

REFLECTIONS ON THE LITERARY TRANSLATION PROCESS: A FOCUS ON  
RÉGINA YAOU'S *SŒURS DE SANG*

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**Abstract**

Translation is vital for bridging linguistic and cultural gaps, particularly in literature, where preserving the author's intent and cultural context is crucial. Régina Yaou's novel *Sœurs de Sang*, a significant work in African literature, remains untranslated into English, limiting its accessibility to English-speaking readers, scholars, and students. This lack of translation not only restricts appreciation of the novel but also hinders critical discourse on its themes and potential translation strategies. This study aimed to produce an English translation of *Sœurs de Sang*, addressing the linguistic and cultural challenges encountered. The focus was on analysing and resolving grammatical, syntactic, rhetorical, and pragmatic issues to maintain the novel's authenticity and accessibility. The study revealed significant challenges in retaining the novel's stylistic and cultural nuances. Adjustments were made to French grammatical structures, sentence syntax, and rhetorical devices to ensure readability for English-speaking audiences. Cultural elements were carefully adapted to retain their specificity, ensuring the translation's accuracy and cultural relevance. The study recommends that future translations emphasise cultural familiarity and contextual sensitivity. This includes ongoing training for translators, collaboration with native cultural experts, and strategic use of translation tools. Regular feedback from native speakers is also crucial for refining translations and improving their reception among target audiences. By implementing these strategies, future translations can better bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, enhancing the global reach and impact of important literary works like *Sœurs de Sang*.

**Keywords:** Literary translation, cultural adaptation, African literature, translation challenges, linguistic accuracy, *Sœurs de Sang*.

**Introduction**

Helping two people who do not speak the same language to understand each other is referred to as translation (Maksymski, 2015). This single activity, although it may seem straightforward, is multifaceted in the way it ensures effective communication between individuals who speak different languages. Translation can take various forms, including interpretation, subtitling, sight translation, and more. Interpretation is the oral translation of spoken language, which can happen in real-time (simultaneous interpretation) or after the speaker has finished talking (consecutive interpretation) (González-Davies, 2020). Subtitling, according to García-Escribano (2023), involves translating spoken dialogue in films or television shows into written text that appears on screen, helping viewers understand the content even if they do not speak the original language. Sight translation is the process of translating written text into spoken words on the spot, often used in legal and medical settings where documents need to be read aloud in another language (see Zou et al., 2022).

Literary translation involves translating literature, such as novels, poems, and plays, from one language to another (cf. Valdeón, 2018). This form of translation requires not just a literal translation but also capturing the style, tone, and cultural nuances of the original text. Technical translation focuses on translating technical documents such as manuals, user guides, and scientific papers, requiring specialised knowledge of the subject matter. Legal translation involves translating legal documents such as contracts, statutes, and legal opinions, where accuracy and understanding of legal terminology are crucial. Medical translation involves translating medical documents such as patient records, research papers, and pharmaceutical instructions, requiring knowledge of medical terminology and concepts. Machine translation is the use of software to translate text from one language to another. While machine translation has improved over the years, it still requires human oversight for accuracy and cultural sensitivity. Specialists in translation strive to understand its nature deeply. Numerous attempts have been made by experts to define translation, highlighting its complexity and multifaceted nature (Hermans, 2013). Linguists, translation theorists, writers, and researchers have proposed various definitions from their perspectives. Ghosal (2023) defines translate as the process of converting the meaning of a written message (text) from one language to another. "This broad definition captures the essence of translation: transferring a message from one language to another. By understanding these different forms of translation, we can appreciate the various ways in which this essential activity bridges language barriers and facilitates communication across cultures.

In the literary field, which is the focus of our research, translation requires not only linguistic competence but also a deep understanding of the context, era, and stylistic expression of the author. This distinction marks the difference between academic and professional translation. The former relies on theory, while the latter is based on practical experience, where skills in stylistics, a fertile imagination, and extensive cultural knowledge are essential. Without these, translations can result in poor quality or even misunderstandings (González-Davies, 2020). Several African novels have been translated into French and English. Notable examples include Ferdinand Oyono's *Une vie de Boy* (1956) and *Le vieux nègre et la médaille*, translated into English by John Reed as *House Boy* and *The Old Man and the Medal* (1956). Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, translated into French as *Le monde s'effondre* by Michel Ligny, and into more than fifty languages, is a testament to its universal impact (Negedu, 2020:283-297). In 2013, Pierre Girard revisited this classic by offering a new translation titled *Tout s'Effondre* for Actes Sud. Similarly, Camara Laye's poignant tale, *L'Enfant Noir* (1953), was brought to English readers as *The African Child* by James Kirkup (Eke, 2010). Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les Soleils des indépendances* (1968), translated as *Suns of Independence* by Adrian Adams in 1981, vividly portrays the tumultuous journey from traditional African life to the complexities of modernity. In Nigeria, bilingual writer and French professor Ramonu Sanusi authored several books, including *Mama Tutù* in French, which was translated into English with Professor Sanusi's permission (Wauton, 2020).

On the other hand, Ivorian writer Régina Yaou, known as an African intellectual, has not yet been translated into English. Her notable works include *La révolte d'Affiba* (1985), *Opération fournaise* (2012), *Aihui Anka* (1988), and *La Citadine* (1977), among others. Her 25th publication, *Sœurs de sang*, remains untranslated, depriving English-speaking readers of the opportunity to enjoy this rich work. Consequently, anglophones who wish to read Régina Yaou's works in English do not have access to *Sœurs de sang*, missing out on its intriguing story. Additionally, students and researchers of African literature who do not speak French cannot explore the novel's rich content. There is also no commentary on the translation of this

novel since it has not been translated, thereby leaving no basis for translation critics to debate the styles and strategies that could have been employed in translating the novel into English. The present article describes a project undertaken to produce an English version of Régina Yaou's *Sœurs de Sang*. It provides an overview of the problems encountered in the translation process and proposes solutions to these issues. By attempting a brief commentary on these challenges, the article demonstrates that literary translation is faced with its attendant challenges and complexities.

### **Understanding Translation from the literature**

Translation is a process that many might think of simply as converting text from one language to another. But it is much more nuanced. At its core, translation involves conveying a message from one language (the source language) into another language (the target language). Conveying the original message to meet the needs of a new audience in another language is crucial in translation. As Berman (2021) explains, “translation is not merely a word-for-word conversion, but an adaptation that considers the cultural and contextual aspects relevant to the new audience”. Various scholars have offered different perspectives on translation. For instance, Nida (1964) defined translation as creating a natural equivalence in the target language that is closest to the meaning of the source language, both in terms of content and style. This approach highlights that translation is not a mere word-for-word conversion but involves capturing the essence and style of the original text.

Aury (1963) suggested that translation is akin to "transferring cultural worlds," meaning that translation helps bridge cultural gaps by making one culture's ideas accessible to another. Seleskovitch and Lederer (1986) further explained that translation involves making the meaning intelligible in another language without losing clarity or creating confusion. The translation process is complex and requires a deep understanding of both languages and cultures. This means translators need to comprehend not only the literal meaning of words but also the cultural contexts of the source text. For instance, Vinay & Darbelnet (1958) described translation as moving from “language A to language B to express the same reality,” which emphasises the importance of finding equivalent expressions in the target language. In practical terms, there are different types of translation: literary and technical. Literary translation deals with texts like novels and poetry, requiring creativity and a deep appreciation of stylistic elements. Technical translation, on the other hand, involves translating scientific or technical documents and demands specialised knowledge in those fields.

Some scholars have provided us with the understanding of the concept of translation through their studies. Eke (2010), for example, emphasizes the unique challenges of literary translation, highlighting the need to capture not only the literal meaning of the text but also the subtle nuances and cultural contexts that define literary works. This complexity arises from the inherent ambiguity in literature, where words and expressions often carry multiple layers of meaning. De la Morena-Corrales and Baer (2022) explore translation as a cultural bridge, illustrating how it facilitates the transfer of ideas and addresses issues of national belonging, linguistic identity, and intersectionality. Their analysis highlights translation’s role in making complex cultural content accessible to a broader audience. Seleskovitch and Lederer (1986) contribute to this view by stressing the importance of clarity in translation, emphasising that effective translation must make meaning intelligible across linguistic boundaries.

Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) argue that translation involves finding equivalent expressions that convey the same reality in the target language. Jakobson (1959) further refines this understanding by categorising translation into three types: intralingual, interlingual, and

intersemiotic. This classification helps in understanding how translation operates within the same language, between different languages, and between verbal and non-verbal signs. Ekpenyong (1998) and Delisle (1984) delve into intralingual translation, explaining how rephrasing within the same language can convey different grammatical structures or expressions while maintaining the same meaning. This aspect of translation is crucial in translator training, as it involves paraphrasing and understanding nuances within a single language.

Venuti (2021) discusses the historical significance of translation. He notes its role in both dogmatic and political contexts. Translation has been used as a tool in shaping nation-states and influencing political and cultural discourse. These works offer a comprehensive overview of translation theories and practices. They reveal the multifaceted nature of translation by emphasizing the need for translators to navigate both literal and figurative meanings, cultural contexts, and the historical significance of their work. This collective body of research enriches our understanding of translation as both an art and a critical component of cross-cultural communication.

### **Materials and methods**

The present research involves a commentary on the translation of Régina Yaou's novel *Sœurs de Sang*, which delves into the story of Shana and Mikénian, two sisters bound by an unusual set of circumstances from birth. Growing up together, they develop a deep emotional bond, becoming almost like emotional twins. They share everything, including moments of happiness, complicity, and even physical support, such as when Shana donates blood to Mikénian, solidifying their biological connection. Despite this apparent harmony, the novel takes a tragic turn when Mikénian betrays Shana in an unexpected manner. Shana, feeling betrayed and ensnared by her sister's actions, finds herself in a difficult and uncertain situation. The novel explores themes of love, sibling rivalry, and the tragedy that can arise from complex familial relationships. The translation of this novel into English was undertaken using various tools, including Reverso, DeepL, and Google Translate, depending on the complexity of the text segments. The complete translation is documented in Wauton (2024). Below is a summary of the reflections on some of the notable difficulties encountered during the translation process.

### **Results and Discussion**

In translating Régina Yaou's *Sœurs de Sang* from French to English, we encountered a range of challenges that fall into five primary categories: grammatical, syntactic, rhetorical, pragmatic, and cultural. Each category presented unique obstacles that required tailored solutions.

#### **1. Grammatical Problems**

Several grammatical challenges arose in the translation due to the differences between French and English. These issues were primarily related to temporal aspects, verb states, and personal pronouns, as French and English handle these elements differently. To address these grammatical issues, we employed various strategies. One key approach was transposition, where we adjusted grammatical structures from French to fit English norms while preserving the original meaning. For example, in the French sentence “Mina leva **la** tête,” we translated it to “Mina lifted **her** head” in English. Here, the definite article “**la**” was replaced with the possessive adjective “her” to align with English grammatical conventions. A literal translation of that text segment as “Mina lifted **the** head would result in an awkward rendition. The use of

grammar checkers like Grammarly ensured that our translations were accurate and stylistically appropriate. These tools helped us identify and correct grammatical errors, ensuring clarity and coherence in the English translation. It was observed that French grammatical structures, such as verb tenses and pronoun usage, did not always align with English conventions. According to Baker (2018), grammatical differences between languages can significantly impact the accuracy and naturalness of translations. To address these issues, we utilised transposition techniques, adjusting French grammatical constructs to fit English norms without altering the meaning (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995). For instance, replacing “la tête” with “her head” in English ensured grammatical coherence and clarity.

Previous studies, such as those by House (2015), emphasize the importance of maintaining the grammatical integrity of the source text while adapting it to the target language's norms. Our use of grammar checkers like Grammarly also aligned with recommendations by Bowker (2023), who highlight the utility of digital tools in improving translation accuracy.

## **2. Syntactic Problems**

Syntactic issues arose from differences in sentence structures between French and English. We faced challenges related to parallel structures, passive voice, and focus constructions, which required us to carefully align the translated text with English syntax norms. To tackle these syntactic challenges, sentence restructuring techniques were employed. We reorganised sentences to fit English syntactic norms while maintaining grammatical correctness and stylistic consistency with the original French text. For example, the French sentence “Un message ? S’écria en écho Mina dont le sourire disparut immédiatement” was translated to “A message ? Mina echoed, her smile disappearing immediately.” This reorganisation clarified the sentence structure and enhanced readability for English-speaking readers.

Syntactic issues in translation involve the alignment of sentence structures between languages. French and English often differ in sentence construction, which can lead to challenges in maintaining fluency and readability. We encountered difficulties with syntactic alignment, particularly with passive voice, focus constructions, and parallel structures. These issues were addressed through careful sentence restructuring and consultation of style guides. According to Newmark (1988), syntactic adjustments are crucial for producing a fluent and natural translation. For instance, restructuring “Un message ? S’écria en écho Mina dont le sourire disparut immédiatement” to “A message ? Mina echoed, her smile disappearing immediately” enhanced readability while preserving the original meaning.

## **3. Rhetorical Problems**

Rhetorical problems involved translating figures of speech, such as metaphors and idioms, to preserve their impact and meaning in the target language. Translating these elements required us to find culturally and contextually appropriate English equivalents. To address rhetorical challenges, we employed cultural adaptation techniques. We identified rhetorical devices in the source text and recreated them in a way that preserved their original effect. For instance, the French reference “Toujours à jouer le Saint Bernard” was adapted to “Always playing the Good Samaritan” in English. This adjustment preserved the rhetorical impact while making the reference more familiar to English-speaking readers. We also consulted literary analysis tools and resources to better understand and accurately translate rhetorical devices. This approach ensured that the translated text retained the stylistic and emotional effects of the original text, even when cultural contexts differed. Rhetorical problems involve translating figures of speech and stylistic elements that contribute to the text's overall impact. Metaphors, idioms, and other rhetorical devices can be challenging to translate because their effects are often culturally specific.

Studies such as those by Newmark (1988) and Venuti (2012) emphasize the importance of retaining the rhetorical effect of the source text. Our approach aligns with their recommendations, as we focused on finding culturally appropriate equivalents that preserved the original's emotional and stylistic impact.

#### **4. Pragmatic Problems**

Pragmatic issues arose from differences in language use, such as formal versus informal address, idiomatic expressions, and nuances of irony, humour, and sarcasm. Translating these elements required us to carefully analyse the context to ensure that the translation accurately reflected the original tone and intent. To handle pragmatic problems, we conducted contextual analysis to determine the appropriate translations for idiomatic expressions and nuanced language. For example, the French phrase “Mon adorée, ce qui s’est passée, je ne l’ai pas voulu” was translated as “My darling, I didn’t want what happened,” preserving the informal and affectionate tone of the original. We also engaged in consultation with native speakers and cultural experts to ensure that our translation accurately captured the intended tone and nuances. This collaboration was crucial for translating humour, irony, and sarcasm in a way that resonated with English-speaking readers.

Research by Baker (2018) and Pym (2014) highlights the significance of contextual analysis in overcoming pragmatic issues. Our use of contextual analysis and collaboration with cultural experts ensured that the translations accurately reflected the intended tone and meaning, preserving the original text's nuances.

#### **5. Cultural Problems**

Cultural differences presented significant challenges in translating *Sœurs de Sang*, particularly with cultural references, local elements, and names unique to the African context. Addressing these cultural challenges required careful adaptation to maintain accuracy and cultural relevance. To tackle cultural problems, we used borrowing as a technique for names and culturally specific terms. For instance, names like Assépouey, Bessolo, and Attame were directly borrowed into English to preserve their cultural authenticity and significance.

We also employed adaptation techniques for local elements and cultural references. For example, the term “Saint-Benard” was translated as “the Good Samaritan” to make the reference more accessible to English-speaking readers while retaining its cultural meaning. To ensure accurate representation of cultural elements, we utilised cultural guides and resources. These tools helped us understand and appropriately convey cultural contexts, maintaining the integrity of the original text while making it accessible to a broader audience.

Previous studies, such as those by Lefevere (1992) and Bassnett (2013), emphasize the importance of cultural adaptation in translation. Our approach, which involved using cultural guides and adaptation techniques, aligns with their recommendations and helped maintain the cultural integrity of the original text.

#### **Conclusion/Recommendation**

In translating Régina Yaou's *Sœurs de Sang* from French to English, we navigated a range of linguistic and cultural challenges to ensure that the final English version accurately reflected the original text's meaning and essence. We addressed grammatical issues by adjusting French structures to fit English norms, such as converting French definite articles into English possessive adjectives, thereby preserving the intended meaning. Syntactic adjustments were also crucial, as we restructured sentences to align with English syntactic conventions while maintaining readability and fluency. This approach involved rephrasing sentences to ensure they were grammatically correct and stylistically consistent with the original text.

Rhetorical devices, including metaphors and cultural references, required adaptation to resonate with English-speaking readers. We identified key rhetorical elements in the French text and recreated them in a way that preserved their impact while making them accessible to the target audience. These often involved substituting culturally specific terms with more familiar English equivalents. Pragmatic issues, such as translating idiomatic expressions and determining the appropriate level of formality, were addressed by carefully considering context and intended effect. We made decisions that preserved the original meaning and cultural nuances, ensuring that the translation was both accurate and culturally relevant. Cultural challenges were tackled by adapting local elements and names to retain their cultural specificity. We employed borrowing techniques for place names and preserved cultural references to maintain the original's local colour and authenticity.

Overall, our approach to translating *Sœurs de Sang* involved a thorough examination of grammatical, syntactic, rhetorical, pragmatic, and cultural issues. By implementing targeted strategies, we aimed to produce a translation that honoured the original text while making it accessible and engaging for English-speaking readers. This process highlights the importance of balancing linguistic accuracy with cultural sensitivity in translation, contributing to a richer understanding of the text in a new linguistic and cultural context.

To enhance the quality and effectiveness of future translations, several key recommendations emerge from our experience with translating Régina Yaou's *Sœurs de Sang*. Firstly, an increased emphasis on cultural familiarity is crucial. Translators should strive for a deeper understanding of the cultural context and collaborate closely with native cultural experts. This collaboration ensures that the cultural nuances and references in the original text are accurately and sensitively conveyed in the translation. Such engagement helps preserve the cultural richness of the source material, making it more accessible and meaningful to the target audience. Secondly, contextual sensitivity must be a priority throughout the translation process. Translators should focus on analysing the context to effectively handle linguistic and cultural subtleties, particularly when translating idiomatic expressions and rhetorical devices. By carefully considering the context and intended effects, translators can adapt these elements in a way that maintains their original impact while fitting the target language's norms and expectations.

Ongoing training for translators is also essential. Continuous professional development enables translators to stay updated with best practices in translation techniques and cultural adaptation. This ongoing education helps improve the overall quality of translations and ensures that translators are well-equipped to handle complex linguistic and cultural challenges. Additionally, seeking regular feedback from native speakers and experts in the target language can significantly enhance translation quality. Post-publication feedback provides valuable insights into how the translation is received by the target audience and helps address any issues that may arise, leading to more refined and accurate translations. Finally, leveraging advanced translation tools and technologies can assist in managing complex linguistic tasks. However, it is crucial to remember that human oversight remains indispensable for maintaining cultural accuracy and nuance. Combining technological assistance with expert human judgment ensures that translations are both technically proficient and culturally sensitive. By implementing these recommendations, future translations can build on our approach, further bridging linguistic and cultural gaps and enhancing the global reach and impact of literary works.

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