

Translation, Femality and Child Mortality in African Literature and their German Versions

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Abstract

In the traditional African society, there exist various beliefs about the health conditions of young and old, male and female and the Ogbanje/abiku myth is one of them. Ogbanje/abiku phenomenon bespeaks the mysterious health challenge surrounding child mortality in the African context. Today medical explanations have been offered for it (Uche and Uche 2015) and this traditional belief is also present in African literary texts (McCabe 2002). However, there has been no study focusing on the representation of the female as a stereotype of ailing *ogbanje/abiku* in Anglophone African texts and their German translations. This study therefore examines how translation contributes to the representation of the female as the typical gender of *ogbanje/abiku* in five African Postcolonial literary works. The analysis is based on the theory of translation as an intercultural writing and works on gender sensitivity in the English and German languages. This is with the aim of showing that gender sensitivity in English and German languages plays a significant role in portraying and projecting the female as the stereotype of an *ogbanje/abiku*. The study concludes that gender sensitivity in a language plays a role in the discrimination against females in stereotyping them as typical of having such a health challenge in African Europhone literature.

Keywords: *Ogbanje/abiku, female, language gender sensitivity, translation*

Introduction

The need and practice of translation has existed since the ages when the culture of writing began and has been on the increase due to the global spread in literacy. The need for translation can as well be ascribed to the rise in migration in the multilingual world. In sub-Saharan Africa, translation serves as a means of intercultural communication within and outside the continent. As such, the translation of Europhone African literature serves this purpose to a large extent. Truly, translation played a major role in the colonization of African countries. In fact, Bassnett and Trivedi (1999:6) for example see the colony as a metaphor of translation, "*a copy of an original located elsewhere*". The principal share which translation holds in the writing of African literary texts, particularly postcolonial African literature can therefore not be overlooked. Many critics of African literature consider African literary text as a form of translation. Bandia (2008) theoretizes African postcolonial literature as a form of intercultural writing with a predominant linguistic and socio-cultural influence. He draws upon the postulation of Tymoczko (1999:24) that the post-colonial writer is disposed with a "metatext" which he implicitly or explicitly foregrounds in his writing. The "metatext" is a signification of the socio-cultural elements of the African oral literature which is subjected to an "alien" contextual propensity when written in the European language. A literary work either oral or written embodies cultural significations and the consideration of such socio-cultural elements in a work of literature is described as "metatext" in translation within the postcolonial context (Tymoczko 1999; Bandia 2008). This kind of phenomenon characteristic of literary writings in Africa is what we term "Intra-literary translation" in this paper. Consequently, an akin term which is also important for this study is what we call "Inter-literary translation". "Inter-literary translation" describes the transfer of an African text written in an European language into another European language. Intra-literary translation and Inter-literary translation are

therefore critical in the evaluation of the transposition of the "metatext" in translating African literary texts. These terms capture the peculiarities of the writing and translation of African postcolonial literature.

In this paper, the "metatext" depicting the myth about child mortality - *ogbanje/abiku* in some cultures in Africa, particularly among the Igbo and Yoruba in Nigeria will be examined. This will be done in order to evaluate how females are used to depict a stereotype of such an ailing condition both in the source and target texts. The aim of this paper is to see how African myth relating to health is represented with a particular gender and what implications this has for intercultural communication between Africa and Europe. The importance of language gender sensitivity in communication is relevant for this study and this will therefore be considered in the following section.

Gender Sensitivity in Language

Research works on gender as it affects various spheres of human life aroused interest in different academic fields and its relevance in language and literature cannot be overlooked. However little has been done on the role of the gender sensitivity of a language in a literary work and how it affects its translation. Therefore, this paper will shed light on this area by examining African Anglophone literary texts and their German versions. As earlier mentioned, the African author using the European language medium engages in intraliterary translation when writing. As such, both the mother tongue and the language of writing play a vital role in this culture representation. Besides, there exists a school of thought which states that the African postcolonial writer actually translates from his mother tongue when writing using the European medium. Going by this, one might actually be fooled that this is what happens all the time when any African writer writes. In contrast, this study will rather adopt the position of Bandin (2016:36), that African authors belong to two language groups at the same time and therefore live "in-between". In their literary works therefore, there is a combination of two languages and two cultures, that is, the African and European languages and cultures. Given this fact, it is important to note that the mother tongues of the African writers whose works are examined in this study are gender neutral while the European language they use in writing is gender sensitive. Also, German, which is the target language, is another European language with higher gender sensitivity than the English, the source language.

For Igbo, one of the African languages considered in this study, Emenanjo (1978) shows that in its linguistic structure, gender is not a grammatical category but maleness or femaleness can be expressed semantically by placing the word *nwoke* (male) or *nwanyi* (female) after an animate object in order to indicate the sex. These findings by Emenanjo are also true of the Yoruba language. For Yoruba, Oyewumi (1997) also elaborates further that the gender neutrality practised in the Yoruba culture is as a result of the gender neutrality of the Yoruba language. She contrasts her findings with the Western society where language is gender sensitive and this in turn makes room for unequal power relations between sexes in this society. Despite Bakare-Yusuf's (2003) criticism, she still reiterates Oyewumi's caution against "blind" importation of concepts (in this context, gender) from the socio-historical experience (language gender-bias) of one society (West) into another (Yoruba).

English and German languages however, are marked with gender in their nominals, pronominals and other linguistic features. Guimei (2010) examines the nature of sexism in the English language by analyzing the gender sensitivity of the language in its grammatical, morphological and syntactic features. Besides, he drew upon other theories of language

and sexism and concluded that sexism in the English language is closely related to the phenomenon of gender discrimination.

German as a language is marked with the masculine, feminine and neutral genders. Gender markedness occurs in its grammar, nominals, pronominals, morphology and others. In this language, gender markedness must always be indicated in all its grammatical structures. Unlike English where the word "teacher" could refer to either a male or a female, in German, the word "Lehrer" can only refer to a male teacher and the word "Lehrerin" can only refer to a female teacher. Stahlenberg and Sczensny (2001) show that a German text, if written in the generic masculine, a reader automatically assume that males are the logical referents. This also applies to the use of the feminine forms, which makes the females the logical referents. However, the use of a neutral form or the feminine and masculine forms together results into the logical consideration of both sexes as the referents. Therefore, they proposed that when both sexes are meant as referents, the linguistic formulations in German should either be the neutral gender or the feminine and masculine formulations. From the foregoing, it can be inferred that the effects of gender sensitivity of German and English languages is a basis for establishing gender bias in the European society. This therefore has consequences for the representation of *ogbanjes/abikus* as males or females in the intra-literary and inter-literary translations of African literature. However, there lies the assumption that such gender bias would not be carried out in the literary texts had the African author written in his/her mother-tongue. Given the facts above, the *ogbanje/abiku* as a concept of child mortality in the African society and literature will be considered next in this study.

Child Mortality: *Ogbanje/Abiku*

The *ogbanje/abiku* is a mythology existent among the Igbo and Yoruba who live in the southern parts of Nigeria's geographical area. This condition characterised by a consecutive sequence of births and deaths of infants is known in the traditional beliefs of these ethnic groups as the *ogbanje* and *abiku* myth. These nomenclatures are also used to refer to (young) individuals who are believed to survive after repeating a cycle of births and deaths. Infant mortality is a realm of experience that transcends the confines of specific ethnic groups in Nigeria (Maduka 2015: 19). Such group of children, perceived to desire an early untimely death, ostracized and/or treated specially (Okonjo Ogunyemi 1996: 63) are stigmatized with names suggestive of and implying an innate abnormality in traditional life (Ilechukwu 2007: 253) of various ethnic groups in Nigeria. Such names are *Ogbanje* (Igbo), *Abiku* (Yoruba), *Eka-Abasi* (Efik), *Danwabi* (Hausa), *Igbakhun* (Edo), *Mfumfum* (Efik), *Menji* (Kalabari). The Yoruba word *abiku* can be literally translated as "born-to-die"¹ while its Igbo equivalent *ogbanje* is literally translated as "children who come and go"². The Igbo *ogbanje* and the Yoruba *abiku* are identical myths, however with slightly different manifestations determined by the cultural imperative (Okonjo Ogunyemi (1996: 62)). In both cultures, Yoruba and Igbo, it is believed that such children deliberately die and return to be born by the same mother again in order to plague her with grief. Comparing this phenomenon with the Western society, Okonjo Ogunyemi (1996: 62) states that "In the West too, there are inexplicable deaths referred to as SIDS – Sudden Infant Death Syndrome or Nameless Viral Infections. To cope with these mysterious deaths, Nigerians take solace in the *ogbanje/abiku* myth". Furthermore, she opines that the *ogbanje/abiku*

¹ This translation is used in the introduction to Soyinka's poem "Abiku" in: *Idanre and Other Poems* (1967)

² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ogbanje>

phenomenon stems from a metaphysical dimension and can be understood in that context (ibid. p. 62). However, Fatokun & Hofmyer (2016) postulate that

the phenomenon can be dismissed as a natural case for reincarnation on medical grounds. ... What was called abiku in the traditional African society in most cases could be said to be nothing but some medical symptoms arising from genotype and other related conditions (p. 10)

In some cases, changeling is used as an equivalent of *ogbanje/abiku* in Western world because this concept is also a mythological way of conceiving what were once unknown diseases that often claimed the lives of children. However, this Western equivalent is not considered acceptable in this study due to the fact that changeling is imaginary and occurs only in stories. *Ogbanje/abiku* children are however real and medical research also attests to this fact. Nonetheless, according to Uche & Uche (2016: 65), "*Ogbanje* remains a reference point in discussing the social and medical challenges of children whose ailments could not be scientifically diagnosed". Research has also shown that sickle cell anemia is the major cause of the so-called *ogbanje/abiku* phenomenon of the traditional Nigerian society. Nzewi (2001) shows that 70% of children categorized as "malevolent *ogbanje*" had sickle cell disease.

***Ogbanje/Abiku* in Postcolonial African Literature**

The *ogbanje/abiku* myth has a relatively high relevance in African literary texts because African authors, using the European medium, exploit traditional folk imaginations and beliefs in their works. Since this myth is celebrated in oral literature, authors try to perpetuate the tradition in written literature. The *ogbanje/abiku* myth has therefore been expressed in various literary and dramatic works, which recapture the essence of African cultural life. This establishes the view that Africa is not culturally barren (Achebe 1986:68). The corpus of written Nigerian literature contains at least thirty works in which *ogbanje/abiku* play some sort of pivotal role (McCabe 2002). Many of them are written in English and among them are canonical texts like *My Life In The Bush Of The Ghost* by Tutuola, *Things Fall Apart* by Achebe, *Ake. Years of Childhood* by Soyinka, *The Slave Girl* by Emecheta and *The Famished Road* by Okri. Other African works having this phenomenon are *Mezie* by Nkala (a novel), *The Ogbanje Boy* by Euba (a drama), *Abiku* (a poem) by Soyinka and *Abiku* (a poem) by Clark. According to Okonjo Ogunyemi (1996) African authors who write on *ogbanje/abiku* not only search for a culture but also successfully inscribe a tradition with their works.

Ogbanje/abiku children who do not die at infancy manifest abnormalities of psychological life and incessant physical health challenges. This happens because as believed, such children still have contact with the invisible world. To wade off such contacts, such children are tied with bells, rings, bangles, rattles and amulets or their *iyi-uwa* is destroyed. In some African societies however, female circumcision is thought of as a means of getting rid of such. Thus, biases against females as representative of children with such "evil spirit" already exist in the traditional African society. This bias could be associated with the fact that authors who illustrate the *ogbanje/abiku* phenomenon in their novels make use of a female character. Besides, this phenomenon is recognised as a medical condition also in the traditional African society since medication is sought after by consulting herbalists, healers, medicine men, and dibias.

The novels examined in this work are five. They are *Things Fall Apart* by Achebe, *Ake. Years of Childhood* by Soyinka, *The Slave Girl* by Emecheta, *My Life in the Bush of the Ghost* by Tutuola and *The Famished Road* by Okri. Considering the role played by

ogbanjes/abiku in African novel, Aji & Ellsworth (1993: 170) note that "Ezinma the *ogbanje* belongs at once to Achebe's inscious tapestry and to the literary context of his novel". Soyinka as well particularly presents the reader with the nature of Bukola the *abiku* giving it much detail as the first child character already in the first chapter of the novel. These examples suffice.

In these novels, *ogbanjes/abikus* have a feeling of self-importance. For example, Soyinka writes, "Like all *abiku* she was privileged apart" (Ake 1981: 16). Achebe too notes "Ezinma's feeling of importance was manifest in her sprightly walk" (TFA 1984: 57). Emecheta also stated that "Girl children were not normally particularly prized creatures but Okwuekwu had lost so many that they now assumed a quality of preciousness" (TSG 1977: 19). *Ogbanje Ojebeta*, the *ogbanje The Slave Girl*, is the only female child of her parents who survived. Being the only female child surviving substantiates the fact that in many cases, such children are even the only ones surviving of all the children born by their mothers. Ezinma and Bukola are Ekwefi's and Mummy B's only children too. Therefore, they enjoy special relationship with their parents and relish what other children do not enjoy. Ezinma calls her mother by name and eats eggs, which other children are forbidden to eat, Bukola gets *saara* regularly and is gorgeously dressed amongst other children and Ojebeta is also so much loved that she was still sucking even at a time she could already talk. The *Ogbanje/abiku* seen as the only child of her mother serve as a prove that it is actually the same child that is born and born over again by the same mother and which at last decides to stay. Their parents especially their mothers worry and spend a lot on them in order to keep them alive.

Also, *ogbanje* children are illustrated as being sickly and manifesting hopelessness to their parents, guardians and relations (Uche & Uche 2016). In African literary texts, such children are usually females. In contrast, male children are described as "strong and healthy". This is exemplified in *Things Fall Apart* as Achebe describes the experience of Ekwefi in giving birth to *ogbanje* children:

By the time Onwumbiko died Ekwefi had become a very bitter woman. Her husband's first wife had already had three sons, all strong and healthy....Okonkwo had slaughtered a goat for her which was the custom. (TFA 1984: 55/56)

In *The Slave Girl* Emecheta in giving details about the female children which Okwuekwu's wife Umeadi has been giving birth to states:

He would have liked a baby girl; but what was the use, when all the girls his wife bore him always died after a few hours.....He remembered though that their first child had been a girl who died within hours. Then they had a boy, who lived and grew strong....They had had a set of girl twins next and both died....However as they grew older, a thought began to nag at him that perhaps he had better settle for just two sons.... (TSG 1977: 14)

In the two examples above, the males are described as healthy. To corroborate this, Tutuola's "Buglar ghost", a "male" spirit *abiku* only "pretends" to be sick, in reality, he is not. In *My Life In The Bush Of The Ghost*, Tutuola writes:

He would develop rapidly and would be very attractive to everyone, as a good and superior baby. Having developed to that attractive state he would start to pretend to be sick continuously.... (MLBG 1954: 54)

Although Tutuola's "Buglar ghost" does not describe the ideal *abiku* of the Yoruba society, the fact that males are considered to be strong and females feeble has been shown from the three examples above. Furthermore, females believed to be stereotypes of this ailing condition are not only in the traditional society or illustrated in literary texts but has also been proved medically. Ilechukwu (2007: 244) notes: "Ogbanje patients are predominantly female (female:male ratio 5:1) and young"(ibid: 244). Even in considering another group of *ogbanje* patients with a lesser number, his remarks show that female predominance is not only a reality but also expected. He remarks that, "The population of *ogbanje* appears small.....even this small sample shows the female predominance expected"(ibid: 244).

In contrast to the physical *abikus*, their nature and gender stereotype, the *abikus* in Okri's *The Famished Road* and Tutuola's *My Life In The Bush Of The Ghost* are males, spirit and they live in the world of fantasies and hallucinations. Although Tutuola and Okri use male spirit children to characterize the *abiku* phenomenon, females are also indirectly included in the reference. For instance, Okri recounts the story in *The Famished Road* using the first person narrative 'I' and uses the *abiku* as a metaphor for life's situation. He concludes, "Our country is an *abiku* country. Like a spirit-child, it keeps coming and going" (TFR 1991:). This makes the female inclusive. In *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts*, although in reality *abikus* are human beings and not ghosts, one can argue that the "Buglar ghosts", the "born and die babies" can either be males or females. Here, the reader believes the "Buglar ghost" is a male since the masculine pronouns "he/him" is used for him in the novel. Also, in contrast to traditional belief, Azaro the *abiku* willfully chooses to live by intentionally burying articles that link him to the spirit world himself. However, real *abikus* are not willing to break their tie with the spirit world. Therefore, Tutuola and Okri's "male" *abikus* do not depict the actual conception of these children in the traditional African society. On the other hand, Achebe, Soyinka and Emecheta do not only represent the *ogbanjes/abiku* in their novels with females, the concept of this myth as illustrated in their novels encapsulates the traditional belief about their health. Consequently, the role of language in the intraliterary translation of this *ogbanje/abiku* phenomenon in the works of Achebe, Soyinka and Emecheta will be examined next.

Ogbanje And Abiku in Intra literary Translation

As mentioned earlier, postcolonial authors engage in intra literary translation that involves his mother tongue and the European language. Since the African culture and the European culture are wide apart, certain nomenclature in Africa lacks equivalents in the European language and vice versa. However, some of those nomenclatures are best left as African words in the European language writing. Not translating these words gives insight into how the African language better presents the inclinations behind the nomenclature.

The non-translation of the words *ogbanje* and *abiku* by African writers makes a reader not to be biased or inclined towards stereotyping a particular sex as the referent of the nomenclature. For example, in English or German, names and nominals are marked with gender as can be obtained in words like priest/priestess, Lehrer/Lehrerin (teacher masc./teacher fem.). Igbo and Yoruba names and nominals are however not marked with gender. This is the case with the words *ogbanje* and *abiku* therefore; either a male or a female could be the referent. Thus, by not translating these nomenclatures, the reality that either of the sexes could manifest the health challenges associated with the myth is presented. However, the Yoruba authors, Tutuola and Soyinka translate this nomenclature into English. Tutuola unlike other writers, writes "born and die" and not *abiku* (MLBG 1954: 54/55). Soyinka also provides an English translation for *abiku* in the footnote as "A

child which is born, dies, is born again and dies in a repetitive cycle" (Ake 1981:16). Tutuola's translation is short and precise while Soyinka's is long and wordy. Soyinka's intra-literary translation is as well evident in the fact that he often uses the word "the child" when referring to Bukola, the *abiku*. This is evident in the fact that the Yoruba word *omo* refers to either "son" or "daughter". This feature also influenced the German translation. In other cases however, when a pronoun is to be used, Soyinka, like Emecheta and Achebe, uses the pronoun "she" or "her" since the female child is described. As mentioned earlier, pronouns in Yoruba and Igbo are not marked with gender, therefore the gender markedness of the English language in projecting the female, as an illustration of this nature of child mortality is evident in their intra-literary translation. Also unlike using *nwa* (child), Achebe and more importantly, Emecheta use "daughter", "girl" or "girl child". This makes the gender-bias of stereotyping the female as the ones with this kind of health challenge more distinctly portrayed in the original texts. Had the African postcolonial author followed the gender neutrality of his mother tongue while writing in English, s/he would have chosen "it" instead of "she" or "her" and "child" instead of "daughter", "girl" or "girl child".

Consequently, this could have lowered the projection of the gender bias towards females as the stigmatised personalities with such health challenge. In addition, Achebe in describing the belief about this phenomenon particularly uses the feminine pronoun as a referent of all *ogbanjes*. For example, he writes: "Everybody knew she was an *ogbanje*. These sudden bouts of sickness and health were typical of her kind" (TFA 1984: 56). Why did Achebe choose to write "typical of *her* kind" and not "typical of *their* kind" knowing fully well that *ogbanjes* could either be males or females? Moreover, Achebe recounting Ekwefi's experience in giving birth to *ogbanje* children, Onwumbiko, Ozoemena and two others, he was quick to point out that Ozoemena was a girl (TFA 1984: 54). This gives the impression that Ozoemena being a girl was more problematic having health issues while alive. As such she was more of an *ogbanje* kind than the other children. Therefore, intra-literary translation makes the females more clearly projected as the stereotypes of children with the incessant sickness characteristic of the *ogbanje* and *abiku* nature in African literature.

Ogbanje And Abiku in Inter-literal Translation

In *Alles Zerfällt*, the third German translation of *Things Fall Apart*, the word *ogbanje* was translated as *obanje* (AZ 2012: 96). It is considered that this is either a mistake by the translator or an attempt to make the word easier to pronounce for the target text reader since the word *Igbo* was pronounced as *Ibo* by the colonial masters and *Ibo* became widely accepted. Tutuola's translation of *abiku* as "born and die" (MLBG 1954: 55) reads "geboren und gestorben" in the German target text (MLBG 1991: 45). This German translation though when translated back into English as "born and died" captures the concept aptly. Soyinka's translation of *abiku* in the footnote as "A child which is born, dies, is born again and dies in a repetitive cycle" (Ake. 1981:16) reads as "Ein Kind, das in nicht endendem Kreislauf immer wieder geboren wird und stirbt" (Ake. 1986: 332) in the endnote of the German translation. This German translation, when translated back into English, reads "A child that is always born and dies again and again in an unending circle". Therefore, Soyinka's lengthy and wordy translation of the Yoruba word gives the impression that such children do not end up staying in the physical world. This notion is what is projected in the German target text.

As mentioned above, Emecheta, Soyinka and Achebe use the feminine gender in describing the *ogbanje* and *abiku* in their novels. Consequently, the feminine gender is also used in the German target texts instead of neutral gender. German being a more highly

sensitive language than English, makes use of the neutral gender as well. In German, the neutral gender is used for words like "the boy" (das Bub), "the girl" (das Mädchen), and "the child" (das Kind). Therefore, the neutral gender is also used to replace them in their pronominals. However, since the author already uses the feminine gender, the German translators follow suit. In the following passage from *Things Fall Apart*, the second and the third German translators use the pronouns "sie" (she) and "ihr" (her) instead of "es" (it) and „seines" (its).

At first Ekwefi accepted her as she accepted other children she determined to nurse her child to health.... She was rewarded by occasional spells of health during which Ezinma bubbled with energy....but all of a sudden she would go down again. Everybody knew she was an ogbanje. These sudden bouts of sickness and health were typical of her kind. But she had lived so long that perhaps she had decided to stay. (TFA 1984: 56)

Anfangs nahm Ekwefi das Kind gleichgültig und wie im voraus verzichtend hin...Sie versäumte nichts, um dieses Kind gesund aufzuziehen. Ihre Mühen wurden belohnt, denn das Kind gedieh und sprudelte manchmal über vor lauter Lebensfreude.....Dann aber sank es plötzlich zusammen. Jeder wußte, daß es ein Ogbanje war. Dieser jähe Wechsel von Krankheit und Gesundheit war typisch für seinesgleichen. Aber es lebte nun schon so lange, daß es schien, als wollte es bleiben. (ODAS – East German Translation 1959: 82/83)

Zu Beginn nahm Ekwefi ihre Tochter an wie alle anderen Kinder zuvor.....Sie setzte alles daran, ihr Kind gesundzuerhalten ...Ihre Mühen wurden belohnt, wenn Ezinma eine Zeitlang bei bester Gesundheit war...Doch dann, ganz plötzlich, fiel sie wieder in sich zusammen. Alle wußten, daß sie ein ogbanje-Kind war. Diese unvermittelten Schübe von Krankheit und Gesundheit waren ein sicheres Zeichen. Aber sie hatte schon so lange überlebt, daß sie sich vielleicht entschlossen hatte zu bleiben. (ODAS - West German Translation 1983: 91)

Anfangs nahm Ekwefi sie so an, wie sie auch die anderen angenommen hatte....Sie war fest entschlossen, das Kind gesundzupflegen, Sie wurde mit Zeiten bester Gesundheit belohnt, während deren Ezinma vor Lebenskraft schäumte...Doch plötzlich warf die wieder nieder. Alle Welt wußte, dass sie ein *ogbanje* war. Die Wechselfälle von Krankheit und Wohlbefinden waren typisch für diese Wesen. Doch hatte Ezinma überlebt, dass es schien, als habe sie sich zu bleiben entschieden. (AZ 2012: 96/97)

In the second and third translations, the equivalents of "she" "her" as "sie""ihr" and also "Tochter" (daughter) were used. In the first translation however, the neutral gender "es" (it) "seines" (its) and "das Kind" (the child) was rather used. In addition, the first translator also avoids using the name "Ezinma" a name meant exclusively for females in Igbo culture, even where the author uses it. Instead, he replaced it with "das Kind" (the child). As such, the interpretation of *ogbanjes* as being typical of female children is overshadowed. Moreover, given the fact that this is the first German translation, the clear projection of the female as the typical ogbanje referent in the second and third translations validate the point that females are actually the stereotypes of this cultural bias considering the retranslation theory. This theory states that retranslations are closer to the source culture than the first or previous translations (Venuti 2003). As such the last two German translations of *Things*

Fall Apart reinforce the fact that females are stereotypes of people with health instability in the African society.

Also, although Soyinka's intra-literary translation of the word "girl" or "daughter" as "child" (*omo*) when referring to the *abiku* influences the German translation as the following example shows, where the translator uses the neutral gender for *abiku* in "she knew she was *abiku*" (*Ake*. 1981: 16) as "sie wußte, daß sie ein *abiku* war" (*Ake*. 1986: 28). This however occurred only once. The feminine gender was used for the word in other instances where it occurred in the novel. For example:

The *abiku* did not immediately regain consciousness...(*Ake*. 1981: 17)

Die *abiku* erlangte das Bewußtsein nicht sofort zurück (*Ake*. 1986: 30)

...feeling too deeply thankful that Mrs. B would not have to cope with a one-armed husband in addition to that willful *abiku* (*Ake*. 1981: 21)

...daß Mrs. B nun doch nicht mit einem einarmigen Ehemann geschlagen war – zusätzlich zu dieser eigenwilligen *abiku* (*Ake*. 1986: 36)

In addition, to project the *abiku* and her gender, being a female, the German translation reads "sie" (she) instead of "we" in the following example in *Ake*.

As we walked, the bells on her anklets jingled... (*Ake*. 1981: 16)

Wenn sie lief, klingelten die Glöckchen an ihren Knöcheln (*Ake*. 1986: 29)

Emecheta in her novel *The Slave Girl* clearly illustrated the *ogbanje* as a female in the storyline not only by using words like "girl child", "baby girl", "daughter", "her", "she" alone but more particularly by the name given to the *ogbanje* protagonist "ogbanje ojobeta". In this novel, female children are characterised as typical *ogbanjes* at birth by interchanging words like "Your daughter" or "girl" with "Your *ogbanje*" or "*ogbanje*". In similar manner, the German translation reads "dein *Ogbanje*", "Tochter", "Mädchen", "sie", "ihr". It is however worthy of note, that though the German translation reads "dein *Ogbanje*", providing the neutral gender for the word, the feminine referent is actually evident in the fact that the word "visitor" is translated as "Besucherin" and not "Besucher" as the example below shows.

Your *ogbanje* visitor (TSG 1977: 17)

Dein *Ogbanje*, diese kleine Besucherin (Sklavemädchen 1997:20)

"...this regular visitor...*Ogbanje* Ojobeta: that will be her name"(TSG 1977:19)

"...diese regelmäßige Besucherin.....*Ogbanje* Ojobeta – so wird sie heißen" (Sklavemädchen1997: 22).

Thus the use of a feminine noun "Besucherin" with *ogbanje* in the examples above reemphasizes that a female referent is intended.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, the *ogbanje* and *abiku* mythology is seen as a health condition and its illustration in the novels of five African writers have been examined. Moreover, females

are representative of this health condition medically and traditionally as traditional "healers" and medical doctors could describe the mysterious health conditions of *ogbanjes* and *abikus* "especially or almost exclusively among women (females)" (Ilechukwu 2007: 245). Also, the bias against women in the African society as being stereotypes for the *ogbanje* or *abiku* personalities has been observed in African novels. African authors illustrate this using the female character and in the use of English language. In addition, the German language projects this gender bias more clearly in translation. However, it was observed that such bias against females would not be carried out in the literary texts had the African author written using his/her mother tongue. Therefore, since gender discrimination is closely related to the gender markedness of English and German such discrimination has serious implications for the presentation of African females and their health status in literary translation. This in turn, has some consequences for intercultural communication. In conclusion, females are portrayed as the typical personalities with serious health challenges in the African society and literature through characterization, language and translation.

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