

CROSS-CULTURAL THEMES AND THE CHALLENGES OF MULTILINGUALISM AND TRANSLATION, A CASE STUDY OF LÉOPOLD SÉDAR SENGHOR'S "DIALOGUE OF CULTURES"

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Abstract

Themes of literary discourse or political debate relating to cultural hybrid or complementarity of cultures must reflect the diverse geopolitical landscapes and idiosyncrasies of the authors and peoples or races under study. Hence the inevitability of the use of multilingual approaches and devices that invariably engenders the participation of professional translators and interpreters especially for conference presentation or for wider dissemination at multiracial fora. This papers seeks to underscore the necessity of translation and interpretation as indispensable tools for actualizing the multilingual frame of Léopold Sédar Senghor's politico-philosophical vision of a universal French cultural family tagged "Francophonie", and which is the theme of the first black French Academician's fifth and last philosophical essay : *Le Dialogue de Cultures* (Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1993).

The linguistic imperative of adoption of translation and interpretation as practical devices for encouraging the participation of non-French member Nations, such as Ghana that became an Associate Member of Francophonie in 2006, and further fortifying the rapidly expanding "French Commonwealth of Nations", we seek to impress on the *International Organization of Francophonie* (OIF) and its annual *Conference of Heads of State and Government of Countries that are partially or fully French-speaking*, the world over, as a viable option for assuaging the feelings of non-European Francophone peoples in Canada-Québec, French Caribbean's and Sub-Saharan Africa who have over the years decried what Jean-Marc Léger (Montréalais), former Québécois General Commissioner for Francophonie, founding Secretary General of AUPELF and first Secretary General of ACCT described in his Foreword to Michel Tétu's famous book : *La Francophonie: Histoire, Problématique et Perspectives* (Hachette, Montréal, 1988), as : " ... la diffusion constant d'un seul modèle socio-culturel, par le risque mortel de l'uniformisation, négation de l'universel ..." (... the constant dissemination of one single socio-cultural model, and the deadly risk of uniformity, a negation of universality ...).

Key Words: "cross-cultural themes"; "challenges"; "multilingualism"; "translation"; "dialogue of cultures"

Introduction

"Le Dialogue des cultures", the title of Léopold Sédar Senghor's fifth philosophical essay published by *Editions du Seuil*, Paris, 1993, has over the years dilated discourse on the theme of "Cultural diversity" or "Complementarity of cultures", thus promoting the advocacy of the *Francophonie*, the rapidly expanding "French Commonwealth of Nations", which has since its first "Summit of Heads of State and government of countries that are fully or partially French-speaking" held in Paris in February 1986, become the second largest linguistic bloc after the *British Commonwealth*.

Concerning the key words in the topic, suffice it to say that "Cross-cultural themes" are themes or subjects that cut across cultures, or are multi-racial in outlook or in scope. "Challenges" are grey areas that need to be clarified. "Multilingualism" has to do with the usage of three or more languages in disseminating information at a multiracial

gathering or forum. “Translation” and its twin sister “Interpretation” are the tools for effecting multilingual dissemination of information at international fora. And “dialogue of cultures” is an expression that has been popularized since the middle of the 20th century by the Senegalese poet, Léopold Sédar Senghor, to express what has become known as the philosophy of cultural hybrid tagged “métissage culturel”.

Senghor’s “dialogue of cultures”, a pacifist call for collaboration

“Dialogue of cultures” is the philosophical concept by which Léopold Sédar Senghor, elected first president of independent Senegal (1960-1980), and first Black man to be elected into the prestigious French Academy in 1983, propagates his multi-racial philosophy of cultural hybrid known as “métissage culturel” or “Complémentarité de Cultures” by fusing together the humanism of *Négritude* described as a rediscovery of the dignity and the personality of the Black man all over the world, and the technology of *Francophonie*, known simply as a nascent, post-colonial, French cultural family spread across the globe. Explaining the seeming harmony of *Négritude* and *Francophonie*, two linguistico-cultural concepts that were opposing prior to the decolonization years (1944-1958), in the introduction to his fifth essay titled: *Liberté V: Le Dialogue des cultures* (Ed. du Seuil, Paris, 1993), Léopold Sédar Senghor says:

Ce n'est pas hasard non plus si je les ai intitulé « Le Dialogue des Cultures ». C'est que le dialogue est l'un des instruments de la Civilisation de l'Universel, dont la Négritude n'est qu'un aspect : le premier et le dernier en même temps, comme je l'ai montré ailleurs.

(It is not mere accident either if I title them « Dialogue of cultures ». The fact is that dialogue is one of the tools of the *Universal Civilization*, of which *Négritude* is one aspect: the first and the last at the same time, as I have shown elsewhere)

Aimé Césaire, French poet and deputy-mayor of Martinique, who invented the word “*Négritude*” in an article titled “*Négrérie*”, published in 1935 in the *Etudiant noir* literary journal he co-founded with Senghor and Damas in the Quartier Latin district of Paris, had also in this early article enunciated his own vision of cultural hybrid tagged “*Le Rendez-vous du donner et du recevoir*”, a radical protest by the new crop of Negro-African, intellectual youths in Paris against the oppressive French colonial policy of Assimilation, in clear terms :

... C'est pourquoi la Jeunesse noire tourne le dos à la tribu des Vieux. La tribu des Vieux dit : Assimilation. Nous répondons Résurrection. La Jeunesse noire veut agir et créer, elle veut avoir ses poètes, ses romanciers qui lui diront à elle ses malheurs à elle et ses grandeurs à elle : elle veut contribuer à la vie universelle, à l'humanisation de l'Humanité ... 1

(... That’s why the black Youth turns its back to the club of the Elders. The Elder’s club says: Assimilation. We say in response Resurrection. The black Youth wants to act and invent, it wants to have its poets, its novelists who will say to its face its own misfortunes and its own achievements: it wants to contribute to universal life, to the humanization of Humanity)

The contribution of Léon-Gontran Damas, the Guyanese poet who together with Aimé Césaire represent the radical arm of the anti-assimilation *Négritude* protest of the pre-Second World War years, to the rapprochement and reconciliation that paved way for the emergence of a full-blown, universal *Francophonie* during the decolonization years, cannot be over-emphasized. The extreme dehumanization and acculturation to which the Caribbean peoples were subjected under French colonization, amply demonstrated in Frantz Fanon’s *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952), explains the aggressive tone of Césairian and Damasian poetry which contrasted sharply with Senghor’s rather conciliatory “pardon”. For example, Léon-Gontran Damas’ two leading masterpieces, *Pigments* (1937, poetry)

and *Retour de Guyane* (1938, prose) were officially banned in Paris, while the colonial administration in his native Guyane bought all available copies of the prose and burnt them.

In his spontaneous reaction to the news of the death of Léon-Gontran Damas in an American hospital in 1978, Léopold Sédar Senghor says of his comrade in arms and author of the first major Négritude collection of poems titled *Pigments* published in 1937: “*Saluons-le comme un prophète du monde nouveau, de ce XXI^e siècle où, dans une civilisation enfin réconciliée avec l’homme, le Nègre occupera sa place: au cœur de la vie, de la beauté*”² (We salute him as a prophet of the new world, of this 21st century where, in a civilization that is finally reconciled with mankind, the Negro will take his place: in the center of life, of beauty). And Léopold Sédar Senghor, the leading founding father of Francophonie went further to say in that tribute published along with others by *Présence Africaine: Hommage posthume à Léon-Gontran Damas* (Présence Africaine, Paris, 1979):

Des “trois mousquetaires” que nous étions, Léon Damas, Aimé Césaire et moi-même, c’est Léon Damas qui, le premier, illustra la négritude par un recueil de poèmes qui portait, significativement, le titre de Pigments. Car cette poésie conservait toutes les qualités de l’œuvre nègre : images symboliques et rythmes faits de parallélismes asymétriques, mais encore humour. Cet humour nègre, point noir, car réaction et revanche du réel : la vie

(Of the « three musketers » that we were, Léon Damas, Aimé Césaire and myself, it’s Léon Damas, the first to announce négritude with a collection of poems that carried, appropriately, the title of *Pigments*. Because that poetry conserves all the qualities of black art: symbolic images and rhythm made of asymmetrical parallelisms, but also humor. The black humor, black mark, being reaction and other side of the real: life)

An interplay of Negro-African and French western cultures

And so, *La Civilisation de l’Universel* which Senghor uses as a synonym for *Francophonie* in his third essay, *Liberté III: Négritude et Civilisation de l’Universel* (Ed. Du Seuil, Paris, 1977, 274), as well as the introduction to his fifth essay, *Liberté V: Le Dialogue des cultures*, (Ed. du Seuil, Paris, 1993) quoted above, has Négritude as an integral resource, an interpretation that informs Michel Tétu’s definition of Négritude as “*la Francophonie en actes*” (Francophonie in action) in his famous book: *La Francophonie: Histoire, Problématique et Perspectives* (Ed. Hachette, Montréal, 1988). What precisely are these two cultural terms, Négritude and Francophonie which have attracted both applause and criticism from Europe and Africa, especially Léopold Sédar Senghor’s conscious effort to relegate Africa’s indigenous languages for French and implicitly submerge Africa’s cultural values to French western culture?

Négritude, the humanistic philosophy which is the central theme of Léopold Sédar Senghor’s first major essay: *Liberté I: Négritude et humanisme* (Ed. du Seuil, Paris, 1964), has been defined in diverse ways by its leading proponents – Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire et Léon-Gontran Damas. Senghor defined Négritude first as “*L’ensemble des valeurs culturelles du monde noir*”³ (The totality of the cultural values of the black world), then, as « *La découverte des valeurs noires et la prise de conscience par le Nègre de sa situation* »⁴ (The discovery of black values and the consciousness by the Negro of his situation), and again as « *L’ensemble des valeurs – économiques et politiques, intellectuelles et morales, artistiques et sociales – non seulement des peuples d’Afrique noire mais encore des minorités noires d’Afrique, voire d’Asie et d’Océanie* »⁵ (The totality of the values – economic and political, intellectual and moral, artistic and social - not only of peoples from black Africa but also of black minorities in Africa, even from Asia and Oceania).

Aimé Césaire, the great pan Africanist, and author of two famous masterpieces, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939, poetry) and *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1955, essay), defined Négritude simply as: « *La simple reconnaissance du fait d'être noir, et l'acceptation de ce fait, de notre destin de noir, de notre histoire et de notre culture* »⁶ (The simple recognition of the fact of being black, and the acceptance of that fact, of our black identity, of our history and of our culture), and later as: “*La conscience d'être noir, simple reconnaissance d'un fait, qui implique acceptation, prise en charge de son destin de noir, de son histoire et de sa culture*”⁷ (The consciousness of being black, simple recognition of that fact, which implies acceptance, taking into one's hand of his black identity, of his history and of his culture).

In an interview published by *Jeune Afrique hebdomadaire*, edition of 16th March 1971, Léon-Gontran Damas, who had also served as deputy representing Guyane in the French National Assembly (1948-1951) defined Négritude as : “*La découverte des valeurs noires et la prise de conscience par le Nègre de sa situation*”⁸ (The discovery of black values and a consciousness by the Negro of his situation), even as he had described the movement as : “*Un instrument de combat culturel le plus efficace pour le Noir à l'époque coloniale*” (A most effective weapon of cultural warfare for the black Man in the colonial era).

Francophonie, on the other hand, was first defined by Onésime Reclus, 19th century French geographer who invented the word, in his book, *France, Algérie et colonies* (1880), as: “*ayant rapport aux populations et aux pays qui à divers titres utilisent la langue française*” (having to do with populations and countries which in diverse ways use French language), but was given a cultural connotation when defined by Xavier Deniau, French parliamentarian, as: “*les liens privilégiés entre les hommes et les peuples de langue française*”⁹ (the privileged links between men and peoples of French language), after it had been presented as a humanistic philosophy by Léopold Sédar Senghor in an article: “*Le Français, langue de culture*”, published in a special edition of *Esprit* journal in November 1962, as : *L'Humanisme intégral qui se tisse autour de la terre; la symbiose des énergies dormantes de tous les continents, de toutes les races, qui se réveillent à leur chaleur complémentaire*” (Integral humanism which revolves around the earth, the symbiosis of dormant energies of all continents, of all races, that wake up with complementary heat).

Francophonie and the challenges of Multilingualism and Translation

Why do leaders of the International Organization of the Francophonie (OIF) insist on implementing just the first segment of the primary objective set out for the multiracial body by its founding fathers, which is: “... *la promotion de la langue française et de la diversité culturelle et linguistique d'une part, et le respect des droits de l'homme d'autre part*”¹⁰ (... promotion of French language and of cultural and linguistic diversity on the one hand, and observance of human rights on the other hand)? Evidently, usage of French language alone as the medium of communication for the 76-nation body negates the principle of cultural and linguistic diversity.

Why don't the Secretary General and the Heads of State and government of the *Francophonie Institutionnelle* that came into being with the inauguration of the *Agence de coopération culturelle et technique* (ACCT) on 20th March 1970 in Niamey, Niger Republic modify the primary objective of the universal cultural family to read: “... *la promotion de la langue française et d'autres langues nationales codifiées des Etats membres, et par là, de la diversité culturelle et linguistique d'une part, et le respect des droits de l'homme d'autre part*” (promotion of French language and other standardized national languages of member States, and thus, of cultural and linguistic diversity on the one hand, and observance of human rights on the other hand). This is the only practical way of assuaging the feelings of diverse francophone peoples across the five continents, and even prospective member-nations from other major linguistic blocs, who would want their national cultural identities reflected in Francophonie programmes (Francophone Summits, Francophonie games, annual Francophonie week celebrations, etc.), through usage of their regional or sub-regional lingua franca.

Far back in 1988, Jean-Marc Léger (Montréalais), Commissaire général de la Francophonie (Québec), first Secrétaire général of AUPELF and ACCT, and former Editor in chief of *Le Devoir* newspaper cried aloud against the linguistico-cultural disproportionality in the organization of the Francophonie. In his Foreword to Michel Tétu's book: *La Francophonie: Histoire, Problématique et Perspectives* (Ed. Hachette, Montréal, 1988, 12), the renowned writer says :

Mon inquiétude est à la mesure de l'ampleur de la tâche à accomplir, des périls qui montent du retard que nous avons pris, collectivement ... La langue française est menacée tout comme les cultures représentées au sein de notre communauté se trouvent mises en cause par la diffusion constante d'un seul modèle socio-culturel, par le risque mortel de l'uniformisation, négation de l'universel ...

(My concern is about the magnitude of the task ahead, about the increasing dangers regarding our late actions ... French language is threatened just as the cultures represented within our community are being questioned by the constant dissemination of one single socio-cultural model, by the deadly risk of uniformity, a negation of universality ...)

In like manner, the Canadian Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney, had in his speech read at the Francophone Summit of 1986, pleaded the cause of the diverse peoples of the Francophone world whose aspirations constitute the major issue for discussion at the Francophonie. He says, inter alia: "*La Francophonie, c'est d'abord et avant tout des hommes, des femmes, des jeunes. Elle impose de garder à l'esprit leurs aspirations et leurs rêves, et d'apporter réponse à leurs besoins fondamentaux* » (Francophonie is first and foremost about men, about women, about young people. It compels us to keep in mind their aspirations and their dreams, and to bring answers to their basic, essential needs).

And Michel Tétu, in his book, *La Francophonie: Histoire, Problématique et Perspectives* (Ed. Hachette, Montréal, 1988, 199), quotes Jacques Rabemananjara (Malgache), writer, and Ali Moindjie (Comorian), journalist, both (creoles) condemning the omnipresence of French in the francophone family. Rabemananjara says : "*La langue française a été un objet de répulsion tant qu'elle représentait une langue de domination*" (French language has been an object of repulsion for so long as it represented a language of domination). But Ali Moindjie, sounding bitter in his article in *Le Devoir* newspaper of 21st June 1986, says: « *Le Français est un instrument de pouvoir dont se sert une élite pour tenir à l'écart la population dont il détruit les particularismes et provoque une certaine uniformisation* » (French is an instrument of power used by the elite to keep at bay the populace whose particularities are destroyed, and it engenders some measure of uniformity), adding : « *La francophonie serait un espace qui laisserait s'affirmer le polymorphisme des peuples, un carrefour où se rencontreraient les particularités pour s'enrichir mutuellement. Hélas ! Entre les discours et la réalité, il y a un fossé : Le français tue nos langues* » (Francophonie should be a space that would allow for free expression of peoples diverse voices, a cross-road where particularities would meet to mutually enrich one another. But! Between speeches and reality, there is a wide gulf: French is killing our languages).

Translation, tool for mass information dissemination

What path should the International Organization of Francophonie (OIF) thread, with the new headquarters: "La Maison de la Francophonie, nouveau siège de l'OIF" (housing all its personnel), in Avenue Bosquet (7e arr.), Paris, that was officially declared open on 20th March 2010 by President Nicolas Sarkozy and Secrétaire général, Abdou Diouf, to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the birth of Francophonie?. What else is there for the OIF other than multilingualism as a policy, and translation and its twin sister, interpretation as mode of mass dissemination of information?

What has multilingualism got to do with the Francophonie, the 'French Commonwealth of Nations' comprising of more than seventy nations? Critics and researchers on culture and particularly interculturality that Francophonie represents, opine that since cultural identity and cultural conflict are inextricably associated with the universal French cultural phenomenon tagged 'Francophonie', multilingualism, is a sine-qua-non which Heads of State of this second largest club of nations, next to the British Commonwealth, must accept as inevitable, in order for the body to be fully relevant in the 21st century.

Multilingualism as a linguistic policy implies adoption of three or more languages for use as languages of instruction in a state or authorized mode of expression at organized fora (conferences or debates). For example, the twenty-seven member-nations of the European Union, including France, adopted a policy in 2009 that their citizens should learn three languages in school - the modern tongue and two other languages of neighboring member states. France on her part resolved that her children should compulsorily learn French, English and one other language of the European Union right from the secondary school.

Conclusion

With the multi-cultural and linguistic setting of activities of the Francophonie that have become daily occurrences, it is compelling that the French cultural family adopts a multilingual approach in its operations in order to effectively mobilize all segments of the society who would then feel a sense of belonging. Countries that are traditional members of the British Commonwealth, such as Ghana that is already an Associate Member of the Francophonie, will then feel comfortable, while others that are aspiring to come into the Francophonie, like Nigeria will be enthused.

Once the leadership of Francophonie decides to adopt multilingualism as a concept for executing its objective of cultural and linguistic diversity, it simply has to choose some two or three regional or sub-regional lingual Franca, with standardized registers (science, computer technology, technical, literary, etc.) to adopt along with French as official languages of the Francophonie. It also has to train translators and interpreters in these languages. At the same time, the teaching of the new languages of the Francophonie should be intensified and budgeted for in all the regions or sub-regions where the languages are spoken, and with supplementary funding from the OIF headquarters in Paris.

Brief Biography of Author

Dr. Peter Olakunle AKINWANDE is a Senior Lecturer in Comparative French & Francophone Literatures at the University of Lagos. Author of *Négritude et Francophonie, paradoxes culturels et politiques* (L'Harmattan, Paris, 2011, 325 pages), *Littérature Française et Divergence Culturelle* (Pierro Publication Bureau, Lagos, 2013, 242 pages), and *L'Afrique francophone, de 1444 à nos Jours* (Pierro Communication Bureau, Abeokuta, 2004, 121 pages), he obtained a Ph.D (Doctorat-Lettres, Nouveau Régime) from Université Paris Est (UPEC), France in 2009. A strong defender of the values of French Language and Culture, Pierre Akinwande advocates Nigeria's future membership of the Francophonie, just like Ghana (since 2006), but premised on a linguistico-cultural exchange programme that will be mutually-beneficial to Nigeria, France and other francophone partners.

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