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The African Cultural Worldview and the Concept of Conflict Resolution through Yoruba-French Proverbs: A Case Study of Olaoye Abioye's Translated Proverbs in *Le Preux chasseur dans la forêt infestée de démons*

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The African cultural universe is quite replete with vivid imagery and condensed wisdom of the ways of man and nature gleaned over the years. Gerontocracy, governance by the elderly, an adopted mode of government by most African communities, mostly has its wisdom reflected in proverbs. Proverbs then become an administrative tool to resolve conflict among warring parties, communities or persons. In this paper, one of the objectives is to showcase instances of proverbs serving as tools for conflict resolution in D.O. Fagunwa's Yoruba novel entitled *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmọlẹ*, which Abioye (1989) has translated as *Le preux chasseur dans la forêt infestée de demons* (The Forest of a Thousand Demons). Another objective is to study the translational strategies employed by Abioye to successfully translate the rich cultural African worldview encapsulated in Yoruba proverbs into French, a non-African language.

Keywords: African cultural worldview, conflict resolution, Yoruba-French proverbs, translational strategies

Introduction

The African worldview, as portrayed through the Yoruba culture in this work, can be said to be encapsulated in proverbs which are seen to be the prerogative of elders. Sotunde (2009, p. 1) defines proverbs as short familiar sentences expressing a supposed truth or moral lesson. On our part, we see proverbs as succinct sayings of a people's collective wisdom garnered through careful observations of life's processes. In Africa, and particularly among the Yoruba as observed by Bamgbose (1974, p. 8), an important element in the usage of proverbs is experience which comes with age. It is assumed that the older you live, the wiser you'll become and that it is in the mouth of elders that proverbs are found. In fact, the following Yoruba proverb corroborates this claim: *Ẹnu agba ni obi i gbo*, meaning literally that it is in the mouth of elders that the kolanut becomes mature. Sotunde (2009, p. 213) translates it to mean: it is the elders' prerogative to pronounce on the state of ripeness of the kolanut.

The proverb enunciated above, though just a sentence, affords us a peep into the adopted worldview of an authentically African people, the Yoruba. The Yoruba novel in question is replete with so many more and is a veritable repository of proverbs used by the characters in it to address myriad situations that arose in the course

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of the story line. In our opinion, the translator achieved a gargantuan task to have been able to render these proverbs in a non-African language which may perceive life differently or enunciate its life philosophy using different imagery. It is our view that translation studies would be made much richer through the study of the translational techniques, or as Wolf (2011, p. 115) calls them, the translatorial practices adopted by Abioye in carrying out a successful translation of the many cultural nuggets contained in the Yoruba version.

This work will be divided into four sections. Firstly, we will take a look at the situational context of the proverbs used in the novel with regards to the context of their use. Secondly, we will consider the cultural scope of the translated proverbs in the two languages of our work: Yoruba and French. Thirdly, the translational strategies involved in the translation of identified proverbs will be considered, and finally before we conclude our work, we shall take a close look at the various instances when proverbs served as tools of conflict resolution in the Yoruba novel and their faithful rendition in the French translation.

True to his identity as an authentic and traditional Yoruba man whom Bamgbose (1974) identified as being well "steeped in Yoruba folklore and beliefs" (p. 8), Fagunwa used quite a number of Yoruba proverbs and adages in his novel, a reason that is often adduced for the enormous success of the work (it has been reprinted approximately twenty-four times to date). The scope of our work cannot however permit the reproduction of all of them and so we have limited ourselves to a small selection that would be mostly representative of the theme of our study: conflict resolution through the use of proverbs. We have therefore made a random selection of a dozen proverbs in both Fagunwa's work and Abioye's translation (twenty-four proverbs in all), and hope that this selection will serve to adequately portray, first, the African cultural worldview as expounded by the Yoruba through their proverbs, and second, the effectiveness of these proverbs in pointing to possible ways of resolving situations of conflict as they occurred among the many fantastic characters and creatures in Fagunwa's novel.

As stated earlier, there are more than twenty reprints of D. O. Fagunwa's original novel first published in 1950. The Yoruba language has evolved a great deal since then especially in its written form. We therefore deem it important to state that the Yoruba orthography used in our work is based on the 2005 reprinted version by Nelson Publishers Limited. Our interest in this paper is actually the Yoruba-French dimension of the proverbs in both novels, especially the instructive techniques employed by Abioye to produce such an excellent translation in French. However, given the reason that the language of our presentation is English, we have made an effort to provide the English translations of the selected proverbs to illustrate our work. It may be necessary to mention here that some of our English translations are from Sotunde (2009).

Cultural Context of Translated Proverbs/Situational Context of Work

This may be a good point at which to pause and place our paper in its proper cultural context by giving a synopsis of the translated novel with its original. This may help us understand better the proverbs enunciated by the characters in the book, the conflict situations that the proverbs address and the role played by the enunciated proverbs in resolving the attendant conflict.

The story revolves around Akara-Oogun, the main character who is a hunter born of a human father and a self-professed witch as a mother. Upon the loss of both his parents (the father actually killed the mother before dying a few months later), he decided to embark on a hunt in a forest known to be inhabited by trolls, demons, gnomes and other fabulous creatures. Fortunately, his name Akara-Oogun, which literally means a bean cake steeped in powerful potions, sees him through his adventures, along with the *deus ex machina* factor which

causes external aid to come to his rescue just when the reader is convinced that he would surely give up the ghost without escape. His journey into the fearful forest (Igbo Irunmọlẹ) was actually done three times; twice by himself, and the third time in the company of six other intrepid hunters. Some of the fantastic creatures he met in the course of his/their journeys are creatures named Agbako or calamity (la calamite), a sixteen-eyed monster; Ijamba or danger (le danger), Aarọni, a one-legged elf, Kurembete (a diminutive fallen angel), Ẹru or fear (la peur), Tẹmbẹlẹkun or Conspiracy (la conspiration), and so many other truly fabulous creatures.

Expectedly, he got into very serious conflict situations with many of these creatures, many of whom wanted to harm him for being human, or at least, for being different from them. How was he able to escape? Interestingly, all these creatures spoke his native Yoruba dialect, so communication was no problem! Another fortunate coincidence was that, these creatures appeared to inhabit the same cultural universe as himself and so many, if not all, of the proverbs enunciated had the desired effect of bringing about resolution or mutual understanding resulting in resolution of the conflictual situation. For example, in the course of the third journey with other hunters, they encountered a creature named Ẹru or Fear (la Peur) who had four heads, many poisonous snakes entwining him, as well as bees and wasps constantly buzzing around him, it was difficult for them to even approach him, not to talk of physically engaging him in combat. A good proverb came to mind whereby they applied a strategy that did not require physical force and which helped get them out of the situation. It is rendered thus in Yoruba: "**Ohun ti a fi ẹsọ mu kii bajẹ, ohun ti a fi agbara mu nii le lara kokoko**." Abioye translated this as "*Patience et longueur de temps font plus que force ni que rage*" (Abioye, 1989, p. 99). This proverb actually has a biblical equivalent in English which says: "Soft words turneth away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1 KJV). And so the situation was resolved by one of the hunters named Olohun-Iyo (the honey-voiced one) singing melodiously and throwing in powerful incantations while singing. The effect of this was that Eru (Fear) took to his heels in fright. A rather comical and ironic resolution.

Another situation of conflict would have arisen when the main character, Akara-oogun needed to persuade another intrepid hunter called Kako, to join the expedition to a mythical land. He employed the persuasive power of proverbs to get the latter to not only agree to join him but to also abandon his newly-married wife in the process. First, he told him: **Bi ko ba ni idi, obinrin ko nję Kumolu** (a baby girl is never named Kumolu unless all the men of valour in the family had perished) which Abioye translated as *S'il n'y a pas de cause valuable, aucune femme ne se nomme Kumolu,* to explain his presence. He then went on to tell him that there is enormous work to be done to bring glory to their land and that as long as this is not done, there can be no rest for the valiant warriors of the land. To express these sentiments, Akara-oogun used just one sentential proverb: **Bi ina ko ba tan laṣọ, ẹję ko le tan leekan**. meaning: bloodstain on fingernails would persist as long as the clothing harbours lice. In French, Abioye rendered this as *On ne peut penser à se laver les ongles tachées de sang tant qu'il reste des puces à écraser.* These two proverbs, along with other persuasive talk by Akara-oogun, decided Kako and resolved the conflict of whether to stay with his newly-married wife or join other warriors to a faraway land in search of glory for their fatherland.

As mentioned earlier, Abioye's French translation can be said to be a remarkable rendition of the Yoruba version with pointers to the French cultural environment through authentically sourced proverbs that serve to give the French worldview regarding the same cultural situation in Yoruba. Some interesting cultural indices in the Yoruba novel are the phenomena of witches (ajẹ), trolls (iwin) and gnomes (egbere), all supernatural creatures which people the Yoruba cosmogony and are reflected in many of the proverbs used to describe events in the novel; for example, "Ajẹ ke lana, ọmọ ku loni; tani ko mọ pe ajẹ ana lo pa ọmọ jẹ?" (the witch

squealed yesterday and a child died today, who does not know that it is yesterday's witch that killed today's child?; "Kaka ko san lara iya ajẹ, on fi ọmọ rẹ bi obinrin, ẹyẹ nyi lu ẹyẹ" (Rather than improve her situation, the witch's offspring are female, all potential witches); "omi loju egbere" (tears in the eyes of a gnome) (Abioye, 1989, p. 9), etc..

In the French cosmogony, do we have as many as these supernatural beings reflected in their proverbs? Interestingly, the animal "cat" (le chat) features a lot in French proverbs and though not exactly in the same context, the cat is perceived as a secretive animal that lends itself to supernatural use in Yoruba land, and so, by extension, is often associated with witches and trolls. Would we be right to talk of cultural convergence in this instance? A few proverbs in French might serve to illustrate our point: "A bon chat bon rat" (tit for tat); "Chat échaudé craint l'eau froide" (once bitten twice shy); "Avoir d'autres chats à fouetter" (to have other fish to fry) (Akakuru & Mombe, 2008, p. 181), etc.

We shall however limit ourselves to the Yoruba proverbs used in D. O. Fagunwa's novel, *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole* and translated into French by Olaoye Abioye as *Le Preux Chasseur dans la forêt infestée de démons*. Given the abridged scope of this work, only a representative selection of the numerous proverbs used in the novel feature here. Our interests are: the translational techniques employed in translating the selected proverbs, the cosmological representation of the selected proverbs in both cultures, and instances of conflict resolution through the use of proverbs in the Yoruba novel and its French translation.

Translational Strategies for Yoruba-French Proverbs

Is translation always possible between languages? This has been an age-old preoccupation among linguists and language practitioners some of whom affirm that it is (cf. Jakobson 1963; Seleskovitch 1968; Cary, 1985); some affirm that it is not (cf. Whorf 1956; Steiner, 1998), and some that translation is possible up to a point (cf. Mounin 1963, Newmark 1998). Our position is that there exist translational techniques and tools to render cross-cultural communication possible across linguistic borders (Iyalla-Amadi, 2000) and so translation of lexical and cultural units between languages is always possible.

Among the first to formulate translational techniques for translation between languages are two Canadians, Jean Vinay and Jean-Paul Darbelnet (1958) who proposed seven translational procedures for effective rendition of words and concepts between languages. We shall adopt their techniques for the purpose of our work. According to them, there are procedures for direct translation where the syntactic structure of the languages in context permit such, and indirect or oblique procedures where employing one-to-one correspondences between the lexical units of the languages in question would give rise to faulty, contradictory or nonsensical renditions. It might be pertinent to note at this point that, in this work, the terms 'translational techniques', 'translational strategies', and 'translational procedures' are used interchangeably. We have provided a quick survey of Vinay and Darbelnet's translational procedures below:

- L'emprunt (borrowing)
- Le calque (loan translation)
- La traduction littérale (literal translation)
- La transposition (transposition)
- La modulation (modulation)
- L'équivalence (equivalence)
- L'adaptation (adaptation)

The first three of the above-mentioned procedures can be termed direct translational techniques while the next four are applied for linguistic or cultural situations that require indirect methods. Since the scope of the present work is in the area of the cultural worldview of the speakers of one language expressed through the medium of another, we shall expectedly be inclined to make use of indirect translational strategies. We shall however observe if there have been instances that have necessitated the use of direct procedures given the perceived divergence in the two cultures involved. In other words, are there always ready-to-fit proverb equivalents in both languages? Finally, we may wish to draw attention to Lefevere and Bassnett's (1990) remark that, "since languages express cultures, translators should be bicultural, not bilingual" (p. 11). Our reaction to this thought-provoking remark is that, to be able to make the cultural norms and practices of one culture known to another, especially through the written medium, the translator must be bilingual before being bicultural. Abioye's translation of Fagunwa's work in French seems to have proved this point.

Selection of Translated Proverbs and Applied Translational Strategies

We shall now proceed to study a selection of Yoruba proverbs and their French equivalents as well as the translational strategies applied by Abioye to arrive at his translations. The proverbs are reproduced below:

(1) Bi ọmọde ba ni aṣọ bi agba, ko le ni akisa bi agba—Même si un jeune home se vante d'être aussi à la mode que ses anciens, il finit toujours par s'abaisser devant l'ancienneté des vieux qui lui montreraient les tas de haillons-reliques des modes (There's no substitute for experience).

(2) Ọpọlọpọ alaangba ni o da ikun de ilẹ, a ko mọ eyi ti inun run, ẹniti a fẹ ni a mọ, a ko mọ ẹniti o fẹ ni—Bon nombre de lézards ont le ventre tourné vers le sol, on n'arrive point à désigner celui entre eux qui aurait mal au ventre car l'apparence n'est jamais la réalité (All cats are grey at night).

(3) Bi ko ba si ohun ti oṣe ẹṣẹ, ẹṣẹ ki i ṣẹ—Il n'y a jamais de fumée sans feu (There is no smoke without fire).

(4) Ọwọ meji ni i gbe ẹru de ori—C'est avec les deux mains que l'on arrive à poser des bagages sur la tête (Many hands make light work).

(5) Ohun ti a fi ẹsọ mu ki i bajẹ, ohun ti a fi agbara mu ni i le kokoko—Patience et longueur de temps font plus que force ni que rage (Soft words turn away wrath).

(6) Ẹni ti o ba da eeru ni eeru i tọ, ẹniti o ba fa ọran ni ọran i ba—les cendres jetées en air cherchent toujours à retrouver celui qui les avait jetées, celui qui sème le vent récolte la tempête (who sows the wind reaps the whirlwind)

(7) Bi ina ko ba tan laṣọ, ẹjẹ ko le tan l'eekan—On ne peut pas penser à se laver les ongles tachées de sang tant qu'il reste des puces à écraser (Bloodstains on fingernails would persist as long as the clothing harbours lice).

(8) Aje ke lana, ọmọ ku loni, tani ko mọ pe aje ana lo pa ọmọ je—On parle du loup et l'on voit sa queue (Witches squealed yesterday and a child dies today, it is a forgone conclusion that the child was killed by the witches (Sotunde, 2009, p. 114).

(9) Kaka ki o san lara iya ajẹ, o n fi ọmọ rẹ bi obinrin, ẹyẹ n yi lu ẹyẹ—Au lieu d'avoir pitié, ils se moquaient de ma situation (Rather than improve her situation, the witch's children are female, all potential witches)

(10) Bi ko ba ni idi, obinrin ko ni je Kumolu—S'il n'y a pas de cause valable, aucune femme ne se nomme Kumolu. (A baby girl is never named Kumolu unless all the men of valour in the family had perished).

(11) Ẹ fi imọ yin ṣọkan—Apprenez que l'union fait la force (United we stand, divided we fall).

(12) Ajo ki i dun titi ki onile ma re ile –Quel que soit la nature du confort éprouvé à l'étranger, tout voyageur cherche à retourner chez lui sain et sauf (East or West, home is best).

To fully understand the proverbs listed about, reference is needed to the context or the situations they describe. The first proverb was enunciated when Akara-oogun, the main character in Fagunwa's novel was summoned by the king of the town he found himself in and the latter extracted a promise from Akara-oogun by flattering his prowess as a hunter. By the time he knew the nature of the task, it was too late to refuse, he had already committed himself by succumbing to the king's flattery without seeking to know just what he was required to do. This is a proverb that many Africans can relate to, perhaps because we are used to seeing mad people in rags as part of our scenery, but in an environment where mad people are confined to asylums and such sights are not common, Abioye's translation, which can be said to be literal, would serve to inform Francophone readers of a sociological fact which might stretch their imagination. We may notice that the English translation is a succint saying that is devoid of imagery. It would therefore appear that in this instance, a direct translational strategy, that of literal translation, was the most appropriate to use.

The second proverb was pronounced by an old storyteller in the guise of Akara-oogun to illustrate that nobody knows who is wishing him well or ill.This proverb was easily understood by most of the listeners who readily agreed with him. But since there is an equivalent proverb which expresses the same situation in French, viz, *la nuit, tous les chats sont gris* (all cats are grey at night), one wonders if the translational procedure of equivalence might not have communicated the message more effectively to the Francophone target audience. The strategy of equivalence was employed in the next proverb where there is a difference in imagery as well.

It can be said that Abioye employed the translational strategy of literal translation for Proverbs (4), (7) and (12) while he used a combination of the strategies of "littérale" and "équivalence" for Proverb (6). The first part of Proverb (6) is more or less a literal rendition that may not readily be understood by a non-African audience, hence perhaps the need to back it up with an equivalent proverb that would be more easily understood.

The imagery in Proverb (7) is typically African and the translational strategy of adaptation may have been required to create or evoke a similar situation of having to crush lice with one's bare fingernails. For Proverbs (8) and (9), the role of witches may not have the same impact in the target culture, that is the Francophone culture, and so Abioye does not talk of *des sorcières* (witches), but rather employs imagery that appeal more to the hunting nature of the French, *le loup* (the wolf). Interestingly, the English take up the imagery of the Yoruba by translating the French proverb, *On parle du loup et l'on voit sa queue,* as *Speak of the devil and he appears.*

Proverb (10) gives a historical background to the naming system in Yoruba land where certain names are for only male children. The translational strategy for it may thus need to be explanatory in addition, a palliative lexical device that is sometimes called *étoffement.*

Finally, proverbs (11) and (12) are self-explanatory and appear succinct in all three languages. While Proverb (11) is declarative, Proverb (12) is nominalised and touches on a social aspect of the Yoruba penchant for merrymaking. It appears that Abioye employed the strategy of transposition whereby the Yoruba used a noun where the French used a relativized clause to express the same situation.

Proverbs as Conflict Resolution Tools

While the situational contexts of our selected proverbs may have helped to better appreciate them as

representative of the African worldview, we may need to take a closer look to see how they served as conflict resolution tools in Fagunwa's story.

The first proverb that was enunciated by Akara-oogun helped him to realise the hastiness of his acceptance of the king's task and so he did not feel any undue acrimony towards the king and instead set about cheerfully to assemble a team to embark on the king's dangerous mission. Without the wisdom and insight provided by this proverb, he might have balked or at best, set about the task in bad faith.

The second proverb helped the old man to get out of a tricky situation after almost pronouncing a death sentence on his listeners through a supposed banter. He had earlier said that not all of them would die peacefully in their sleep. When the listeners countered this with dissatisfied remarks, the old man asked them to predict what would happen to them in the near future and they must also state how many enemies they have now and are likely to have in the near future. The proverb he enunciated made it clear to all that it would be difficult to do so since no one can read another's intentions.

We believe that the third and fourth proverbs are self-evident as conflict resolution tools and the fifth one has served as an illustration earlier on in our work. We shall then go on to the sixth proverb which was enunciated by Akara-oogun to justify the brutal killing of one of the wives of a king that offered him hospitality. The wife colluded with some disgruntled citizens to dispose of the king by agreeing to leave the king's window open as identification of the king's bedroom. Akara-oogun was privy to the plan through his friend and took steps to relocate the king to his own room while he opened the window of the wife's bedroom. When the murderers arrived, they entered her room and mistook her for the king. Expectedly, they hacked her to death, believing that they were dealing with a king they wanted to be rid of. The proverb therefore provides a good premise to justify the treacherous wife's murder and also temper the conflict that might have arisen from her death.

Proverb (7) has been commented upon earlier on while Proverb (8) was actually one that resolved conflict against the main character's favour. The cause of conflict was the perceived stealing of the king's precious dog who was in Akara-oogun's custody. One of his supposed friends who was in reality very jealous of his closeness to the king proferred this proverb to prove that since Akara-oogun was the main guardian of the dog and was first to announce its loss, it followed that he, out of everybody, was most likely to know the whereabouts of the said dog, and had in fact stolen the dog. Being a known friend to Akara-oogun, what he said was believed and the conflict situation created by the stolen dog was resolved by Akara-oogun being found guilty. This accusation led to a rash action on the latter's part whereby he beheaded his supposed friend as well as the heads of all the elders present. This expectedly gave rise to more conflict when the youths of the town decided to mete out justice on him by burying him up to his neck in the ground and placing plates of food just out of his reach to taunt him. This situation led to the pronouncement of the next proverb (Proverb 9) which expresses the fact that, rather than listen to his pleas for mercy, they took actions that would further make him suffer and left him there for dead. This particular situation was finally resolved by a torrential rain that softened the ground enough for him to wriggle out and scamper to safety.

Proverb (10) was enunciated by the main character when he went in search of Kako and proverb (11) was from an old man who tried to allay their fears of embarking on the dangerous adventure by giving pieces of advice that would put them in good stead to resolve perceived conflicts as a united team.

Finally, proverb (12) was proferred by one of the intrepid hunters to assure the citizens of the town that they would surely return after their expedition, and that any conflict arising from their departure should be

mitigated by the thought of their imminent and safe return. Even though this last part is not clearly reflected in the Yoruba proverb, Abioye attempted to capture it in his French rendition by adding it when he said *Quel que soit la nature du confort éprouvé à l'étranger, tout voyageur cherche à retourner chez lui sain et sauf* (No matter how comfortable one's sojourn is, every sojourner desires to return home safe and sound).

We believe that the above exposition illustrates to a large extent the role played by the proverbs in Fagunwa's novels and their faithful rendition by Abioye in his French version.

Conclusion

As noted by Lefevere and Bassnett (1990, p. 8), a culture assigns different functions to translations of different texts. We have seen in this paper how Abioye, in what could be called a bicultural capacity, has succeeded in assigning the right cultural nuances to his translation of an authentically African text in French. Through his translations, the French, and indeed the Francophone reading audience, will become acquainted with Yoruba proverbs and get to appreciate their role in addressing and resolving situations of conflict as they arise in human affairs.

We have also endeavoured to illustrate the translational strategies at work in Abioye's translations. Being a work that spans two cultures, one would have expected the translator to look for pat equivalents to express the proverbs in the French language. But this procedure would have led to the loss of the rich cultural African imagery contained in the Yoruba proverbs. The translator therefore consciously chose to use the direct strategies of literal translation and lexical borrowing in some instances to make the Yoruba culture known to the French public. Proverbs like *C'est chez soi qu'on est le mieux* (East or west, home is best), *la nuit tous les chats sont gris* (all cats are grey at night), *mieux vaut prévenir que guérir* (prevention is better than cure), could have been used but that would have been at the cost of an appreciation of the African Weltashauung portrayed by the Yoruba proverbs.

It might be instructive to draw attention to the French worldview as well through the cultural items contained in some of the equivalent proverbs. A case in point is where the Yoruba talked of 'witches' (ajẹ) and the French used a personification of the wolf (le loup) to translate the same reality (cf. Proverb (8)). Concerning Proverb (6), the French equivalent is actually *qui sème le vent récolte la tempête.* Even though Abioye opted for a literal translation, most likely to add local colour, the French would grasp the import of the message to be imparted through its established equivalent which tallies with the English version, "Who sows the wind reaps the whirlwind." The point of interest is that while the Yoruba, a people very close to the earth through rural habitation, use the imagery of ashes (eeru) as remnants of firewood or charcoal cooking to express an observed truth, the French use an image from the elements of nature, the wind (le vent), to express the same observed truth.

In conclusion, we wish to reiterate the salient role played by translation in breaking down cultural barriers and promoting linguistic unity the world over. This would be in keeping with Vermeer's concept of translation expressed by Snell-Hornby (1990, p. 82) when she says:

> Translation is not the transcoding of words or sentences from one language to another, but a complex form of action, whereby someone provides information on a text (source language material) in a new situation and under changed functional, cultural and linguistic conditions, preserving formal aspects as closely as possible. (Snell-Hornby, 1986, p. 33).

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