

Perception and Translation of Humour in Post-Colonial Literature: The Case of Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*

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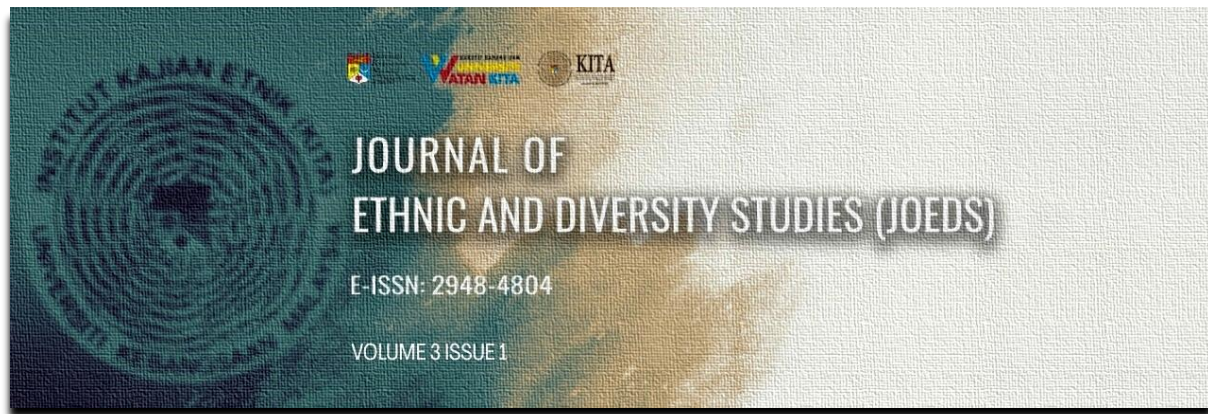
ABSTRACT

*Nigerian literature produced immediately after independence revealed to a large extent the manifestations of humour in such works. The objective of this paper is to investigate the translation of humorous elements in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*. Data for the study are culled from *The Lion and the Jewel* using the generative theory of verbal humour proposed by Attardo and Raskin (1991) as the theoretical framework. The method involves devoting keen attention to the most indicative examples in the text where the translator's decision-making process is geared towards facilitating the target reader's understanding of Soyinka's humour. The paper finds out that the analysis of Soyinka's humour in the text assists us to determine the cultural aesthetics and linguistic position of Nigerian dramatic literary system on the scale of comedy creation and domestication. The paper concludes that the translator's ability to perceive and translate humour in the text belongs to human trait which develops through time and culture (Hadiati (2008:9).*

Keywords: Humour; Translation; Culture; Nigerian literature; Generative Theory.

ABSTRAK

*Kesusasteraan Nigeria yang dihasilkan sejurus selepas kemerdekaan mendedahkan sebahagian besar manifestasi jenaka dalam karya tersebut. Objektif kertas ini adalah untuk menyiasat terjemahan unsur-unsur jenaka dalam *The Lion and the Jewel* karya Wole Soyinka. Data untuk kajian diambil daripada *The Lion and the Jewel* menggunakan teori generatif humor verbal yang dicadangkan oleh Attardo dan Raskin (1991) sebagai kerangka teori. Kaedah ini melibatkan menumpukan perhatian yang mendalam kepada contoh yang paling jelas dalam teks di mana proses membuat keputusan penterjemah menjurus ke arah memudahkan pemahaman pembaca sasaran tentang jenaka Soyinka. Makalah itu mendapati bahawa analisis humor Soyinka dalam teks membantu kita menentukan estetika budaya dan kedudukan linguistik sistem sastera dramatik Nigeria pada skala penciptaan dan domestikasi komedi. Makalah ini merumuskan bahawa*



kebolehan penterjemah untuk melihat dan menterjemah humor dalam teks tergolong dalam sifat manusia yang berkembang melalui masa dan budaya (Hadiati (2008:9).

Kata kunci: Humor; Terjemahan; Budaya; kesusasteraan Nigeria; Teori Generatif.

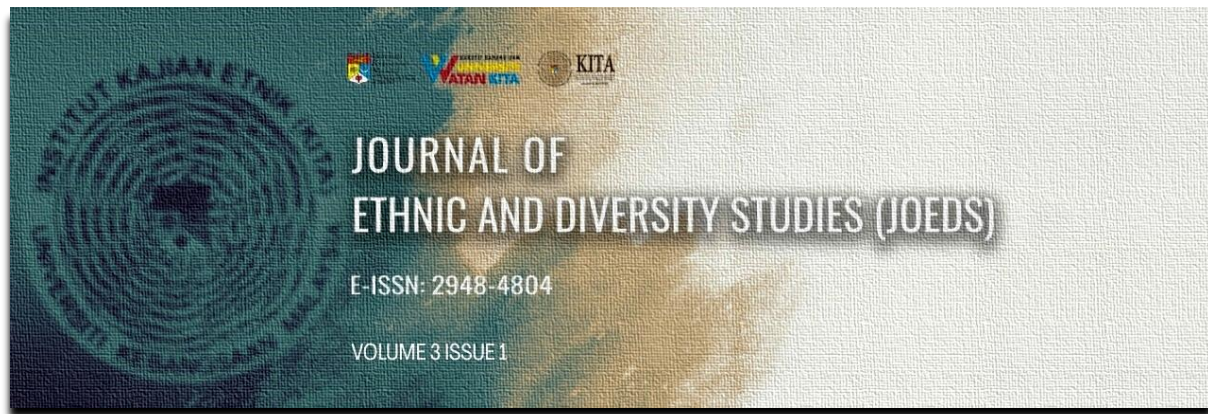
INTRODUCTION

Nigerian literatures produced immediately after independence revealed to a large extent, the manifestation of humour in such works. Translating humour emanating from a culturally-bounded text like *The Lion and the Jewel* presents a difficult task to the translator due to the fact that the translator takes into account the cultural aesthetics of the source text in order to ensure the acceptability of the target text to the target reader. In this contribution, the translation of humour is investigated in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* translated into French as *Le Lion et la Perle* by Philip Laburthe-Tolra. Soyinka embellishes the content of his creative fiction with humorous features to create laughter, generate emotional apprehension, show stress, pilot and properly smoothen conversation. Data for the study are culled from *The Lion and the Jewel* and its French translation using the General Theory of Verbal Humour as the theoretical framework. The text features a good number of humorous instances used to create comic effect to the target readers. Attention is devoted to the most indicative examples where the translator's decision-making process is geared towards facilitating the target reader's understanding of Soyinka's humour. The study investigates the translation procedures that contribute to a new model of humour translation in dramatic text. The study analyzes the factors that are pertinent to cultural affinity of the target reader so as to allow conclusions to be drawn on sufficient results.

The paper reveals that analysis of Soyinka's humour in our text assists in determining the cultural, aesthetic and linguistic position of Nigerian dramatic literary text on the scale of domestication and foreignization. It also reveals the role of translation as a medium for cross-cultural communication. Through the translation of *The Lion and the Jewel* into French, the French readers become more interested in reading the target text that allows them to explore other people's culture. Reflecting on the comparative text analysis of the text, this paper attempts to identify the most prevalent strategies used by the translator in the transfer of Soyinka's humour. The paper concludes that the translator's creative ability to perceive and translate humour in the text belongs to human trait which develops through time and culture (Hadiate 2008:9).

LITERATURE SURVEY ON HUMOUR TRANSLATION

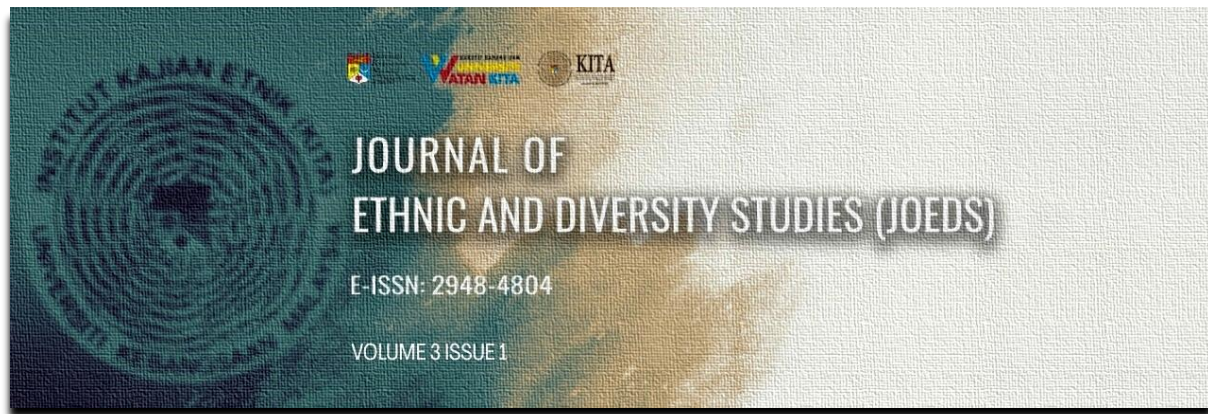
Numerous researchers have presented their contributions on the role of humour in literary narratives (Mahmood & Maryam (2021); Hadiate (2008); Katerina (2014); Adijei (2015); Chusni,



(2018). In an early article, Mahmood & Maryam (2021) analyzed the Persian humor expressions' appropriacy and their translated versions in English through a qualitative study. Arvo (2006) discussed the contemporary linguistic theories of humour focusing on subtopics as the Arthur Koestler's Dissociation theory of humour and its reception; Victor Raskin's Script-based theory of jokes in his semantic mechanisms of humour; the General theory of verbal humour by Victor Raskin and Salvatore Attardo and the attempt of testing GTVH by Nillibald rich. Most of the humour theories ever proposed are, to a large extent, mixed with theories and many contemporary researchers believe that humour in its totality is too huge and multiform a phenomenon to be incorporated into a single integrated theory (ibid: 28). The work of Katerina (2014) examines the audio-visual translation of humour created by means of extralinguistic culture-bound references (ECRS) in the US-American TV Series,

The New Normal (Adler and Murphy, 2013). In the work, specific case study was discussed drawing on Relevance Theory and the concept of incongruity and superiority. The concept of context was given as an element specific to audio humour. With regard to translating audiovisual humour, a functional approach was promoted but that also seeks perlocutionary equivalence (ibid.:183). Drawing on these theoretical insights, three elements were considered as crucial for subtitling of extralinguistic culture-bound references in audiovisual humour: (i) the tripartite relationship, addresser-addressee-audience, (ii) extra-textual aspects; and (iii) intra-textual aspects (ibid. 183). He affirms that a model that could cater for the translation of culturally-derived humour would need to take into account the factors analysed in his research work, as well as more that may arise through relevant research. The work of Hadiate (2018) claims that the ability to perceive and produce humour belongs to human trait Hadiate (2018:9), which develops through time and culture. He submitted that humour is like a frog, once it is dissected, it dies (ibid.:9). Adije (2015) x-rays the language of humour in anglophone African literature using Achebe's *A man of the people* as case study.

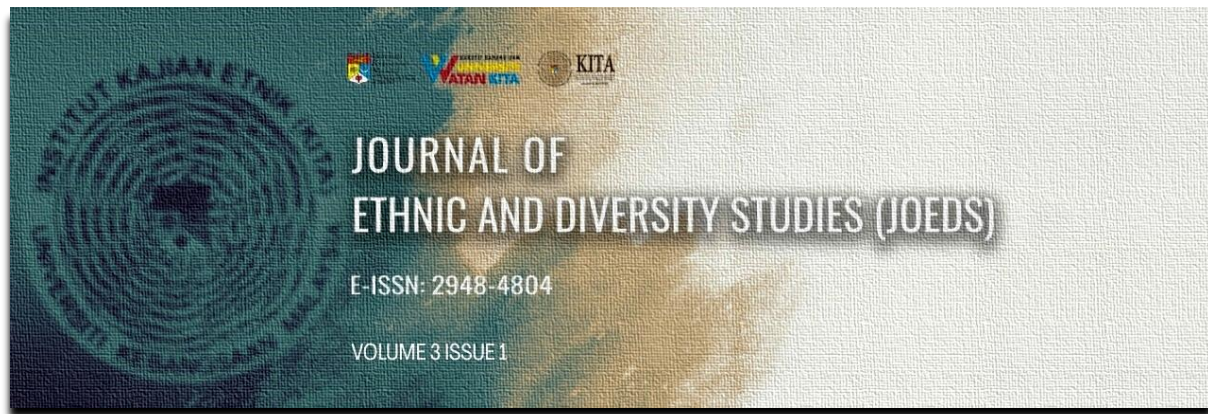
In his contribution, instances of humour show the strong attachment or detachment of a character towards somebody or something, satirize people in the community, deliver his major theme of corruption, and make the text interesting to read. Ying (2010) analyses the transfer of humour in translating advertising texts. He based his research on a prior study, processes that the transference of humour is quite flexible in the practice of advertisement translation. He claims that humorous expressions in original texts may be faithfully translated, or detected, or in some cases humour may be added in translated texts Ying (2010:47). From the survey, it is discovered that researchers have published numerous contributions that suggest what kinds of approaches should be used in the translation of humour from one text into another. One area of research remains underrepresented; there have been relatively few studies on the translation of humour in Nigerian dramatic text. Since much of the available scholarship has extolled the payoffs and challenges of humour research in other disciplines, this paper will explore humour translation in dramatic text and add another literary dimension to the theory and practice of translation.



THEORETICAL INSIGHT ON HUMOUR RESEARCH: LINGUISTIC THEORIES OF HUMOUR

The linguistic theories of humour can be classified into three main branches. In this section, I will discuss the three main classifications of humour. These are theories of incongruity, or inconsistency or contradiction or dissociation. This theory is based on some objective characteristics of a humorous text and it is assumed that every such act involves two different planes of content, line of thought. In newer works, the planes are called frames of references, isotopies, schemas, scripts (ibid. 27). Second, the theory of superiority or disparagement or criticism, or hostility accentuates the negative attitude of the producer and, or user of humour towards its target and the often alleged aggressive character of laughter (ibid. 27). This humour is directed to person or group typically on political, ethnic or gender grounds (ibid.:27). Third, the theories of release also referred to as psychoanalytic theory is concerned with the recipient of humour and the psychological effect humour allegedly brings about in the recipient (ibid.:27). Beyond the three classifications of humour is the script-based theory proposed by Raskin and Attardo (1991). This theory evaluates the semantic distance, or degree of similarity between particular joke texts and it involves six-level hierarchical representation model of verbal jokes: language, narrative, strategy, target objects, situation, logical mechanism and script opposition. This theory will later be applied in the analysis of the translation of Soyinka's *Lion and the jewel* translated into French as *Le lion et la perle*. Humour as perceived as incongruity when the humour is created where the information provided by the joke-teller is incongruous with information that the addressee expects to receive (Katarina 2014:167).

It has also been argued that producing and understanding humour is inextricably linked with a sense of self-gratification, while those involved in successful humour-deciphering often enjoy a feeling of superiority (Attardo 2009:323). Humour possesses a social dimension. Vandaele (2002:157) assigns a social dimension to the notion of superiority and points out that it can include "any anti-social effect, intention or cause that humour may have, either interpersonal and socially visible or "private", but with reference to social world. Therefore, feelings such as self-esteem, inferiority, aggression, hostility, disparagement and solidarity are viewed from the overarching perspective of superiority (Katarina 2014:167). It is however affirmed that both incongruity and superiority need to be complemented by elements pertinent to the communication context, which may include the interlocutor's assumed knowledge and relevant expectations (Vandaele 2002:159). The implication of this statement is that the target readers can perceive humour in dramatic and narrative texts once they have the dramatic context, coupled with the socio-cultural knowledge of such humour in the text.

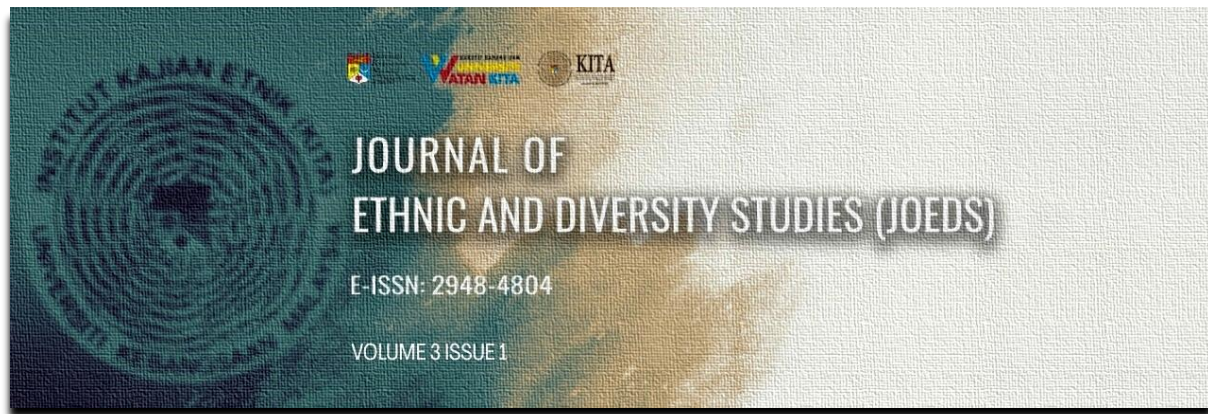


THE NOTION OF HUMOUR IN LITERARY TEXT

The concept of humour has been discussed by researchers in many disciplines: psychology, semiotics, linguistics (Freud 1960, Dorfles 1968; Raskin 1985; Attardo & Raskin 1991). Freud affirms that humour is used to ease psychological tension. Dorfles sees humour when it operates in a determined communicative circumstance a (...) change of relationship between the sign and its referents is given (1986:102). Humour is generally produced and expressed through the medium of word-play to cause laughter, physiological reaction, intellectual and emotional stimuli. Humour is perceived as the cognitive process which often, but not always, leads to the realization of the seizure-like activity called laughter Daniel (2015:195). It is necessary to state here that humour, laughter, jokes are familiar expressions in dramatic texts. Humour is the preoccupation of any dramatic piece that is meant to be staged for the enjoyment of the audience. All cultures are regarded as being familiar with humour (Polimeni and Reiss 2006, Franklyn 2006) and the ability to perceive and produce humour belongs to human trait (Chusni, 2018:1). Raskin (1985) states the ability to appreciate and enjoy humour is a universal human trait, whereas the individual's responses to humour are the result of their exercising of this ability in varying degrees. Humour is therefore, unique to culture and the different fields of human endeavours. It is, therefore, the reader's priority to perceive its schemata in order to properly understand such humour in dramatic texts and particularly, during their inter-lingual rendering. Defining humour in dramatic text relates to what makes the audience laugh in drama. Humour in dramatic narrative is simply what triggers emotion, intellectual stimuli, to the target reader. In other words, it refers to what is funny in the narrative with its causal effect.

ANALYSIS OF HUMOUR IN THE LION AND THE JEWEL RENDERED AS: LE LION ET LA PERLE

Traditionally, translation involves the reproduction of original message to the target audience. as it relates to dramatic text, it means the transfer of humorous elements of the original text into the target language and culture without any loss of meaning/jokes/laughter. Translating humour in a dramatic text, the translator must be familiar with the extra-linguistic and socio-cultural feature of the original text. This is what Zabalbeascoa (2005:190) refers to as "linguistic or encyclopedic knowledge, or their degree of familiarity or appreciation for certain subject-matters. This means that before a humorous feature of a text can be faithfully rendered, the translator needs to establish a link with the context in which the humour takes place and the audience's assumed knowledge. The translator should know the interpersonal dynamics among those involved in joke in order to decide on the most appropriate translation strategy (ibid.:197).



THE TITLE TRANSLATION OF THE TEXT

Soyinka's play is titled: *The Lion and the Jewel* rendered by Philippe Laburth-Tolra as *Le Lion et la Perle*. The translator uses what Newmark calls semantic strategy of translation in the transfer of the Soyinka's title. Semantic translation refers to the transfer of the word as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the target language allows the exact contextual meaning of the original. Newmark (1988:39). The translator could have rendered the title idiomatically as the King and the Queen, but he chooses to semantically render the title within the context of the original text and word-form in order to remain faithful the original text as closely as possible. The word "lion" is first used in the text by Lakunle when he remarks that: "*For that, what is a jewel is to pigs?*" P.3. Lakunle values education above any other things. This quality ought to have made him a jewel among his village people. His claims of too much knowledge, bookish wisdom gives him the assumption that all other people in his village are pigs, illiterates. Sidi refers to Lakunle's assumption as madness to the village people of Ilujinle. Though Lakunle is the most well read in the village, his claim of knowledge becomes so clear that Sidi could be referred to as the jewel of the village. The word "lion" normally refers to the king of all animals in the forest. In the text, the word "lion" refers to Baroka. Sadiku, the most senior wife of Baroka tells Sidi that "The Lion sent me. He wishes you well (p.19). « c'est le Lion qui m'envoie. Il te vient du bien. » (p.27).

In the play, the word "lion" is attributed to Baroka:

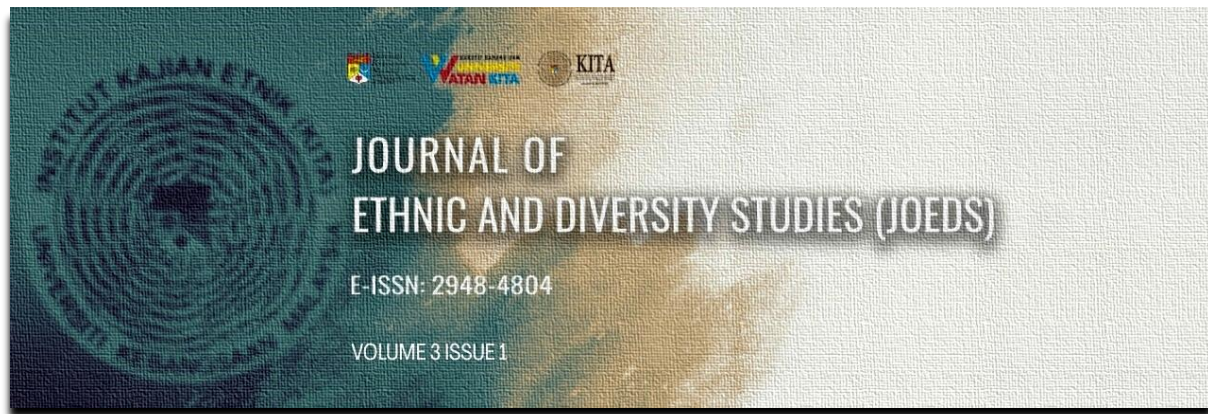
Will you be Baroka's own jewel?

Will you be his sweetest princess, soothing him on weary nights?

What answer shall I give my Lord? (p.20)

Et bien! Veux-tu devenir la perle de Baroka?
Veux-tu etre sa plus douce princess, celle qui
calmera la lassitude de ses nuits Quelle réponse
donnerai-Je a mon seigneur? (p28-29).

From the above text, Baroka wants Sidi to be his jewel, his wife. Sidi sees herself as the only jewel of Ilujinle when she claims that Baroka "seeks new fame as the one man who has possessed the jewel of Ilujinle p.21. Humour arises out of the shared knowledge and experience the reader possesses about Soyinka's text. In the translation of the text, the title presents an irony of situation; *The Lion and Jewel* are two incongruous animals. It is incongruous for a lion and

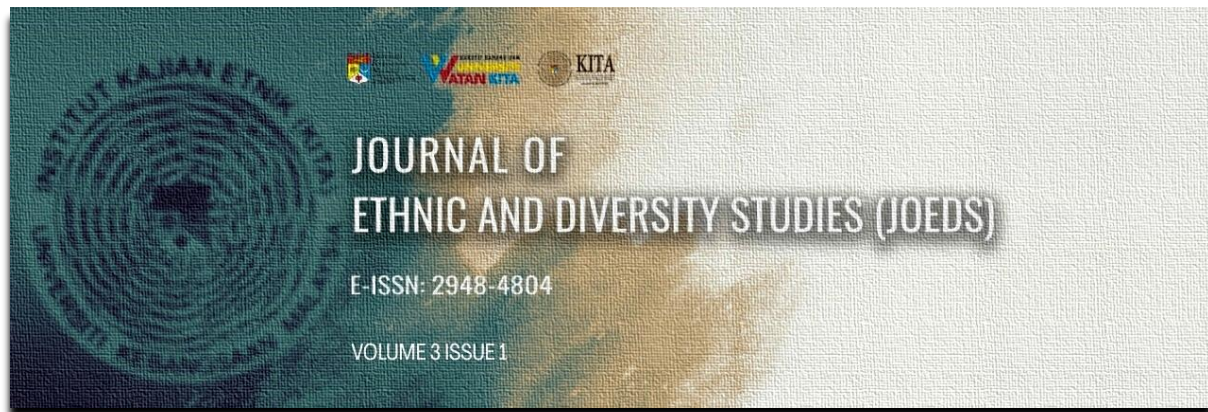


jewel to dwell together. It is comical and a costly joke for a jewel to desire the position of a lion. The overarching use of these words by Soyinka is what Polimeni and Reiss (2006) refers to as humorous communication that helps to navigate contentious social situations. Soyinka's act of comparing a lion with a jewel through the use metaphor is what makes his text humorous. The juxtaposition of lion and jewel in the title agrees with what Attardo (1994:223) refers to as logical mechanism. The logical mechanism accounts for the way in which the two senses (scripts) in the joke are brought together. Logical mechanism can range from straight-forward juxtapositions, false analogies, garden apt phenomena. The title of the text is funny, humorous and an attempt to flatter two major characters in the text. The two characters, Lakunle and Sidi, both symbolizing the North and the South; the high and the low; the affluent and the poor; the strong and the weak; the old and the new; the teacher and the student; modernism and tradition; progressive and retrogressive; palatable and unpalatable; educated and illiterate. The title affirms the theoretical position of Raskin and Attardo's script-based jokes. Here lies the two incongruous characters in the text. Sidi, an illiterate village girl of Ilujinle, is incongruous to the eminent honourable personality of Lakunle, who is a sound educated, civilized personality. It is, therefore, incongruous when Lakunle reacts to Sidi's stance of bride-price with the use of padding of jaw-breaking or so to say, high-sounding words, which Lakunle assumes are suitable for the description of the act of paying bride-price before marriage in Ilujinle Village:

A savage custom, barbaric, out-dated, rejected
denounced, accursed (p.7)

Si je suis maintenant incompris par ta race de
sauvages et toi, je plane au-dessus des persiflages et
n'en demeure pas moins impassable (p.9).

This word "*Lion*" presents the opportunistic nature of Lakunle. The lion image of Lakunle makes the text highly humorous as one imagines Lakunle's cursing, abuse and yelling at Sidi. This makes the readers laugh. The congruity is that it is socially acceptable, customary for people to pay bride-price in Ilujinle before marriage. It is however incongruent to marry without paying the bride-price. It thus becomes insulting to Sidi to marry without bride-price, and Lakunle to pay bride-price before wedlock. Hence, the use of savage custom, barbaric, outdated. The French translation captures this humorous amusement of Lakunle's language to the French reader of the text. Although Lakunle sees himself as a man of "big brain" and it is incongruous to consider his disposition as "big brain" because Sidi felt really mad with Lakunle on his account of woman's nature of having "small brain". (p.4), "un cerveau plus petit" (p.9). He further pacifies Sidi, but indirectly substantiating his earlier claims on woman's brain description or rating through the book he has read. Employing the theory of incongruity, the title shows the various humours such as



sarcasm, marriage relationship, name calling, greetings, modernism and tradition, comparism in *The Lion and the Jewel*. These humorous elements bring about congruent and incongruent features in the dramatic narrative. These humours contribute to the creation of laughter, release of emotional and intellectual stimuli in the target reader.

Soyinka succeeds in his use of humour in driving home the preoccupation of the text: modernism and tradition symbolized by Fakunle and Sidi in the text. The target reader feels the import of these humours in the target text. Name calling becomes an avenue for Sidi to be humorous in the text. Sidi refers to Lakunle as a popular “madman of Ilujinle, who calls himself a teacher!” (p.3), “le fou d’Iloujinlé qui se dit instituteur” (p.9), in reaction to Lakunle’s supposed abuses, especially through the exhibition of his bookish behaviour that comes in the form of his oration of big words which Sidi presumes have no meaning. Lakunle also resort to name-calling by referring to Sidi as:

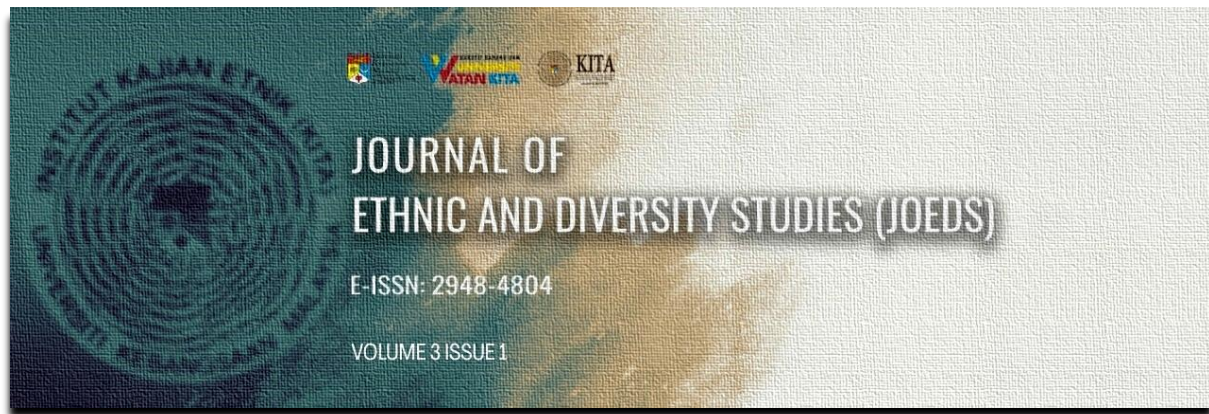
My Ruth, my Rachael, Esther, Barthsheba,
Thou summed of fabled perfections
From Genesis to Revelations (p. 20).

Ma Rute, ma Rachel, mon Esther, ma
Bethsabée vous qui rassemblez toutes les
perfections révélées depuis la Genèse
jusqu’à l’Apocalypse, n’écoutez pas la
voix de cette infidèle (...) (p.28)

Sidi’s remark will likely elicit some desired laughter from the target reader of the French translation of Soyinka’s narrative; Sidi replied Lakunle in a humourous manner:

My name is Sidi and I am beautiful
The stranger took my beauty
And placed it in my hands (...) I need no
funny names
To tell me of my fame (p. 20)

Je m’appelle Sidi, et je suis belle.
L’étranger a capte ma beauté pour la
placer entre mes mains (...) Je n’ai pas
besoin de noms a coucher dehors pour
m’annoncer ma célébrité (p.20)



It is incongruous for Lakunle's bookish behaviour to be interpreted as that of a popular madman of a village. This statement from Sidi is humorously demeaning of Lakunle's intellectual status. After this, a sudden humour emerged from Lakunle where he suddenly delves into poetry rendition to express how much he loves Sidi:

Lakunle: Sidi, my love will open your mind
Like the chaste leaf in the morning, when
The sun first touches it. (p.6)

Sidi, mon amour t'ouvrira l'esprit comme
la chaste corolla au matin, des que les
rayons du soleil l'ont effleurée (p.11)

This abrupt transition from a normal way of confabulation to a panegyric display evicts laughter in the target reader of the text. A stronger form of joke, humour and laughter may be realized when Sidi outrightly dismissed Lakunle's marriage proposal on the ground of payment of bride price:le-même en crachoir recueillant les mépris du village! (p.12)

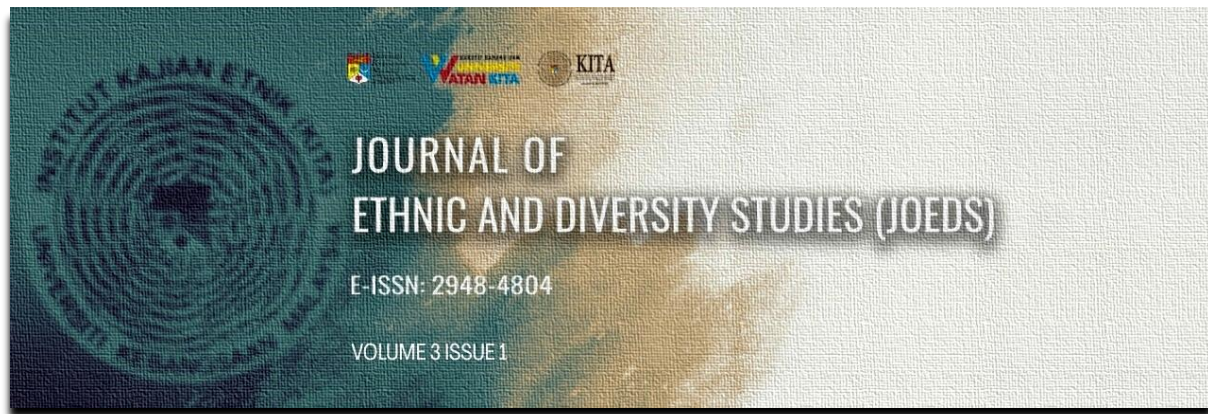
Will you make me a laughing stock?
Well, do as you please, but Sidi will not make herself
A cheap bowl for the village spit (p.7)

Voudrais-tu faire du moi un objet de risée?
Bon, agis comme il te plait.

Mais, Sidi ne veut pas se transformer el, there is incongruity between Sidi's expected action and her actual action. Sidi reacted by hilariously insulting Lakunle's father as a drunk whom Lakunle takes after". There is a form of greeting that evokes so much humour in Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*. One of such is when Baroka, the Baale of Ilujinle mispronounces 'Good morning' as 'Guru morning' and the way he describes Lakunle's perpetual greetings makes it more amusing.:

Baroka: Guru morning, guru morin, ngh-hn! (...)
Guru morin. Wal guru morin wet my throat? (p.16)

Bouyou, bouyou, hum! (...) Est-ce que "
bouyou" me rafraichira le gosier? (p.22)



In the noon part of the play, the tension of Lakunle's love expression is heightened where Lakunle assumes that Sidi is to some extent dancing to the tune of his drum. He, therefore, begins to feel deeply emotionally affected and lost so much that he doesn't know the point at which he starts to read poetry in adulation of Sidi's beauty, which Sidi carefully dismisses with her thoughtful deconstruction of Lakunle's emotional intent. There is a dramatic humour where Baroka begins to reminisce and reflect on the manner in which Sidi who happens to be his crush has described him as 'old too old' (p.28). This reflection is implicative of how disillusioned Baroka is by the statement and in effect, he bitterly rebukes Sidi in absentia:

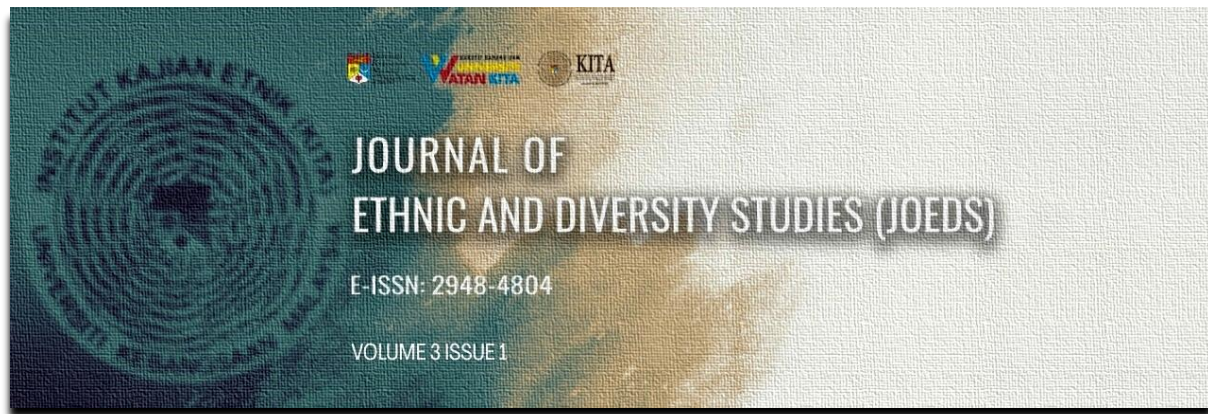
Baroka: She says.... That I am old
That I am much too old? Did a slight
Unripened girl say this of me? p.28.

Elle dit...que je suis vieux, que je suis beaucoup trop vieux?
Est-ce qu'une petite fille a peine en fleur a dit cela de moi? p.36

As a result of the above description, Baroka ventures into the recounting of his triumphs which he believes have been objectified by virtue of his vigour and body fitness as against Sidi's demeaning description. Another scene that injects humour in the text is where Lakunle's presence is dishonoured by the womenfolk comprising Sidi and Sadiku because of the dissatisfaction that has begun to arise against Fakunle. He is given names such as 'scarecrow' (p.34) to make him feel inferior with Sidi thereby intimidating him of their space, that is, the women space.

Sadiku: The scarecrow is here. Begone fop! This is the world
of women. At this moment our star sits in the center of the
sky. We are supreme. What is more, we are about to perform
a ritual. If you remain, we will chop you up, we will make
you the sacrifice (p.34).

Ah! Voice l'épouvantail. Arrière, frêluquet! Nous sommes
ici entre femmes. Notre étoile est en ce moment a son zenith.
Nous sommes les reines! Et par-dessus le marche, nous
allons te couper en petits morceaux pour t'offrir en
sacrifice...p44



This situation evicts laughter from the reader especially when Lakunle, the bookman is teased out by the women folk. There is an element of surprise here, a joke element is established. Incongruity is strongly established because instead of honouring Lakunle, aspersion is cast on him. The women starred and laughed at him. Lakunle's civility is strongly belittled through this humour. The French translation captures the belittling. The catalyst that elicits humour in the altercation between Sadiku and Lakunle is the seriousness with which Lakunle teases Sadiku through the use of delayed humour. He describes Sadiku as a "yoke who does not have western education" (p.36):

Lakunle: I won't demean myself to bandy words
With a woman of the bush (p.36).

Lakunle: Je m'avilirais si j'avais des mots avec une
vieille de la brousse (p.46).

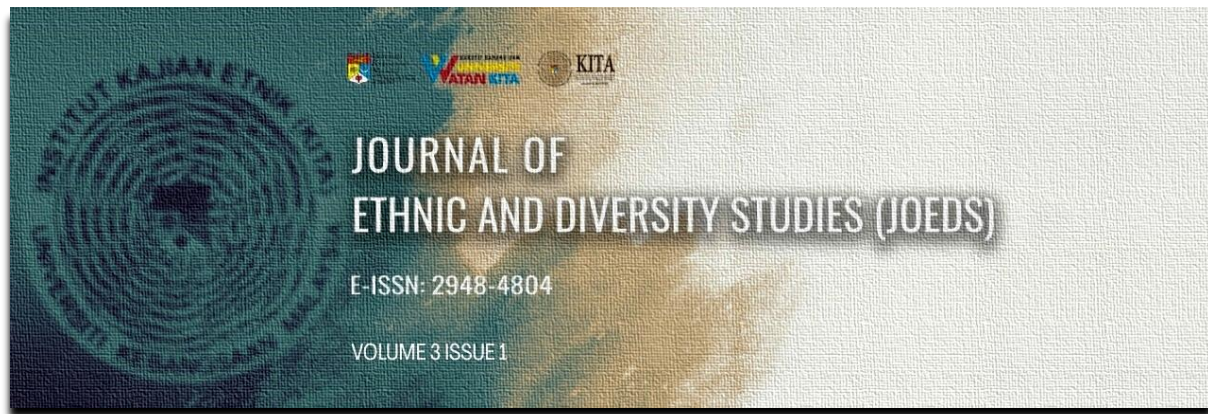
The effect of this humour is not realized almost immediately after the joke. This is what Ritchel (2010:41) claims that some "presentations of humour leave some of the necessary linguistic connection implicit, so that the audience must fill these in for themselves. In such situation, humour is achieved by the audience or reader after a careful thought of the utterance, or when all the details such as the context, the butt of the joke, the mood and atmosphere have been revealed (Daniel, 2015:199).

ETHNIC STUDIES IMPLICATION

The ethnic implication of this paper is that the analysis of Soyinka's humour in the text assists us to determine the cultural aesthetics and linguistic position of Nigerian dramatic literary system on the scale of comedy creation and domestication.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, our analysis of humour offers additional perspective on the subject matter and reflects some interesting findings that could be challenged in the future research on humour and translation in dramatic narratives. The study makes a methodological point by demonstrating how the linguistic theories on humour can be fruitful in conceptualization and highlighting humorous discourse within the framework of translation studies. Above all, further research on humour translation in other non-nigerian drama texts will always be desired and worth exploring.

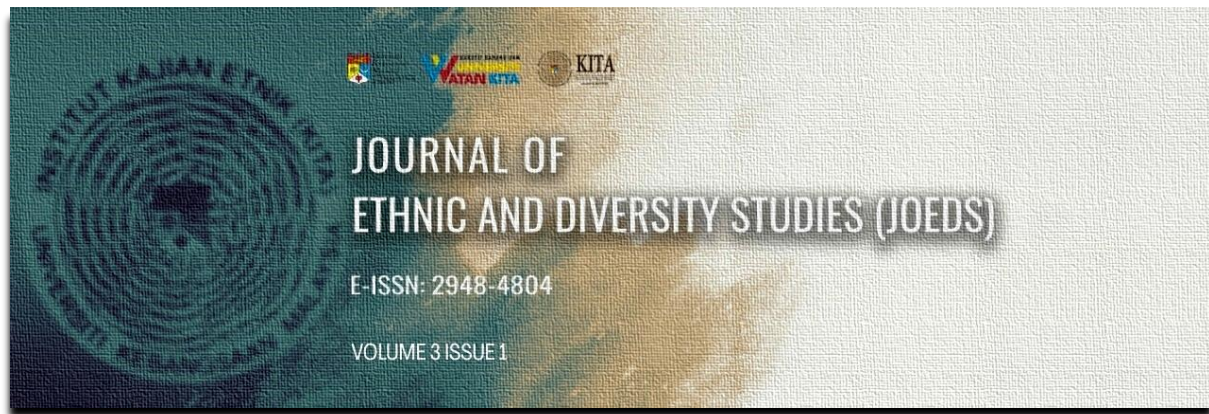


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