRANSLATE LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN?

- As Rwanda may be the case, translating literature for children is an interesting concept. One simple reason is that till now Rwandans do not write a lot. So, we are requested to translate some beautiful stories written by others.
- Another natural reason for importing / exporting culture and children's literature through translations is to let children travel the world through their readings and discover the world around them.
- Why should we translate our own stories into other languages? Simply stated: we need to let others know who we are, how we think, how we act, how we perform, our lifestyle, our standards but most importantly our cultural beliefs and knowledge. We want others to learn of our own literature written by ourselves. We have a conception that when others write our own literature they write it bad. It's the same case as regards writing our own history.

## BEST PRACTICES OF TRANSLATING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN AFRICA

- When translating for children, the translator should behave as a writer and translate as naturally as they can.
- Before starting the act of translating, the translator should read several times the story, understand it, analyse all the elements that go with it. They should just preview the story in the image of a child.
- If possible, translators should meet the author and try to find out more about the setting/context in which the story was created (social/political/etc.).
- Let your translation sounds smooth and natural. Better, find a native speaker to read it for you to ensure it fits well in the target language and culture. Translation and culture go interchangeably.
- A good translated book should be 100% equivalent to the original in terms of content, effects and message
- As a translator you can choose to preserve the names of characters, or domesticate them. What really matters is for the characters' names to sound naturally in a target-reader's mind and cultural knowledge.
- Translation is a creative process. Be ethical while re-creating a story.

# CHILDREN'S LITERATURE TRANSLATION THEORY AND STRATEGY:

## FOREIGNIZATION VERSUS DOMESTICATION

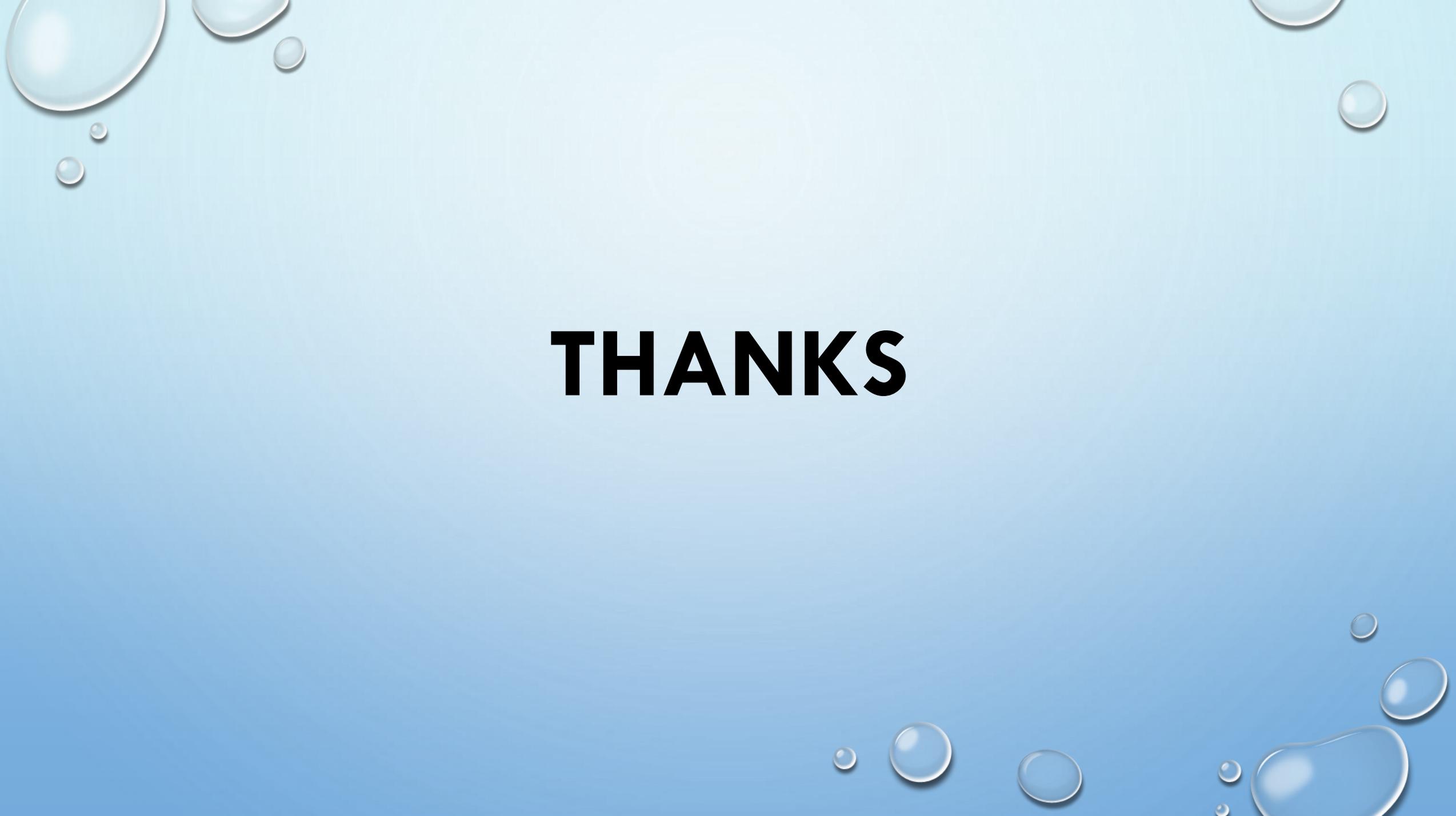
- When translating any kind of foreign literature, there are two macro strategies that can be applied to the text: those are foreignization and domestication.
- **Foreignization:** maintain the “foreignness” of the text. This can disturb the reader when foreign elements appear in the text
- **Domestication:** Render the text smooth, fluent and natural by domesticating it. Let the text sounds as if it were written in the target text.
- The choice between these strategies is based on the motivation of the translation: educational motivation versus entertainment, recreational, naturalization motivation

## EXAMPLES OF SOME TRANSLATED AFRICAN STORIES BY BAKAME EDITIONS

- **Imvugo Idasanzwe - The Magic Formula** – La Formule magique: original story written in German (Dikum Dakum) by Ibrahima Ndiaye and translated in Kinyarwanda by Agnès Gyr-Ukunda
- **Ubucuti bw'Imbeba n'Inzovu** - True Friends: original story written in Kiswahili by John Kilaka. First published in Germany (Gute freunde: ein bilderbuch aus Tansania) by Baobab Publishers and translated into Kinyarwanda by Agnès Gyr-Ukunda
- **Uruhimbi rwa Nyanka** – Le Secret de Nyanka – The Secret of Nyanka: original story written in Kinyarwanda by Denyse Umuhuza and translated in English and French.
- **Guruka Kagoma Guruka** - Fly Eagle Fly: original story written in English by Christopher Gregorowsky and translated in Kinyarwanda by Valentin Utaruhijimana.
- **Mimi Hogoza** - Mimi Mystery: original story written in English by Michael Daniel Ambatchew and translated in Kinyarwanda by Bakame Editions.
- **Little books for little hands** – Utuganza – Petites mains – Mikono midogo

# CONCLUSION

While translating for children, one should take into account their specific purpose and specific audience. It is the job of the translator to acknowledge the relationship between the linguistic and visual systems, and to choose a method of translation or adaptation that makes the text readable for the intended target reader. The translator must consider not only the target language and culture, but also the needs of target readers and cultural norms. What really matters in translating for children is how well translations function in real situations, where the reader of the translation meets the “intimacy” of the translator, the author and the illustrator. Translating our language into another language or translating another language into our own is enriching it.

The background is a light blue gradient. In the top-left and bottom-right corners, there are several realistic water droplets of various sizes, some overlapping. The droplets have highlights and shadows, giving them a three-dimensional appearance.

**THANKS**