

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*: Deviations in Translation

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Abstract

Many scholarly papers have been written about Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. While many scholars focused on Achebe's use of proverbs, some others concentrated on his domestication of the English Language. Other studies also examined the different translations of *Things Fall Apart* into French, German, Hebrew, Finnish, and Spanish. However, there seems to be paucity of studies on Achebe's use of translation in the novel. Premised on the sociolinguistic theory of translation, this paper attempts to examine the appropriateness of Achebe's translation of some Igbo words and phrases into English in the novel under study. The study employed the qualitative analysis of selected words and phrases as translated in *Things Fall Apart*. The paper submits that in some of his translations in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe deviated from their original Igbo meanings. The paper concludes that the improper translation of some original Igbo words into English in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* conveys wrong meanings to readers.

Key words: Translation, Igbo Words, Deviation, Things Fall Apart

Introduction

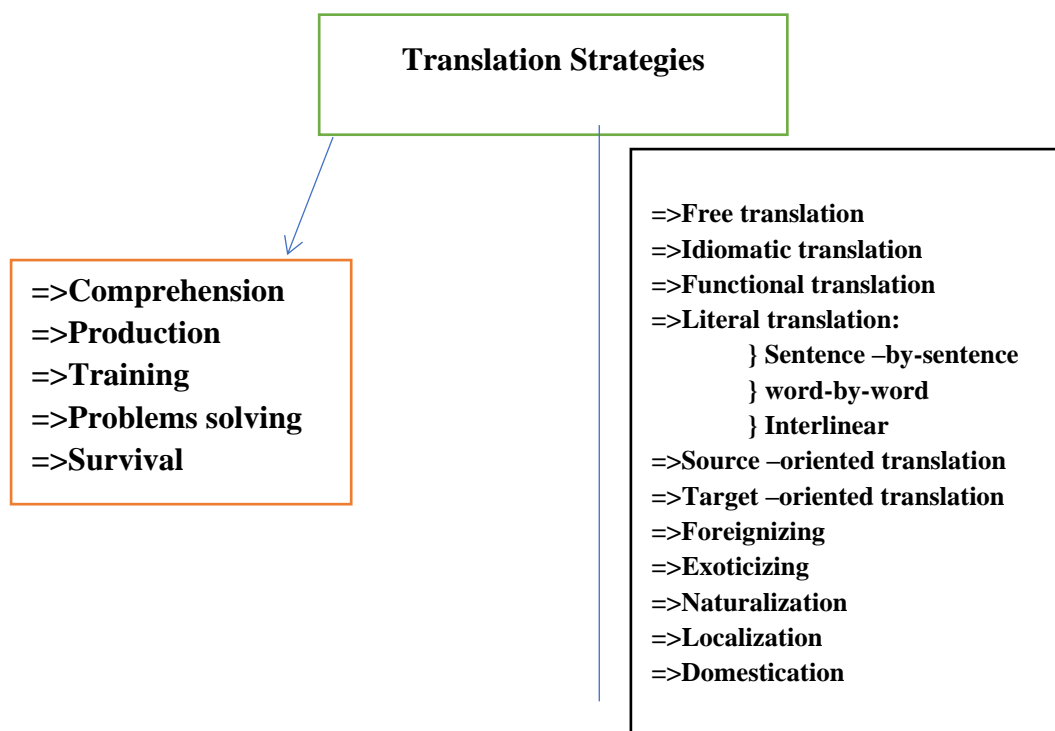
Over the past fifty years, African Literature has come to occupy the world stage. African writers have been celebrated for rising above their colonial experience to tell their story in their own way. One area that has attracted readers of African Literature is translation. Translation, which is the immediate focus of this paper, is a tool that enables African writers retain their African roots and at the same time convey their Africanism to their readers. Bassinett (2013) cited in Chez (2020 p.1) defines translation as the process that involves:

The rendering of a Source Language (SL) text into the Target Language (TL) so as to ensure that (1) the surface meaning of the two will be approximately similar and (2) The structures of the SL will be preserved as closely as possible but not so closely that the TL structures will be seriously distorted.

Bassnett's definition presupposes that a translator is at home with two languages, two cultures and two world views. However, because no two languages and cultures are identical, it is not strange that in the process of translation, some writers may alter the meaning of a word or concepts in the original language. While some writers have argued that translation is beyond equivalence (Fawcett 1997, House 2001 & Zhan 2020), others have submitted that multiple cultures are involved in translation therefore multiculturalism must be factored into the definition of translation. They argue that we cannot give an adequate translation of the text even though we are able to produce equivalents in English for every word. Translation implies that we have the capacity to enter into the mind, the world and the culture of the speakers or writers. And we can express their thoughts in a manner that is not only parallel to the original, but also acceptable to the target language.

Furthermore, apart from being at home with two worlds, translators must be conversant with certain pre-conditions. According to Doherty, (2014 p. 82), amongst other prerequisite knowledge in translation, the translator must have a grasp of the content and the original intention of the writer/author as revealed in the language source. Again, the translator is expected to have a high level of competence and proficiency in both SL and TL. Rather than translate word-for-word, the translator is encouraged to use every day common expressions in

the translation of texts, presenting the material and the sense of the source language in the translated work. Depending on the translator's motive, different translation strategies and translation procedures can be employed. They include:



Translation strategies. Source Doorslaer (2007, p. 226)

In the same vein, Doorslaer, (2007 p.227) explicitly outlines the procedures required for an effective translation to be achieved. These include: Acculturation, adaptation, amplification, borrowing, calque and coinage, compensation and concision, condensation and de-nominalization, direct transfer and dilution, expansion and imitation, implication and interchange, interpretation and modulation, modification and paraphrasing, categorization and reformulation, addition and omission. Doorslaer paired his proposed procedure which is expected to enhance the translation process for any translator both from the angle of SL to TL or the reverse situation. However, it could be often unclear which translation procedure a translator has employed in their work. This will further give rise to deviations in the meaning communicated by the author and his original intention to present the literary text to the public. Although the author may not absolutely intend the deviations in meaning and content but what the audience understood and interpreted from the translated work obviously created gap of miscommunication.

The text under consideration in this paper – *Things Fall Apart*–is an original piece by the great African writer, Chinua Achebe. He wrote the novel at a time when hardly any European could believe that an African could pen down African cultural traditions and experiences using a new language. Achebe wrote from his original thoughts and experiences (Source language – Igbo) into a foreign language (TL – English language). Unsurprisingly, he encountered a limitation of words to express the whole concept he had in mind about the culture and tradition of the Igbo people, which he intended to convey to the foreigners who thought that Africans had nothing of value to showcase to the world. Hence, Achebe's first story of the Igbo people was written and entitled *Things Fall Apart*. This text was written in English (TL) with interchangeability and translation of some Igbo words and phrases into English while others remained in the source language.

Among Chinua Achebe's novels, *Things Fall Apart* appears to be the one that has enjoyed the highest number of translations, having been translated into 57 languages (Ayoola p.250). The novel captures the rhythm of rural life among the Igbos of Nigeria before its occupation by the British. The coming of the Europeans ripped off the people of Umuofia of their culture and traditional beliefs. Ezema (2013) opined that language, culture and thought are interwoven. This means that none could be discussed without the others. Culture cuts across every aspect of a people's lives and language determines peoples' concept of reality. Therefore, the different world views of people should not be laid aside in the process of translation. This is because people in different societies perceive and conceive realities differently, underscoring the reasons for their differed languages (Yule, 1996). As such language and culture are intertwined even in translation from SL to TL, language and culture go hand in hand for meaningful communication to be achieved. A writer's language is the most suitable vehicle for conveying the writer's culture. But since Achebe prefers to use the English language in order to achieve the widest readership, translation becomes the bridge through which Igbo words are transferred to the English Language. In this paper, the researchers shall analyze selected words and phrases in *Things fall Apart* which appear to have deviated from their original Igbo meanings.

Literature review

This literature review is designed to examine the translation studies done, particularly in Nigerian novels, as well as studies done on Achebe's *Things fall Apart* in order to establish the relevance of the current study. Sakri (1985 p.1) cited in Sutopo (2019) submitted that translation carried out by a team is more successful than one done by one person since translation is a multidisciplinary enterprise requiring accuracy to the original text in aspects of language, culture, science or technology. Larson (1984 p.11) cited in Nyandwi & Bazimaziki (2019) noted that literal translation or word-by word translation, especially in idioms, metaphors, and other figures of speech, such as those used in literature, notably in folk stories, fiction, drama and poetry, is liable to distort the Source Language Translation (hereafter SLT) intended meaning hence meaning-based translation is a better option. They also averred that the challenges encountered while translating Mariana Ba's *So Long a Letter* from English to a Bantu language, Kinyarwanda, were mainly related to the translation of unknown ideas, genitive constructions known as "of phrases", figures of speech such as metaphors, similes, gender markers, proper names, active and passive constructions, proverbs and proverbial phrases.

Osakwe (2010) citing House (2001) notes that translation can be overt or covert. Overt translation is literal verbatim translation used in the syntactic and Lexi-semantic equivalents used in the text. This includes the translation of cultural items and concepts, events, festivals, religious rites and beliefs. It also includes transference either in part or fully of second language items to target language. Covert translation is a type of creative translation which combines the lexis of the target language in a free and unusual manner with a communicative rather than sheer semantic intent. Interlanguage translation is the type which translates the entire text into another language for example Kaikkijajoaa is the Finnish translation of *Things fall Apart* by Heike Salojarvi, Wale Ogunyemi translated *Things fall Apart* to Yoruba, *Igbesi Aye Okonkwo*. Zero translation is a situation where writers use their mother tongue without translating. Malane (2001 p.437) cited in OU-HSSATA (2020 p.6) has argued that translation helps to explain the process of colonization and decolonization both as a colonizing method and a form of resistance by the colonized, so that the translation metaphor is used to better understand colonial power relations, limitations of cultural transfers and the problem of differences and otherness.

A number of translation studies have been carried out on Nigerian novels. According to Madueke (2019a) the first Nigerian novel to be translated into French is Amos Tutuola's *Palm wine Drinkard* followed by Achebe's *Things fall Apart*. However, international recognition, such as the winning of awards, determines which African novel is translated into an international language. She further argues that while the South African government uses public funds to ensure South African image and culture are exported through the translation of South African novels, the Nigerian government does not use translation of Nigerian novels to achieve cultural diplomacy among French-speaking countries. Nyong (2020) used the Interpretative approach to examine the cultural, linguistic and semantic challenges posed to Michel Ligny in his translation of humour in *Things fall Apart*. The study revealed that Ligny demonstrated a deep understanding of the Igbo culture and was faithful to the translation of humour in the novel. However, when Ngedu (2020) used Lawrence Venuti's (2004) theory of domestication and foreignization of translation to examine Ligny's translation of *Things fall Apart*, it was discovered that an ideological divergence exists between the title of the original text and the title of the translated text.

Furthermore, using the Retranslation theory to examine the German translations of the proverbs in *Things fall Apart* Olalere (2021) submits that the first German translator foreignized the proverbs; the second translator domesticated the proverbs while the third translator paid close attention to the form of the proverbs. Madueke (2019b) has also noted that Pracotal, who translated Chimmanada Adichie's *Half of the Yellow Sun* into French under the title "L'mitre du soleil" preserved the local colour of the novel by not translating the vernacular words in the novel.

Unlike the above studies which are concerned with interlanguage translations of Nigerian novels into European languages, Osakwe (2010) focused on how Achebe and Soyinka in *Arrow of God* and *Idanre* respectively translated their first language (L1) and culture (C1) into English. She avers that both writers adopted different methods in solving the problem of cultural and linguistic translatability. While Achebe used overt and covert translations to achieve authenticity in *Arrow of God*, within the context of discourse, he was able to handle the problem of zero translation equivalence as context enables the non- Igbo reader to tease out the meaning of Igbo words in the novel.

Anyachebelu (2021) explored Achebe's use of Igbo expressions in *Things Fall Apart* in order to discover whether the Igbo words are integrated and adapted into the structure of the literature in English. The study also examined how these words are used aesthetically, to what degree aestheticism is achieved through their inclusion in English literature, the reason for using the loan words and whether the loans would be difficult for non-Igbo speakers to understand. The findings reveal that most of the loans are onomastic; others are musical instruments, and some others are greetings. The study concluded that Chinua Achebe is able to adapt effectively the Igbo expressions into his English novel that non-Igbo speakers can fully understand.

From the foregoing, it can be observed that, to our knowledge, no study has paid attention to how faithful Achebe is in his translation of Igbo words into English. Anichebe's (2021) work is similar to our paper, but it differs significantly from ours. While the book chapter is concerned on how far the Igbo words Achebe used in *Things fall Apart* fit into the English language, the focus of this paper is the extent to which Achebe deviated from the original meaning of Igbo words as he translated Igbo words to English. It is this lacuna that this study intends to fill in.

Theoretical Framework

According to Zahra and Nadeem (2018), the act of translating involves an original text produced by a writer in a particular language and for a particular audience, and a translator

translates the same text in another language for another audience. For them, translating a text implicates an author and a translator, an original text and translated text, the language of the original text and the language of the translated version of the text. It is worthy of note that often times, the audience of the target audience differs from the audience of the original text. It deals with issues relating to comparisons of the original and translated texts and the literary quality such as stylistic features and rhetorical devices in the text.

In keeping with these arguments, Venuti (2000) states that all translation theories fall into three broader paradigms: autonomy, equivalence and function. Here autonomy deals with the role of author and translator in the act of translation, equivalence holds argument on the issues of comparison between the original text and the target text and the theoretical debate and the third category of debate in translation theory involves the function of translation and the target audience for which the translation is created. When these debates are kept in view, the different translation theories become significant in the discussion of postcolonial, feminist and oriental views. Therefore, in highlighting the deviations in translation of Achebe's TFA, the question of autonomy, equivalence and function of the translated text comes to bear on the translatability and untranslatability of the text achieve the original intention of the author – Achebe and the audience– (especially non Igbo speakers). In the context of this paper, sociolinguistic theory of translation is appropriate in order to examine the effectiveness of literary translation of Achebe's TFA.

The objective of this study is to analyse Achebe's translations of some Igbo words in *Things fall Apart* to examine whether he was faithful to the original meaning of the words.

Research Methodology

In order to discuss the deviations in TFA, the researcher used the sociolinguistic theory of translation to study the Igbo words translated in TFA. According to Nida (1964a) sociolinguistic theory of translation has strong influences on the context of communication. It further relates the linguistic structures to a higher level where they are considered based on their function in communication. The sociolinguistic theory of translation pays more attention to the author, the historical background and circumstances within which he/she wrote, the history of the interpretation given to the text in addition to the social setting of communication. In the text of study, TFA, Achebe portrayed the tenets of sociolinguistic theory in his writing and translation of the text to some extent.

Therefore, this research uses descriptive qualitative analysis method. This method was used to identify some of the Igbo words as used in the text and compared it with the original Igbo meanings of the words as used in the original text and the deviations in the meaning as used in TFA. This is supported by Creswell (2014) which opines that qualitative research is a systematic understanding based on various methods of inquiry that aim to investigate social or human difficulties. Since the aim of this study was to identify the deviation in translation of some of the Igbo words used in Achebe's TFA, the researchers selected some Igbo words and the English language translation provided by the author. The data were collected by reading the text – TFA and highlighting the sentences and phrases which reflected the deviations in translation which is the main focus of the study. The researchers discussed the deviation by looking up the direct translation/synonym equivalent of the Igbo words and their English equivalent. The researchers also used the Igbo dictionary to highlight the deviation in translation of the selected words.

Result and Discussion: Deviations in translating Igbo words into English

We can see from the table that the translator in TFA deviated in translating the following words and phrases from Igbo to English.

Achebe's translation	Original Igbo translation	Deviation in translation
The <u>elders or ndiichie</u> p. 9	Elders in Igbo means "Ndi Okenye" Ndiiche in Igbo means "chiefs, titled persons"	Yes The deviation in translation revealed the change of Ndi Okenye to Ndiiche (titled persons)
Near the barn was a <u>small hut, medicine house or shrine</u> where Okonkwo kept the wooden symbols of his personal gods.	Shrine in Igbo means "Okwu alusi"/ "Uno alusi"/ "uno mmoo"	Yes Medicine house is not the same as shrine. Shrine in Igbo means Okwu Alusi/uno alusi while medicine house means "Uno Ogwu"
The first voice gets to <u>Chukwu or God's house</u> (p. 46)	Chukwu in English means the Great God/all powerful and source of knowledge God's house in Igbo may translate to "Uno Chukwu"	Yes Therefore, there is no link between Chukwu and God's house.
Ilo or playground (p.74)	Ilo in English literally means outside; Ezi ama/mbala ezi means area in the compound; in front of the compound, outside the compound wall and beginning from the main gate not occupied by houses Playground in Igbo should be "Ama egwuregwu"	Yes Ilo does not literally mean a playground. In this context, it is assumed and thus translated by Achebe to mean a place where children and young adult play. The direct translation of playground should be "Ama egwuregwu" which literally refer to where people play.
Ekwensu or evil spirit had entered his eyes p.85		Yes
Amadiora will break your head for you'		Yes

According to Zahra & Nadeem (2018), translation studies have an interdisciplinary dimension. Its theoretical viewpoint consists of the language and theories that are clearly connected to culture. Therefore, translating a literary text from the source language into the target language entails a clear comparison of the two languages in the light of the linguistics level; semantic, syntax. Morphological, stylistic and phonological. And since all languages have their respective culture which are specific to their context, translation from one language into another becomes not only a linguistic comparison but also a cultural comparison. Thus, in this discussion of deviations in Achebe's TFA, the researcher considered the cultural use and meaning of the selected words in comparison to the use and meaning of same words in the target language. The table above showed the identified sentences and phrases where the author

translated some words from Igbo language to English language and some from English to Igbo language.

In the first phrase, the author said; “*The elders or ndiiche* p. 9” Here Achebe referred to the elders in English language and translated same in Igbo language by using a coordinating conjunction ‘or’ presupposing that ‘elders’ and ‘ndiiche’ mean the same thing as the word he used to refer to it but they are not. Hence, in Igboland, elders are old people while “ndi iche” are noble men, men of valour. They are titled men who earned their title according to the traditional rites they represent or the traditional title accorded to them by merit within their specific communities. Anieke, (2008 p.92) captured this quite clearly when he explained that an “Ichie” can be an “okenye” (elder) but being “okenye” is not essential to being an “Ichie”. A very strong evidence is the fact that Unoka the father of Okonkwo is an elder but certainly not an Ichie. The translator was guilty of over generalization. The deviation in translation revealed the change of Ndi Okenye (elders) to Ndiiche (titled persons). By this kind of translation, the intended meaning in the source text can only be understood by the native speakers of Igbo language who would only apply the knowledge of the Igbo word to understand the entire sentence as well as the message the author hopes to disseminate to the target audience. On the other hand, the non-native speakers reading the translation could be misled by the meaning as presented to the audience.

The next text on the table, the author makes this statement; “*Near the barn was a small hut, medicine house or shrine where Okonkwo kept the wooden symbols of his personal gods.*” A medicine house in Igbo literarily means a hospital, ‘uno ogwu’ but a medicine house is not the same thing as a shrine. A shrine in Igbo means a place where a god is worshipped, Okwu Alusi/Uno alusi”. Although in the sentence under evaluation, the translator reduces small hut, medicine house and shrine to mean the same thing in English language as well as in Igbo equivalent. Again, Anieke (2008 p.92) argues that what the translator probably meant was “ogbaja,” a place or house of worship in a family. The deviation in translation revealed the change of a personal sitting or meeting place to a medicine house and or a shrine.

In another statement, the author using a native idiom deviated in the translation of what he intended to communicate as revealed in this sentence; “*The first voice gets to Chukwu or God’s house (p. 46). Chukwu or God’s house as used above suggests that both words can be used interchangeably. However, in Igboland, Chukwu means the Great God/all powerful and source of knowledge. God’s house or heaven being an English word, when translated into Igbo, would mean “Uno Chukwu. Consequently, God and heaven are not synonymous as the sentence makes the audience readers to believe. The deviation in translation makes the readers assume that God and his abode are synonymous. It needs to be mentioned that in some parts of Igbo land such as Isu in Ebonyi State, Chukwu does not mean Almighty God. Therefore, what Achebe translated was the direct Igbo language idiomatic expression which says; “*Okwu onu izuzu elugo be chukwu*” translated directly as “*the first voice gets/reaches to God’s house.*” Here Achebe employed idiomatic translation strategy to achieve sentence by sentence translation. This however, did not clearly convey the native speaker’s view of the use of such expression because of the deviation in the translation of the idiomatic expression.*

Ilo or playground (p.74) Ilo in English literally means outside. Ezi ama/mbala ezi means area in the compound, in front of the compound, outside the compound wall and beginning from the main gate not occupied by houses. Playground in Igbo should be “Ama egwuregwu” which literally refers to where people play. Ilo does not literally mean a playground. In this context, Ilo is assumed and thus translated to mean a place where children and young adults play whereas it means outside. The deviation in translation makes the readers assume that outside and playground mean the same thing. In this context, Achebe applied a localized translation strategy which caused the deviation in translation as revealed in the word Ilo or playground highlighted above.

Ekwensu or evil spirit had entered his eyes (p.85) – In the phrase highlighted, Achebe Used the coordinating conjunction “or” in *Ekwensu or evil spirit had entered his eyes*’ presupposing that *Ekwensu* and *evil spirit* are synonymous. But in the Igbo worldview *Ekwensu* is chief of evil spirit not just an evil spirit. This reflects Achebe’s attempt to localize the literal meaning of the word ‘evil spirit’ to convey his message to both the local and international audience. However, such strategy created deviation in translation because of the ambiguity of words and it’s conveyed meaning across the two cultures – source and target languages.

“*Amadiora will break your head for you*” Ordinarily, human beings do things for fellow human beings. Since Amadiora is a god in Igbo land, Amadiora cannot do something for a person as a physical person does. When Achebe makes a statement as shown above, it shows the fact that he is using his literary skill of personification to attribute the action of breaking head to an invisible being. However, it would have been more appropriate for Achebe to write “*Amadiora will break your head.*” According to Anieke (2008 p.100), Amadiora is a powerful god of thunder who punishes his victim by using thunder to tear the victim to pieces. For that reason, Anieke argues that a more accurate translation of the sentence should have been; *Amadiora will scatter you into pieces: Amadiora ga gbari gi isi- gbarie means to smash, or blow in pieces not break.* “*Amadiora will break your head for you*”, is a direct translation from the source language – Igbo to target language English.

The addition of the preposition ‘for’ in such a sentence is typical of a crude colloquial way of speaking in Igbo land especially among the semi-literate individuals. Achebe’s application of such colloquial translation would likely be purposeful although it highlights deviation in translation.

Summarily, the problems occasioned by the translations of some Igbo words in TFA to English captures Malane’s view (2001 p.437) cited in OU-HSSATA (2020 p. 6) ‘that translation helps to explain the process of colonization..., the limitations of cultural transfers and the problem of differences and otherness.’ Without the colonial experience, translation may have been unnecessary. Achebe may have chosen to write TFA in his Igbo language. However, in the process of conveying his cultural experience to an international audience, Achebe approximates, using the closest equivalents where the English language lacks the exact word(s) suitable enough to capture his cultural experience.

The findings from this study confirm Maria Tymczko’s view cited in Anieke (2008 p. 81) that most post-colonial literature are recreations, retelling, reinterpretations or translations of material or elements of a culture either in the original language of the culture or in another language. In the case of TFA, Achebe was doing the two, translating from Igbo to English on one side and translating English to Igbo in other sections of the text.

Conclusion

Although Achebe’s TFA has enjoyed international recognition, this paper submits that in some of his translations in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe deviated from the standard Igbo meanings of some of the words, phrases, idiomatic expressions and sentences used in TFA which could convey wrong meaning to readers especially foreigners and some local audience who are not originally Igbos. The purpose of every literary text is amongst others to inform its readers about the linguistic richness of the local setting of the literary text as well as their creativity in various fields of life. It is also meant to portray the richness of their culture – customs and traditions, rituals, and the totality of who they are as a people. When these are misrepresented in discourse, then the essence of writing is defeated and the audience gets confused. Thus, the findings of this paper reveals that the deviations in translation found in TFA could cause misrepresentation of the Igbo people linguistically, culturally and socially. It could also give room for the misunderstanding of the author’s intent as well as the traditional belief system of the Igbo

people to the outside audience. By deviating in the lexico-semantic content in TFA, the author's intention of showcasing the Igbo worldview through the cultural and linguistic milieu of the Igbo people was not achieved. However, although the semantic build-up of the words, phrases, idiomatic expressions and sentences in the text may be misrepresented in some ways, it did not completely erode their entire comprehension considering the varied contextual situations within which these phrases, idioms or sentences were presented. This paper concludes that though there was deviation in translation of some words, phrases, idioms and sentences in TFA, the author was able to showcase the worldview of the African culture especially the Igbo ethnic community in Nigeria to the world of literature.

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