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Abstracting Culture in Translation: What gets Lost in Translating "Fêter la Noël" into English and Kolokuma Languages?

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Abstract

This article looks at the abstraction of cultural elements in the production and translation of certain words or expressions. It adopts Gideon Toury's Target-orientedness approach (within the scope of the Polysystem) which predicates the acceptability of a given translation on its adherence to "norms originating in the target culture". The study focuses on the translation into English and Kolokuma of the French word *Noël* and expression *fêter la Noël* which refer to a key religious and festive period marking the birth of Jesus Christ. It lays bare the cultural substrata of the said word and expression as well as that of their equivalent translations in an attempt to explain the translation choices made in accordance to the norms of target languages and cultures. The study found that in translating *Noël* and *fêter la Noël* whether in English (an Indo-European language with certain affinities to French) or Kolokuma (a Central-Ijaw dialect which is an African language of Niger-Congo family with no affinity at all to French), the solution still lies in finding words or expressions referring to the same cultural phenomenon but whose distinct cultural underpinnings are abstracted and, therefore, unknown to speakers of the other languages.

Keywords: Abstraction, Culture, Translation, *Noël*, Kolokuma

Introduction:

Translation Studies witnessed in the 1980's and 90's an innovative approach driven essentially by the works of Susanne Bassnett and André Lefevere (2001) which became known as the cultural approach or "Cultural Turn". At first focused on literary translations, the cultural approach eventually cut across all types of translations such as literary, non-literary, scientific, technical and pragmatic among others (Snell-Hornby 1990: 84). The cultural approach realized a shift from linguistic or language-based translation wherein the source text assumes all preeminence to a more 'relative' translation method that takes into consideration the cultures in question. Thus, it emphasizes the diversity and pluralism of languages and cultures and the determining factor of culture in the representation or expression of phenomena. Mi-Yeon Jeon and Annie Brisset (2006) rightly stated that: "The study of the interdependence of language and culture, as well as the implications for translation, is nothing new to the discipline of Translation Studies: Approaches vary according to the notion of culture, the notion of translation and according to the disciplines brought into play."

Jeon and Brisset (2006) asserted also that although "the role played by culture in the production and interpretation of meaning is acknowledged, culture is rarely defined." Therefore, we shall give at this point a basic definition of the notion of culture to guide us in this study. The American Sociological Association (2020) defines culture as follows:

Sociology understand culture as the languages, customs, beliefs, rules, arts, knowledge, and collective identities and memories developed by members of all social groups that make their social environment meaningful. Sociologists, it adds, study cultural meaning by exploring individual and group communication; meaningfulness is expressed in social narratives, ideologies, practices, tastes, values, and norms as well as in collective representations and social classifications.

Obviously, translating culture is difficult due to the fact that cultural phenomena differ from one place to the other, and even among the same people, from one period of time to another. However, this paper focuses on abstracting culture in translation, and especially what gets lost in translating the French expression *fêter la Noël*. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), abstraction is "the action of removing or separating something from a place or context (= the situation, facts, words, etc.)". Within the context of translation, abstracting words or cultural elements means removing or detaching the said words or cultural elements from the translated text. This could be due to their redundancy or their complexity requiring lengthy or difficult explanations. It could also be due to semantic gaps arising from the inexistence of the said cultural elements in the target language.

The functionalist approach which is epitomized by the Skopos Theory propounded by Vermeer and Katharina Reiss among others, lays more emphasis on adhering to the target culture. As such, this approach downplays the cardinal translation concept of equivalence in favour of adequacy. Katharina Reiss (1983) defines adequacy as follows:

Adequacy is simply appropriateness. Appropriateness is nothing in itself: it has to be seen in relation to an action. You do something appropriate in relation to the purpose of what is done. Every time a translator takes a decision, the dominant factor is the purpose of the translation, so translational decisions must be appropriate for this purpose. Adequacy is thus a relation between means and purpose, and is thereby process-oriented.

In other words, she views adequacy as the achievement of the purpose of the translation which is to produce a text that is acceptable to the target reader because it fits the given purpose. In contradistinction, Reiss (1983) defines equivalence as follows:

Equivalence, on the other hand, is a relation between two products, the source and the receptor texts. A clear distinction must be made between the two terms, because translations may serve different purposes from one another, and a translation may serve a different purpose from its source text. This affects the equivalence of the two products. This becomes obvious as soon as one begins to consider different types of translation, either theoretically or as they exist in practice.

Thus, it is clear that the evaluation of a translation could not be based solely on its equivalence to the source text but also on the requirements of the target reader or audience. Therefore, in this article, the translation of the French word *noël* is not given merely as equivalent to *Christmas* in English and to *Kirisimésì* in Kolokuma, nor the statement *fêter la Noël* taken as equivalent to "celebrate Christmas" in English and to *Kirisimésì téi* in Kolokuma. But it takes into account the cultural dimension of both word (*Noël*) and statement (*fêter la Noël*) in French and in the target languages. This approach has much in common with Gideon Toury's work on norms of translation and target-orientedness method which he developed also within the scope of the Polysystem Theory.

Toury (1995:56) holds that on one hand a translator may choose to comply with the requirements of the source text even if it entails bending the rules of the target language and culture; this position is often "characterized as the pursuit of adequate translation". Toury (1995:56) buttresses this view by stating that "an adequate translation is a translation which realizes in the target language the textual relationship of a source text with no breach of its own [basic] linguistic system."

On the other hand, the translator may choose to comply with the requirements of the target language and culture, thus subscribing inevitably to shifts from the source text. Highlighting the difference between adequacy and acceptability in translation, Toury (1995:56-57) wrote: "Thus, whereas adherence to source norms determines a translation's adequacy as compared to the source text, subscription to norms originating in the target culture determines its acceptability."

The cultural dimensions of Noël

This study focuses on the translation into English and Kolokuma of *le/la Noël*, a French word that refers to a key religious and festive period marking the birth of Jesus Christ. The choice of English (an Indo-European language with clear affinities to French) as target language 1 and Kolokuma (a dialect of Ijaw

which is an African language notable for its Subject-Object-Verb structure) as target language 2 is to buttress the fact that difficulties in translation are not symmetrically linked to how close or how far apart the languages in question are.

Origin, Definition and Meaning of the word *Noël*

The online site, Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales (CNRTL) (n.d.), traces the origin of the word "noël", to the Latin adjective *natalis*, and defines it as follows:

Du lat. *natalis* adj. «de naissance, relatif à la naissance», *natalis dies* et par substantivation *natalis* «jour de naissance» utilisé en lat. eccl. pour désigner la Nativité du Christ. L'o de *noël* (en face de l'a. fr. *nael*, ital. *natale*, a. prov. *nadal*) est dû à une dissimilation des 2 a de *natalis*.

This quotation affirms that *noël* comes from the Latin adjective *natalis* which means of birth, related to birth, and *natalis dies* (day of birth) used as a substantive in ecclesiastical Latin to designate the Nativity of Christ. The o in *noël* (before the old French *nael*, compare with Italian *natale* and Provençal *nadal*) is due to a dissimilation of the two a in *natalis*. The CNRTL gives the following meanings to the word *noël* which we have translated here into English:

Noël (Noun). Masculine (or by ellipse, feminine noun signifying the feast of Christmas).

1. Christian feast of the nativity of Christ, celebrated on December 25.

By metonymy

2. Canticle celebrating the feast of Christmas.

3. [Middle Age] Shout of joy among the masses celebrate a joyous event.

4. *Fam.* Gift offered during the feast of Christmas.

Guy Bertrand (2020), Senior Language Adviser with Radio-Canada, observes that *Noël* as a Christian feast is a masculine noun, and except in some formal usage, it is used in general without the definite article "le". The feminine form *La Noël* which by ellipse (*la fête de Noël*) means the feast of Christmas is also common in some Francophone countries. However the French always use the masculine form in saying a joyous or merry Christmas (*un joyeux Noël*) and never the feminine form "*une joyeuse Noël*". The masculine definite article "le" is used when *noël* refers to a Christmas carol or a Christmas gift. In such cases, the word is spelt with small letters and can even take the mark of the plural.

Meaning of the word *Noël* in English

Concerning the history of the word *noël* from an English perspective, the Blog, *very-utile.com*, states that the etymological meaning of the word *Noël* is derived from two Gaelic words *Noio* (meaning new) and *Hel* (meaning Sun) and it used to refer in the beginning to a pagan festival celebrating the solstice of December. But Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.) lists it as "Noel", meaning Christmas (when it is spelt with an initial capital letter). In addition, it states as follows:

English speakers borrowed the word *noel* from French. It can be traced further back to the Latin word *natalis*, which can mean "birthday" as a noun or "of or relating to birth" as an adjective. (The English adjective '[natal](#)' has the same meaning and is also an offspring of *natalis*.)

This source corroborates the first meaning giving by CNRTL that links the French word *noël* to "natalis" which means nativity or birth in Latin, and it provides a clear reason why *noel* is translated in English as Christmas, or in other words, as the mass of Jesus Christ. According to Robert Green (2025), mass is "the central act of worship of the Roman Catholic Church, which culminates in celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist." This goes further to elucidate the semantic connection between Christmas and the midnight celebration of the mass on the eve of the birthday of Christ.

Concerning the emergence of the French word *noël* in English, Merriam-Webster states that "an early use of *noel* (spelled *nowell*) to mean "Christmas" can be found in the text of the late 14th-century Arthurian legend *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*". Merriam-Webster (n.d.) gives a second meaning of the word *noel* as follows: "Noels were being sung in Latin or French for centuries before

English-speakers started using the word to refer to Christmas carols in the 18th century". It differentiates between *noel* (meaning Christmas carol when it is spelt in small letters) and *Noel* (meaning Christmas when it is capitalized) by providing the following sentences as examples: 1. "The choir sang *noels* during the Christmas season" and 2. "He wished his friends a joyous *Noel*". Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.) gives similar meanings to the word *noel*, notably as the feast of Christmas or Christmastide and as a Christmas carol. However, Cambridge Dictionary captures only the first meaning of this word which is Christmas.

Meaning of the word *Noël* in Kolokuma

Let's recall that *noël* comes from the Latin adjective *natalis* which means "of birth, related to birth", and *natalis dies* which means day or date of birth. So, a literal translation of the day or date of birth of Christ in Kolokuma will be *Kírìsì zìibáí*. However, *Noël* is translated in Kolokuma as *Kírìsímésì* which is the entry made in the *Dictionary of Kolokuma Iẓon* published by Kay Williamson & Roger Blench in 2011. This is a clear borrowing from the English word Christmas. But the borrowed word had to undergo some phonemic changes so as to conform to the norms of the Kolokuma tongue. For instance, the name Jesus Christ becomes *Zeésù Kírìsì* in Kolokuma, and Christmas (understood in English as the shortened form of Christ's mass) becomes *Kírìsímésì*.

Below is a tabular presentation of the various meanings of *noël* obtained from some dictionaries in French, English and Kolokuma:

Table 1: Lexicology of *noël* and its translation into English and Kolokuma languages

S/No.	French Le Dictionnaire Robert	Merriam- Webster	English Cambridge	Oxford	Kolokuma Dictionary of Kolokuma Iẓon
1	(Le) Noël (Christmas) (masculine noun)	Noel/ Christmas	Noel/ Christmas	Christmas	Kírìsímésì
2	La Noël (feast of Christmas) (feminine noun)	Noel/ Christmas	Noel/ Christmas	The feast of Christmas; Christmastide	Kírìsímésì ugé tèi
3	Le Noël (Christmas carol) (masculine noun)	Christmas Carol	No entry regarding this meaning.	Christmas Carol	Kírìsímésì duman
4	noël (shout of joy at the birth of Christ; by extension: shout celebrating a happy event) (exclamation)	No available corresponding word	No available corresponding word	No available corresponding word	No available corresponding word
5	Le Noël (Christmas gift) (masculine noun)	No available corresponding word	No available corresponding word	No available corresponding word	No available corresponding word

From the table above, we can observe several lexical gaps in the translation of *noël* into English and Kolokuma, notably the non-availability of corresponding words for its fourth and fifth meanings (shout of joy and gift). Besides, no translation accounts for the difference between the masculine gender (*le Noël*) and the feminine gender (*la Noël*). Hence the question arises, what do speakers of the various languages in question mean when expressing themselves about celebrating Christmas? In other words, what is lost in the translation of the French expression or statement *fêter la Noël*?

Cultural Dimension of the Statement "fêter la Noël"

Let's start by recalling here that the French statement, *fêter la Noël* should not be taken merely as equivalent to "celebrate Christmas" in English and to *Kirisimesi téi* in Kolokuma. The feminine adjective "la" attached to the noun *Noël* is suggestive of an ellipsis of the statement *la fête de Noël* which means literally in English 'the feast of Christmas', and in Kolokuma, *Kirisimesi ugé* which means literally, 'Christmas feast'. Therefore, *fêter la Noël* can be translated in English as "celebrate Christmas" or as "celebrate the feast of Christmas"; whereas in Kolokuma, it can be translated on the one hand as *Kirisimesi téi*, meaning word-for-word 'Christmas celebrate', and on the other hand as *Kirisimesi ugé téi*, meaning word-for-word 'Christmas feast celebrate'. Besides, it should be noted here that Christmas is celebrated by non-Christians alike, and that most people seem to prioritize sociocultural events like, partying, visiting neighbours, etc., over the religious aspect which has to do with attending mass on Christmas eve or church service on Christmas day. Hans J. Hillerbrand (2025) wrote that

since the 20th century, Christmas has also been a secular family holiday, observed by Christians and non-Christians alike, devoid of Christian elements, and marked by an increasingly elaborate exchange of gifts. In the secular Christmas celebration, a mythical Santa Claus plays the pivotal role.

Christmas Traditions in France

In France, the tradition during Christmas is to gather family members for a long dinner called "réveillon" usually after midnight mass on the 24th day of December. One iconic element of the meal is a roast turkey and potatoes with a log shaped cake called "la bûche" as dessert. People organise also parties and various programmes and sing noels in church, schools, social events, etc. It is also a period of giving gifts called "noels" or undertaking charity works. Children drop their shoes by the Christmas tree set up in the parlour and go to bed expecting "le père Noël" (Father Christmas or Santa Claus) to bring them gifts which he will keep by the Christmas tree while they sleep. They wake up in the morning to pick their gifts.

Christmas Traditions in England

In England, the tradition is somehow similar, especially with regards to singing Christmas carols and having a family dinner. According to European Centre for Learning and Training – ECLAT – (2020),

carol singing is one of the oldest Christmas traditions in Britain; it began in the Middle Ages when poor people would walk round the streets singling holiday songs and begging for food and money. Today, groups of people stand in the street or go from home to home collecting money from charities. The majority of churches also have carol singing events which many people attend.

Concerning the family Christmas dinner in Britain, the iconic meal is roast turkey and potatoes with dessert of Christmas pudding. Christmas pudding is made with dried fruits, eggs, molasses and spices. It can be left to mature for a month or longer as the high alcohol content prevents it from spoiling. Besides these two similar Christmas traditions, let's highlight another that is slightly different such as the giving of gifts to children by Santa Claus. Here, on Christmas eve, children keep their stockings, not their shoes, by their bed so that Santa Claus can fill them with gifts called stocking fillers. They open their presents in the morning.

Finally, let's observe that there are Christmas traditions peculiar to the British such as the following:

1. Crackers:

These are large sweet shaped cardboard tubes used as a table decoration. Each cracker contains traditionally a small toy or trinket, a riddle or joke and a coloured paper hat or crown. But nowadays, it contains different articles some cheap and others, expensive which are exposed when the cracker is pulled apart in a popping noise by two people holding each end.

2. Pantomimes: According to European Centre for Learning and Training – ECLAT – (2020), pantomimes are a type of musical theatre for families. These theatrical productions happen during the Christmas and New Year holidays in the United Kingdom. The performances use a well-known story or fairy tale and incorporate songs, dancing

and jokes. The audience is expected to participate in the performance by talking with the actors and joining in the singing. Many English associations in France put on pantomimes during the holiday season!

3. The king or queen's address:

According to the official web site of the British Royal Family, The Royal Family (n.d.), "The original idea for a Christmas speech by the Sovereign was mooted in 1932 by Sir John Reith, the visionary founding father of the BBC, to inaugurate the Empire Service (now the BBC World Service)". Since then, the king's address has become an iconic element of British Christmas traditions. The content covers both national and international issues. The Royal Family (n.d.) states that

Each Broadcast carefully reflects current issues and concerns, and shares The Monarch's reflections on what Christmas means to them and their listeners. Over the years, the Christmas Broadcast has acted as a chronicle of global, national and personal events which have affected the Monarch and their audience.

The above-mentioned traditions (though the list is not exhaustive) are what marks out any Christmas celebration as typically British. Thus, this is the cultural substratum that comes to mind when a British speaker talks of celebrating Christmas.

Christmas Traditions in Ijaw land

In Ijaw land (Southern Nigeria), Christmas traditions are not as old as in France or Britain. They came to be with the emergence and spread of Christianity in Ijaw land which according to Prezi Isaac Enetimi (2015) took place from late 19th century to early 20th century thanks to the activities of the Christian Missionary Society (CMS). According to Enetimi (2015), Christianity spread from Bonny (1865) and Brass (1868) to other Nembe speaking areas, and to Ogbia and Ijaw areas where its acceptability from 1911 was not in doubt. Enetimi stated that For Christians in the region who are mostly either Anglicans or Evangelical and Pentecostal believers, the festivities are focused on attending church for worship and singing of carols on the 25th day of December, and for everybody, it is centred on merry making especially, listening to Ijaw music, eating (a delicious lunch and dinner) and drinking. Every family cooks a sumptuous meal made generally of white rice with chicken stew. People here have imbibed also the spirit of giving which characterizes the season, and as such, they give out cooked meals and other items to friends and neighbours. The Christmas season is also a period of home coming when people travel home to see and commune with members of their family and community. The Christmas tree tradition is gaining ground among the people though it is still not an iconic feature of Christmas celebration in Ijaw land. Likewise, children do not

wait till morning on Christmas day to open presents brought to them by Santa Claus. Traditionally, parents sew or buy new clothes and shoes for their children who put them on proudly on Christmas day go around showing off their Christmas clothes, and eating and asking for gifts. One major aspect of Christmas season in Ijaw land is the cultural display of traditional and masquerade dances, wrestling competitions, social gatherings and partying.

Just like we observed above that there are certain traditions that mark out Christmas celebrations as typically French or British, the traditions of homecoming, wrestling, masquerade dancing, giving to neighbours, and merry making are iconic elements of Christmas celebrations in Kolokuma or Ijaw land. These elements as well as the local Christmas meal made of chicken stew and rice are among other cultural tropes what a Kolokuma speaker thinks about when he or she talks of *Kírisímésì ugé téi*, that is to say, celebrating Christmas.

Significance of Cultural Elements and their Abstraction in Translation

This paper aligns with the view of Seleskovitch and Lederer (1984) that text is synonymous with discourse or language in context, and that it is from this level of text or discourse that we must translate rather than from the level of language as code. More so, this article agrees with Jakobson's view, cited by Hui Guo (2012), that translation does not just mean the change of linguistic symbols from one language into another, but it is rather a process of information substitution. Translation is both a fact of language and culture. Even so, many words or expressions are culturally loaded, and such words can only be understood

from the particular cultural phenomena they refer to. Football, for instance, is both a word and a sport; that is to say it is both a linguistic symbol and a cultural phenomenon which in addition can manifest in two different ways or practices based on whether the context of occurrence is in the United States of America or elsewhere in the world. It is obvious, therefore, that one should take into consideration the cultural dimension of the word football (by clearly differentiating American football from soccer) in order to translate it effectively.

However, some cultural elements are at times downplayed or abstracted in the translation of certain words when the corresponding words convey enough information to the target readers. A good example is the translation of *Noël* (from the Latin adjective *natalis* which means “of birth”, related to birth, and *natalis dies* – day of birth – of the Lord) as Christmas (Christ’s mass) or Christmas carol while the other meanings of the word (shout of joy and gift) are omitted. The cultural element relative to the birth of Christ in the word *Noël* is abstracted in the English translation, and another element, namely the Mass, is introduced. Another good example of cultural abstraction in translation is the Kolokuma word *Kirisimésì* which stands for Christmas. Though this word *Kirisimésì* was borrowed from the English word Christmas, it does not in any way signify Christ’s mass in Kolokuma, nor does it signify the birth of Christ. This is so because the morphosemantic split of the word Christmas between ‘Christ’ and ‘mas’ which remains meaningful to an English speaker, is not applicable to Kolokuma as the word *Kirisimésì* cannot be split into *Kirisì* (Christ) and *mésì* (Mass). *Mésì* does not translate “mass” in Kolokuma, and worst still, it does not exist as a free lexeme in Kolokuma. The closest translation we have of the word “Mass” in Kolokuma is *sòsì* which means church.

Besides words, cultural abstraction occurs also in the translation of idioms and expressions. For instance, the French idiom - Noël au balcon, Pâques au tison - which means literally 'Christmas on the balcony, Easter at the embers', suggests a warm temperature allowing people to celebrate Christmas on the balcony or outdoor may be followed by a cold snap at Easter. Let’s consider the following translation given on the Blog, The Local France (2024):

French	English
Moi, je préférerais la neige à Noël, mais je pense que nous aurons un Noël au balcon.	As for me, I would prefer a White Christmas, but I think it will be warm.

This shows that the cultural dimension of Christmas on the balcony is already abstracted in the English translation. Now, in Kolokuma, it gives: “Ari aba, dóḡḡḡ *Kirisimésìkì* Ì òḡḡḡḡtìmo, ìndaá Ìne tòn bāràbì, ifiyebi ḡfìḡḡḡmì”, meaning as for me, I would prefer a cold Christmas, but I think the period will be hot. The cultural dimension of Christmas on the balcony, together with the semantics of snow and white Christmas, is completely lost in the Kolokuma language where the climatic norms are restricted to *baaraá* (meaning dry season, roughly from January to May), *okonroón* (meaning harmattan), and *bowéí* (meaning flood; season when rivers overflow into bushes, roughly August to October).

Another example is that of the Oriental fragrance for women called *Noel au Balcon* by the creator Etat Libre d'Orange. In paragraph 1 of the website *Fragrantica* which was launched in 2007, the house describes the fragrance as follows: “This girl is a gift for well-behaved men. The one who bursts into a party and suddenly makes you want to believe in Father Christmas. Half way between a flirtatious temptress and a dancing queen, temperature rises just by her presence.” Now, this image of a girl warming up the Christmas party by her fragrance is rooted in the French idiom, *Noël au balcon* which, as we know, refers to an unusually warm Christmastime. But this inference to partying on a balcony on a warm Christmas day is already blurred in English, and it is completely inexistent in Kolokuma. To the Kolokuma speaker, *Noel au Balcon Etat Libre d'Orange* is merely a brand name of a fragrance for women.

Concerning the other languages, notably English, there are idioms which are grounded in Christmas festivities but whose cultural background is already abstracted; some of them are “the proof is in the pudding”, “the more the merrier”, “good things come in small packages”, etc. In her blog, *Language Learning*, Helena (n.d.) wrote that “The festive twist [about the first expression] comes from Christmas pudding being a famous cake made with dried fruits soaked in rum eaten around Christmas time in some parts of the world.” This expression is translated into French as “C’est à l’usage qu’on peut juger”, meaning simply it is by the usage that one can judge of a thing. In kolokuma, it gives “*éřì yekì gbanai emì*” which means simply seeing is believing. With regard to the second expression, she wrote: “The term

“merry” — meaning happy or jolly — is often used at Christmas, such as in the common festive greeting “Merry Christmas”. With more people around, there’s more room for fun, diverse conversations, and general enjoyment”. The literal translation of this expression in French is “plus on est nombreux plus on s’amuse” which means “the more we are, the more we have fun”, shifting the focus from being merry (and Merry Christmas) to having fun. In Kolokuma, it gives “Izan deñbì ìmbeḷe deñ”, meaning the more the sweeter. As for the third expression, she explains it as follows: “You can easily use this idiom to describe actual gifts at Christmas time (especially when your sibling complains about the size of your present), giving this idiom a festive twist.” The French equivalent expression, “les bonnes choses viennent dans de petits paquets”, shifts the emphasis to costly jewels or ornaments of precious metals and stones which are wrapped in small packages. This is translated literally in Kolokuma as “Ebi ye ama dolo dolo kí boemi” with no inference to Christmas.

Conclusion

This paper looks at the abstraction of cultural elements in the translation of French words and expressions such as *Noël* and *fêter la Noël* into English (Christmas, and celebrate Christmas) and Kolokuma (*Kírisimésì*, and *Kírisimésì ugé téi*). It found that these culturally loaded words and expressions correspond rightly to one another, and do refer to one and the same cultural phenomenon which focuses on celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. However, a closer study carried out in our attempt to explain the translation choices made in accordance with the norms of the target languages and cultures, reveals several gaps between these words and expressions, laying bare differences in their grammatical structures as well as cultural underpinnings.

We observe at first a lexical gap in the translation of *noël* into English and Kolokuma, notably the non-availability of corresponding words for its fourth and fifth meanings (shout of joy and gift). Then, we notice a significant difference in French between the masculine gender word (*le Noël* – Christmas) and the feminine gender (*la Noël* – the feast of Christmas). Finally, this study highlighted a semantic gap in the fact that these words do not refer to, or do not cover entirely the same Christmas cultural traditions or elements; they do refer also to many other cultural elements which vary or are completely distinct from one place to another or from one period of time to another. In other words, speakers of the various languages in question mean different cultural elements when expressing themselves about celebrating Christmas. However, these cultural elements are abstracted in translation as no single translation of the word *Noël* or the expression *fêter la Noël* could account for the peculiar traditions associated to celebrating Christmas in various places (i.e. France, England, Ijaw land).

At this point, it should be noted that the purpose for abstracting cultural elements in translation is rooted in the need to communicate effectively, using the cultural context known to speakers of the target language. Again, some of the practical reasons these cultural elements are abstracted border on either their redundancy, due to the fact that their knowledge or inference is commonly shared by speakers of both source and target languages (*Noël au balcon* suggesting a warm Christmas, *la neige à Noël* suggesting a white Christmas, etc.), or their absence in the target language (snow and white in France and England, harmattan in Ijawland) and would require lengthy and confusing explanations. Thus, abstracting them obscures cultural variations between these words and/or expressions of various languages, but it makes room for a perfect equivalence between them, such that a sentence like *fêter la Noël* is clearly understood by the English as celebrate Christmas, and by the Kolokuma as *Kírisimésì ugé téi*.

We shall conclude, therefore, by saying that in translation, what gets lost in abstracting cultural elements are specific details whose omission does not constitute a hinderance per se as they are compensated by elements of the target language culture such that the concept or meaning of the word and/or expression in question is clearly understood by speakers of the said target language. Ultimately, the implications of cultural abstraction in the field of translation are consequential for language policy, translation training, and cross-cultural communication, especially in a multi-ethnic society and globalized world.

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