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# Translation and Botswana Literature in Setswana Language: A Postcolonial Criticism and Practice

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**Abstract:** The role of translation in the development and transformation of various aspects of both traditional and modern Botswana literature cannot be overlooked. This is not only because of its significance in defining and describing the different categories of the literature but also due to the fact that translation has opened paths that make it possible to theorize and critique Setswana literature in the context of translation. Translation in Setswana literature applies to a vast volume of works encompassing the written and oral genres. This project aims to explore the perspectives and arguments that have been submitted by various translators and authors with respect to translation in Setswana literature in general. While recognizing that, at different historical periods, translation as a process has patently transpired in other local languages spoken in Botswana in a similar fashion, the present study exclusively focuses on the literary production in the Setswana language. In addition to being the common parlance, Setswana boasts of a sizeable works of literature, some of which have been translated into European languages, and mainly English. The examples of works that are considered for description and critique in this study are drawn from the oral and written traditions of Setswana literature. These include oral poetry, oral narratives such as proverbs and folktales, written poetry, novels and plays. Based on the critical discussion of these works, the study also aims to investigate the impact of translation on the formation and transformation of these genres that constitute the body of Setswana literature. This research project builds on few existing translation studies on Botswana literature. But, unlike most of the existing studies, it also goes beyond those studies in that it acknowledges and contextualizes the work of translation not merely as a new literary invention in the language but also in its instrumental function in enhancing and diversifying the trajectories of Setswana literature. **Keywords:** Setswana Literature, Translation

## Introduction

Since the colonization of African societies in the 1880s, literary critics and historians have been engaged in a continued and heated debate about what accurately represents African literature. This is due to complex factors, but primarily due to: 1) the absence of uniformity of the different literary traditions associated with the multiple languages and cultures in the continent, and 2) the tendency of critics who attempted to define African literatures based on western notions. Despite the impositions, the result was that traditional literature in Africa has continued to assume and maintain its existence and identity in various forms and mediums. Translation was one of these important mediums.

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In Setswana, both oral and written literary traditions have long existed in the form of oral poetry and narratives (proverbs and folktales), written poetry, novels and plays. In this process, Botswana literary works have also been translated into other languages and mainly English. This study primarily aims to investigate the impact of translation on the formation and transformation of these genres that constitute the body of Setswana literature. The research project builds on few existing translation studies on Botswana literature. However, unlike most of the existing studies, it goes beyond those studies in that it sees the role of translation in Setswana literature not merely as a new literary invention in the language but also as having instrumental function in enhancing and diversifying the historical development of Setswana literature as a whole. Translation as a new literary invention in Setswana has affected or impacted both the written and oral forms of Setswana literature in several ways.

One significant area in which the impact of translation is evident is demonstrated in the way previously *recorded oral poetry* was transcribed from the oral to its *written* form. In many instances, before they were available for translation, oral poems had to be first written down, that is be transcribed into a written text of Setswana orthography. This was necessary not only to facilitate the logistics of translation but importantly so in order to create a written physical (visual) equivalent with the English language into which they were translated. This means that the process of translation of any given oral text required a complex procedure involving double translations: from oral to written Setswana, and from written Setswana into English. The procedure of double translation, which often was the norm with translators, in turn produced the effect that a textual interplay came into being between the original language (written Setswana) and the target language (written English). Concretely, the result of this method of transcribing and translating is seen in many publications such as Schapera, Plaatjie, and Raditladi. Isaac Schapera in his book, *Praise-poems of Tswana Chiefs*, highlights these steps and procedure of translation when he discusses his methodology. He underscores that:

None of the texts was recorded by myself. They were all specifically written for me by teachers or other literate Tswana: occasionally by the composer's dictation, from the dictation of other men familiar with the poems, and, now and then, from personal knowledge; and of many, notably Kgatla and Ngwato, I have two or more independent versions. (1965:39)

Another important observation that can be made about translation from Setswana into English pertains to the texts' suitability for translation and the way translation work was debated by critics in the Botswana context. Fundamentally, critics were divided along three lines of argument. There were those who were skeptical of the idea of translation, claiming that the art foreignized Setswana culture and literature (Shole 1990:51-55). There were others, while accepting the idea of translation, showed reservations about the translatability of some Setswana ideas and expressions into English (Seboni 2011: Intro). A third group argued that as a language

Setswana had the vitality to express human values that can be translated into any other language (Schalkwyk and Lapula 2000:10, Makutoane and Naude 2009:79).

At this initial point, I want to dwell on the idea of translation as a process, and as a literary invention that has influenced Setswana literature in its history. Arguably, and despite the criticisms, translation is deemed relevant for a critical inquiry such as this because it opens the opportunities for exploring the role of translation in Setswana literature, as in any other literatures which have translation work as an integral part of their historical development. From a broader perspective translation studies is a very important area in comparative studies of literature, particularly those representing postcolonial settings. In the context of Botswana, the importance of translation is even more paramount, given the fact that novels such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* are read and discussed in the country in Setswana language. From the perspective of translation studies, reading *Things Fall Apart in Setswana* is an exciting development. First, it shows the possibility of translation within African languages. Second, it offers a model of comparison about how Setswana novels can be translated into English and other African languages and attain wider readership. Thirdly, and specially for the purpose of this study, it provides a vital framework to amplify the discussion on translation in Botswana by focusing on this single work. Similar arguments apply to the translation discussed in this study, including Schapera, translator of *Praise-poems of Tswana Chiefs*, Raditladi's *Dintshontsho tsa Lorato*, and Thedi's translation of Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather*.

A brief outline of this project follows: in the first section, a detailed background of translation and its relationship with Setswana literature is provided. In this section, a first attempt to conceptually define Setswana literature is made. Since, a holistic definition of what Setswana literature constitutes has never been given, this part will necessarily be exploratory and hypothetical. A list of objectives and research questions of this project will follow it. Consequently, a justification for this study will be provided explaining the necessity and rationale of this investigation. The importance of researching African language literatures, such as Setswana is highlighted. A discussion on some theories of translations follows. The section concludes with a discussion of the critical literature on translation as viewed by published commentators and theorists of Setswana orature and literature.

### **Aims of the Study**

This research project focuses on four specific objectives: First, it seeks to describe the extent to which translation has been an integral component of Setswana literature. Second, it seeks to examine the statements made by critics about Setswana translations. Third, it aspires to contribute to the discussion on translation. This is achieved by analyzing specific samples of translations. Four, to appreciate the instrumental function of translation in enhancing and diversifying the trajectories of Setswana literature as a whole.

### **Justification**

Despite its potential to expand the thematic scope of Setswana literature, there has been very little work on literary translation on Setswana literature. It continues to be largely neglected by

critics, and even translators. Comparatively, the focus of Botswana literary critics is, unfortunately, on works that are written in the English language. While understanding the complex forces at play that privilege Anglophone literatures in the country, this research undertaking attempts to break that dichotomy between the equally important literatures in Botswana, namely European language, and the African language literatures. In other words, this project is built on the presumption that Setswana indigenous literatures deserve equal critical attention with the predominant postcolonial Europhonic literatures, which while assuming a center stage have also contributed to the historical invisibility and marginalization of Setswana language literary productions. This position does not stand on its own, but rather underscores what some Setswana literary figures have recognized in their writings. For example, Shole amplifying the same point observes that: “not much attention has been given to literary translations in Setswana, either as translations or works of art on their own, despite the role they have played”(Shole 1990:51). If such gaps are addressed through developing this area of enquiry, there is a possibility that the outcome is that more texts and reviews pertaining Setswana literature are produced such that the primary literary production and translation work become central, rather than peripheral to the study of Botswana literature as an academic discipline. From an academic point of view, it is also this unique concern to empower and recognize the significance of Setswana literature in Botswana and its translations that make this study unique in its purpose and scope. No work that recognizes and analyzes the historical and critical role of translation in Setswana literature has been done before.

### **Background**

The section explores translation in terms of how it is mapped into the literary development of Setswana literature in many respects. First it considers the definition as a significant part of the discourse without which this discussion is incomplete. The next important consideration focuses exclusively on the background of translation in Botswana context, and for this I utilize a more generalized approach that considers how much has been written about translation in Botswana since colonial period and beyond. Hence, a brief discussion of translation under classifications of religion, fictionality and research follows.

### **What is Setswana Literature?**

In this project, Setswana literature is broadly defined to constitute any literary work that has its oral and written origins in all parts of Southern Africa where Setswana is predominantly spoken as a native language. Those countries include Botswana, South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe. In the Botswana context, there is historical and literary evidence that Setswana literature is a living integral part of the society's culture. Setswana literature is part of the country's school curriculum; printed works are published, reviewed and read by the literary community, while performances of oral poetry and narratives are ubiquitous especially in the rural areas. Despite the dominance of English language literature, Botswana view their indigenous literature as a significant force in the formation of their cultural identity. As creative art, it assumes the important function for creating and enhancing aesthetic experience and general cultural

awareness, and fostering communal cohesion. With regards to the nature of Setswana literature, social relevance, fictionality and imagination are viewed as its inherent elements that define its quality. Social or cultural relevance in Setswana literature, like in all African literatures is dependent on notions of space and time. This means that, Setswana literature is shaped by historical currents, while sometimes also contributing to those developments. In *A History of Tigrinya Literature*, Ghirmai Negash attests to this claim when he writes the following statement which, in principle applies to African literature. He writes that, “literature is a relative, time and place bound concept, which, therefore, is always subject to change and to being redefined within the course of its own history” (Negash 1999:76). In *Praise Poems of Tswana Chiefs*, Isaac Schapera quotes Lestrade making a similar assertion. Lestrade states that, among the Tswana people, “[These] compositions are regarded by the Bantu themselves as the highest products of their literary art,” which has developed across history and geographies creating different genres of literature (Lestrade qtd. in Schapera 1965:2).

It is also worth noting that in Setswana language the term literature has been translated as *padi* which is the derivative of the verb *bala* or *to read*. In this sense, the term *padi* as a label thus privileges written Setswana literature over the oral form. To avoid this dichotomy inherent in the word *padi*, I have decided to use the English term literature to refer to both Setswana written and oral forms. Lestrade gives a vivid description of how ‘orality’ and performance constitute an important part of this form of literature by observing that “they are a type of composition intermediate between the pure, mainly narrative, epic, and the pure, mainly apostrophic, ode, being a combination of exclamatory narration and laudatory apostrophizing”. (Lestrade qtd. in Schapera 1965:2). In sum, Lestrade’s sentiments acknowledges the unique attributes or characteristics that define this subject. His way of defining is corroborated by critic Isidore Okpewho, who problematizes the fact that the word *literature* “is generally used to cover any volume of written or printed text[...] it is commonly used in a restricted sense to refer to creative texts that appeal to our imagination or to our emotions”(1992:3). I use this understanding to advance my argument that to refer to Setswana literature as *padi* is very restricted in the following ways: it is an inaccurate mistranslation that imposes western mainstream approaches to understand the subject of Setswana literature; it is very restrictive in the sense that that it undermines the role of oral literature (“literature delivered by word of mouth” (1992:3)) in developing written forms of Setswana literature. In addition, it only sees Setswana literature through the *colonizer’s* framing and ideology, especially when some postcolonial theorists have perceived that “written African literature evolved out of the colonization of Africa by Europe” (Negash 2009:74).

Lestrade and Negash present an interesting perspective, which basically puts emphasis on the fact that literature should be defined by the people whose culture significantly emulate what they perceive it as such, and not necessarily on the basis on foreign, western impositions which have continually influenced the structure and form of literature. Due to the oral culture of its

people, it is a challenge to draw conclusions based on exact historical origins of oral aspects of Setswana literature. Setswana literature thus constitutes Botswana literature which is a conceptual embodiment of oral and written forms of literatures or literary works that were written (or performed orally) and published in and about Botswana by the native speakers of the language. However, historically it remains a fact that there has been non-native speakers of this language who learnt it for purposes of conducting research and executing duties as colonial administrators during the time when Botswana was still a British protectorate. Another example of such is the colonial missionaries who sought to spread Christianity among the natives.

A similar approach used by Ghirmai Negash in defining Tigrinya literature in *A History of Tigrinya Literature in Eritrea: the Oral and the Written* is closely followed in defining Setswana literature in this work. Tigrinya Literature is defined on the basis of its origins and important historical periods. While acknowledging the challenge that comes with any attempt to define literature, Negash notes that,

At the general level, however, in so far as my assumption and utilization of the term 'Tigrinya literature' in this study is concerned it refers to all oral and written texts in the language that are recognized and experienced as literature in the community, predominantly for their creative use of the language, fictionality and imaginative qualities<sup>2</sup>.  
(Negash 1999:77)

### **Missionaries and Early Translations**

Missionaries David Livingstone (1813-1873) and Robert Moffat (1795-1883) are reported by historians Tlou and Campbell to have settled among the Tswana<sup>3</sup>. Their mission was to spread the gospel and convert local people into Christianity. Prior to this arrival, precolonial Botswana societies constituted well integrated societies that generated their own thought system and passed it from one generation to the next. In this process, translation was viewed as a very important weapon in the service of conversion. The translation of the gospel of Luke into Setswana emerged as among the first translations performed in the history of Setswana language. Other translations that followed continued in the same trend of seeking to advance the interests of the new religion. In this regard, Berman, makes the following emphatic point showing that translation was initially associated with the dissemination and consolidation of the Christian faith among Batswana:

Radical changes began after a missionary visitor suggested that Moffat must replace the Dutch hymns with Setswana ones so that the gospel truths in the Setswana language would be fully implanted in the hearts of

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<sup>2</sup> Negash, Ghirmai. *A history of Tigrinya literature in Eritrea: (the oral and the written 1890-1991)*. Research School of Asian, African, and Amerindian Studies, University of Leiden, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Tlou, Thomas, and Alec C Campbell. *History of Botswana*. Macmillan Botswana, 1984.

the Batswana. Moffat then translated the Dutch hymns into Setswana and he also translated Dr. William Brown's catechism (scripture lessons) of 336 questions and answers, the lord's prayer and other related material. (Berman 2014:112)

## **Foundations of Criticism**

Research demonstrates with concrete evidence that translation is historically known to be a very important aspect of Botswana literature. The existence of translations and the scholarly criticisms or commentaries attest to this historical fact. Shole cites Prochazka's assertion that "perhaps all literatures of our cultural area start with translations" to reiterate the significant role translation has played in the history of Setswana literature (Shole 1990:53). At this point, an attempt to answer some basic but important questions is crucial. The first question to consider is that of how and when did the work of translation start in Botswana. Furthermore, addressing a question of who the main translators were at a particular point and appreciating who the main translators were needs attention. Paramount is also developing an understanding of what debates emanate from the various kinds of translations in Setswana language. Finally, as a way of laying the foundation to this work, it is important to use an approach that addresses the origins and development of translation in Botswana by paying close attention to some texts that have been translated from either Setswana or English.

## **Methodology and Research Questions**

To successfully develop an argument that places translation in the context of Setswana literature through reviewing published criticisms and translations, this research presents the following as research questions:

1. Who were the main translators of Setswana literature at a given time in history?
2. What type of translations did they perform and what were the motivations?
3. What methods or approaches did the translators use?
4. Did the translators write some introductions to their works?
5. What is translation in the context of Setswana literature?
6. Who were the main critics of the translated works and what statements did they make about the translated works?
7. What role has translation played in the development of Setswana literature?

## **Theoretical Considerations**

The theoretical premise of this research project advocates for a culturally responsive translation approach when translating any work of literature. Due to linguistic, cultural and social differences, it is important for translators, more especially creative translators to avoid using expressions that decontextualize the culture of a target language. In this specific case, the translation from English into Setswana or vice versa must use approaches that are relevant by

presenting some cultural ideas in an unbiased way. In *The Translation Studies Reader*, Lawrence Venuti offers some key concepts that can generally guide any work of literary translation such as the one under consideration. Venuti theorizes that “the exercise of translation can exist both as process and a product”(2012:1). Venuti further postulates that “translation dates back to the antiquity or the ancient past especially the period before the middle ages”. This statement is maintained by Venuti’s focus on the “approaches that have been developed in the twentieth century”. Amplifying his point further, Venuti notes that “it was during this period that translation studies emerged as a new academic field, at once international and interdisciplinary” (2012:1).

By citing the postulation of a French translator and translation theorist Antoine Berman that “a translator without historical consciousness is a crippled translator, a prisoner of his representation of translation and of those carried by social discourses at the moment,” Venuti emphasizes the importance of the work of translation to be more than just changing a document from a source text to a target language(Venuti 2012:2). As Venuti argues, “scholars of translation as well as translators can significantly advance their work by taking into account the historical contexts in which translation has been studied and practiced.”(Venuti 2012:2)

According to Venuti, the translation process focuses primarily on the need to identify the distinction between a translator and a translation scholar. This is important because the latter engage in different interdisciplinary tasks which are guided by distinct theories of translation. Venuti makes a claim about the complexities of translation by highlighting that “there is no guarantee that what is acceptable as a theory in one discipline or approach will satisfy the conceptual requirements of a theory in others.”(Venuti 2012: 2). *Relative autonomy* as a concept of translation that Venuti uses refers to “factors that distinguish [a work of translation] from the source text and from the texts initially written in the target language. These factors include textual features and strategies performed by the agents who produce the translation, not only the translator but the editors as well”(2012:5). Venuti perceives that the history of translation theory can in fact be imagined “as a set of changing relationships between the *relative autonomy* of the translated text and two other categories, *equivalence and function*”. For Venuti, equivalence is associated with “accuracy,” “adequacy,” “correctness,” “correspondence,” “fidelity,” and “identity. It is a valuable notion of how the translation is connected to the text” (2012:5). Function is understood “as the potentiality of the translated text to release diverse effects, beginning with the communication of information and ending with the production of a response comparable to the one produced by the source text in its own culture, since translation is also social, function is also the reason why readers are able to respond to the translated work, consequently opening the door for a critical platform” (Venuti 2012:5).

Translation theorist, Louis Kelly, argues for “a ‘complete’ theory of translation that “has three components: specification of function and goal; description and analysis of operations; and critical comment on relationships between goals and relationships” (Kelly qtd. in Venuti 2012:1). Similar to Venuti’s, Kelly also understands function to mean the potentiality of the translated

text to release diverse effects, beginning with the communication of information and the production of a response comparable to the one produced by the source text in its own culture.

Walter Benjamin in his essay titled *The Translator's Task speaks about cultural Appropriation*. Benjamin asks a thought provoking question: "is a translation meant for readers who do not understand the original?" The author uses this question to develop his argument that "translation is a form and therefore in order to grasp it as such, we have to go to the original" (Benjamin 2012:76). According to Benjamin, factors that satisfy the translatability of a text are the production of an equivalent literary language in the target text such that the originality of the source language is not only represented in the target text but also transcending it. Put in simple terms, Benjamin views the translated text as a creative work of literature. Through translation, Benjamin argues, "the original develops into a linguistic sphere that is both higher and purer" (2012:79). For Benjamin, the translator's task is "to find the intention toward the language into which the work is to be translated, on the basis of which an echo of the original is awakened in it" (Benjamin 2012:79-80). This statement emphasizes the fact that every translated text presents a significantly unique and new form.

In *Principles of Correspondence* Eugene Nida discusses correspondence in translation by describing in detail the different types of translation. Nida argues that "no two languages are identical, either in the meanings given to corresponding symbols or in the ways in which such symbols are arranged in phrases and sentences, it stands to reason that there can be no absolute correspondence between languages" (1964: 141). This assertion is corroborated elsewhere by Rossetti, who argues that "a translation remains perhaps the most direct form of commentary" (Rossetti qtd. in *ibid*). Furthermore, as Nida continues to perceive, "translating of some types of poetry by prose may be dictated by important cultural considerations."(1964:142-3). This argument is fitting to understand the practice of translation and its relation with Setswana literature and many other postcolonial African literatures that underwent the process of translation. Hence, as Nida rightly understands, it is improbable to have a translation that does not reflect the matrix from various elements of culture. Within the frameworks of this paper, Setswana translations should therefore carry a voluminous amount of culture which informs the background of the original text.

Nida further puts emphasis on the fact that "the particular purposes of the translator are also important factors in dictating the type of translation[...]the primary purpose of the translator may be information as to both content and form. A translator's purposes may involve much more than information" (Nida 1964:142-3). This statement explains and help us think about why different translators translate various works for a number of reasons. Some of the reasons include ensuring linguistic and cultural preservation. In the context of Botswana, it can be posited that the intent of the work of translation goes beyond just the transmission of information, but can be viewed as a contribution to cultural development which promotes linguistic competence and cultural confidence. However, this was not the case with earlier translations introduced by Christian missionaries who sought to spread the religion that was used

as a one of the tools by the colonizing British. I revisit Nida's theoretical approach to translation later in the paper. A detailed description of basic orientations or approaches to the practice of translation is also highlighted in Nida's essay. Two main types of translation are identified as formal and dynamic forms of equivalence in translation. *Formal Equivalence* in translation "focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content. The message in the receptor language is matched as closely as possible with the different elements in the source language." (Nida 1964, qtd. in Venuti 2012:129). Furthermore, *Dynamic Equivalence* in translation and in contrast constitutes "complete naturalness of expression, and tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture; it does not insist that he understand the cultural patterns of the source-language context in order to comprehend the message." (Nida 1964, qtd. in Venuti 2012:129). Drawing the parallels and distinctions between the two types is very key for translators, especially translators who translate postcolonial literary texts. This results in a highly communicative text, one that is not just an appropriation of a different language. The English translation of *The Conscript* by Ghirmai Negash is one of the comprehensive translations that reveal a cultural interplay of this dichotomy occurring in both formal and dynamic equivalence. Some translations which will be discussed later in the essay, demonstrate the challenge of *Cultural Relevance* in translation which Nida successfully incorporates into the discussion. In this regard, Nida underscores that "when the cultures are related but the languages are quite different, the translator is called upon to make a good many formal shifts in the translation" (Nida qtd in Venuti 2012:130). I highlight the importance of the expression *formal shifts* which refer to the intuitive ability of the translator to be able to recognize the deeper (hidden) cultural aspects that need to be made culturally relevant through the inclusion of proper equivalents. The theories examined in this part of the paper, will be used simultaneously to approach Setswana literature within the frameworks of translation.

## **Literature Review**

### **A Historical Survey of Setswana Literature in Translation**

Since the focus of the project is specifically on how translation has played a role in developing Setswana literature, a broad historical time frame that dates back to early colonial literature is considered. As noted by a translation critic Shole Shole "the earliest forms of modern written literature [in Setswana language] consisted of translations" (Shole 1990:51). One of the key arguments emphatically advanced is that translation, having dominated the first *written form* or *orthography* of Setswana language, resulted in the development of new literary traditions in the history of Setswana language given that earlier traditions constituted oral literature. In addition, some of the works that may have been influenced by earlier translations include newspapers and local journals which were written in both Setswana and English, during and after the colonial era. In an attempt to prove and present this as an undisputed historical fact about the development of literature written in Setswana, Shole cites Robert Moffat's *Pilgrim's Progress* as

one of the earliest works under the genre of prose fiction (Shole 1990:53). Robert Moffat was a missionary who had been sent by the London Missionary Society to introduce Christianity in Southern Africa. After learning the local language, he undertook a number of translation works which included the translation of the bible that aimed at converting the locals into Christianity. Another researcher in a bible translation project, Eric Hermanson outlines other theological translations carried by missionaries and administrators such as Jan van Riebeeck during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Hermanson 2002: 6).

After the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a number of translations were carried by writers in Botswana and South Africa. These were mainly the translation of some works by William Shakespeare. Shole observes that “the first dramas in Setswana were translations of William Shakespeare’s *Comedy of Errors* and *Julius Caesar*. Another interesting development was the translation of Chinua Achebe’s *Things fall Apart*, translated from English into Setswana by D. P. S. Monyaise” (Monyaise 1991). At the time, other important translations of the time include Botswana’s national anthem which was adapted around 1966, when the country gained independence. Originally written in Setswana, the country’s official language, the national anthem has an English translation which is the country’s official language. Categorically, the earlier translations started with theological translations, followed by the translation of literary arts in the forms of drama and then song. This translations are defined within a set of significant historical periods before and independence.

Translation is a very important and significant tool that was consistently used by missionaries, anthropologists, and possibly colonial administrators. Furthermore, exposure to mainstream western literature such as the works of Shakespeare and others largely influenced the method of translation that was used at the time. Evidence from research demonstrate that translators, in addition to using a ‘word for word’ approach, also copied the style and the structure thus appropriating Setswana into the English version from which it was translated. Due to this, some important aspects of cultural relevance and contextual meanings were compromised. This confirms the importance of Nida’s warning about the risks inherent in every work of translation that is not culturally responsive. Mentioned earlier, Hermanson offers a different argument and understanding regarding the challenges in the translation techniques at the time when he writes that,

Translation theory was not well developed and so when they came to translate the Scriptures they did so with *formal equivalence*, in the same way as they had been taught to translate the Classics, matching word for word and structure for structure wherever possible. It must be noted, however, that some translators made an attempt towards what would have been regarded at the time to be a more idiomatic rather than literal translation, involving *mother-tongue speakers* and using something of the genius of the language into which they were translating. (*A Brief Overview of Bible Translation in South Africa* 2002:7-8)

Therefore, on the basis of the abovementioned justifications about the translation techniques, I emphasize that different methods were used by various translators depending on the time and context of translation. These methods defining earlier translations into the body of Setswana literature can be summed up into the following classifications: 1) Some used the word for word method; 2) Some used the method or techniques of equivalence, thus focusing on meaning rather than words; 3) and a few others also included critical introductions to their translated texts, where motives and approaches behind each work of translation are explained to the readership. Examples of translators who used the word to word method are Plaatjie, Raditladi and Seboni; translators who experimented with the method of equivalence include Monyaise, and Schapera. The latter two Monyaise in *Dilo di Masoke (Things Fall Apart Eng.)* and Schapera in *Praise Poems of the Tswana Chiefs* also wrote extended critical introductions to their translations, explicating their methodology.

### ***Major Translations and Translators***

The main translators considered in this research include Raditladi, Monyaise, Plaatje and Schapera. They produced the actual translations from English into Setswana and vice versa. In their translated works, it is evident that the translators explored different styles and techniques of translation. However, as an anthropologist Schapera's translations are a case for exceptionality given that the works were oral poems whose translations was developed and made possible by working with the literate Batswana. The translation critic, Shole J. Shole who has been a fundamental figure in Setswana translation studies is also considered. Shole's work as a critic focuses on describing aspects of translation and mistranslation to the extent represented in Raditladi and Plaatje's successes and failures to accurately record the cultural translations in Shakespearean plays. His critical study also offers alternatives as possible solutions to errors he identifies in the translated Shakespearean plays translated from English into Setswana. Others who succeeded Raditladi and Plaatje in undertaking literary translations include Seboni and Thedi whose works come at a later stage but are also discussed briefly in this project. Together, the works of these translators (Raditladi, Plaatje, Seboni, and Thedi) and the critical work of Shole constitutes a very diversified entity of Setswana literary productions currently in translation. If categorized, the major works in Setswana literary translation can be mapped into the following two groups: 1) the actual translations that were propagated by individual translators themselves; 2) criticisms of translations by translation scholars who researched complex nature of translation in relation to Setswana literature.

Shole's critical work is important for various reasons. In his critique, he outlines specific aspects of mistranslation or translation problems. Furthermore, he defines and discusses translation works in the context of cultural relevance and faithfulness within the Setswana. His approach offers an expansive method of looking at translation as an activity that is connected with cultures of both the source and target languages. Shole's main argument is that "literary translation should be approached much more carefully since it entails not only linguistic

structures but importantly culture which, in Setswana, is constituted by proverbs, folktales, idioms and other elements of oral literature.” (Shole 1990:52) According to Shole, cultural context is crucial because, if not carefully attended to, it can distort the meaning of the original text and the intent of the writer. This view of translation aligns with translation theorists discussed in the earlier section such as Venuti and Nida.

As for the translators who undertook the translation of Shakespeare’s plays, Shole criticizes them for failing to cross-examine cultural elements that tend to prevail in the English culture and on the other hand for compromising cultural concepts inherent in Setswana culture. He achieves this by comparing the two translations earlier discussed and draws the following undisputable conclusion:

[Of the] two translations of Shakespeare in Setswana, namely Plaatje's *Diphosophoso* and Raditladi's *Macbeth*, [the]former is a fine example of free and idiomatic translation while the latter is mechanical, literal and unimaginative. The two illustrate what can happen to an original text in translation. (Shole 1990:51)

According to Shole, an ideal translation is the one that is culturally responsive, which does not attempt to appropriate or allow the culture of another language to dominate. As Shole continues to argue, the only way that translators could have avoided incidents of *mistranslation* is by approaching both the source and the target texts faithfully. Shole emphasizes that the translation of texts from English into Setswana and vice versa should always be comparative in their approach such that the translator’s consciousness and techniques enters the essence of the text and is visible in the outcome. He further suggests that comparative approaches of translation between languages are far more best suited in the Setswana context rather than a hierarchical approach that may create the privileging of English culture to Setswana. In short, Shole’s observations underline that exposure to the styles and methods of writers from both traditions is necessary in translation, and also that there is a need for translators to evaluate critically whether or not the text to be translated is suitable for translation in Setswana. Furthermore, Shore problematizes this notion further by reiterating the fact that the translations of this kind “[result] in a stiff and awkward style, which sadly lacks natural vitality. In the case of drama it affects *stageability* and *character portrayal* because the dialogue is usually stilted and unspeakable. At its best it takes the reader to the cultural and temporal milieu, as well as the structural peculiarities of the original”(Shole 1991:52). This situation without doubt presents some conceptual problems especially those that have to do with the expansion of translated Setswana literature into other adaptations such as film and theater. In full agreement with the position that Shole takes, it is highly unlikely that Setswana translations can develop fully unless the problem of decontextualized translations is attended to.

On the other hand, Plaatje is among the first leading local translators before countries where Setswana is spoken such as Botswana and South African attained independence. In his 1916

publication, *Sechuana Proverbs with Literal Translations and their European equivalents*, Plaatjie represents a rather distinct form of translation of oral literatures such as the traditional teachings found in the Tswana culture. One of the methods that Plaatjie adopts in his translation is the appropriation of Shakespeare's style into the Setswana vernacular. Through this method, Plaatjie seems to emphasize the capacity of Setswana and an African language to be used in *creative composition* and *literature*, just as Shakespeare did the same for English. Plaatjie's approach closely copies the European style and techniques of translation and this can be seen in other works that he translated from English into Setswana. Viewed from a theoretical perspective, Plaatjie's efforts to emulate the Shakespearean style in Setswana can lead to two interpretations. One interpretation can lead to the claim that he deliberately did so in order to show or demonstrate the capacity and vitality of Setswana language in ways that are on par with English. A less sympathetic interpretation is to view his method as a sign of his own cultural assimilation in the European tradition.

After Plaatjie's attempt, after almost a century that Barolong Seboni, a poet and translator from Botswana undertook a similar translation project. Seboni's 2011 publication *Setswana riddles: Translated into English*, is prefaced by an introduction that illuminates on the translatability of Setswana oral literature (witticisms) and closely follows the approach that was adopted by Plaatjie though with some minor modifications. His translation of Setswana riddles into English indicate not only the *translaterbilty* of Setswana into English and other African languages, but also that it is possible to translate oral forms of literature into new medium that allow for a proper documentation. However, Seboni's technique of translation also differs from Plaatjie's in certain ways. Unlike Plaatjie, who sought equivalents for expression in the source and target languages, Seboni's translation tends to be more literal. Furthermore, unlike Plaatjie, Seboni used extensive notes to explain cultural context and meanings behind the expressions.

Semakaleng Monyaise, the translator of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* into Setswana (*Dilo di Masoke*), attempted to fully capture the original intent of the writer Achebe by retaining the original form of the text as a postcolonial African novel. For example the names of the characters are not changed, with a few exceptions of nativized names in the Setswana orthography. Achebe's orality and storytelling technique are fully retained in the Setswana text by Monyaise. Another translator, Barulaganye Thedi, whose approach and style parallels that of Monyaise can be seen in the translation of Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather* from English into Setswana. It must be noted however that the works of Thedi and Monyaise are neither preceded nor prefaced in ways that suggest the methodology and underlying theories of their translations. It is also not clear why these translations do not have critical introductions to the translated works.

### **In-depth Look into Methods of translation**

Fundamentally, to understand the trends of translation and how they are mapped into the literary history of Setswana literature it is important to analyze questions raised by translators and critics.

This can be seen by looking closely at the prefaces and introductions of their translated works. In this work, the critical introductions to the translated works are viewed as important commentaries without which the literary history of translation in Botswana is incomplete. Therefore, I consider in depth, some introductions and criticisms to the translations offered by Plaatjie and Shole.

In his critical review of both Plaatjie and Raditladi's translations, Shole writes that "these dramas represent three major types of translations, namely literal translation, free translation as well as adaptation. They also illustrate the major achievements and shortcomings of this literary practice in Setswana" (Shole 1991:51). Classification of the translation techniques or methods employed is emphasized in Shole's observations. During the translation of the Shakespearean plays, translators adopted two methods that varied in the following ways: one entailed some modifications whereas another did not make any changes to the original work to the actual translations. As Shole underscores, some of the works did not translate well in terms of literary content, but that the translators utilized the same style and theme by using a different language. Shole further writes that "in terms of translation studies in Setswana literature, not much attention has been given to literary translations in Setswana, either as translations or works of art on their own, despite the role they have played. He continues to argue that even among our reading sector, which consists mainly of students, these translations suffer neglect" (Shole 1991:51). Shole makes some interesting comparisons in cases where translations concern genres such as poetry as opposed to other works of literature such as drama. He mentions that "the translation of poetry presents great problems. If the two languages belong to distinct cultures this becomes worse. Images, puns and allusions may become ineffective or fail to make sense" (Shole 1991:57). Clearly, this complex phenomenon demonstrates that it is a challenge to imagine a conventional translation technique which can be applied to Setswana poetry, and possibly poetry in many other African languages.

In his work, which succeeds the major translation conducted by Plaatjie, Seboni emphasizes that the purpose of his translation is "to provide a storehouse or treasure trove of Setswana riddles in English for those who want to understand and appreciate the oral traditions and wisdom of Batswana"(Seboni 2011:Intro.). Thus, Seboni makes a powerful statement that translation of traditional literature needs to be considered as it is a crucial tool that can be used to record Setswana wisdom in other forms of documentation. He further asserts that "this is a preservation exercise in that the riddles have not only been transformed from the oral into the written, but have also been captured and stored in a second language, one that rules the waves of world literature, the airwaves of communication and the microwaves of technology" (Seboni 2011:Intro.). Seboni's assertion solidifies an answer to the question of language that has been asked by critics in the domain of African literature elsewhere. He explains: "in the translation of the Setswana riddles into English, I have tried to be as literal as possible so that the nuances and idiosyncrasies of Setswana language come out as much as possible. I have also tried to preserve the sentence structure and word order of Setswana as much as was feasible without making

nonsense of the meaning in English. In other words, I strive to capture the original Setswana riddle rather than just the equivalent in English”(Seboni 2011:Intro.). However, Seboni also understands that his approach to translation calls for a delicate balance as it has some challenges. For example, along the way “some words, expressions and phrases that are literally not translatable and it is to this extent that I may not have achieved my goal” (Seboni 2011:Intro.).

Seboni’s observations about translatability are similar to those shared and used by Schapera. Thinking particularly about the difficulties involved in translating poetry, Schapera argues,

it is not only the European translator who finds such words and phrases unusually difficult, modern Tswana are sometimes puzzled by them[...]. One feature of the vocabulary needs special mention, not because it presents new difficulties to the translator, but because it enables the poet to indulge in what Fowler terms ‘elegant variation’. It consists of referring to a single person by several different kinds of name (Schapera 1965:22).

When it comes to translating Setswana poetry, Schapera acknowledges that there are some stylistic and ambiguity challenges that are unique and popular to Setswana tradition but not English. Schapera’s observation corroborates Shole’s ideas presented earlier that sought to critic aspects of Setswana literature. Shole, puts emphasis on the importance of being conversant with both the cultures of the source and target language as translators.

### **Critics on the Translation of Setswana Bible**

Bible translation in Southern Africa was initially conceptualized and executed by either missionary societies or bible societies (Makutoane and Naude 2009:79). For example, “the first translation was published by the Paris Evangelical Society in 1909. This translation is well known and is still in use as the “old translation. The second translation is the Southern Sotho translation, published in 1989 by the Bible Society of South Africa”(Makutoane and Naude 2009:79). This historical fact of translation demonstrates that the timeframe that define the origins of translation of texts in Botswana date back to the colonial period. This period is marked by the arrival of Christian missionaries such as Robert Moffat and David Livingstone. However, arguably the missionaries primarily focused on translating religious literatures such as the bible. The goal was to convert locals into Christianity, and one of the ways to achieve that was through the spread of the gospel in translations. Therefore, the earlier translations of biblical literature clearly demonstrate the role played by translation in ensuring religious assimilation imposed on Batswana by the British colonialists. For example, there are many novels (not in translation though) whose plot or storyline allude to events that are recorded in the Bible. In the years that followed thereafter, along the works of Shakespeare that were translated into Setswana, translation continued, thereby strengthening the argument that Setswana literature has seen many translation routes that emanate since colonial period through to the postcolonial epoch.

## **Motivations and Method**

There were various forms of translations that had been undertaken and these include those that were religious oriented, and those that were of literary or creative nature. Therefore, this makes it possible to classify and categorize such translations according to their original intent. For example, whether the translations were for research or religious purposes for example affected methods that were used. Translations of the religious texts largely ignored the sensibilities of Setswana culture and language but rather focused on the goal of converting. As a matter of fact, the Bible, classified as a religious text, is among the first textual items to be translated, and was later followed by other literary works. Other major works of translation included the translation of the national anthem of Botswana to symbolize patriotism and independence from the British in 1966. In this context, the translation was done on a 'national song' and its goals were politically inclined. The English translation of the national anthem presents some methodological challenges if compared with the Setswana version.

On the basis of the above mentioned assertions about translation and its relationship with Setswana literature, the postulate that the thematic focus has been continually shaped and affected by some significant historical moments is indeed true. This is mainly due to the fact that translation keeps on changing in terms of focus at any given time. For example, at some point the focus was on the translation of creative works across different genres which included poetry, song and drama. And, in some cases the methods or techniques that were used imitated the European literary traditions which were seen as 'conventions'. Under these circumstances, translators did not decolonize the methodologies by accepting these conventions without modifications that could make some of these works more relevant. Critics such as Shole and others responded by problematizing the methods for their textual de-contextualization for the intended audience. However, we can be more sympathetic and acknowledge the fact that at the time written Setswana literature was still at its infancy those earlier translations of creative works can be seen as a contribution to the areas of African literature, and comparative literature as well as translation studies. Some of these efforts can be applauded for establishing a platform to engage criticisms of the less researched African language literatures.

## **Critical Discussion**

In view of the amount of work that has been done on translation and how it relates to the development of Setswana literature as a whole, we are at a point of drawing some interesting conclusions as translators and critics of Setswana literature. Translation in the context of Botswana literature has without doubt its origins from the colonial period. Earlier literary translations were influenced by the colonial occupation and subsequent domination an influence in the written literature. Therefore, in this part of the paper, translated works are discussed critically in terms of how they are mapped into the field of translation and Setswana literary studies in general. It has been demonstrated that the motives behind the earlier works of

translation were entirely based on the urgency of the colonial missionaries to convert the locals into Christianity. In the process, for the first time oral literature of Setswana cultural lore was presented in the written orthography which followed the same alphabet used in the language of the former colonizer, or British English in Botswana context.

It must be emphasized that the translations were done in different forms resulting in having other forms of translations in addition to the textual literary translations. There is historical evidence that some resulted from transcriptions whereas other genres were represented in other forms or mediums. For example, some folktales were represented as picture illustrations in addition to the written form. I argue that this can be viewed as a unique transitional phase of Setswana oral literature since it entails transcriptions from first the oral to the written texts of both Setswana and English, and then secondly into pictures. Some of these translations were designed precisely to facilitate instruction for learners and children in Botswana primary schools. However much work still remains to be researched in this particular area which touches on Children's Literature in Botswana. I must emphasize that the methods, motives, and at times style applied to the translations were commensurate with the functions and the goal of the translations. For example, as I have noted above, some translations were done for educational purposes. It was one of the only, if not effective ways that the *colonialists* could depend on in order to be progressive in their undertaking. For example, the earlier discussion on 'The Bible and Translation' clarifies the argument on the function of colonial translations which primarily conferred religious or spiritual education. What follows is a critical overview in which I postulate on the basis of each specific genre of Setswana literature that is historically known to have been significantly affected by the translation process.

#### *Oral Narratives: Setswana Proverbs and Folktales*

Oral narratives encompass the unwritten aspects of Setswana literature. Culturally, in Botswana oral narratives were passed down from one generation to another through the process of socialization. This is the case with many other African societies. However, as a result of translation, a number of interesting observations develop which can equip literary critics with a philosophical base for a comparative study of various forms of literatures of Setswana nature. For example, some proverbs were transcribed into written Setswana and then later translated into English. Hence, this translational transition is threefold: from oral, then to written Setswana and thirdly into English. In this process, attempts by translators to avoid the use of literal translations tend to surface, and in some rare contexts the use of equivalents in target languages is also present. However, while this phenomena has been problematized and dismissed by critics such as Shole as lacking a relevant, authentic and aesthetic cultural appeal, this method has been very effective in *internationalizing* the content of Setswana literature. This meant Setswana as a creative language, could enjoy being mapped into world literatures. In this regard, it has been possible to draw some similarities and comparisons between Setswana and English translations.

Setswana folktales stand out when compared with translated proverbs because they went through a threefold process of translation. Firstly, the folktales transitioned from the oral to the written, then secondly they were translated into English. The third aspect, which is hitherto recommended for another study is that many folktales also existed in the form of pictures. It has also been availed for teaching Setswana studies at local primary schools. Arguably, this method is one of the important translation developments that can also be used to speculate on the role that translation has played in building Setswana literature for children in Botswana. Many other folktales from various parts of Africa have also undergone through a similar process, and because of this they can be studied comparatively. This is viewed in this work as one interesting hallmark of translation which can be studied critically, in the same way as other translated works have been studied.

Through the work of translators such as Plaatje and Seboni, it has been shown that some of the proverbs in Setswana language were translated into English. This was achieved through the use of different techniques adopted by translators. In some instances, in cases where there were challenges, the translators found solutions through the use of equivalents in the target language. While proverbs, just like folktales have oral traditions, it is important to draw conclusions that it is through the process of translation that they were first converted to the written forms by way of transcribing them, and then they were later translated into other languages. In this case, such proverbs can be said to have sustained a twofold process which entailed having to be put first in the written Setswana orthography and then later translated into English. Another significant aspect to take into consideration about such proverbs is that while in the precolonial period they were passed from one generation to another, through the process of translation it was possible for them to exist in written forms which improved their documentation.

#### *Poetry: The Oral and the Written*

Oral poems in Setswana have been first transcribed and then translated into English. Schapera's method which was discussed earlier informs the basis of the criticism that follows. The translations of Schapera were primarily influenced by anthropological research which sought to explain cultures of Setswana speaking societies to the colonial scholarship. Thus his use of the translated term '*praise poetry*' does not fully represent '*poko*' as perceived by the people themselves. Schapera's translation therefore focuses on only one aspect, of 'praise' and this problematic approach excludes other features of these traditional poems such as criticizing, ridiculing, indigenous humor, mockery and insult. Clearly, we cannot objectively claim that the latter components are praising in nature. Therefore, his translation and many other works by other researchers that used the term 'praise poetry' only focuses on a single aspect and may result with some serious theoretical misconceptions on what this type of poetry does according to the Setswana customs. In addition, the translations of the poems are not 'culturally complete' as

they are supposed to be accompanied by ululation and choruses in addition to their presentations in specific social cultural contexts. In that sense, it can be argued that the textual representation of these translation omits the orality and therefore do not fully represent the complete cultural forms. Much work remains on the work of critics who are interested in studying the nature of Setswana literature in given social contexts.

### *Prose, Novels and Plays*

As shown in the earlier section, a few novels and plays from English have been translated into Setswana. An outstanding example in this category is the translation of Chinua Achebe's *Things fall Apart* into Setswana by Monyaise. Plays that were also translated imitated the style and the form of Shakespearean plays in translation. Two examples in this style are: Plaatje's *Diphosophoso* and Raditladi's *Dintshontsho tsa Lorato*. Interestingly, the translation of Shakespearean plays into Setswana influenced to a very large extent the nature of plays that followed thereafter. For example, the play of *Motswasele* by Raditladi. Generally, this contributed to the development of Setswana literature in many ways. It had a huge effect and influence on the structure of Setswana novels and plays that followed thereafter, including those that were not written in English or those that never went through the translation process.

### *Biblical Literature and Colonialism*

Translation critics such as Lamin O. Sanneh have emphasized the "centrality of translation to the Christian religion". Sanneh further notes that, "when we take translation seriously, we find that the rules according to which the enterprise succeeds or fails are generally determined by indigenous paradigms" (1990:95). There are some consequences associated with this and this may be used to support the contention that a critical study of translation in indigenous literatures should be overemphasized and revisited with decolonized methodologies. The translation of the bible into Setswana language can thus be analyzed by placing it in various postcolonial contexts. For example, an observation that "readers of the Southern Sotho translations are held prisoner by Western translators by denying them the right to biblical texts received and interpreted on their own terms as religious artefacts from the ancient Mediterranean world" cannot be doubted. (Makutoane and Naude 2009:80). This can be viewed as a call to see the need to challenge, refine and modify the translation conventions that were introduced into Setswana language through religious literature.

### **Conclusion**

Translation has historically played a significant role in the growth of Setswana literature. It was used by missionaries, anthropologists and possibly colonial administrators to advance some colonial interests. Translation has also been used as tool by colonizers to assimilate English language as well as influence literary forms of Setswana literature. Furthermore, exposure to mainstream western literature such as the works of Shakespeare and others largely influenced the

methods and techniques of translation. There is evidence that local translators used ‘word for word’ approach, but also copied the style and the structure of foreign literatures. Furthermore, as translations were undertaken for different purposes, the challenge was that cultural relevance and contextual underpinnings were compromised in some cases. Critics have been vocal at lambasting some of these problematic translations and in some cases translators have made an effort to correct these theoretical problems. This work contributes to these debates, and has argued for a decolonized approaches when translating Setswana literature. In addition to the translation productions produced by some European missionaries and anthropologists, some speakers of Setswana who had received western education also participated in the art of translation. There was scholarly commentary and criticism that responded to the works that had been translated. Some translations had “introductions” that sought to explain and justify motives and approaches behind each work of translation. The translations of genres such as proverbs and folktales incorporated new methods and styles. However there is much that can be said about the aesthetic detachment influenced by this occurrence. Setswana folktales were oral and therefore detached from their social context of being listened to at night after they were made available in the written language. This meant that they were not passed on from one generation to the next another by word of mouth as was the custom of Batswana. Translation of texts have led to literary criticism which can be applied to build the postcolonial discourses that relate to Setswana literature. Translation in Setswana literature remains to be a very important area of study where Setswana literary genres of Setswana nature can be studied critically as a systematic whole, and in relation to the African-language literatures. Therefore the need for an intensified work on the actual translations, research on translations, and the critical studies of Setswana literature is important, and the government of Botswana should do more to recognize research directed towards this area of study.

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