

The sociolinguistic implications of English–Yoruba translation: An example of Adichie’s *Zikora*

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Karimat Omonike Mustapha

Languages Department, Federal Polytechnic, Offa, Kwara State

mustaphakarimat1985@gmail.com

Abstract

The success of translation depends on both the encoder and the decoder. The text under study is *Zikora* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, an African literary work rooted in the author’s Igbo sociocultural background but expressed in English. Translating it into Yoruba therefore makes the text multicultural. The purpose of this study is to examine the social, cultural, and linguistic influences of the source language on the target language, as well as to explore how translation challenges are addressed using appropriate typologies. This is a qualitative and descriptive study of an interlingual translation of an expressive text from English into Yoruba. The analysis is guided by Newmark’s (1981) contextual equivalence typology. Findings reveal that the syntactic structures of the two languages differ significantly, and that contextual factors play a crucial role in the transfer of meaning during the translation process. The study concludes that the context of childbirth is relatively universal. Consequently, language use in this domain is minimally influenced by culture, and where cultural influence does occur, meaning loss is limited.

Keywords: Translation, English language, sociocultural, *Zikora*,

Introduction

The field of translation is increasingly gaining the attention of scholars especially as it exhibits varying features. *Zikora* is a story written by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian writer, with an American setting which has its lead character as *Zikora*, a lawyer in Washington D.C. *Zikora* in Igbo literally means ‘gather the crowd’. It is a fiction about the emotional storms weathered by women in their tumultuous journey to motherhood. The analysis is on this scene on which an interlingual translation is done from English, the source language into Yoruba as the target language. In the process, the translator employs some

translation techniques in order to adequately represent and transfer meaning from English source to Yoruba target language.

Literature review

Translation

Venuti (2008) avers that translation is a process by which the chain of signifiers that constitute the foreign text is replaced by a chain of signifiers in the translating language which the translator provides on the strength of an interpretation”. Newmark (1985) defines translation as the rendering of the meaning of a text into another, into what the author intended the text. Translation is therefore encoding the meaning and form of the source. Translators therefore should meet three important requirements which involves being familiar with the source language, the target language and the subject matter.

Translation typologies

Jakobson (1959) in his triadic definition of translation identifies three typologies of translation as:

- i. Intralingual translation, done with the same language, also known as rewording.
- ii. Interlingual translation, done between two languages.
- iii. Intersemiotic translation, done from a verbal to non-verbal language.

Newmark’s (1981) typologies of translation recognize four categories: interlinear, literal, semantic, and communicative translation.

Interlinear translation, whereby the primary senses of all words in the original text/language are translated as if they are out of context and the word order of the original is retained.

Literal translation, the type done in a situation where the primary senses of the lexical words of the original text/language are translated as if they are out of context but the syntactic structures of the target language are respected.

Semantic translation, which attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the source text/language as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the target language allow it. It is said to be second language biased and author-centered.

Communicative translation, which produces an effect as close as possible to what is obtained in the original text on its reader. It aims at producing a natural and idiomatic text.

Translational problems

The process witnesses certain problems which serve as hindrances to the translator. This forms the concern of the academics as scholars of different backgrounds have looked at the problems from various perspectives. The scholars include linguists, philosophers, psychologists, etc. The problems are basically in terms of context and culture. These lead to further divisions which include linguistic structure. Mathieu (2015) identifies the following areas that pose problems to translators in the process of translation. These are: grammar, syntax, rhetoric, pragmatic, and cultural problems.

He explains that lexical problems are solved with dictionaries, glossaries, terminology banks and the use of experts. The problems include: terminology alternatives, neologism, semantic gaps, contextual synonyms and antonyms. However, syntactical problems which has to do with the natural order of speech and rhetorical is the identification and reaction of figures of thought e.g. comparison, metaphor, paradox and diction. Pragmatic problems on the other hand concern the differences in the formal and informal modes of addressing ‘You’, idiomatic phrases, sayings, irony, humour and sarcasm. The differences in cultural references include names of food, festivals, etc. and this usually leads to language localisation to correctly adapt the translation to the target culture.

Hanyunto (2020) explains the problems under four categories of linguistic, literary, aesthetic and sociocultural problems. Linguistic problems encompass phrase and clause structures; syntactic structures and collocations. Aesthetic and literary problems involve poetic structure, metaphorical expression and sounds. As for socio-cultural problems, this bothers on expressions containing the four major cultural categories i.e. ideas, ecology, behaviour and products while issues with aesthetics have to do with diction (beauty of the words), figurative language, metaphors, etc.

There are many angles or procedures to translation e.g. componential analysis, use of cultural equivalent words of the second language (SL) word to give functional equivalents. He can use descriptive equivalents, that is modifying SL word with description of form in the target

language (TL), classification by providing a generic, general or superordinate term for a TL word, synonym when he supplies the near TL equivalent for the SL word. In this paper, meaning is put in the first consideration considering the cultural and situational context. Hence, cultural translations are due by translating based on units, words, phrases or clauses. Community used are synonym and cultural equivalent.

Methodology

The analysis is on the first scene of *Zikora*, a short story by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. It centers around Zikora and her mother in the hospital, as she is in labour. The study employs Newmark's (1981) typologies of translation which recognizes four categories of translation of fiction which are interlinear translation, literal translation, semantic translation and communicative translation.

Data presentation and analysis

Focus was on both linguistic and contextual transfer of meanings because of the linguistic and wide cultural gap between the two languages. In achieving the aim of the study, meaning in the target language (TL) here does not mean studying everything in the different structures or lines rather, those semantic and pragmatic elements that have been employed in achieving translation from SL to TL.

- I. All through the night my mother sat near me but never touched me.

Ìyá mi joko tì mí títí tí ilẹ̀ fì mọ́, sùgbọ́n kò fọwọ́ kàn mí rárá.

or

Títí tí ilẹ̀ fì mọ́, iyá mi joko tì mí, sùgbọ́n kò fọwọ́ kàn mí rárá.

This is an indication that in the two languages, adverbial is the most mobile element which can be in any position in the syntactic structure. However, the night has not been translated individually rather the translation is based on a contextual interpretation of sitting throughout the night to mean “till morning”

- IIa. Once, I screamed, a short scream that lanced the air in the hospital room,

Lẹ̀ẹ̀kan naa, mo pariwo sókè gan-an nínú iyàrá itọ́jú ní ilé iwòsàn,

There is barely categorisation or gradation of noise in Yoruba language that can translate ‘a short scream’ that lanced the air’ as we have in English. Hence the ‘ariwo’ is contextually chosen as the best lexical item to replace scream.

- IIb. and she said, “That’s how labor is,” in Igbo, and I wanted to say, “No shit,” but of course she didn’t understand colloquial Americanisms.

á sọ fún mi pé bí ọmọ bíbí se rí nìyẹn ní èdè Igbo. Mo sì maa ń fẹ́ láti sọ fún un wípé ‘ẹ fí mí sílẹ́’, ẹ̀gbọ̀n kò gbọ ọ̀nà èdè tí Amẹ́ríkà.

The conjunction is lost in the translation as it is realised here only orally with a pause in the Yoruba linguistic context.

- III. I had prepared for pain but this was not mere pain.
Mo tí múra sílẹ́ fún ìnira ẹ̀gbọ̀n eléyí pọ̀ púpọ̀ gan-an.

The translation is not reflexive of the perfect tense; rather only shows it is in past tense. This is a linguistic problem.

- IV. It was something like pain and different from pain.
Ìrora ni, ẹ̀gbọ̀n ó tún yàtọ̀ sí ìrora kékeré.

Linguistically, this collapses the subject verb structure and also changed it to a phrase making it inadequately translated. However, the rhetoric effect is maintained in the target language.

- V. It sat like fire in my back, spreading to my thighs, squeezing and crushing my insides, pulling downward, spiraling.
À fí bí ẹ̀ni wípé iná ńjó lẹ́yìn mí, tí ó ńjó lọ síbí ìhà mí, tí ó ńjó mí nínú àtí ìta lọ sí ìsàlẹ̀, ẹ̀bẹ̀ni ó sì ń pọ̀ sí í.

The lexical items such as ‘sat’ has been translated contextually to mean the burning sensation of the fire. Hence no direct translation of ‘fire’ rather the pragmatic competence of the translator has been employed. This expression also shows that

the target language also uses pragmatic elements as seen in the pronoun ‘it’. It has also ignored the syntactic structure here thereby adopting a literal translation described by Newmark (1981).

- VI. It felt like the Old Testament.

Se ló dàbí iyọnu tó wà nínú Bíbèlì Mímọ (tí a kọ ní àkókò/ìgbà Mose).

The cosmological context and background knowledge of the translator have assisted this translation because it takes a Christian or someone with a little knowledge of the Christian doctrine to comprehend the meaning before he could translate it.

- VII. A plague. A primitive wind blowing at will, evil but purposelessly so, an overcoming in my body that didn’t need to be.

Ó n jà bí ìjì àtíjọ, ó sì gba gbogbo ara mi ní ọ̀nà tí ó pọ̀ púpọ̀.

This communicative translation prioritizes meaning over structure, employing a simile to convey figurative sense from a simple non-literary text.

- VIII. Hour after hour of this, and yet the nurses said I wasn’t progressing.

Wákàtí n lọ lórí ara wọ̀n, síbẹ̀ àwọ̀n nọ̀sì agbẹ̀bí n sọ pé ara mi kò ì tí ì ní ìyípadà kankan.

This is also a communicative translation as not progressing is translated in terms of her body and not as the sentence portrayed it as about herself.

- IX. “You’re not progressing,” the smaller nurse said as though it were my fault.

‘kò tí ì súnmọ̀ ọ̀mọ̀ bíbí rárá’, nọ̀sì agbẹ̀bí kékeré sọ bẹ̀, àfí bí ì pé èmi ní mo fà á.

Not progressing has been contextually interpreted in terms of situational context to relate to the child birth.

- X. The room felt too warm and then too cold.

Inú yàrá nàà tutù púpọ̀, bẹ̀ ni ó tún gbóná gan-an.

In the target language it becomes difficult to get an adequate vocabulary to translate ‘too warm’ as a contrast of ‘too cold’. Hence the choice of ‘gbona ga-an’ as used in Yoruba cultural context.

- XI. My arms itched, my scalp itched, and malaise lay over me like a mist.
Àisàn (àìlera) nàà bo gbogbo ara mi bí ikúukù, bèyèni ọwọ àti awọ orí n yún mi.

In order to receive a similar effect as used in the source language, Yoruba, the target language alters the position of the groups in the sentence. It brings ‘malaise lay over me like a mist’ to the initial position considering its importance in the overall meaning of the expression.

- XII. I wanted nothing touching my body.
Nkò fẹ́ kí òkan kàn ara mi rárá.

‘I wanted’ is a positive expression translated as ‘I did not want’ in Yoruba sense. This is due to linguistic differences between the two codes.

- XIII. I yanked off my hospital gown, the flimsy blue fabric with its effete dangling ropes that gaped open at the back as if designed to humiliate.
Mo yan asọ ilé iwòsàn jù sílẹ̀, eleyi to fele, ti o no áwọ omi-aró pẹ̀lú okùn tí ó n mì jolojolo tí ó sì tún ní àláfó lẹ́hìn, èyí tí ó dàbí ẹ̀ni pé wọ̀n dá láti fí ní se ẹ̀lẹ̀yà)

There seems to be an equal translation here at linguistic and cultural levels. Though the word humiliate has been translated with ‘fí ní se ẹ̀lẹ̀yà’, four words. This is the contextual interpretation of the word.

- XIV. Naked, I perched on the edge of the bed and retched.
Ní ihòhò goloto, mo fara lé etí ibùsùn,

The single word ‘naked’ has also been translated with three words ‘Ní ihòhò goloto’ as deduced from the contextual interpretation.

- XV. Relief was impossible; everything was impossible.
kò sí itura, gbogbo òkan ni kò rọ̀rùn láti se fún mi.

This is a communicative translation. The expression cannot semantically translate to Yoruba.

- XVI. I stood up, sat down, and then I got on my hands and knees, my taut belly hanging in between.

Mo dìdè, mo jòkó, mo tún ñrákò pẹ́lú ikùn tó ñfi dùgbèdùgbè láàrin.

The translation in the first part is interlinear while the last part adopts a communicative typology. It translates ‘**I got on my hands and knees**’ using the sense in the clause as a single word which means crawling.

- XVII. The clenching in my lower body came and went, random, irregular, like mean surprises.

Ìrora ní ìsàlẹ̀ ara mi ñlọ, ó ñbọ̀ lẹ̀kẹ̀kọ̀kan.

The rhetoric in the expression is not present in the target language; hence it is translated communicatively.

- XVIII. The bigger nurse was saying something.

Nọ̀ọ̀sì agbẹ̀bí àgbà bèrẹ̀sí sọ àwọ̀n ọ̀rọ̀ kan,

There is no clear adjective comparison in Yoruba. Hence ‘bigger’ is just semantically translated as ‘big’.

- XIX. I shouted at her, “I need it now!”

Mo ké mọ ọ̀n “mo nílò rẹ̀ báyí!”

The pragmatic use of language here is also translated into the target language, using the pronoun ‘it’ to anaphorically refer to the earlier speech murmured by the senior nurse.

- XX. “You’ll get the epidural soon,” she said.

Kò ní pẹ̀ tí wàá fi gba abẹ̀rẹ̀ tí yóò mú kí ara tù ọ̀ láti bímọ.

The word epidural is a technical word in the health register. Thus, the translation process is faced with a grammatical problem which leads to using a clause to translate a single nominal word.

XXI. The smaller nurse needed to check me.

Ó se pàtàkì kí nọ̀ọ̀sì agbẹ̀bí kékeré yẹ mí wò.

Yoruba does not have a simple way of grading adjective in comparison. Hence, smaller receives a lexical translation of the generic word ‘small’

XXII. I rolled onto my back.

Mo fẹ̀hìn lélé.

The translation is not directly translatable of the word ‘roll’, it has simply produced the effect in the sense relayed.

XXIII. An invasion of fingers.

Won ti owo bo mi loju ara

The phrase has a pragmatic meaning which is implied. The implied meaning is what the target language has translated.

XXIV. She was gloved and I couldn’t see her nails, but her false eyelashes, curving from her upper lids like black feathers, made me worry that her nails were long and sharp and would pierce through the latex and puncture my uterus.

Ó lo ìbọ̀wọ̀, n kò sì rí èékánná rẹ̀ sùgbọ̀n irun ojú rẹ̀ tí ó gùn láti òkè ipènpéjú jẹ́ kí n lérò pé èékánná rẹ̀ gùn ó sì tún mú, èyí tí ó seése pé bí ó bá kan ilé ọmọ mí, yóò dá ihò sí ilé ọmọ mí.

XXV. I tensed up.

Ara kan mí.

This is also a communicative translation that is aided by the awareness of the context of situation.

XXVI. “Bring your feet up and let your legs fall apart,” she said.

Ó wípé “Ká ẹ̀sẹ̀ rẹ̀ sókè, kí o sì yà á kàtàkàtà”.

In direct quotations, English usually have at the back, the expression ‘she said’ while it comes first in Yoruba, otherwise it sounds absurd. This is problem at the level of syntactic structure

XXVII. “What?”

“Kíni?”

This is directly the same in meaning in both languages

XXVIII. “Bring your feet up and let your legs fall apart.”

“Ká ẹ̀sẹ̀ rẹ̀ sókè, kí o sì yà á kàtàkàtà”.

The word ‘bring’ in the SL has been translated as ‘raise’ in the SL typically used in the linguistic context of the TL.

XXIX. *Let your legs fall apart.*

Jẹ́ kí ẹ̀sẹ̀ rẹ̀ lọ́ lọ́tọ́tọ́.

It is also communicatively translated bearing the context in mind.

XXX. What did that even mean?

Kíni ìyẹn túmọ̀ sí gan-an?

The utterance is a reaction to the difficult task earlier given to the patient. She is angry. This is taken care of pragmatically in the translation.

XXXI. How could legs fall apart?

Báwo ni ẹ̀sẹ̀ se le yà kàtàkàtà?

This is a semantic translation.

XXXII. I began to laugh.

Mo bèrẹ̀ sí í rẹ́rín.

The tense in the two languages is the same.

XXXIII. From somewhere outside myself I heard the hysteria in my laughter.

Láti ibi tí mo wà, mo ní ìmòlára ìmóríyá láti inú èrín tí mo ń rín.

The adverbial expression here has a rhetoric effect hardly translatable into Yoruba. However, the meaning is not lost because the communicative essence has been transferred.

XXXIV. The nurse looked at me with the resigned expression of a person who had seen all the forms of madness that overtook birthing women lying on their backs with their bodies open to the world.

Nọ̀ọ̀sì agbẹ̀bí náà wò mí pẹ̀lú iwòye ẹ̀ni tí ó ti rí onírúurú ihùwàsí/írírí àwọn obìnrin tí ó ńrọ̀bí láì bìkítà irú àwọn ènìyàn tó wà ní àyíká tí ó ńwo òun.

The word madness here is a borrowed language which does not translate literally to lunatic behaviour; it has rather been borrowed like a slang expression to cover the general attitude or behaviour of a woman in labour. It has thus been translated pragmatically. 'The body open to the world' is also a literary expression merely emphasizing her carefree and nonchalant attitude about her nudity, born out of pain.

Findings

The study revealed that the cross-cultural and interlingual translation from English to Yoruba reveals that syntactic structures and semantic structures vary in the two languages at times. This can be seen in terms of tenses. The problems are prominent at both linguistic and cultural levels especially in idea presentation. The word nurse is used in the SL as a generic name whereby Yoruba has a specific name distinguishing it from the ones in charge of child birth or delivery. Also found out are variation in punctuation, adverb placement and the problem of adjective comparison.

Conclusion

The whole essence of translation is meaning transfer. It therefore becomes expedient for a translator to understand the context of the source text for an effective translation. However, the process does not come without difficulties in certain areas. In the study, a cross-cultural

situation involving the translation between the English source and Yoruba target, the challenges are exhibited at both linguistic and cultural levels. This informed the adoption of Newmark (1981) method of translation which revealed the communicative translation as the most frequent.

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Appendix

All through the night my mother sat near me but never touched me.
Once, I screamed, a short scream that lanced the air in the hospital room, and she said, “That’s how labor is,” in Igbo, and I wanted to say, “No shit,” but of course she didn’t understand colloquial Americanisms. I had prepared for pain but this was not mere pain. It was something like pain and different from pain. It sat like fire in my back, spreading to my thighs, squeezing and crushing my insides, pulling downward, spiraling. It felt like the Old Testament. A plague. A primitive wind blowing at will, evil but purposelessly so, an overcoming in my body that didn’t need to be. Hour after hour of this, and yet the nurses said I wasn’t progressing. “You’re not progressing,” the smaller nurse said as though it were my fault.

The room felt too warm and then too cold. My arms itched, my scalp itched, and malaise lay over me like a mist. I wanted nothing touching my body. I yanked off my hospital gown, the flimsy blue fabric with its effete dangling ropes that gaped open at the back as if designed to humiliate.

Naked, I perched on the edge of the bed and retched. Relief was

impossible; everything was impossible. I stood up, sat down, and then I got on my hands and knees, my taut belly hanging in between. The clenching in my lower body came and went, random, irregular, like mean surprises.

The bigger nurse was saying something.

I shouted at her, "I need it now!"

"You'll get the epidural soon," she said.

The smaller nurse needed to check me. I rolled onto my back. An invasion of fingers. She was gloved and I couldn't see her nails, but her false eyelashes, curving from her upper lids like black feathers, made me worry that her nails were long and sharp and would pierce through the latex and puncture my uterus. I tensed up.

"Bring your feet up and let your legs fall apart," she said.

"What?"

"Bring your feet up and let your legs fall apart."

Let your legs fall apart.

What did that even mean? How could legs fall apart? I began to laugh. From somewhere outside myself I heard the hysteria in my laughter.

The nurse looked at me with the resigned expression of a person who had seen all the forms of madness that overtook birthing women lying on their backs with their bodies open to the world.

Ìyá mi dúró tí mí tíí tí ilẹ̀ fí mọ́, sùgbọ́n kò fọwọ́ kàn mí rárá. Tí mo bá ti pariwo sókè gan-an lẹ̀ẹ́kan nínú iyàrá itọ́jú ní ilẹ̀ iwòsàn, á sọ fún mi pé bí ọmọ bíbí se rí nìyẹn ní èdè Igbo. Mo sì maá n fẹ́ láti sọ fún un wípé 'ẹ fí mí sílẹ̀', sùgbọ́n kò gbọ́ ọ̀nà èdè ti Àmẹ̀ríka. Mo ti múra sílẹ̀ fún inira sùgbọ́n eléyí pọ́ púpọ́ gan-an. Ìrora ni, sùgbọ́n ó tún yàtò sí ìrora kékeré. À fí bí ẹ̀ni wípé iná ńjọ lẹ́yìn mi, tí ó ńjọ lọ síbí ihà mi, tí ó ńjọ mi nínú àti ita lọ sí isàlẹ̀, bèèni ó sì n pọ́ sí i. Se ló dàbí iyonu tó wà nínú Bíbẹ̀lì Mímọ́ (tí a kọ ní àkókò/ìgbà Mose). Ó n jà bí ịjì àtíjọ́, ó sì gba gbogbo ara mi ní ọ̀nà tí ó pọ́ púpọ́. Wákàtí n lọ lórí ara wọn, síbẹ̀ àwọn nọ̀sì agbẹ̀bí n sọ pé ara mi kò ì tí ì ní iyípadà kankan 'kò tí ì súnmọ́ ọmọ bíbí rárá', nọ̀sì agbẹ̀bí kékeré sọ bẹ̀, àfí bí i pé ẹ̀mi ni mo fà á. Inú yàrá nàà tutù púpọ́, bẹ̀ ẹ̀ni ó tún gbóná gan-an.

Àisàn (àìlera) nàà bo gbogbo ara mi bí ikúukù. Bèèni ọwọ́ àti awọ orí n yún mi. Nkò fẹ́ kí nkan kàn ara mi rárá. Mo bó asọ ilẹ̀ iwòsàn (aláwọ́ omi-aró pẹ̀lú okùn tí ó n m̀ jolójolo tí ó sì tún ní àlàfo lẹ́hìn, èyí tí ó dàbí ẹ̀ni pé wón dá láti fí mí sẹ́lẹ̀yà) jù sílẹ̀.

Ní ihòhò goloto, mo fara lé etí ibùsùn, kò sí itura, gbogbo nkan ni kò rọ̀rùn láti se fún mi. Mo dide, mo jòkó, mo tún ńrákò pẹ̀lú ikùn tó nífi dughèdughè láàrin. Ìrora ní isàlẹ̀ ara mi ńlọ́, ó ńbò lẹ̀ẹ́kọ̀ọ́kan. Nọ̀sì agbẹ̀bí àgbà bèrẹ̀sí sọ àwọn ọ̀rọ́ kan, mo ké mọ́ ọ̀n "mo nílò rẹ́ báyí!"

Kò ní pẹ tí wàà fí gba abéré tí yóò mú kí ara tú ọ láti bímọ. Ó se pàtàkì kí nọ̀sì agbẹ̀bí kékeré yẹ mí wò. Mo fẹ̀hìn lélẹ̀. Ó lo ìbọ̀wọ̀, n kò sì rí èékánná rẹ̀ sùgbón irun ojú rẹ̀ tí ó gùn láti òkè ipènpéjú jẹ́ kí n lérò pé èékánná rẹ̀ gùn ó sì tún mú, èyí tí ó seése pé bí ó bá kan ilé ọmọ mí, yóò dá ihò sí ilé ọmọ mí. Ara kan mí.

Ó wípé “Ká ẹ̀sẹ̀ rẹ̀ sókè, kí o sì yà á kàtàkàtà”.

“Kini”

“Ká ẹ̀sẹ̀ rẹ̀ sókè, kí o sì yà á kàtàkàtà”.

Jẹ́ kí ẹ̀sẹ̀ rẹ̀ lọ lóṣẹ́ṣẹ̀.

Kini iyén tùmò sí gan-an? Báwo ni ẹ̀sẹ̀ se le yà kàtàkàtà? Mo sì bèrẹ̀ sí í rẹ́rín. Láti ibi tí mo wà, mo ní ìmọ̀lára ìmọ̀ríyá láti inú ẹ́rín tí mo ń rín. Nọ̀sì agbẹ̀bí náà wò mí pẹ̀lú iwòye ẹ̀ni tí ó tí rí onírúúrú ihùwàsí/írí àwọn obinrin tí ó ńrọ́bí láì bikítà irú àwọn èniyàn tó wà ní àyíká tí ó ńwo òun.