

REPRESENTATIONS AND SYMBOLS IN EFIK MYTHOLOGY: IMPLICATIONS FOR TRANSLATION

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ABSTRACT : Representation alludes to interpreting or describing something or someone in works of art using visual, written or oral procedures. Sometimes, art works depict many things other than what is seen or stated. This may cause the mode of representation to become iconic, thus relying greatly on ideas or on symbols. However, symbols usually refer to solid recognizable things such as: animals, plants or objects that could be difficult to capture in a picture or a sculpture. In Efik mythology, there are myriads of representation in symbols and in stories which meanings are connected to other interconnected variables. And these symbols require extra knowledge and understanding to decipher their meanings. The purpose of this paper therefore is firstly, to identify through analysis method, the challenges in translating and interpreting representations and symbols and secondly, to proffer ways to minimize these problems.

KEYWORDS: *Symbols, Efik mythology, representation, translation, interconnectivity.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Representation in art attempts to mirror what is there in the real world. A representative or figurative play for example, has as its goal, the depiction of a true-life scenario so that it becomes easier to pass across a message that is easily understood even by an amateur. A painting for example, can also capture what looks like what is given in real everyday life situation or image such as: cat, alphabetical letters, house, car, staff, and so on. Representation then in art seeks to depict the physical appearance of realities. Symbols on the other hand, seek to convey the hidden meaning of something and often represent abstract ideas. It is usually an artistic expression of something or an object. For example, the sculptor symbol of a blindfolded woman holding a pair of scale on her left hand and a sword on her right hand depicts justice. This very famous symbol of justice as an idea or a universal concept is one that humans are familiar with. The blindfolded woman, the pair of scale and the sword depict the idea that justice is blind and it executes fairness dispassionately. Blackburn notes that ideas or concepts can be seen as historical forces, having actual effect in the real world (375).

In the Efik mythology, there is a wide pool of representations and symbols are either sung or written down by the Efik people and handed down from one generation to the other. This mythology captures bardic poetry, songs, mythical creatures and warriors. Ansa and Okon state that the naming pattern of any society not only reflects the language behavior of the community, but it also presents “interesting interactions between language and culture on the one hand, and language, culture and history on the other” (83). This paper shall bring to the fore, some Efik myths and how representations and symbols are central to the Efik mythology and delineate their implications for translation and interpretation. Meanwhile, it is similarly important to clarify the fundamental terms in the study which are translation, representations and symbols.

What is Translation?

Translation is essential for the very purpose of making sense of language as found in a Source Text (ST) and into a Target Text (TT). The theories employed in the field of translation are to be able to make the task of translation easily achievable. This suggests that translation is after accuracy, equivalence and the communication of meaning. Clearly then, the field of translation is an engaging one as it bridges the divide between ignorance and knowledge, obscurity and clarity. Ukpong (2016:125) notes that translation is both an art and a science; the art of translation has to do with the proficiency and intuitiveness with which one can translate words or text and the science has to do with understanding the principles and methods that make for a correct and acceptable translation”.

Translation is therefore geared towards exactitude so that meaning becomes unambiguous as what is translated makes a high level of competence. Thus, Ukpong noted that translation has as its thrust, the accuracy,

clarity and naturalness of the meaning, messages or ideas of what is being translated. On the strength of this, acceptable equivalences will seem to be the defining basis of a good translation” (2019:142).

However, translation has in addition, a cultural undertone. This is so because language is the building block of conversations and engagements within the framework of human relationship and, this is where meaning is situated. The implication of this is that, what is intended in a source text may be translated wrongly in a target text because of differences in syntax, semantics and other interconnecting variables. Hence, culture plays a subtle but major role in the whole domain of translation. Again, Ukpong asserts that since translation is a human activity and humans are social/cultural animals, then translation must have a social/cultural dimension. Humans communicate in words and text; hence language is a medium of communication invented by man to foster harmonious social relationship and co-existence” (...Barriers in Translation, 81).

The purpose of translation therefore, is for a thorough and exact replication of a source text into a target text. This is the basis upon which it can be said that a translation has taken place. Thus, the whole effort of translation studies in its sophistication is to ensure that translation is done in a manner that engenders human progress and advancement. In the light of the above, how might representative symbols whose meanings are often abstractive and elusive be translated so that the source text is exactly what to get in the target text? Ukpong (2020) gives us an insight into this when she opines that: The concept of meaning is very vital to any effective translation. But whose meaning? Is it that of the translator or the text being translated? No word or position is presupposition less. Hence, every concept or term must have a certain idea built around it without which an accurate or a meaningful translation will be impossible (168).

Translation therefore is very essential to any meaningful discourse as it forms the nucleus of any meaningful exchange of text just as interpretation is to words. We shall now consider what representation in art connotes. Generally, the concept of representation transcends the boundaries of studies in Art in that, it is partly present in many regions of practice and as such, it cannot be confined to that which pertains to art alone. For example, a football player represents his club in the same sense as a bottle cap can be used to represent the position of a player in a model of play, yet neither the football player nor the bottle is art. Hence, representation transcends just being considered as a theory of art. However, our concern here majors on representational of theory of art. Thus, it can be said that since it is impossible to visually see the usual event of which certain works of art depicts or represents and in addition, it doesn't seem that works of art are empty decorativeness, because art must then serve as representation. This by implication, means that it is impossible to discuss art without referring to it as a representation of some kind. According to Elbridge, art products and performance seem in some rough sense, to be about something even when they do not necessarily carry any explicitly stable single message. They nevertheless invite and focus thoughts (23). This means that a work of art in some way or the other sets the mind of its audience to think about something or to draw the attention of its perceiver to focus on a subject matter. It follows then that most works of art primarily undertake to describe certain actions, situations, and events. It is within this descriptive purview that the knot of representation can be properly situated. This is because representation in the sense of merely being a place holder, appears to be too exclusive to serve as a theory of art since it leaves many works of art which are apt, to be regarded as art out of this category and as such, to consider representation in art from this perspective fails to adequately designate a necessary property of all artworks. Therefore, representation in Art, according to Gordon, “would preferably be taken as a piece which is about something; that is, a work of art serves as representation if it has a subject about which one makes some comment” (26). What this implies is that an artwork is properly said to serve as representation when it talks about something other than standing in for something or serving as a placeholder for what it represents.

To talk about representation in art means, x is an artwork only if it is about something. That is, “x is an artwork only if x has a subject about which It makes some comment about and of which it says something or expresses some observation” (Noël, 29). By extension, what this sense of considering representation in art holds is that, in other for anything to count as a work of art, it must contain some semantic content, that is, a work of art necessarily processes the property of “aboutness” and has a subject matter which it expresses.

At this point, it could be considered important to raise the question: how “generalizable is aboutness” when we hold on to it as a necessary property of art? And would it be logically admissible to consider it as a formal quality of artworks? Before an attempt is made to answer the above question, it will be germane to take note that the term “aboutness” or “semantic” contents as the case may be, is not entirely a feature of artworks alone because, many other things which are not in proper sense a work of art or closely related to art, have a subject about which they say something. Nevertheless, the sense here is that artwork will not require interpretation unless they are about something. Since artworks require interpretation, then, they certainly must be about something.

The above position appears to be a very strong argument in favor of representation in art, but then, it cannot be ignored that some artists aspire to create works of art that are designed to defy interpretation and to

ultimately mean nothing just in the attempt to deconstruct the distinction between artwork and real things. If some artwork then defy interpretation and are utterly meaningless, one may ask: are they still about something and are they work of art at all? Ironically, the answer to this question is in the affirmative because the artwork of this nature emphasizes that artwork is not like real things but are real things themselves and as such, possesses a semantic content of which the nature of such artwork is. It is true that real things don't exemplify the property of real things even though they possess it but then, something is disregarded as exemplifying real things in order to make it above the theoretical point that all artwork possess semantic content. It is therefore, on this rubric that art works in furtherance are considered as symbols which convey certain meaning that describes or says something about events, situations, phenomenal experiences. The study now turns to examining what symbols in art connote.

II. SYMBOLS IN ART

Essentially, humans have announced superiority when it comes to the entire job of self-preservation due to their special ability to encode, decode and understand symbols or to respond to a wide range of signals. Thus, it won't be out of place to maintain that humans, unlike other animals, make use of signs and symbols not only to indicate something but to represent and gain more knowledge about something.

According to Gillo, "signs and symbols are not the same even though they are intrinsically related and connected to each other" (77). This means that signs which may be artificial or natural indicate the existence of past, present or future of a thing, event or condition; while symbols on the other hand evoke actions appropriate to the presence of the object. So, symbols are thought and not proxies for their object. In other words, symbols are markers for the conception of objects. The point that needed to be stressed here is that symbols are conception that captures the essence of things and not things themselves. Signs announce things while symbols lead us to conceive a thing hence, artwork in the process of representation serves as both sign and symbols. What this means is that, works of art are objects which serve as signs and as such distinct from any of their object and at the same time are also symbols that convey certain thought and messages that can be interpreted. It is, therefore, a distinct property of artwork to convey thoughts and it is this property that qualifies artwork as symbolic representation so that it could be said that a work of art symbolizes something implying that meaning, message, or significance is already implicit and will become actual when the beholder perceives, interprets and communicates. It is the case then that art which remains in the state of an unexpressed embryo for the exclusive use of the one who conserves it, never reaches full authenticity of birth.

Who are the Efiks?

Attempting answer to the question of the identity of the Efiks is not an easy endeavor following various myriad of historical accounts, numerous stories, and documented analysis from various sources on this very subject matter. According to Asukwo and Etta, there are various schools of thought such as that of the Akak which traced the Efik origin to the Hebrew, that of the Aye which traced the Efik origin to Orient Africa and that of the Efik Ibibio group who claims that Efik origin is based in E.N Amaku fiction called Efik Ebrutu (278). The commonly accepted account of the origin is that of the Hebrew account. Asukwo and Etta posits that: The etymological origin of the name Efik evolves from its original Hebrew Tongue Alphik or Aphex as recorded in the book of Judges 1:31. It is at this point that Akak claimed that the Efik was one of the tribes that came out from the many tribes of Israel, particularly from among the offspring of Jacob. This may be true because the Israelites met the Alphik in Canaan when they came out of Egypt. In Canaan, the Alphik appeared to have lived in the republic with a certain king who was killed by Joshua at Israel's arrival (Joshua 12: 1- 18) Joshua then shared the republic of Alphik to Asher, a tribe in Israel (12). The point made here is that it is the Alphik through a long length of historical development that evolve into what is today known as the Efiks. So, from this analysis, the Efiks appear to have a historical antecedent that has a biblical origin. The Efiks believe in a supreme creator, God, ancestral spirit, spiritual forces, magic, sorcery and witchcraft. They are found in the south geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The word Efik refers to both the people and their language as they have their existence and cultural practices wrapped up in certain historical myths, proverbs, arts, and oral traditions with themes which center on the supernatural, mythical creatures, and warriors.

III. EFIK MYTHOLOGY

Before trying to situate Efik mythology in its proper context, it is important to understand what myths stands for. According to Jaja, myths are accounts of the origin of societies and institutions not subject to rationalization but often used by historians and philosophers in their quest to study African history; for it is only thus that we can comprehend the various aspects of the continent's history and culture" (9). It is however, not only in African history is myth widespread. Even the western world particularly, the Greeks and Romans have their own myths. Berens gives us insight into this thus:

In appearance, the gods were supposed to resemble mortals, whom however, they far surpassed in beauty, grandeur and strength; they also were also more commanding in stature, height being considered by the Greeks an attribute of beauty in man or women. They resembled human beings in their feelings and habits, intermarrying and having children, and requiring daily nourishment to renew their strength and refreshing sleep to restore their energies. Their blood, a bright ethereal fluid called Ichor never engendered disease and when shed, had the power of producing new life (4).


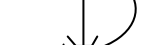


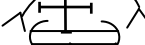

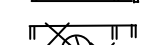

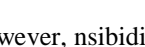
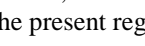
The Efik myth bothers basically on creation as all other myths. The creator, Abasi created two humans and then decided to not allow them to live on earth. His wife Atai, persuaded him to let the people live on earth with him. In order to control the humans, Abasi insisted that they eat all their meals with him, thereby keeping them from growing or hunting food. He also forbade them to have children. But soon, though, the woman began growing food in the earth, and she stopped showing up to eat with Abasi. Then the man joined his wife in the fields, and before long, there were children also. Abasi blamed his wife for the wrong way things had turned out, but she told him she would handle it. She sent death and discord down to earth to keep the people in their place, and brought their numbers down.

As expected from the Efik myth, Alagoa opines that myths are historical information transmitted orally by processes peculiar to each community” (9). Myths indeed are man-made stories that play explanatory functions in the African understanding of reality. This is so because human beings have always been myth makers (Amstrong, 2). From a very early date therefore, it appears that homo sapiens were distinguished by their ability to have ideas that went beyond everyday experience. Humans are thus, meaning seeking creatures which is why every culture has their own community myths about creation and societies as well as linguistic symbols that represents reality.

Representation and Symbols in Efik Mythology

In Asukwo and Etta’s view, “very little had been done on the subject of Efik mythology” (43) although, many works have been written on aspects relating to Efik mythology as well as on the nature of art in Efik mystical practices. Art is a very stringent contributor to Efik mythology. This is owed to the fact that popular Efik beliefs in myths such as Ekpe, Ekpo, Ndem, Abon and so on, are all engraved in brass, woods, clay, and other artifacts. The materials are used to create different images for the description and identification of these deities. Art serves a representational purpose of depicting the various properties of these deities. Essentially, it should be noted that Efik mythology involves a production of knowledge and discourse which concerns power, myths, knowledge, and supersensible events. Efik mythology then can rightly be taken beyond mere storytelling to a general understanding of how events present meaning to the Efik people. To this end, Efik mythology resides and operates within the Efik culture and artistic representations. As such, the mass communication media in the Efik society reveals valuable insights into how the audience is conditioned to interact with the social world.

In addition, mythical symbols are not mere representations concealing some mystery or hidden truth but also a kind of self-contained form of interpreting reality. For example, some Nsibidi symbols as:

1.		=	Beauty
2.		=	Chief
3.		=	Hatred
4.		=	Divorce
5.		=	Meeting
6.		=	Unity
7.		=	Speech
8.		=	Journey
9.		=	Mirror
10.		=	Word

However, nsibidi is an ancient system of graphic and encoded communication, indigenous to the southeasterners in the present region of the Cross River in Nigeria and the peoples of southwestern Cameroon.

There is no thick line of demarcation between the real world (artistic objects) and the ideal world (artistic representation). For instance, the above Efik symbols and what they represent are matters of existential and idealistic concerns. To this end, knowing the symbols is transcending what they actually mean so much so that the symbols and their actual meaning are coterminous. In some mystical practices such as Abon or Ekpo, every mystical action performed by the subject transforms him into the demon or the suprasensible being which he

represents. This means that the dances as well as the rites performed by the human actors do not mean a mere initiate's representation but it is more of being identified momentarily with the person of the mystical drama. So in like manner, the image of a thing in the Efik tradition is endowed with its active force and the object is considered as the essence of the thing which it represents and carries magical powers. Therefore, in Efik mythology, arts and mystical thinking use symbolic representations in a sense that transcends the conventional western idea of representation.

This means that in the case of humans acting as symbolic representational object, the human actors of mythical practices represent in an implicit sense the mythical subject which in actual sense, is considered as the same with the mystical subject. This mystical subject and the non-human symbolic representations are also accorded equal sacred treatment. Thus, artistic representations in Efik mythology does not just convey information about what is represented but stands at equal pace with the ideal it represents. Therefore, in Efik mythology the lines dividing image and meaning is outrightly erased and artworks are not merely images, or symbols place holder for an ideal reality, rather, artworks are considered as taking on the same realities which they represent.

Implications of Representation and Symbols in Efik Mythology for Translation

Generally, the term translation is understood as an endeavor to find the equivalent meaning of a statement in a text for a target language. This means that the whole thrust of translation involves finding equivalence meaning from one source text (ST) to a target text (TT) notwithstanding the theoretical framework that is employed. Hence, equivalence is centrally the object to be rendered from the source language into the target language so that meaning can be made sense of. This is quite a tedious task for translators who are commonly faced with challenges such as situations where there are nonequivalent words in the target language to represent the meaning captured by source language. This challenge is very much profound in the inherent implication of the approach to symbolism and representation in Efik mythology as it is evident that the Efik approach to the notion of representation does not square up with the conventional western understanding of representation.

With regards to translation, the consequence herein is that, unknown mystical experiences cannot be accurately represented say from the source language to a target language. This is because source language has its wordings wrapped or bounded up in the reality it speaks of and as such, do not just serve as a word that refers to face value meaning. Therefore, it becomes a very herculean task for translators to translate certain expressions in a source text or language into target text due to the stringent union between those words and the reality they represent symbolically.

In the circumstances where expressions in the source text are translated, the translator cannot command the mystic force therein though such a man may succeed in the exact translation. This therefore, leaves a gap in what is attainable during translation from the source text to the target text. This will mean that; target text possesses some domain boundaries in the course of seeking equivalence in meaning. This does not majorly result from the absence of words per se but as a result of the division between such target Language and the reality or expression it depicts. It is to be maintained that in Efik mythology, such expression is favorably possible in source language because of the ontological connection between such source language and the meaning it refers to of which inversely limits the extent to which any target language can make translation possible.

Since there is no distinction between words and their meaning in Efik mythology (a central truth in Efik worldview) then target text cannot capture or cover those mystical experiences like it would be done by source language because in Efik mythology, words are not just symbols or representations of what they refer to rather, they are the same with the reality they describe. This is made clear when libation rituals for instance, is translated into target Language; it will seem that something is missing in the search for equivalence in meaning between the two languages which ought to go into an intrinsic union with reality to which it speaks.

IV. Evaluation and Conclusion

In the study of the Grecian mythology, we meet with some curious and what may at first sight, appear as unaccountable notions. Thus, we hear of terrible giants hurling rocks, up heaving mountains and raising earthquakes which engulf whole armies. These ideas however, may be accounted for by the awful convulsions of nature, which were in operation in pre-historic times. Again, the daily recurring phenomena which to us, we know them to be the result of certain well ascertained laws of nature, are so familiar as to excite no remark, were to the early Greeks, a matter of grave speculation and not unfrequently of alarm. For instance, Berens notes that when they heard the awful roar of thunder, and saw vivid flashes of lightening, accompanied by black clouds and torrents of rain, they believed that the great gods of heaven were angry and they trembled at his wrath" (6). In the same vein, oral interpretations of certain occurrences as well as translation in documented text can be herculean especially when there is fundamental underlying meaning that needs to be unraveled. For instance,

libation rituals in Efik community establish a very strong connection between the present (living beings) and the past (ancestors) as crucial components of African traditional culture and spirituality; they thus emphasize the belief in ancestors and man's dependence on supernatural forces for existence, growth and well-being. Mensah and Silva examine the language of libation rituals in the context of Efik traditional marriage from literary, ethnographic and linguistic perspectives thus:

It describes the form and style of language use as well as the structure (morphology and syntax) of libation prayers, which are coded in specific cultural messages and reveals that the ritualized and symbolic language of Efik libation performances is generally solemn, poetic, less manipulative and not structurally open-ended and that though they may employ common place everyday narratives, they have pragmatic connotations that can broadly be contextualized and understood in terms of the values and belief system of the Efik given their culturally-shaped meanings and metaphysical presuppositions (59).

From the above quoted, translating the cultural view of a people which myth is one, is not an easy task at all. It is one that demands a thorough understanding of the issues at stake before translation can be truly achieved. It is even more onerous when symbols especially the esoteric ones with their own distinct meaning are under the radar. In concluding this study, Dukor highlights the importance of understanding a people's cultural worldview if translation must be properly targeted because of their all-pervading nature. He asked why all this linguistic and socio-cultural contacts without any of the culture dying off for the survival of the other in accordance with Darwin's theory of natural selection? The answer provided is that "what might partly be accountable for this is the similarity in the fundamental thought processes of African cultural groupings" (24) of which Efik is one.

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