

Register Variation in the Translation Process from *L'Enfant Noir* by CamaraLaye to *The African Child*

Dr Akimi YESSOUFOU
Ecole Normale Supérieure
Université d'Abomey-Calavi
yyeskim@gmail.com

Abstract

The study enters the old debate of whether language is translatable. Using Halliday's register theory as an analytical framework, it combines both anthropological and structural approaches to literary study in a context of translating a literary work. *L'Enfant Noir*, an iconic novel in Francophone Africa, is object of the contrastive analysis of such register variables as field, tenor and mode of discourse. The analysis uncovers relevant features of register variation that occurred in the translation process from French to English. A major finding underpins the translator's attempt to refurbish the original writer's style.

Keywords: register variation, translation, African literature

Résumé

Le papier fait une entrée dans le vieux débat de la traductibilité d'une langue. Prenant pour cadre analytique la théorie du registre de langue selon Halliday, l'analyse croise l'approche anthropologique d'étude littéraire et l'approche structurale, dans un contexte de traduction d'œuvre littéraire. *L'Enfant Noir*, icône du roman africain en langue française, est l'objet de l'analyse contrastive de variables telles que le champ, la teneur, et le mode du discours. Elle met en exergue les traits marquants de variation du registre de langue lors de la traduction du français en anglais. La mise en relation des variables autorise à questionner si le traducteur n'a pas voulu améliorer le style original de l'auteur.

Mots-clés: variation du registre de langue, traduction, littérature africaine

1. Introduction

Although translations tend to reconstitute original meaning, unavoidable changes do occur at the double levels of syntax and lexis. The structural differences between the source and target languages in contact partly explain such compulsory departures. For instance, the rules governing English pronouns differ from the ones doing French pronouns; yet translators do convey meaning from one language to the other. Behind structural differences, are hidden semantic and pragmatic changes as well. Translation transcends the mechanistic view of conveying meaning from one language to another, to include cross-cultural as well as ideological transfers (Nissen 2002, Toury 1995, Hatim and Mason 1990). No matter its orientation, translation entails the rewriting of a separate and rather different text (Turner 2006).

By claiming that language is a means to an end, systemic functional linguists assert that language structure reflects somehow the cultural organization of the society using that language (Firth 1957, Halliday 1985, Eggins 2004). In another word, behind the lexical and grammatical principles of language stand contextual principles that are based on the socio-cultural organization of that language community; register refers to these contextual principles. To this

respect, if lexico-grammatical rules are transferable from one language to another, how can one translate a discourse register into a target language, without distorting the socio-cultural realities that are embedded in the source language? Do the source and target languages always have similar lexico-grammatical opportunities to enable transfer of the register variables? The French saying that '*traduire, c'est trahir*' has more scientific background in the linguistic examination of what changes occur to register and therefore to socio-cultural realities of a source language, when a piece of discourse is being translated into a target language. By claiming that language structure embodies the socio-cultural organizations of that language community, systemic functional linguistics provides scientific justification to the common perception of the translator as a traitor (Hatim and Mason 1990).

Using the register theory as an analytical framework, the current study examines two discourses of the same socio-cultural fabric but presented in different languages: French by the original writer Laye (1953) and the English translated version by Kirkup (1959). The register analysis contributes to the description and appraisal of the stylistic changes that occurred to the same message in the course of its translation from French into English.

The plot features the story of the physical and academic development of the narrator who grew up from childhood in his native village, Kouroussa, to adulthood in Conakry. Composed of twelve chapters with 221 pages in the original French version (Plon edition) and the same number of chapters but with only 159 pages in the English translated version (Fontana edition), the novel ranked as a reference in sociological, anthropological and literary information about Africa, in matters related to the *Malinké* people in west Africa.

This study presents in the first place a synopsis of the novel and its context of publication, followed by a brief exposition of the register theory. Applying the theory in its triple variables of field, tenor and mode of discourse to both versions of the literary work, the study ultimately questions whether the English translation departed from the original work by adding more artistry to it.

2. *The African Child: The Plot in its Context*

On the eve of the waves of independence of African countries, when most African novelists used to denounce colonial rule, calling for its end, the Guinean novelist Camara Laye published his first novel, *L'Enfant Noir* in 1953. Surprisingly enough, the plot remained indifferent to the

political activism in *vogue*; it rather illustrates the Negritude movement whose major concern was to advertise African culture to the world and to value black culture and identity (Taiwo 1967).

L'Enfant Noir is a recollection of childhood memories and experiences. The writer who confuses with the main character recalls the development of an African boy from childhood to maturity. The plot evolved around African traditions marked by family ties, traditional rituals and schooling. As he grew up, the narrator related his childhood experiences both in village and in town, all weaved in his academic destiny. After graduation from primary education, the young boy left the village for the city, Conakry where he could attend technical high school. After completing high school, the narrator got the opportunity to study abroad at Argenteuil in France. While his father eventually gave his consent and blessings for the journey, his mother objected, for fear that she might lose her son. After rituals and sacrifices by his parents, the young boy left for France. It was a moment of great emotion but romance took over when the story ends with the narrator on board an airplane in company of his beloved Marie, even if she was to get off in Senegal.

L'Enfant Noir is about African mystery, traditions and beliefs. Part of the author's intention is "to portray African traditions, to show his readers the mystery of Africa" (Taiwo 1967). How could these realities be conveyed into another language without altering the author's register? To what extent does the target language structure enable the translator to convey the author's register choices?

3. Register Theory: Linking Contexts to Language Structure

Although no apparent relationship exists between context and language structure, systemic functional linguists established links between external factors and the internal organization of language in use. Building on Malinowski's anthropological work in relating meaning to context of production, systemic functional linguists gave more scientific touch to discourse analysis, by differentiating between context of culture or genre and context of situation or register (Martin 1984, Halliday 1985, Hatim and Mason 1990, Eggins 2004). Both genre and register impact language structure to the extent that a more objective discourse analysis requires considering both components of context.

Context of culture points to the “culturally accepted ways” of using language to perform social acts; it is “a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture”(Martin 1984: 25). The types of meanings, lexical items and grammatical choices that are expected in a greeting ritual certainly differ from the rules governing language use in a transactional conversation.

Register, also known as context of situation, compounds all three kinds of functions that language is structured to perform; each type of function relates to each register variable (Firth 1957, Halliday 1985, Eggins 2004). The more an analyst gathers information about the three contextual variables, the better off s/he is to interpret a discourse. The first variable is the field of discourse and identifies with the experiential function of language; the second one is the tenor of discourse which intimately links with the interpersonal function. The third variable is the mode of discourse which has a textual function. As a means to an end, language is used to relate experiences by bringing into contact interactants in the form of spoken or written discourse. Since the current study highlights register variation, it is necessary to have an insight into the three variables and relate how they interact.

3.1. Field of Discourse and the Experiential Function of Language

Field of discourse pertains to what language is used to comment about, the subject matter or the topic of discourse. Eggins (2004: 90) conceptualizes the field as “what the language in use is being used to talk about”. As such, field of discourse serves the experiential function of language, as we use language to relate experiences, to present a worldview; we thereby construct realities and express attitudes. Thus, field of discourse impacts language structure at both levels of lexis and grammar.

Lexically, field of discourse is interpreted along a continuum presenting variations of lexical items from one end to the other, in terms of binary contrasts: shallow, general and commonsense taxonomy at one end, to deep, complex and specialized taxonomy at the other end. A discourse marked by shallow taxonomy is probably meant for general purposes and ‘outsiders’ whereas a discourse marked by deep taxonomy addresses a specialized audience. Shallow taxonomy displays general terms and everyday lexicons, whereas deep taxonomy exhibits technical terms, abbreviations, acronyms and terms often accessible to an initiated audience (Halliday 1985, Borrillo 2000).

At the grammatical level, field of discourse is likely to undergo transitive relationships, which emphasize the “what” in a question model like “who is doing what to whom, where, how and when...?” Transitivity brings forwards the relationship among an object, its verb and subject, with emphasis on their actual expression of realities where the object stands for the field of discourse.

3.2. Tenor of Discourse and the Interpersonal Function of Language

Tenor of discourse addresses “the social role relationships played by interactants” (Egins 2004: 99). In order to better inform about the degree of formality and politeness in communicative events, Poynton (1985) broke this variable into three continua: power, contact and affective involvement. The power continuum varies from equal power at one end to unequal power at the other end. When interactants of unequal power engage in communicative events, formal language use is expected; but if they are of equal power, informality tends to prevail. The contact continuum varies from frequent contact at one end to occasional contact at the other. In frequent contact situations, language use tends to be informal whereas occasional contacts require formality. Lastly, the affective involvement continuum varies from high affective involvement at one end to low affective involvement at the other. High affective involvement requires familiarity and informal language use whereas low affective involvement presupposes distance and formal language use.

Tenor variation impacts language structure with formality and informality markers. Formality markers include neutral lexis, full forms, politeness phenomenon..., whereas colloquial lexis, abbreviations, slang, acronyms...are distinctive features of informality (Egins 2004: 101). As the grammar of interpersonal meaning is limited to mood patterns, analysis of modal verbs and other grammatical categories such as pronouns and vocatives for instance reveals interactants’ attitudes and probable power distance. Tenor of discourse evokes the interpersonal function of language as Halliday (1974: 328) put it: “Here the speaker is using language as the means of his own intrusion into the speech event: the expression of his comments, his attitudes and evaluation and the relationship that he sets up between himself and the listener...”

3.3. Mode of Discourse and the Textual Function of Language

Mode of discourse underpins the distinctive features of a written or spoken discourse. This variable serves the textual function of language by providing clues concerning the various ways in which language structure is affected, depending on whether one is in a situation of written or spoken discourse. Mode of discourse impacts language structure at two distance levels: the spatial or interpersonal distance and the experiential distance (Martin 1984). The spatial distance continuum presents a situation where participants can see and hear one another with the possibility of feedback at one end. In this instance, the channel of discourse is more likely to be a spoken mode and the interaction often casual. For the second end of the spatial distance continuum where the previously mentioned features are more or less missing, the channel of discourse is the written mode with concern for formality. Between the two extremes, hang other channels such as the radio, the telephone, the email...which require a combination of the characteristic features of both written and spoken discourses.

The experiential distance continuum specifies which language type is to be found in either written or spoken discourse. At one end of this continuum, language is used as an active tool for pragmatic goals. While reflecting active experiences, language tends to be direct with more characteristic features of spoken discourse. At the second end of the experiential distance continuum, language is indirect and reflects experience construction; here language is used as a reflective tool to construct experiences with more characteristic features of written discourse.

Chafe (1985) identified nominalization and low grammatical intricacy as distinctive markers of written discourse. Since writing requires formality, detachment and seriousness, verbal forms are de-verbalized into nouns with less dependent clausetype sentences. Conversely, spoken discourse is marked by frequent occurrence of verbal forms with high grammatical intricacy and grammatical innovation. Similarly, lack of formality and directness are inherent to spoken discourse.

4. Register Theory and Literary Studies

Register theory contributes to literary studies in two ways. Though wrapped in fiction and imagination, literature deals with human society and culture. Even in his *Animal Farm*, with all animal characters for instance, Orwell (1987) criticized specific political morals and practices which result from human agency after all! So, systemic functional linguists advanced that, since literature reflects human society in language, a scientific analysis of a piece of literature requires

careful examination of the three register variables. Prior to systemic functional linguists' interpretation of literary works, most of literary critiques either focused on language structure without regards to contexts or clung to contextual information only without concern for language structure (Halliday 1974, Hatim and Mason 1990). Register theory builds on the structural approach by showing serious concern for language internal organization and construction. It stands as an attempt to bridge the gap between society and language structure in literary studies. Such a scientific approach limits subjectivity in literary critique formerly based on intuitive and impressionistic judgments.

If translation entails the production of a different text, register analysis contributes to appraise not only the lexical, syntactic and semantic differences between the source and the target texts, but also to pinpoint stylistic, cultural and ideological differences too, given that both texts are produced by different authors for different purposes and in different contexts (Hatim and Mason 1997).

5. From *L'Enfant Noir* to *The African Child*: Relevant Features of Register Variation

An important claim of register theory is that contexts impact language structure. The current analysis consists of examining variations at the three levels of field, mode and tenor of discourse in the translation process. The contrastive description intends to shed more light on the assumption that Camara Laye's style as a creative writer differs from James Kirkup's as a translator. Each register variable is identified with a major linguistic feature. The field of discourse has been examined through variations in the lexical taxonomy; the tenor of discourse has been examined through pronominal variations with emphasis on how pronominal choices reveal characters' attitudes and feelings. Finally, the mode of discourse has been examined through the parameters of lexical density and grammatical intricacy.

5.1. Taxonomic Variation

Analysis of lexical taxonomy informs about how a field variant belonging to the familiar register in *L'Enfant Noir* has changed into formal taxonomy in *The African Child* and vice versa. To what extent is taxonomic variation noticeable in the two versions of the same story? Bearing in mind that the scope of field in the novel compounds a recollection of childhood experiences through African traditions and mystery, the field continuum is worth considering in its most striking contrastive features as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Field continuum with taxonomic variation from *L'Enfant Noir* to *The African Child*

Deep taxonomy	←————→	Shallow taxonomy
Technical terms Specialized items More precision		Commonsense terms General items Less precision
sayon	little black snake <i>puîné</i> guiding spirits serpent	<i>génie noir</i> <i>genies</i> spirits <i>serpent</i>
<i>The African Child</i> mohammedan goldsmithing		<i>L'Enfant Noir</i> <i>musulman</i> <i>travail de forgeron</i> <i>travail de bijoutier</i> work of goldsmith <i>jeteur de sorts</i> witchdoctor
	magician <i>sorcier</i>	
thee/thou/thy	<i>mon petit époux</i> southsayers	<i>toi/tu/ton/ta/tes</i> mylittle man <i>diseurs de choses cachées</i>
	<i>c'estcompris?</i> <i>grand-mère</i> grand-mother	d'you hear me? grand-mamma/granny
same paragraph missing in <i>The African Child</i>		2nd paragraph on p.77 present in <i>L'Enfant Noir</i>

Lexical items in bold characters are English words chosen by the translator whereas original French words by the narrator are in italics. A row displays each French word with its English equivalent(s). The closer items are to the specialized end of the continuum, the more formal and more technical they appear. Conversely, the closer items are to the commonsense end of the continuum, the more general and more informal they appear. When both French and their English equivalents are superposed in a cell, it signals equality of specialization in both languages or lack of variation.

5.2. Tenor Variation and the Role of English Pronouns

While informing about attitudes and feelings of characters along the continua of power, contact and affection, analysis of tenor variation helps identify a discourse as formal or informal. The task here is to highlight discrepancies between the two discourses with regards to the degree

of formality. As characters of the novel are of distinct social statuses, classes and age groups to one another, the tenor is

expected to vary significantly in the plot. While every language has structures that reveal interactants' attitudes and feelings, the English pronominal system offers unique possibilities of revealing attitudes that are different from the ones that the French pronominal system offer. Table 2 presents significant differences between *L'Enfant Noir* and *The African Child* as far as the unstated meaning of the pronominal choices is concerned.

Table 2: Tenor variation with pronominal choices in both *L'Enfant Noir* and *The African Child*

User	Referent	Relationship	Attitude	Pronoun
innocent narrator	snake as a toy	casual contact high affection	neutrality (<i>Fr</i>) self-identity English	<i>qui, sa, il, ses</i> that, he, him his
forewarned narrator	any other snake	unequal power frequent contact low affection	neutrality hostility	<i>le</i> it
confused narrator	the serpent	unequal power	neutrality confusion	<i>il, le</i> it
narrator	calf with a star	high affection	neutrality self-identity	<i>il, le</i> he, his, him
narrator	crocodile as a totem	unequal power low affection	informality hostility	<i>son, lui-même</i> its, itself
the guiding spirit	narrator's father	unequal power frequent contact high affection	neutrality formality	<i>t', toi, tu, te, tes</i> thou, thine thy, thee
narrator	monkey	high affection	neutrality satisfaction	<i>le</i> him
narrator	panther	low affection	neutrality hatred	<i>qui</i> it
	KondénDiara, the lion	unequal power casual contact low affection	informality formality	<i>il, lui, toi, te</i> he, his, thee
narrator	the dead Cheikh Omar	equal power frequent contact high affection	neutrality sympathy	<i>il, le</i> him, his
narrator	Cheikh Omar's ghost	casual contact	neutrality dread, fear	<i>la</i> it

The attitudes expressed through pronouns result from the relationships between users and referents, i.e. what the pronoun refers to. A hostile relationship between the narrator and the snake, for instance, yields a different pronoun to designate the snake than when an affective relationship is established between the two characters.

5.3.Mode Variation: Lexical Density and Grammatical Intricacy

While describing written discourse, mention was made of nominalization as the process of formalizing discourse by packing ideas, reasons and causes into nominal groups; thus, instead of using action verbs, only weak verbs (auxiliaries) are used whereas action verbs are de-verbalized and changed into nouns. A direct consequence of nominalization is lexical density. Lexical density is calculated by the ratio of content-carrying words to the total number of words in a written discourse. Content-carrying words are main parts of speech such as nouns, head of verbs, adverbs and adjectives. High lexical density suggests that the text under analysis is lexically dense and full of nominal groups. On the contrary, low lexical density signals high grammatical intricacy score.

Linguistic Features	Excerpt in <i>L'Enfant Noir</i>	Equivalent in <i>The African Child</i>	Differences
1. Lexical density ratio	40.49%	40.60%	0.11%
content-carrying lexical items	375	348	27
total number of lexical items	926	857	69
2. Grammatical intricacy score	2.28	2.39	0.11
number of clauses	130	139	09
number of sentences	57	58	01

Table 3: Mode variation with the features of lexical density and grammatical intricacy

Given that the context of oral discourse favours informality, innovations and activity, non-content-carrying words tend to dominate oral discourse. Sentences with dependent clauses, human agents and active type processes are a few linguistic features of oral discourse; as such, oral discourse tends to have high grammatical intricacy. Grammatical intricacy score is calculated as the ratio of the total number of clauses in a text to the total number of sentences in that text. Both lexical density and grammatical intricacy function as an on/off binary system. A lexically dense text has low grammatical intricacy and vice versa. The material for the current study is excerpt from both discourses (French version: 14-19, and its English equivalent: 15-18). The lexical density and grammatical intricacy for both texts are calculated in Table 3.

As illustrated above, the difference between *L'Enfant Noir* and *The African Child* is narrow as far as the mode of discourse is concerned. We infer that the translation has remained close to the original version when we consider the mode variable.

6. Discussion: The *African Child*, an Artistic Completion of *L'Enfant Noir*?

Major critiques against *L'Enfant Noir* on its publication minimized the writer's literariness. Rather, charges were against the author's indifference to the independence struggle prevailing in most achievements of African writers in the 1950s and 1960s. Critics preferred to focus on the political situation of the novel rather than assessing its literariness. Contrary to critics, the translator preferred to address the literariness of the novel without distorting the plot. As a consequence, Laye's indifference to the on-going anti-colonial struggle at the time remains a valid charge for both versions of the plot. However, an important linguistic weakness of the original novel lies in the difficulty for the adult Camara to create a language proper to his boyhood without his adult judgmental interferences (Palmer 1972).

In the original version, the writer's concern for avoiding adult judgmental interferences surfaced on many occasions. His reference to general terms with shallow lexical taxonomy on the field continuum signals this concern (see Table 1). The reader is told boyhood experiences from the mouth of a growing boy. Put aside a few comments that highlight the adult writer's reference to his past, the taxonomy shows the commonsense register with occasional occurrence of informality. Even the language of adult characters is diluted into the register of a child; they do not speak the language of their status or age group. The effort to infantilize the register is partly explained by the deep affective relationship between the narrator and all other characters of the plot including animals and even objects. Adult though the other characters are, they had to dilute their language and come down to the level of the child and speak his language. The adult writer's preference for the commonsense register can also be interpreted as an effort to address a general audience. Specialized though 'goldsmithing', the 'serpent', the 'initiation ceremony' and the circumcision rituals might be, they were narrated by a boy in a register appropriate to him. In general the register in *L'Enfant Noir* does not vary too much beyond the occasional comments that disclose the adult writer's intrusion into his past boyhood memories.

In *The African Child*, however, the translator made considerable effort to vary the register. In fact, register variation is an act of creativity, “the more creative the text is the more dynamic language use must be” (Hatim and Mason 1997: 102). Instead of using a commonsense register with shallow taxonomy like the narrator, the translator preferred using deep taxonomy with lexical items at the specialized end of the field continuum. Unlike the French version of the novel, the characters in the English translation try to speak the language of their milieu while the narrator, despite his being a child, tries to adjust to the situation. A few pieces of evidence are helpful. Between the narrator and his grandmother, there is high affective relationship that was strengthened by the translator when he varied the register from the formal “grandmother” to the less formal “grand-mamma”, after using the colloquial “granny” where the French edition just mentioned the commonsense “*grand-mère*”. A similar variation of register occurred with the narrator’s uncle in Conakry whom the translator termed “mohammedan” instead of the commonsense equivalent of “*musulman*”, Muslim, probably because of the character’s excessive devotion to Islam and his piety.

A number of linguistic features changed from the original version to the English translated version. Table 2 exhibits significant differences between the functions of the pronouns used in either version of the novel. In the French version, the pronouns do not reflect noticeable register variation except for specifying the gender and number of referents. In the English version however, the translator made striking choices. In general, the English third person singular pronoun specifies three gender categories: masculine, feminine and neutral genders. The translator used both masculine and neutral genders to express attitudes of affection or hostility between user and referent. Though a totem to the narrator’s mother, the crocodile was treated with contempt, when in the translation, the narrator refers to the animal with the neutral gender “it”. Likewise, the translator used the same neutral pronoun to refer to the panther, to an ordinary snake and to Cheikh Omar’s ghost... In short, the narrator downgraded all the characters of the plot that he does not like or fearsome characters, by referring to them with the neutral gender pronoun. On the contrary, he celebrated all domestic animals and particularly godlike creatures by referring to them with the masculine gender either for affective reasons or for their supernatural power.

In addition to pronominal variation that the English language offers with the third person singular, the translator also varied the register through the use of other archaic forms of pronouns to fit significant circumstances. When making the guiding spirit speak, the translator changed to the archaic language proper to the religious field. So, the guiding spirit addressed the narrator's father in terms of "thine", "thou", "thee"... The translator used the distinction markers to identify the narrator's father as the god's priest or a prophet. Thus, the choice emphasizes a different intention from the one in the original French version where the writer used the second person singular "tu" and its variants; the French second person singular pronoun, though emphasizing intimacy and affection, belongs however to the informal register (Gilman and Brown 1990). Whereas the original writer emphasized intimacy and affection in French, the translator preferred the solemnity and religious nature of the interaction. He deemed it necessary to establish a difference between the words from the mouth of a human being and the ones from a godly creature.

In a context of loneliness and homesickness where writing became a better way out for entertainment and recreating life through childhood memories and experiences, actual facts are more likely to be romanticized; the personal bias of the writer might interfere with past realities. Literary critics often refer to the writer's bias as a strong weakness to the literariness of the novel, charging that he only presented good aspects of life in Africa, that he featured rosy characters and mildly treated them (Palmer 1972). On this ground, some critics label the novel a romantic one. There is evidence that the translator too shared this critique when he reduced substantially idealistic features by highlighting more realism and objectivity in the English edition. A careful reader perceives the translator's concern for realism and objectivity when he distanced himself from the writer on many occasions.

The discrepancy between the writer's 'idealistic' intention and the translator's 'realistic' achievement became more visible when the translator skipped a whole paragraph of the original version for artistic reasons. The vacuum left for the English equivalent of a whole paragraph in Table 1 insinuates a technical choice by the translator. In his introduction to the Fontana edition of *The African Child*, William Plomer wrote: "Autobiography is best without self-pity, self-justification or boastfulness. The African Child is without these weaknesses." In fact, careful examination of the missing paragraph in the French edition shows that the writer easily slipped

into self-justification while trying to excuse her mother's supernatural powers. Part of the paragraph reads like this: "...*Son don de sorcellerie ne lui permettait, l'eût-elle voulu, de rien tramer elle-même. Elle n'était donc point suspecte. Si l'on se montrait aimable à son égard, ce n'était aucunement par crainte...*" (Laye 1953: 77). In the French version, the narrator tried to clear his mother of any possible suspicion that a well-informed reader might have regarding the dark corners of his mother's supernatural powers. This rosy initiative sharply contradicts Plomer's assertion and probably justifies the translator's choice of skipping the paragraph in the English version.

6. Conclusion

Register theory has the merit of demonstrating that language structure (semantics, syntax, grammar etc.) reflects culture as well as it is a function of culture. Since literature profiles society and echoes social facts and culture with the medium of language, register theory has potentials for analyzing literary discourse. The contrastive study presents typically African social realities and contexts in foreign languages (French and English) with the mediations of both inspiration and translation. Whether in *L'Enfant Noir* or in *The African Child*, the ideal way of doing justice to the socio-cultural realities is to assess them against the plot in *Malinké* language. On this ground, the study shows its limits which are also inherent to the oral genre of early African literature.

However, the contrastive analysis of register variation between the two versions of the novel shows significant changes that indicate how the translator managed to refurbish the style in the original version. There is a growing contention that "translations generally do violence to the original language and that literary works are best studied in the original language of their composition" (Senanu and Vincent 1976: 2). Findings of this study indicate that violence to the original language may result in positive outcomes for the translated work such as artistic perfection.

References

- Borrillo, M. J. (2000) "Register Analysis in Literary Translation: A Functional Approach", in *Babel* 46(1): 1-19.
- Chafe, W. (1985) "Linguistic Differences Produced by Differences between Speaking and

- Writing”, in R. David, O.T. Nancy and H. Angela (eds.), *Literacy, Language and Learning: The Nature and Consequences of Reading and Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eggs, S. (2004) *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics* (2nd edition). New York: Continuum.
- Firth, J. R. (1957) “Personality and Language in Society”, in J.R. Firth (ed.), *Papers in Linguistics*. London: Oxford University Press. 177-189.
- Brown, R. and Gilman, A. (1990) “The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity”, in P. P. Giglioli (ed.), *Language and Social Context* (2nd edition). London: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Halliday, M. A.K. (1974) “Linguistic Function and Literary Style: An Inquiry into the Language of William Golding’s *Inheritors*”, in C. Seymour (ed.), *Essays on Language of Literature*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- (1985) *Spoken and Written Language*. Vic: Deakin University Press.
- Hatim, B. and Mason, I. (1990) *Discourse and the Translator*. London: Longman.
- (1997) *The Translator as Communicator*. London: Longman.
- Laye, C. (1953) *L’Enfant Noir*. Paris: Plon.
- (1959) *The African Child* (James Kirkup Trans). London: Fontana.
- Martin, J.R. (1984) “Language, Register and Genre”, in F. Christie (ed.), *Children Writing: A Reader*. Geelong, Vic: Deakin University Press: 21-29.
- Nissen, U.K. (2002) “Aspects of Translating Gender”, *Linguistik Online* 11(2), last accessed in October 2011 at http://www.linguistik-online.de/11_02/nissen.html.
- Orwell, G. (1987) *The Animal Farm*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Palmer, E. (1972) *An Introduction to the African Novel*. London: Heinemann.
- Poynton, C. (1985) *Language and Gender: Making the Difference*. Geelong, Vic: Deakin University Press.
- Senanu, E. and Vincent T. (1976) *A Selection of African Poetry*. London: Longman Group Limited.
- Taiwo, O. (1967) *An Introduction to West African Literature*. Lagos: Nelson.
- Toury, G. (1995) *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Turner, A. (2006) "Translation and Criticism: The Stylistic Mirror", *The Yearbook of English Studies* 36(1): 168-176.