



## East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences

[eajass.eanso.org](http://eajass.eanso.org)

Volume 8, Issue 1, 2025

Print ISSN: 2707-4277 | Online ISSN: 2707-4285

Title DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/2707-4285>



EAST AFRICAN  
NATURE &  
SCIENCE  
ORGANIZATION

Original Article

### Techniques Used in Translation of Proverbs in Siku Njema by Ken Walibora

Lilian Mumbi Benard<sup>1</sup>\*

<sup>1</sup> University of Belgrade Serbia.

\* Author's ORCID ID; <https://Orcid.Org/0009-0008-3874-7675>; Email: [lilyben70@gmail.com](mailto:lilyben70@gmail.com)

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.1.2633>

#### Date Published: ABSTRACT

22 January 2025

#### Keywords:

*Proverbs,  
Translation Techniques,  
Source language (SL),  
Target language (TL),  
Siku Njema,  
Ken Walibora.*

Proverbs play a very important role in any cultural society such as to inform, caution, and inspire people in their daily lives, among others. Generation after generation, proverbs have endured, offering insights and direction that people still find meaningful to date. This research, is concentrating on the numerous approaches, which were employed by the translators Dorothy Kweyu and Fortunatus F. Kawegere to translate Siku Njema by Ken Walibora. This research highlights several approaches used in the translation process, including direct translation, equivalence, and omission, utilizing diverse methodologies such as the descriptive method which is utilized to explain each proverb, translating them from their original language to the target language while maintaining their contextual meaning. By taking this approach, the proverb's core meaning is maintained, enabling readers to completely understand its significance. The analytical method is also used, which allows for a greater comprehension of the complexity and cultural significance of each proverb. To capture details that could otherwise be lost in translation, this analysis is crucial. The comparative technique enhances the research even more and offers insights into how various cultures understand related issues by contrasting proverbs in their original form with their translated counterparts. Last but not least, the proverbs in "Siku Njema" are methodically chosen and examined using corpus analysis. In addition to aiding in the identification of important phrases, this approach makes it easier to comprehend how they are used throughout the text. The research intends to clarify the difficulties in communicating cultural meanings through language by looking at these different translation techniques, which will ultimately improve our understanding of the source material and its translation. This thorough examination highlights the proverbs' timeless value in fostering cross-cultural understanding and improving communication.

#### APA CITATION

Benard, L. M. (2025). Techniques Used in Translation of Proverbs in Siku Njema by Ken Walibora. *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 8(1), 106-112. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.1.2633>

#### CHICAGO CITATION

Benard, Lilian Mumbi. 2025. "Techniques Used in Translation of Proverbs in Siku Njema by Ken Walibora". *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences* 8 (1), 106-112. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.1.2633>.

#### HARVARD CITATION

Benard, L. M. (2025) "Techniques Used in Translation of Proverbs in Siku Njema by Ken Walibora". *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 8(1), pp. 106-112. doi: 10.37284/eajass.8.1.2633.

#### IEEE CITATION

L. M., Benard "Techniques Used in Translation of Proverbs in Siku Njema by Ken Walibora". *EAJASS*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 106-112, Jan. 2025.

#### MLA CITATION

Benard, Lilian Mumbi "Techniques Used in Translation of Proverbs in Siku Njema by Ken Walibora". *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, Vol. 8, no. 1, Jan. 2025, pp. 106-112, doi:10.37284/eajass.8.1.2633.

## INTRODUCTION

Translation is such an extremely broad phenomenon which can be understood in different ways. The American theorist Lawrence Venuti, defines translation as "A process by which the chain of signifiers that constitutes the source-language text is replaced by a chain of signifiers in the target language which the translator provides on the strength of an interpretation" (Venuti, 1995: 17). According to Cambridge dictionary, translation means something that is translated, or the process of translating something, from one language to another. In other words, translation is the process of translating words or texts from one language to another, but it can also refer to the product of such a process. Because of the existence of several languages, our cultures will also differ from one another. Newmark (2003:94) defines culture as "the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression", thus recognizing that each language group has its own features which are culture-specific.

"Methodology is the philosophical framework within which the research is conducted or the foundation upon which the research is based" (Brown, 2006). The methodology in this work describes the research method, approaches and ways in detail that are used through this study explaining both their advantages and disadvantages and their practical applicability to the research.

According to Collins dictionary, A proverb is a short sentence that people often quote, which gives advice or tells you something about life. According to literaryterms.net, a proverb is a short saying or piece of folk wisdom that emerges from general culture rather than being written by a single, individual author. Also, Meider (1985: 119) has defined the proverb as "a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation". Proverbs were used in ancient times and are still used up to date. Sometimes wise sayings are used to mean the same way as a proverb. They are part of the short forms of oral literature and they play very vital roles in different types of literary works which portray different cultures from all over the continent. They have been passed from generation to generation mostly through word of mouth or through writing. They can also be found in articles from various sources.

Due to the existence of several languages, our cultures differ from one another. In order for others outside of the local culture to comprehend the stories, this oral literary work is transformed into written form and translated into multiple languages that differ from the original text. To prevent future misunderstandings, translators must accurately translate literary works in terms of language and culture. Due to cultural variations, it is crucial for translators to be able to convey the original text's

meaning to the reader in the target translation with ease.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

To identify the main translation techniques used by Dorothy Kweyu and Fortunatus F. Kawegere to translate the proverbs in *Siku Njema* by Ken Walibora.

To examine whether the translation techniques used by Dorothy Kweyu and Fortunatus F. Kawegere to translate the proverbs in *Siku Njema* by Ken Walibora were successful

To explore the application of different methodologies used in the translation of proverbs in *Siku Njema* by Ken Walibora.

To examine the effectiveness of the methods used in explaining each proverb to the reader to ensure a deeper understanding of the cultural context of the proverbs.

## METHODOLOGY

Every language's vocabulary must have proverbs. This not only indicates the beauty of a language but also the culture of a given community. The main purpose of this research is to know the translation techniques of proverbs used in the novel written by Ken Walibora's *Siku Njema*. In accordance with this purpose, the methods used in the research work are descriptive method, analytical method, comparative method and also corpus analysis method.

### Descriptive method

This is an exploratory research method and aims to accurately and systematically describe a population, situation or phenomenon. It often develops knowledge concepts and provides solutions to critical issues. Here, each proverb is described both in its original language that is Swahili and also in its target language that is English.

### Analytical method

As the word sounds, to analyze is to examine something in detail in order to discover and

understand it more. Each proverb was analyzed and explained in detail hence better understanding of it.

### Comparative method

This is an important tool in the field of linguistics, offering insights into the historical development and relationship between languages. It is a technique for studying the development of languages by performing a feature-by-feature comparison of 2 or more languages. Each proverb was compared to its translated version of it in order to know the technique used during their translation and how effective it is.

### Corpus analysis method

This refers to the empirical analysis of linguistic characteristics and patterns associated with language use in different contexts such as genres and settings among others. This method was used to select the proverbs from the novel written by Ken Walibora's *Siku Njema* according to the techniques used. All these methods were used hand in hand to bring out the full meaning of each proverb hence understanding it more in a better way and also to show how the proverbs were used in context. The methods also helped us to know whether the translation technique used was effective and successful or not.

## ANALYSIS

This chapter focuses on the translation techniques that were used by Dorothy Kweyu and Fortunatus F. Kawegere as they translated the proverbs in the novel; *Siku Njema* by Ken Walibora. It will also explain the meaning of each proverb and the context in which it has been used in the novel; *Siku Njema* by Ken Walibora.

The translation techniques include:

### Literal Translation

It is also known as direct translation. The goal of a literal translation is to reproduce the form of the source text as much as possible into the target text since no translation is 'ever too literal or too close to

the original' (Newmark, 2003: 137). In other words, the translator stays with one-to-one correspondence until it is necessary to alter this for the sake of meaning (Strauss, 2005: 156). Some English and Swahili proverbs have the same meaning and do not have a specific cultural reference. That is why they can be rendered literally.

Some of the proverbs for whose translation the said technique was used include the following:

**a) *Unyasi Mmoja ukitoka kwenye paa, nyumba haivunjiki (page 12).***

This proverb was translated to *the roof does not leak because a blade of grass is missing*. This is a direct translation, and it was a success as the initial meaning is retained. This proverb serves as an encouragement. Its meaning is more of imagery as it brings out the image of a house whose roof is made of grass and when one grass falls it cannot leak. It means that one should not give up because he or she encountered a problem as there is always a solution to every problem.

**b) *Alieachwa kaachiwa mengi (page 19).***

This proverb was directly translated to, *the bereaved bears a lot*. This proverb discusses death because it is a major topic in all societies. The surface meaning is that the person who loses someone through death is left with a lot of pain and devastation. The deeper meaning is that the person who is facing a particular problem or challenge is the only one who knows the extent or how deep the problem or challenge is. This proverb is mainly for sympathy and was a success as the initial meaning was retained hence the reader is able to understand the proverb as it is in the source language.

**c) *Mtu hakatai wito, hukataa aitiwalo (Page 28 and 129)***

This proverb was translated to; *one does not reject a call; he rejects that which he is called for*. When someone calls you and you ignore the call, it is considered rude in Swahili culture. It is therefore

vital to at least understand the call's purpose before objecting to it. A similar proverb to this is: do not judge a book by its cover. This literal translation method was a success as the reader is able to understand the proverb as it is in the source language.

### **Equivalence**

Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) view equivalence-oriented translation as a procedure which "Replicates the same situation as in the original, whilst using completely different wording" (quoted in Kenny, 1998, p. 342). In other words, the procedure of equivalence can be used to translate fixed expressions in SL (source language) such as idioms, clichés, proverbs, nominal or adjectival phrases, animal onomatopoeia, etc. into equally different forms in the target language (pp.90). Translation equivalence is a procedure which replicates the same situation as in the original, whilst using completely different words. Proverbs in general are good examples of when equivalence as a strategy should be used. This technique ensures their meaning is preserved by finding a target language equivalent.

The proverbs for which this method was used in the process of translation of *Siku Njema* by Ken Walibora include the following:

**a) *Yaliyopita si ndwele, tugange yajayo (page 32).***

This proverb has been translated to; *it is not good to reopen old wounds*. This proverb refers to time because it depicts the past, present, and future, making it a crucial element in every society. In Swahili, the literal meaning of this proverb is that the past is not a disease that can be forgotten. Instead, we should focus on the future or what is coming next.

The way the proverb has been translated to English in the novel makes it similar to the original Swahili version of it hence making it a success as the reader is able to understand the original meaning of the proverb but using different words.

**b) Aisifuye mvua imemnyea (88).**

The translation of this proverb in “*Siku Njema*” by Ken Walibora is *he who talks of a man’s goodness is one who has benefited by it*. The direct translation of this proverb in Swahili is: One who praises rain has been rained on. One of the many universal natural occurrences that demonstrates weather is the rain. Therefore, this Swahili proverb makes use of rain to describe several societal aspects.

The meaning of this proverb is that if one praises someone it means that they have seen their goodness. In the novel *A Good Day* by Ken Walibora, the proverb has not been translated directly, but an equivalence of it, that is *He who talks of a man’s goodness is one who has benefited by it*, has been used in order to bring out the intended meaning to the reader hence the method is a success although in different words.

**c) Hujapokosa la mama hata la mbwa huambwa (Page 3).**

This proverb has been translated as: *half a bread is better than no bread*. Correspondence is the best method which was used here because if the proverb was directly translated it could sound like an insult to the reader and would not make sense at all. The alternative proverb half a bread is better than no bread has the same meaning as the proverb in the original language although in different words. Hence the translation method is a success.

**Omission**

Omission can be defined as, “a strategy by means of which professional translators delete words, phrases, sentences, sometimes even more consistent parts of the source texts in order to adjust—linguistically, pragmatically, culturally, or ideologically—the translated text for their target audiences” (Dimitriu, 2004, p. 165). It means dropping a word or words from the source language while translating. The translator omits words that do not have equivalents in the target language, which may raise the hostility of the receptors or words that

may bring out cultural differences between the source language and the target language. Omission is also used to avoid confusion that may happen when using lengthy explanations that may distract the reader, especially if the omitted particular item or expression is not vital enough to the development of the text (Davies, 2003) thus, omission is a very vital technique used during translation though sometimes it might be considered as the inability of a translator to translate a given word or words thus not giving the whole story as it is in the source language.

Dorothy Kweyu and Fortunatus F. Kawegere used omission when translating some of the proverbs in ‘*A Good Day*’ by Ken Walibora whereby some of the proverbs are used in the Swahili version of the novel but when it was translated into English the proverbs were omitted. The proverbs which have been omitted in the translation of ‘*A Good Day*’ by Ken Walibora include:

**a) Afadhali nusu ya shari kuliko shari kamili. (Page 28)**

According to Glosbe that is Swahili to English dictionary, Shari means an illness, bad luck, accident or misfortune. In Swahili proverbs, this proverb has been translated as *half a mishap is better than a whole one or minor accident is better than a big one*. Regardless of the country or culture they are in, every person has to overcome unique obstacles throughout their lives. As a result, this proverb addresses them. The meaning of this proverb is that it is better to solve a problem when it is small because if it becomes big it will cause more harm and therefore solving it will be more challenging.

The adage advises people to address a difficulty while it is still in its early stages rather than after it has already become a catastrophe. It is similar to the proverb, a stitch in time saves nine. Even though there is a similar proverb, the omission technique is the best method for this proverb because the proverb makes more sense in the Swahili version which is



the original language than in any other language. The proverb brings out the beauty of the Swahili language and cannot be replaced by any other language. The translated version of the novel in English has no such proverb.

**b) *Leo ni leo msema kesho ni mwongo.* (Page 20)**

This proverb refers to time in its context. Every culture depends heavily on time because it is only through time that we can understand our own or another society's history, the present, and even anticipate the future. Therefore, this Swahili proverb discusses time, a crucial concept. The translation of this proverb according to Google Translate is today, whoever says tomorrow is a liar. This proverb simply means use your time well and do things that were meant to be done today, today and not any other day because you may end up not doing them eventually. It is mainly used to discourage procrastination and encourages someone to do things at hand first because nobody knows what will happen tomorrow as it may be too late to do them.

The proverb *leo ni leo msema kesho ni mwongo* was only used in the Swahili version of the novel. In the English version, it has been omitted as English has no such proverb as its availability would have distorted the meaning and the reader would not be able to get the original meaning of the proverb hence making the omission technique a success. Nevertheless, this proverb is similar to the quote made by Thomas Jefferson, never put off for tomorrow what you can do today.

**c) *Usione wembamba wa reli gari moshi hupita* (Page 78).**

According to Google Translate, this proverb has been translated as do not see the narrowness of the railway the train passes. Different forms of transportation are used in every community. In essence, this Swahili proverb discusses how a train can pass through a railway and how that design is related to human behaviour. The meaning of this

proverb is do not undermine someone or something because of any reason thinking they cannot do a particular task. Just as the railway is slim, something as big and long as a train actually passes there. The proverb is used to warn those people who like diminishing other people thinking they cannot do or qualified to accomplish a given task. Sometimes, those people who look like they cannot accomplish the task end up giving more and better results than those people who look like they are more qualified. Thus, the moral of the saying is never to doubt someone for their abilities before seeing the results. This proverb is only available in the Swahili Version of the novel because it makes more sense and brings out more outstanding meaning in Swahili than in any other language. It brings out the beauty of the Swahili language hence making the omission method of translation a success.

## CONCLUSION.

What this research shows is that during the translation of the above Proverbs by Dorothy Kweyu and Fortunatus F. Kawegere, three main techniques were used hand in hand to bring out the full meaning of each proverb to the reader. These three main techniques are: (1) Direct translation (2) Equivalence and (3) Omission. In direct translation, the proverbs were translated directly from the source language to the target language hence bringing out the same meaning exactly the way it is to the readers. In the equivalence method, a proverb that is similar in meaning to the original proverb was used. The reader is able to get the meaning of the proverb but in different words. Last but not least, the Omission method was used whereby, it was mainly used for those proverbs which have no equivalence or which cannot be translated directly. It was also used to retain the beauty of the original language which is Swahili.

Different methodologies have been used in each proverb, including the descriptive method, where each proverb is described, and the analytical method where each proverb has been analyzed so that the reader can fully understand it. The comparative

method is where each proverb is compared from its source language to its target language so that we can understand and know which translation technique was used. The corpus analysis method is where the proverbs in question were chosen from a corpus of proverbs.

It is true that Dorothy Kweyu and Fortunatus F. Kawegere did an outstanding job translating the proverbs in "Siku Njema" by Ken Walibora, as the readers are able to understand the proverbs' meanings exactly as they are in the original language and the beauty of the Swahili language because they made no changes to the meaning. The usage of proverbs in Ken Walibora's novel "Siku Njema" demonstrates his talent as a stylish and outstanding author.

## REFERENCES

- Brown, H. D. (2006). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (5th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Dimitriu, R. (2004). *Omission in translation*. *Perspectives*, 12(3), 163–175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2004.9961499>
- Davies, E. (2003). *A gobbledygook-free guide to translation: The role of omission in translation*. St. Jerome Publishing.
- Kelly, D. (2014). *A handbook for translator trainers*. Routledge.
- Meider, W. (1985). *Proverbs: A handbook*. Greenwood Press.
- Newmark, P. (2003). *A textbook of translation*. Prentice Hall.
- Walibora, K. (1996). *Siku Njema*. Kenya: Longhorn Publishers. Walibora, K. (2019). *A Good Day*. (Dorothy Kweyu, Fortunatus F. Kawegere, trans). Kenya: Longhorn Publishers.
- Venuti, L. (1995). *The translator's invisibility: A history of translation*. Routledge. Vinay, J. P., & Darbelnet, J. (1995). *Comparative stylistics of French and English: A methodology for translation*. (J. C. Sager & M. J. Hamel, Trans.). Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Zanettin, F., & Rundle, C. (Eds.). (2022). *The Routledge handbook of translation and methodology*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315158945>.