TRANSLATION AS *DISMEMBERING* AND *RE-MEMBERING*: NON-ACOLI SPEAKING LAWINOS AND THE EXPANSION OF CONTESTED SPACES IN OKOT P'BITEK'S *SONG OF LAWINO*

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Introduction

When *Song of Lawino* (*SOL*) was published in 1966, p'Bitek accompanied it with the now famous lament to the effect that by translating the work from Acoli to English, he had "clipped a bit of the eagle's wings … , and rendered the sharp edges of the warrior's sword rusty and blunt, and also murdered rhythm and rhyme" (p'Bitek 1966: iv). This was a serious vilification of the translation process; it clearly suggested that the process was harmful to the performance of the text. Since its publication, *SOL* has been translated into several languages, including French, German, Spanish, Kiswahili and Luganda; and translations in Runyoro-Rotooro and Sheng are forthcoming.[1] The volume of scholarly work on p'Bitek as a writer in general, and on *SOL* in particular, also continues to grow.

As the number of translations grows, so do the questions around the messages that the various translations transmit. Central among these questions is whether the new texts communicate the same message as the "original." Indeed the very notion of "the original" among the Lawino texts is contested. While *Wer Pa Lawino* (*WPL)* is widely assumed to be the "original," *SOL* was published first (1966), and *WPL* was published in 1969, after the author had made revisions to the 1954 version (Heron 1976; Okot and Garuba 2017). For this reason alone, *SOL* cannot be regarded as an exact translation of the text of *WPL* that was published in 1969. In 2001, Taban lo Liyong published "another" translation in English entitled *The Defence of Lawino (DOL)*, translated from the 1969 version of *WPL*. Lo Liyong's translation generated new questions in the debate about the nature and "accuracy" of the translations of the Lawino texts, and around the identity of Lawino the character. This has led some scholars to suggest that he had created "a new Lawino" (Lewis 2002). As will be seen later in this essay, lo Liyong has himself described *WPL* and *SOL* as two separate books, while Fraser (2008: 100) refers to the process that produces *SOL* as *transcreation* instead of *translation*.

Whether we agree with the "new Lawinos" or "two separate books" suggestions or not, the available evidence shows that the different translations raise new issues in the overall communication of *SOL*. Lawino, one of the characters that Fraser describes as "sons/ daughters of print" (Fraser 2008: 100), is the focal point that holds "the Lawino texts" together. In the Luganda translation *(Omulanga gwa Lawino - OGL)* for example, in addition to highlighting the problems of shipping meaning across languages, the question of Lawino's resilience as a champion of African values is key to the work's communication. In lo Liyong's *DOL*, questions of character identity and cultural depth are prominent; for example; does lo Liyong's use of English colloquialisms not undermine Lawino's African personality and cultural identity? In Sozigwa's Kiswahili translation, *Wimbo wa Lawino* (*WWL),* the prominent question is one of whether the text conveys the same message as that of *SOL*, given that the translator excludes p'Bitek's trademark sarcasm against Christianity. This essay assesses the extent to which these and related considerations diminish or strengthen the communication of *SOL*.

SOL was published at a time when the notion of the "downtrodden African woman" was so strong in English-speaking African circles that the voice of a rural Acoli wife calling a husband to order, moreover a Western educated one, was quite startling. In order to do this convincingly, p'Bitek creates a firm and broad Acoli cultural base, which Lawino uses as a launch-pad for her rebuttal against the errant thinking of her deracinated graduate husband. However, in addition to taking issue with Ocol for his unselective aping of Europe, p'Bitek subtly raises issues of social and educational development that require a critical response from new generations of African people. These issues include, among others, Lawino's rejection of smallpox vaccines in favor of the traditional medicine man's divination. These issues require collective deliberation, and will continue to justify efforts by translators to avail it to readers in other languages.

This essay mainly focuses on the interaction between p'Bitek's *WPL* (Acoli) and *SOL* (English), Kiyimba's *OGL* (Luganda) and lo Liyong's *DOL* (English). The essay also takes interest in Sozigwa's *Wimbo wa Lawino*, but this is limited to the translator's handling of those sections that present p'Bitek's sarcasm against Christianity in *SOL*. Both *OGL* and *WWL* use *SOL* as their "original," which comes with its own set of problems as will be seen later, but *OGL* benefits substantially from *DOL*, and this tends to further complicate attempts to straightjacket descriptions of translations.

Translation Theory and the Horizons of the Literary Text

Translation theories differ in their emphases, but they give technical guidance to the work of the translator. Philological theories, for example, focus primarily on the form, style and meaning of the text; linguistic theories emphasize the linguistic structures rather than the literary genres and stylistic features of the text, and sociolinguistic theories focus on the author, the text's historical background, the circumstances surrounding its evolution, elements in its setting and the history of its interpretation (Nida 2001: 125). All these theories are quite enlightening, especially on the choices available to the translator as s/he endeavors to transmit a literary experience in a new language (Shaheen 1992: 25-60). Also valuable are grammatical, cultural, interpretive and typographical models of translation (Nida 2001: 125). Eugene Nida's translation model aptly summarizes the translator's mission as being "to reduce the source text to its structurally simplest and most semantically evident kernels; to transfer the meaning from the source language to the receptor language on a structurally simple level; and to generate stylistic and semantically equivalent expressions in the receptor language" (Nida 1964: 68).

Translations of all kinds are generally problematic, because languages have unique syntactic structures, sounds and culture-based semantic loads that defy literal translation from one to another, but literary texts present even more unique challenges to the translator. They rely on words and figures of speech that are often intertwined with the culture of the original language, and are attended by thought patterns, emotions and contexts that are difficult to reconstruct in a new language. Even in the original language, writers make several deviations from the language used by ordinary users in order to create a literary text. These deviations–lexical, morphological, syntactic, phonological and semantic–are part of the writer's unique contribution to the growth of the language. Writers excite readers by crafting new words or skilfully deploying existing ones. They entertain them using word play and sound assembly, and, in order to do this, they defy established syntactic boundaries and generate new meanings from words and situations. But the original orality of language resists attempts to reduce it to the written form. Semantic and acoustic uncertainties will continuously compel the writer to make adjustments to the text, sometimes leaving him/her dissatisfied with the result. P'Bitek confessed that when he was preparing *WPL* for publication, he had to repeatedly re-work large parts of it.[2] He further recalls that when he completed the first draft of *WPL*, he took it to his mother and proudly announced his accomplishment. His mother, a celebrated traditional Acoli *composer and singer* [emphasis added], asked him to sing it; and in his own words, "… of course, I couldn't, and my balloon just collapsed" (Lindfors 1977: 283). He could not sing it

because he was standing astride two types of media: the written one and the oral "original" that resists graphic fixing. Given the above difficulties, one can very well appreciate the additional challenges that can arise when the work is moved into another linguistic tradition.

The translator is often compelled to make decisions that result in *distortions* of form and meaning, in effect "dismembering" the original text. Some of the stylistic attributes of the original text will cross into the new linguistic setting, but the new text will remain a dissimilar reconstruction of the original. The translator may use the idioms and expressions of the receptor language in order to communicate his/her understanding of the writer's meaning to the new readers. He/she may also have to make several innovations, and these might include the creation of new words. In some instances, this will be akin to rewriting the text, but it will be an important part of the process of *remembering* the text in the new linguistic and cultural medium. The translator's endeavor to maintain the spirit and critical landmarks of the original work might result into major differences between the two texts, which will be reflected in their stylistic features and subject matter depth. The word choice, image assembly, rhythm, as well as the social cultural content, may differ significantly as a result of the challenges of the new medium and the translator's capacity to navigate them. As already noted, lo Liyong asserts that p'Bitek wrote two separate books: "*Wer pa Lawino* (a very deep, philosophical book in Acoli, a book of morals, religion, anthropology, and wisdom), and a second light book *Song of Lawino* ... [in which] *w*hatever was striking, dramatic, and sarcastic was highlighted … [and] whatever was more philosophical and deeper was suppressed or left out" (lo Liyong 1993: 87). And elsewhere, lo Liyong describes *SOL* as "… a watered down, lighter, elaborated, extended version of *Wer pa Lawino*" (p'Bitek 2001: xi).

Weakened as it may seem, however, Garuba and Okot assert that *SOL*'s "innovative force … was to intervene in an English/Anglophone field of cultural production, introduce new positions that foreground orality and authenticity and new genres within it …" (Garuba and Okot 2017: 319), and, according to Peter Nazareth, it "was the first poem in East Africa to 'break free of the stranglehold of British writing'" (Nazareth 1984: 10). Garuba and Okot also point out that *SOL* did not depend for its value on *WPL*, in the way that Kiyimba's translation (*OGL)* might depend on *SOL* for its name. *SOL* was already an established classic by the time *WPL* was published (also see Gikandi 2011: 261). It is the innovations that the author makes in the process of translation that propel it to center stage of the African literary canon. Even though *SOL* emerges from a translation process, its stature as a work of art is not diminished by this fact. Given the linguistic dexterity of *WPL*, and the reception that it received in the Acoli society (as described by Garuba and Okot 2017), one can

understand p'Bitek's frustration at his failure to translate all its attributes into English. But the truth is that the English translation *(SOL)* succeeded in establishing its own currency as a literary text, in defiance of cultural and linguistic odds. What lo Liyong refers to as "Okot the jester" highlighting "whatever was striking, dramatic, and sarcastic …" simply underlines p'Bitek's methods of *re-membering SOL* in English*,* and thus giving it its independent existence as a literary text.

Translation and Issues in Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*

Eugene Nida's translation model empowers the translator to take decisions that can decisively affect the shape of the new work. Translating a work of art is an act of interpretation and creativity that can re-shape the form and affect the meaning of the text in major ways. In the particular case of *OGL*, the translator makes decisive interventions in the areas of diction, imagery and text layout. At the end of the process, the following questions arise: Does the Luganda work present the same Lawino as we encounter in *SOL*? And if yes, how do the differences between the two Lawinos affect meaning and communication?

Non-Acoli readers of *SOL* are constantly aware that there are many cultural landmarks that are inaccessible to them because of the language barrier. However, the depth of cultural understanding that comes through the English medium gives the work a clear message and literary direction that will survive translation-related challenges. We argue however that the linguistic choices and decisions made by the translators, as well as the changes dictated by the new cultural contexts and linguistic disparities, can lead to subtle expansions of the spaces available for creativity and interpretation. The discussion identifies several linguistic/structural and cultural challenges which make it impossible to produce "exact" translations, but which sometimes impact positively on the communication of the texts.

The first issue that arises for discussion is that of diction, as reflected in the title of the Luganda work – "*Omulanga gwa Lawino."* The literal term that translates the word "song" in Luganda is "Oluyimba," but the translator chooses "Omulanga." The word "Omulanga" has two socio-linguistic meanings in Luganda: one is "Wailing" and the other is "Appeal." P'Bitek's work answers to both meanings of the title, and in choosing the term "Omulanga," the translator takes advantage of this semantic ambiguity. But the choice of the term "Omulanga" also points the interpretation of the work to an interesting new direction. It is an indicator from the outset that the translator's approach aims at maximizing meaning over lexical "accuracy." This is consistent

with other decisions made throughout the text on matters of imagery, syntax and structural organization.

The title aside, the words used in *OGL* are generally of three types. The first are regular Luganda language words. The challenge for these words is that the meaning that the translator attempts to make them relay has come all the way from the Acoli language via English. The second type of words are Acoli words. All the Acoli words that p'Bitek used in *SOL* are retained in *OGL*. The presence of these words in the Luganda translation gives the readers a flavor of the Acoli original, and the hope is that they will communicate to the Luganda reader in the same way they have communicated to the English-speaking literary fraternity for the past fifty years in *SOL*. The third group of words are Luganda words/expressions coined/created by the translator, using the available lexical and semantic resources as a starting point. It is in these words that the translator leaves his mark on the lexical culture and meaning of the text. The new inventions include words like "Nakabango" (the Christian God), "suutabaana" (lullaby), "aniayisewano," (a type of perfume), "Mwami-alamula" (the head of the family's stool), "Mulanga-Njuba" (the early morning star), and "Nyweza-munno" (the get stuck dance).

The word "Nakabango" is probably the most semantically and stylistically significant of the new creations. It is derived from "Bango" or "Owebbango" (hunchback in Luganda), which is fairly innocent of any spiritual associations. But in Acoli cosmology, *Ruhanga* (the hunchback) is a malevolent deity (Jok), one that is responsible for deformities resulting from spinal meningitis. Its use to refer to the Christian God was the result of a linguistic and conceptual misunderstanding in the maiden encounter between the missionaries and Acoli elders (Van Rinsum 2004: 23-38). P'Bitek consistently and sarcastically uses the term "hunchback" in *SOL* to refer to the Christian God. At one level, this can be dismissed as p'Bitek's characteristic cheekiness, but it is difficult to shake off the negative connotations it creates. By generating a semantically close Luganda term (Nakabango), the translator attempts to cash in on the wider thematic debate of the text. Even in the Luganda language where the hunchback does not have an accompanying theological baggage, the reference to the Christian God as a *hunchback* still carries a cheeky negativity with it, and this enables *OGL* to conform, to some extent, to p'Bitek's satirical intent in *SOL*.

In chapter seven, the word "testicle" is used in both p'Bitek's and lo Liyong's translations to describe the pendulum of Ocol's clock. The Acoli text (*WPL*) also uses the direct linguistic equivalent of "*testicle."* Use of the literal equivalent of "testicle" in the Luganda translation would provoke an uproar from the Luganda reading public. The choice of the term "Serumbeete" is an attempt

to conform to the subtlety and circumspection with which native Luganda speakers express themselves on matters related to sex. Socio-cultural considerations have forced the Luganda-speaking Lawino in *OGL* to express herself differently from the Lawinos that we meet in *SOL*, *DOL* and *WPL*.

The situations described in *SOL* sometimes invite the use of Luganda culture-based images. For example, in chapter five, Lawino complains that when she is fully adorned for the Acoli dance, her husband says she looks "extremely ugly." The Baganda have an image for describing unbearable ugliness, which is *"Omubi akutuza endiga ku ttale,"* – meaning that someone's ugliness is so unbearable that when sheep see him/her, they struggle to break free of their tether. Images like these are not used because they would further diminish Lawino's Acoliness, since their conception is Ganda culture-based. The translator therefore renders p'Bitek's lines as plainly as:

> Ocol takoma kwebyo
> Agamba mbu bwe nnewunda obulungi
> Nga neetegekera amazina Amacoli
> Mulabikira bubi nnyo
> Mbu era mba ntiisa n'abannetoolodde. (*OGL* p. 52)

This is equivalent to:

> Ocol does not stop at that
> He says that when I adorn myself
> In preparation for the Acoli dance,
> I look very ugly to him
> And that I frighten those around me.

This is done in agreement with Nida's principle of "generating stylistic and semantically equivalent expressions in the receptor language" (Nida 1964: 68).

Some images in *SOL*, such as that of Tina's head smelling like "rats that have fallen into the fireplace" (chapter 5) are beautiful, but they do not seem to have any cultural equivalents in either Acoli or Luganda. Translating them into Luganda demands the use of many words, thus expanding the volume of the Luganda text, an act that Bassnett-McGuire (1980: 79) refers to as "unpacking" the language of the original text. Other images present conceptual difficulties, and compel the translator to improvise and to use many words to render into Luganda the meaning that he understood to be intended by the author. This is in agreement with Nida's view that the longer translations are usually the better ones (Nida 1964: 163). Examples of such difficult images include that of the "pregnant coffin" (*SOL* p. 33; *OGL* p. 54).

Translation is also an act of interpretation, and the translator takes responsibility for his/her interpretation. *SOL* tells a powerful story that

compels translators to make innovations that will enable its meaning to flow in the target language. In chapter five for example, Lawino declares that she is proud of her skin which is smooth and black, and that her "'boyfriend' who plays the *nanga* sings praises to it" (*SOL* p. 56). The Luganda translation plays down the suggestion that Lawino had 'a boyfriend' in the sense of an adulterous sexual relationship. This interpretation is consistent with the spirit of the rest of the text. Lawino complains about the pain that she has to endure because Ocol has deserted her bed, but p'Bitek does not suggest anywhere that she engages in sex outside marriage. Indeed, in chapter 11, Lawino asserts that she "is not a loose woman"; and because Ocol knows this, he is not worried that she could betray him with his brother. This interpretation also protects Lawino's image; she is a flag-bearer for African culture, and it is important that she is not presented as an adulteress. And because the translation is also an act of cross-cultural exchange, Luganda readers should not be given the impression that adultery was acceptable among the Acoli. Even though Lawino and her husband are estranged, she is still a married woman trying to chastise an errant 'Europeanised' husband – a challenge for which she would lose moral authority if she came to be seen as an adulteress. The Luganda translator therefore deliberately avoids presenting "boyfriend" as connoting a sexual relationship. The text says:

> Ye omuvubuka akuba *ennanga*,
> Engeri gy'alutenderezaamu
> Alabika nga anneegwanyiza. (*OGL* p. 56)

As a re-translation, it would read like:

> *The young man who plays Nanga*
> *Praises my skin in a manner that*
> *Suggests he wants to say something*

It simply suggests that Lawino has an admirer, which is fairly 'harmless.'

The syntax of p'Bitek's *SOL* is another prominent area where the translator makes innovations in response to the linguistic disparity between English and Luganda. The syntactic constructions of the text are recognizably those of standard English, but the spirit of Lawino's communication gives her language the aura of an African language, as in the example below:

> Where did the Hunchback
> Find the hands
> The hands for molding himself
> Where did he find them? (*SOL* p. 67)

P'Bitek uses English to reflect Lawino's native thinking without making drastic syntactic deviations. The challenge for the Luganda

translator is to render Lawino's Acoli thought patterns into Luganda, by-passing the default English language structures in the text that he uses as his "original." The translator has to work backward to transform Lawino's near-standard English speech into a structurally African expression. The punctuation and text layout have to drastically differ from those of the English text. It should also be kept in mind that behind the linguistic innovations made by both p'Bitek and the translators is a serious debate on divinity and the cosmos, with which the "Luganda-speaking" Lawino in *OGL* seems to be more comfortable than her "English-speaking" counterparts in both *SOL and DOL*.[3] The translator's problem is thus not just the translation of individual words or a single idea into a new language, s/he also has to transmit Lawino's sense of incredulity at the propositions being made by the new religion. The construction of the extract below is as much about translating the written words as it is about transmitting the shock that Lawino experiences in her new identity as a Luganda-speaking/ Acoli hybrid in *OGL*:

> Ye abaffe,
> *Nakabango* ono
> Yakozesa ki okwetonda
> Nga tannafuna mikono?
> Lyo ebbumba yalisimisa ki? (*OGL* p. 135)

In his attempts to re-create Lawino's outrage, the translator creates a text that would sound as the below re-translation into English:

> *Tell me Friends*
> *This hunchback*
> *What did he use to create himself*
> *Before he got hands?*
> *And the clay,*
> *What did he use to dig it up?*

The bulk of the text layout in *OGL* remains close to that of *SOL*, but there are cases in which lines, and even whole sections, are re-created and re-organized to allow meaning to flow. The challenge was to ensure that Lawino is understood by the Luganda-speaking audience; otherwise, the translation would be an exercise in futility.

The other stylistic innovations that the Luganda translator makes include re-composing and multiplying the lines of the translations of the traditional Acoli songs, to increase their power to transmit rhythm and meaning. The most significant creative interpretation in this respect is the multiple reproduction of the refrain "the pumpkin in the old homestead." This is a principal gain that has the effect of offsetting losses that have been made elsewhere. It is central to the meaning of the poem, and its multiple reproduction also enhances its capacity to stylistically and thematically hold the poem together.

Significantly, *OGL* includes a fourteenth chapter, translated from lo Liyong's *DOL*. Chapter 14 is a good conclusion to the argument of the poem, and it gives the Lawino in *OGL* an extended opportunity to reiterate the main point of the work – *the pumpkin in the old homestead must not be uprooted.* The communication of the "Luganda-speaking" Lawino is thus different from that of her English-speaking counterparts in *SOL* and *DOL* to this extent.

Some of the stylistic challenges experienced by the Luganda translator are also apparent in other translations of *SOL*. Okere, Onyango and Furaha (2018) and Pembe (2010) have studied Sozigwa's *Wimbo wa Lawino* (*WWL* - Kiswahili), and have noted the translator's difficulties in relaying the poetic features of *SOL* across the linguistic barriers between English and Kiswahili. Unlike *OGL*, *WWL* attempts a word by word and a line by line translation; and this presents additional difficulties in the text's communication. Published in 1975 (twenty six years before *DOL), SOL* was the only text available to Sozigwa as a reference point in his engagement with Lawino. It is therefore not surprising that the entire structure of *WWL* flows in tandem with p'Bitek's English work, unlike Kiyimba's *OGL* which benefits from reference to *l*o Liyong's *DOL.* And when it comes to diction, Sozigwa makes literal translations of p'Bitek's words in *SOL*. As a result, he does not transmit the widely acclaimed sarcastic intent of p'Bitek's work. For example, p'Bitek writes:

> Maria the Clean Woman
> Mother of the Hunchback (*SOL* p. 66)

Sozigwa plainly translates this as:

> Maria Mtakatifu
> Mama wa Mungu (*WWL* p. 60)

Not only do we lose the sarcasm attached to the foregrounded term "Clean," the term "Hunchback" is also simply translated as "Mungu" (God). In the English text that Sozigwa uses as the original for his translation, p'Bitek's intent was to satirize Christianity as an invading cultural force. By translating "Hunchback" simply as "Mungu" or *God,* Sozigwa presents a Lawino that is at peace with Christian theology, which p'Bitek's Lawino was not.

By translating "Maria the Clean Woman" as "Maria mtakatifu," Sozigwa reverts to the ordinary prayer of the Catholic faithful, which was not what p'Bitek wanted Lawino to say. Lawino was still battling with the theological logic of "the Clean woman" as well as the idea that we were all "sinners," which p'Bitek deliberately and sarcastically presents as "us who spoil things" in the quotation below (instead of *us sinners* – an indicator that Lawino has not internalized the Christian theological notion of "sin." This is a major reversal of p'Bitek's satirical thrust against Christian theology, which is still

incomprehensible to Lawino. Likewise, translating "Mother of the Hunchback" as "Mama wa Mungu" (Mother of God) presents the text simply as an ordinary record of the "Hail Mary" prayer in Kiswahili.

And in the lines that follow, P'Bitek says:

> Pray for us
> Who spoil things
> Full of graciya (*SOL* p.66)

But Sozigwa writes:

> Tuombee
> Sisi wakosefu
> Uliyejaa neema (*WWL* p. 60)

It is particularly important to note that Sozigwa translates the line "Full of graciya" as "Uliyejaa neema," whereas p'Bitek deliberately uses the term "graciya" instead of "grace" with the intention of reflecting Lawino's skepticism towards the new faith. This skepticism is lost in the Kiswahili text when Sozigwa "straightens it out" by using "Neema," which is the direct Kiswahili equivalent of "Grace."

It is possible that the translator of *WWL* lacked the necessary literary sophistication to appreciate p'Bitek's sarcastic intentions, but these glaring differences in meaning demonstrate that the process of translation is fraught with difficulties that could result into actual communication mismatches, or even direct negations of the original author's meaning. The debate will continue on the extent to which translations should be actual representations of the original meaning, but in the portion of *WWL* cited above, we have a clear instance in which the message and spirit of *WWL* unwittingly differs from that of *SOL*.

'A New Lawino'? - Taban lo Liyong's *The Defence of Lawino*

The translations that use *SOL* alone as their *original* see the Acoli world entirely through p'Bitek's eyes. Inevitably, they have to deal with the linguistic and cultural disparities between two worldviews, but they have to work with an Acoli culture and a Lawino character that is presented to them by p'Bitek as a standard reference point. *DOL* presents an Acoli culture and a Lawino seen through another pair of eyes. Lo Liyong has repeatedly said that p'Bitek's text is *SOL*, and that anything that the rest of us may say, including his own *DOL*, will always be a footnote.[4] This notwithstanding, *DOL* is an invaluable text in the understanding of *SOL*. In particular, the stylistic choices made by the translator, especially the word choice, extend the cultural debate in novel ways.

In his approach to word choice, lo Liyong does not make any attempt to present Lawino in her Acoli character, and yet it is her Acoli identity that gained her admiration from readers all over the literary world. For example, the use of traditional English swear language like "*What on earth* is the meaning of Gulyelmo?" (p.60) by Lawino in *DOL* is inconsistent with the spirit of p'Bitek's work, as reflected in *SOL*. Lawino, from the very beginning, is projected as a traditional African woman defending African ways, and language use is key to fulfillment of this goal. Lo Liyong's Lawino is consistently different from p'Bitek's in the language that the translator gives her. Examples of language that give Lawino an un-African character include the following: "Cooking with European stoves *messes me up"* (p. 34), "*Atop the pressure-stove* …" (p. 34), "It entails *waking up betimes*, brushing through the dewy grass" (p. 48) and "*Father and mum*" (p. 101).

Equally alien to p'Bitek's Lawino in *SOL* is lo Liyong's use of images and allusions that are clearly distant from her Acoli personality and predictable social experience. These include references to her breasts standing "*at ninety degrees*" (p. 17), Clementine being stuck on her husband "*like a magnet*" (p. 27), Catholic sisters shouting "*like industrial machines*" (p. 56), the reference to death who kills *Miss World* and the leper" (p. 66), and the image of Ocol rising early "before *John the Baptist wakes* (p. 84)." There is also the very unfortunate instance in which lo Liyong uses the word "witch" (p. 101) to refer to the traditional medicine-man, something that would make p'Bitek turn in his grave. This drastic departure from p'Bitek's Lawino is also conspicuous in chapter two where lo Liyong's Lawino says: "Forgive me, *dear reader* ..." (p. 5). The attempt by lo Liyong's Lawino to address the reader directly is both a stylistic flaw and a compositional anomaly, since the most enduring aspect of Lawino's identity is that she is a village woman who can neither read nor write.

Several other examples can be cited to demonstrate that there are serious ways in which lo Liyong's translation significantly deviates from the spirit of p'Bitek's work, at the level of word choice. The overall image presented by lo Liyong's word choice is one of a *foreign* Lawino, one that is not at peace with her Acoli roots. This Lawino will be unfamiliar to readers who have interacted with p'Bitek's Lawino for the past thirty-five years. Ironically however, lo Liyong states his objective as being to present "Lawino discoursing on African ways of life to fellow Africans without too much consciousness about the presence of the whites" (p'Bitek 2001: xvi). It is highly doubtful that his approach will achieve this objective, even though one may argue thatlLo Liyong' Lawino speaks to the Europeans and Western-educated Africans using *familiar language.*

Also significant is the difference between the ways the two texts deploy the deictics "you" and "they." P'Bitek's Lawino addresses her

politician husband directly as "you," while lo Liyong's Lawino talks about politicians in general as "they." P'Bitek's decision to make his Lawino address her husband as "you," as different from lo Liyong's nebulous "they," empowers her to focus more clearly on the mission of correcting her wayward husband.

The other feature of style that is of great significance is that lo Liyong's translation is linguistically tight, hits at the meaning directly, and marginalizes the imagery and poetic and stylistic features for which p'Bitek's *SOL* is famed as a work of art. In chapter 10 for example, p'Bitek has a detailed description of the calamities that afflict a home and compel elders to seek the help of the medicine man. It is flavored with traditional images and idioms. Lo Liyong, on the other hand, translates the section plainly, in two short stanzas. The idea being projected is the same, but the absence of the traditional poetic and stylistic flavors that make *SOL* a poetically powerful experience, and elevate it above a mere anthropological work,[5] tends to weaken the hold of lo Liyong's Lawino on the cultural constituency that she sets out to defend.

It is also worth noting that *SOL* has a more regular rhythm than *DOL*. Below are the excerpts that present Western dances in the two texts. In both, Lawino deems the dances immoral because people embrace in public and dance with anyone, including close relatives; the difference is in the presentation style. P'Bitek writes:

> You kiss her on the cheek
> As white people do,
> You kiss her open-sore lips
> As white people do
> You suck slimy saliva
> From each other's mouths
> As white people do. (*SOL* p. 44).

And lo Liyong's version runs as follows:

> The dancers would all smoke cigarettes, like Europeans
> Both women and men: smoke like Europeans
> They would all suck their cheeks, like Europeans
> They would all suck their tongues, like Europeans
> They would lick the saliva from their mouths, like Europeans
> Leaving men's mouths plastered with paints, of Europeans
> With which their women had smeared their lips (*DOL* p. 14).

The other significant difference between the two translations is a conceptual one. While p'Bitek's Lawino makes reference to "White people," lo Liyong's Lawino refers to "Europeans." For the village woman that Lawino is supposed to be, the color of the newcomers is the immediate observable reality. Lo Liyong's reference to the newcomers as "Europeans" is quite out of character since it alludes to the *continent* of origin (Europe), which knowledge is outside Lawino's known sociological scope.

Also worth noting is that, on the one hand, p'Bitek (in *SOL)* keeps his Lawino closer to her African roots through his use of Acoli words to name plants, customs, dances, musical instruments and other cultural artifacts. Lo Liyong, on the other hand, attempts to translate them to English, and by so doing tends to undermine Lawino's *Acoliness* and weaken the poem's Afrocentric character. For example, while lo Liyong's Lawino refers to Ocol's ineptness "at playing the gourd percussion, or responding in the chorus" (p. 20), p'Bitek's Lawino castigates Ocol for his inability to:

> Beat rhythm on the half-gourd
> Or shake the rattle-gourd
> To the rhythm of the *orak* dance (*SOL* p. 50).

The above observations notwithstanding, there are many instances in which lo Liyong's translation *(DOL)* makes significant structural and semantic interventions that reinforce p'Bitek's communication. For example, the image of Ocol behaving like a "Hyena trapped by hunters" and that of Lawino's brain being like that of "a sparrow," (p.3, chapter one) as translated by lo Liyong, are clearer than those in *SOL*. Likewise, lo Liyong's description of Tina's eyes as "pale and wan," which is not included in p'Bitek's translation, is quite valuable. The images of newly "roasted" hair looking like "dog's vomit," of Clementine's head resembling "a garden of potatoes that has been raided by beasts," and of Clementine sticking on Lawino's husband "like lice that feed on parasitic dogs" (chapter five) are valuable additions to the long list of Lawino's diatribes against her co-wife in *SOL*. Likewise, in chapter three, lo Liyong's Lawino warns that those who are preparing for the Orak dance should *"not eat too much"* (p. 11). This is not included in *SOL*, but it is a powerful addition to the Lawino cultural repertoire.

In chapter four, lo Liyong's Lawino (in *DOL*) refers to Ocol's failure to hear the mockery of the Europeans he is imitating, because he has become their loud-speaker and a parrot (pp. 21-22). This is not included in *SOL*; and yet it is a major point in the communication of the Lawino texts. P'Bitek also omits the refrain of "the pumpkin in the old homestead," which is common to the endings of this chapter in both *WPL* and *DOL*. And in chapter five, the full name of the birth place of Lawino's mother (Koch Goma), the Acoli name of the tree under which the dance to the ringworm is performed (kegelia), as well as the name of the worm itself (omemelo) are found in *DOL* and not in *SOL*. So is the stanza in which Lawino tells us that women who have just delivered have their heads cleanly shaven. And in chapter six, the types and amounts of food prepared for the digging party are more elaborately described in *DOL*; the same applies to the reference to the electric stove being suitable for cooking "Baganda plantains" and the paraffin stove being suitable for bachelors' cooking needs (*DOL* p. 32).

Chapter six presents an interesting perceptual and stylistic difference between the two 'translations.' In their descriptions of the way the Acoli sit when they are eating, *SOL* is more poetic, while *DOL*'s meaning is clearer:

> The young men
> Sit cross-legged
> And a girl sits carefully
> On one leg (*SOL* p. 60)

Lo Liyong translates the same lines as:

> Girls sit with their ankles neatly bent beneath them
> Boys sit crossing legs, all quiet and respectful. (*DOL* p. 37)

Similarly, the translation of the meanings of Acoli seasons in chapter seven is clearer in *DOL* than in *SOL*. So are the lines about young men "playing hide and seek with ghosts" as they look for girls, "making yarns to entangle star-eyed girls" and "time" not being like a shade which, "when [it is] lost [,] death follows" or "buck (meat) forgotten by hunters." Also, the translation in *DOL* is clearer on the prohibition of sex during menstruation, on the Kwashiorkor child "eating like baby locusts," and on the lazy members of society who are always well enough to eat. In this chapter also, there is an interesting gender-related translation difference between *SOL* and *DOL*. When hunger oppresses people in the period of *Abalo-pa-nga* – just before the harvest, some people resort to plucking unripe millet to feed the children. In *SOL* these people are *women*, while in *DOL* they are *men*. The reference to these people in p'Bitek's Acoli work (*WPL*) is gender neutral, but it makes sense in the Acoli cultural context for the people anxiously looking for food to feed the children to be women. The existence of this difference is in itself interesting and suggestive of how differences in perception can manifest themselves in the work of translators.

In chapter eight, *DOL* sheds light on the meanings of Acoli names, which is of great benefit to non-Acoli speakers, and to the general communication of the text. This is particularly so for the death-related names that the Acoli give to children born after they have lost their first ones. Also, the meanings of the bull names that the leaders of girls are given are clearly included in *WPL* but are left out in *SOL*. *DOL* is therefore quite valuable in this respect.

Chapter nine is an interesting meeting point between the two translations. They are strikingly similar in their presentation of the content, and apart from the omission of part of the Catholic prayer in *SOL*, it is a valuable reminder that the two are translating the same work. In chapter ten however, while *SOL* has a lot of detail about Ocol's attempt to cut down the ancestral tree called *Okango*, it excludes his determination to burn down the family shrine. This is found in *DOL*. So is the section about the women who are anxiously

waiting for husbands to return from hunting expeditions. And in chapter eleven, it is in *DOL* that we find the stanza in which Lawino speaks of her husband checking on people's tables like a beggar, and also complains that "he sleeps away, leaving me all alone" (p.84).

The other significant details include the use of two different lullabies in *SOL* and *DOL*. But the lullaby that lo Liyong uses in *DOL* is part of p'Bitek's Acoli text *(WPL)*, which suggests that the one in *SOL* could have been introduced by p'Bitek in the process of translating *SOL* from the unpublished text of *WPL*, or the one in *WPL* was introduced in the process of revising it for publication in 1969. The same applies to the proverb about "the fool who visited his mother in-law indecently dressed," and the image of the "guinea fowl growing old with its baldhead" in chapter thirteen. Also, as noted earlier, *SOL* has 13 chapters, while WPL, *DOL* and OGL have 14.[6]

In the preface to *Omulanga gwa Lawino*, I observe that "translation is an age-old practice that enriches the target language" (Kiyimba p. xxiv), and also enhances the communication of the original text. From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that the debate in the Lawino texts is much the richer for the existence of the different translations. Indeed, the Lawinos in the different texts continuously reinforce each other's message through the subtle communication differences and the interesting questions they raise for further debate. The catalogue of interpretational divergences and stylistic choices exhibited by the different translators are, in the words of lo Liyong, "understandable and healthy for scholarship" (Foreword to *Omulanga gwa Lawino*, p. xix). This is the position that we maintain throughout this essay, which builds on the position in the preface to *OGL* by the translator – that translation inevitably creates a storm, but scholarship will be the beneficiary when the storm settles.

Conclusion

The relationship between *SOL* and *WPL* will continue to be the subject of debate, especially on the question of whether *WPL* is the "original" or *a version*. Because it was translated by the author, it is understandable for him to take liberties that expand its scope. But this discussion has demonstrated that, even for texts translated by others, the translation process dictates innovations that make the new texts communicate differently but productively. In the cases of *OGL* and *WWL*, there is the additional complication of translators using a "translation" as their "original," and therefore having to deal with multiple cultural displacements of Lawino. But even lo Liyong who uses the Acoli text as his "original" has to deal with the sensitive problem of linguistic and cultural disparity between Acoli and English.

What is generally true of all these translations is that they extend both the cultural and intellectual horizons of *SOL*. In the ensuing

debate, general questions arise about issues that might have been taken for granted. For example, p'Bitek's skepticism about the Christian message has become part of his trademark. What do readers make of the significant departure from this message in Sozigwa's *WWL?* And what about the many innovations I made in *OGL*? Do they still communicate p'Bitek's message? Lo Liyong's *DOL* is translated from p'Bitek's *WPL*; so is it an alternative text to *SOL*? In the final analysis, the many differences identified between the translations, including the linguistic variations and innovations in lo Liyong's *DOL* and my own *OGL*, are all valuable aspects of the communication of the Lawino texts, even though some may seem to contradict the author's position in *SOL*. Because p'Bitek is the author, the position he presents will always be the position of first call; but as the variety of ideas generated by the various translations shows, it will by no means be the only one.

Notes

1. Runyoro-Rutooro is a Western Ugandan language, while Sheng is a Nairobi Kiswahili-based English/African language creole. JKS Makokha is working on the Sheng translation to be entitled *Mahewa ya Lawino*, while Shirley Byakutaaga is working on the Runyoro Rutooro translation to be entitled *Ekizina kya Lawino*.

2. P'Bitek told a literature class in Makerere in March 1982 that whereas he completed the first Acoli draft of *Wer pa Lawino* in 1954, he had to go back to "the real professors of Acoli" to strengthen the Acoli text before it was published in 1969. By this time, the unpublished version of *WPL* was already in use among the speakers of the Acoli language. This is why *WPL* continues to be referred to as the original, even though it was published three years after the publication of *SOL.*

3. See the present writer's 1986 MLitt dissertation entitled *From an Oral Culture to a Linguistic Matrimony* (University of Strathclyde, Glasgow) for a discussion of the linguistic and cultural kinship between the Acoli language and other African languages.

4. Public Lecture at Makerere University in June 2012.

5. Taban lo Liyong told his audience during a lecture at Makerere in May 2009 that he wanted to have "more meaning and less poetry" in his translation.

6. Lo Liyong told his audience during a public lecture at Makerere University in June 2012 that p'Bitek omitted a whole chapter from *SOL*, because he was "tired."

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