

TRANSLATING TO PREVENT COVID-19: QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF THE TRANSLATIONS OF PREVENTION MESSAGES IN WOLOF

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Abstract : In a sociolinguistic context largely dominated by power relations between French, the official language, and Wolof, the main vehicular language, communication for health and prevention often comes up against obstacles due to the effectiveness of the terminology used. When it comes to translation from English into Wolof, two types of difficulties can be identified: the somewhat asymmetrical terminology of the two languages and the method of translation. Considering the impact of these difficulties on the quality of translations, we question the degree to which they are adapted to the contextual and cultural realities of the target language. This study focuses on the evaluation of the quality of translations into Wolof of medical prevention messages in French, in the context of the fight against Coronavirus. Partly inspired by quality assessment perspectives of House (2001) and Larose (1998), our approach explores the possible effects of Wolof translations through the prism of the implementation of a cultural filter and a translational method aimed at efficiency (Sambou, 2019) and faithfulness to the meaning of the original texts. By analyzing the translator's methodological choices through a dozen statements, we propose adaptive procedures of communication in the Wolof language intended to succeed in the translation task while preserving the informative and persuasive functions of statements.

Keywords: Translation, Prevention, Covid-19 Pandemic, English, Wolof

Résumé : Dans un contexte sociolinguistique largement dominé par des rapports de force entre le français, langue officielle, et le wolof, principale langue véhiculaire, la communication pour la santé et la prévention se heurte souvent à des obstacles liés à l'efficacité de la terminologie utilisée. Lorsqu'elle concerne la traduction de l'anglais au wolof, on relève deux types de difficultés : la terminologie quelque peu asymétrique des deux langues et la méthode de traduction. En considérant l'incidence de ces difficultés sur la qualité des traductions, nous nous interrogeons sur le degré d'adaptation de ces dernières aux réalités contextuelles et culturelles de la langue cible. Cette étude s'intéresse à l'évaluation de la qualité des traductions en wolof de messages de prévention médicale en français, dans le cadre de la lutte contre le Coronavirus. Inspirée en partie des perspectives évaluatives de House (2001) et de Larose (1998), notre approche explore les effets possibles des traductions wolof sous le prisme de l'application d'un filtre culturel et d'une méthode traductionnelle visant l'efficacité (Sambou,

2019) et la fidélité au sens des textes de départ. En analysant les choix méthodologiques du traducteur à travers une dizaine d'énoncés, nous proposons des procédés adaptateurs des communications en langue wolof destinés à réussir la tâche de traduction tout en conservant les fonctions informative et persuasive des discours.

Mots-clés : Traduction, prévention, pandémie de Covid-19, anglais, wolof

Introduction

Senegalese sociolinguistic context is particular. Indeed, the vast majority of the population does not understand the official language, French, which is the language of the administration, institutions and external affairs, according to article 1 of the Constitution of January 22, 2001¹. However, initiatives aiming at improving the status of national languages, particularly Wolof, have been increasing since the country's accession to independence, to the extent that most communications of all kinds are carried out in these languages. In this respect, Wolof, which is present throughout most of the national territory, occupies a prominent place and further widens the gap separating it from French and other codified languages in everyday communications. Thus, for more efficiency, most institutional (from the State and its branches) or social (groups of individuals or companies) initiatives have chosen to communicate in bilingual versions French/Wolof, and sometimes only in Wolof. In communications intended for the general public, this is especially noticeable in actions intended to prevent and control endemic or emerging diseases. Since March 2, when Senegal registered its first patient with coronavirus disease, prevention messages against this pathology so far unknown by the population have flooded the media and public communication spaces. However, the omnipresence of Wolof, a language of oral culture by its very essence, alongside French, the source language of these communications, is of great interest for the translator. Indeed, for the efficiency of these messages, the choice of translation terms and processes is a crucial step in the communication process. In this context, among the greatest difficulties in the act of translation are all those examples and implicit information coming from the background of the French language and its encounter with Wolof. Considering the impact of these difficulties on the quality of translations, we question the degree to which they are adapted to the contextual and cultural realities of the target language. In other words, to what extent do the target statements achieve the same effect as in the source language while meeting the requirements of the receptive culture?

This study focuses on the evaluation of the quality of translations into Wolof of medical prevention messages in French, in the context of the fight against Coronavirus. Partly inspired by quality assessment perspectives of House (2001) and Larose (1998), our approach explores the possible effects of

¹ Article 1 of the 2001 Constitution states: « The official language of the Republic of Senegal is French. The national languages are Diola, Malinke, Pular, Serere, Soninke, Wolof and any other language that may be codified. » (Our translation)

Wolof translations through the prism of the implementation of a cultural filter and a translational method aimed at efficiency (Sambou, 2019) and faithfulness to the meaning of the original texts. By analyzing the translator's methodological choices through a dozen statements, we propose adaptive procedures of communication in the Wolof language intended to succeed in the translation task while preserving the informative and persuasive functions of statements.

1. An Overview of the sociolinguistic context

Like in most African countries, the Senegalese sociolinguistic landscape is characterized by a multilingualism based on the coexistence of a variety of native languages that are confronted with the hegemony of French as the official language. The power relations that mark the dynamism of languages is among the particularities of Senegal. Those almost elusive power relations in certain fields can be categorised in three groups: French/national languages, French/Wolof and Wolof/other national languages. Indeed, the Wolof language has imposed itself as a lingua franca for 80% of Senegalese speakers in 2002 (Cissé, 2005) and close to 90% in 2019 (Diagne, 2019). Today Wolof is the common language in which oral interactions are done. The relationship between Wolof and the other local languages point a latent and significant glottophagy processus through a large flow of interferences and lexical loans. Pular and Manding language are holding off from the dominance of Wolof while languages like jóola and sereer continue to lose ground to the benefit of Wolof. (Diouf, I. et al., 2017) The other linguistic communities run up against the predominance of Wolof despite their survival efforts. When it comes to the uses of languages, Wolof dominates all conversational situations even those that would go exclusively in French. As the first language of literacy in Senegal, it dominates the major offensive of local languages in human to human exchanges, both in oral and written levels. As shown by the 1976, 1988, 2002 and 2013 general population censuses mentioned by Diouf, I. et al. (2017), the expansion rate of the Wolof language follows, first, a constant evolution up to 2002, and registered, from that year, an average growth rate of 9,42%. From 2013 to 2019, the progression of Wolof language was around 15%. In view of that progression we are entitled to sustain that Senegal could reach « universal wolofisation » over the next few decades. This sociolinguistic context explains the omnipresence of Wolof about the communication around prevention including messages from French or other foreign languages like English. Therein lies the relevancy of studying prevention messages initially expressed in English and translated into Wolof.

2. A few words about Wolof language

The Wolof group is one of the main ethnic groups in Senegal. Their numbers have led to the unofficial establishment of the Wolof language as the country's main national language. It is a language that is overtaking French in almost all areas, including administration. This language is having cultural expansion. This is partly due to its unity; speakers from different regions understand each other perfectly, and the differences lie in accents, as well as in words borrowed from other neighbouring languages. There is, for example, the

Lebou accent, the St. Louisian accent, the central accent, etc. Wolof has long been written with the completed Arabic alphabet. This script is still used in religious texts, but Wolof now uses the Latin alphabet with special conventions to respect the particular sounds of the language.

"The act of "wolofisation" by some Senegalese is becoming a trivial and also normal phenomenon. Almost all Senegalese speak Wolof and use the language to communicate with each other and at the same time to eliminate some language barriers." (Ndiaye L, 2007: 3). Wolof is a language that belongs to the branch of the Atlantic languages, a sub-group of the Niger Congolese language family. French is of the Indo-European family. Hence, there are differences at the phonemic, morphological, syntactic, morphosyntactic and also lexical levels. Wolof differs from French by its synthetic aspect, more perceptual than conceptual, and uses simple words, in addition to a sustained prosodic rhythm, singing and bouncing.

Examples 1 & 2:

Fever	Yaram wu tàng
The virus	Doomu jàngoro ji

The difference between the two language systems can also be measured at the lexical level. In Wolof, the same meaning can be expressed by different terms, which makes it possible to communicate effectively without interrupting the speaker.

Example 3:

Illness	Jàngoro, woop, feebar, yaram wu sutànte
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Thus, we considered it useful to carry out this study which addresses the real and persistent problem of translating medical terms into Wolof in the context of covid-19.

3. Relevant aspects from Translation Quality Assessment

In the recent history of translation, translation quality assessment has mainly been a concern of teachers. In fact, from the 1970s onwards, most of the work on this issue, generally dealing with faithfulness to the original text, was more concerned with the effectiveness of the learner's translation skills on their translation. This approach assumes that translation is « the result of a linguistic-textual operation in which a text in one language is re-contextualized in another language ». (House, 2015: 2) In the assessment process, a certain emphasis is laid on the linguistic correspondences between the two texts, since translation in this case is essentially aimed at the acquisition of linguistic competence. However, as pointed out by Toudic et al (2014:2-3), the criteria put forward for the evaluation of a translation vary according to the object of the translation task itself and the

context in which it is carried out. Today, with the exponential involvement of computer-aided translation tools in the process, these criteria have become as diverse as they are varied and cover a wide range of language and message-related error types. This is how can be determined "a quality index (TQI) from the ratio number of words evaluated/number of errors". (Toudic et al., *ibid.*:7). The present study looks at the issue of translation quality mainly from a pragmatic point of view by applying the principles relating in particular to the purpose and "mission of the text". (Durieux, 1991 :171). In this respect, the practical questions we are entitled to ask are: did the translation have the same effect on the recipient as the original? Is the translation adapted and integrated into the receiving context? In both cases, faithfulness to the message communicated in the source text is the primary criterion by which the quality of the translations is judged. It is this idea of assessment that guides the holistic approach to the analysis of our corpus.

4. Methodology

The description of the methodological framework of this study brings us to tackle the issue related to the choice of the corpus and to explain the method we have used for the analysis of the latter.

4.1 Choice of the corpus

The choice of the statements that make up our corpus was guided by two criteria: the relevance of the communication situation and the translational interest of the choices made by the translator. These two criteria make it possible, to a certain extent, to gauge the importance of the message conveyed by the statements in the overall communication strategy for the prevention of the pandemic. The relevance of the communication situation lies in the global framework of the multiple stakes linked to the effectiveness of the communication strategy of public authorities (State and branches) and social stakeholders or partners (NGOs, associations and international organizations). In the context of the fight against the spread of coronavirus, it is crucial that the possible means of prevention be fully brought to the practical knowledge of the general public. Indeed, if the very first communications on prevention of the disease aimed at the population required translation into national languages, it is above all because, at the beginning, the message they carried naturally ran up against the problem of its appropriation by the populations, more than two thirds² of which (i.e. approximately 71%) are not French-speaking. Thus, for reasons of effectiveness of these communications, translations into national languages (first and foremost into Wolof in most cases) were undertaken and disseminated on all communication media accessible to the populations (television, radio, billboards, social networks, etc.).

The study of translated statements has, in our opinion, a twofold interest in corpus translology. On the one hand, it offers the opportunity to bring into dialogue two texts belonging to different cultural universes; this exchange

² Refer to page 17 of the 2014 report by the Observatoire de la langue française.

between cultures legitimizes and reinforces the growing interest of translation studies in intercultural communication. Translational analysis, far from being merely contrastive, explores the diversity of channels and modalities through which a message is expressed. On the other hand, the confrontation that translation creates between a hyper-central language such as English and a language of low diffusion such as Wolof gives the latter epistemological possibilities that can strengthen its knowledge and its diffusion to a wider audience. From this perspective, translation provides a basis for contrastive studies on vocabulary and, in particular, terminology. This is why the choices made by the translator in re-expressing meaning are of interest to us, as it allows us to examine more closely the issues related to the effect of terminology and stylistics on meaning.

4.2 Method of corpus analysis

For the analysis of the statements we adopt a method based on four relatively short steps. We begin by providing a brief description of the context in which the statements are communicated, then present, below each statement, its translation; in the third step, we critically examine the choices made by the translator against the key principles of quality and effectiveness of translation (Sambou, 2019). In the final stage, for each statement studied, we suggest a possible translation(s) in accordance with the meaning of the source statements. The general findings that will be drawn from this analysis will open up research perspectives on other issues related to the evaluation or criticism of translations.

5. Presentation and analysis of the corpus

5.1 Presentation of the corpus

We attempted to gather a number of prevention messages that we considered were representative enough of all the aspects this study intends to analyse. Indeed, considering the translational interest of the statements and their relevance in the overall framework of the coronavirus prevention strategy, we extracted the main part of our corpus from one source: an information booklet on the coronavirus in twenty-six (26) languages (thirteen of which are African) designed and published by the Coordination Office for the Mediterranean of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Published in a context where the pandemic was hitting Italy (headquarters of the Office) hard with more than 80,000 cases and 8,165 deaths as of March 26, 2020, this document had two objectives. On the one hand, its production appears to be a rapid response to an urgent need to inform the population, especially migrants, on the various measures to be taken to protect themselves against Covid-19 and to stem its spread in Italian territory and beyond. On the other hand, this initiative is part of IOM's global strategy to support governments in carrying out more inclusive communications on prevention against this disease, especially towards populations on the move outside their national borders. The source text, some five hundred (500) words, is produced in an accessible English and simple style. Its content and the form of presentation of the messages follow the World Health Organization (WHO) prevention rules and guidelines. It describes, in relatively

short sentences, the basic rules to be observed in order to fight, individually and collectively, against the spread of the pandemic. Our corpus covers more than half of the source text and its translation into Wolof, about 275 words. In the analysis, we focus on those aspects of the source texts whose translations clearly present a risk of misunderstanding, our objective being to ensure that the message communicated can be understood in accordance with the author's communicative purpose.

5.2 Corpus analysis

In Senegal, like in any other country, communication for preventing covid19 is especially articulated around four questions. In the following developments we analyse the English-Wolof bilingual statements from our corpus in through the following four complex questions.

(i) « What are the symptoms of Covid-19 ? » /
« Luy màndargaal nit ku am Covid-19 ? »

The first segment of the translated corpus includes two types of errors: overtranslation and awkward syntax.

« The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, tiredness, and dry cough.»

« Màndarga yiñu gënë raañe mooy yaram wuy tàng, yaram wu diis mànàm còono ak sèxët.»

The word « tiredness » is used quite a lot in coronavirus descriptive and preventive messages. According to WHO, the most common symptom is tiredness with fever and dry cough. In that statement tiredness is overtranslated in Wolof. It seems that the translator abused the metalinguistic function of the spoken language. In this context the addition of the term « còono » is unnecessary all the more as the phrase « yaram wu diis » suffices gives the right meaning of the word « tiredness ». in the meaning of WHO³, that tiredness is generally accompanied by a shortness of breath, a symptom suggestive of anaemia. This is why its translation is subject to be extensive and complex like « yaram wu diis ». Hence, the translation in Wolof of that statement could give:

Màndarga yiñu gënë raañe mooy yaram wu ytàng, yaram wu diis ak sèxët.
(The most frequent symptoms are fever, tiredness and dry cough)

The second segment shows an inappropriate profusion that stems from explicative translation.

« ... those affected should receive care to relieve symptoms. »
« ... kEEP kumu dal dinañula taxawu joxla ay garap ba facc lu melni socc bi, yaram buy tàng, còono bi ak sèxët bi. »

³ On its official page, to the question "What are the symptoms of coronavirus infection in humans? the WHO answers: "Symptoms depend on the virus, but the most common symptoms include breathing difficulties, fever, cough, **shortness of breath** and difficulty of breathing. In more severe cases, the infection can lead to pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death. »

In this context of pandemic prevention, while the public needs to receive accurate information, specialized communications which are re-elaborated for popularization purposes should focus on the essential aspects the message. In the translation task, amplification technics should be used only when the translating process faces some terminological problem. Thus, instead of nine words employed to translate « symptoms », the translator could have chosen an equivalent already used in the precedent statement and then add a nominal complement. We would then obtain:

« kEEP kumu dal dinañula taxawu joxla ay garap ba facc màndargay feebar yi. »
(...all affected persons will be managed free of charge for the treatment of symptoms)

(ii)« Is there a vaccine, drug or treatment for Covid-19? » /
« Jangoroji am na garap bu koy facc wala ñakk bulaciy àr ? »

The following statement could have been a practical case of loss and compensation if the meaning of the omitted passage were added at the beginning of the translation.

« Most patients recover thanks to supportive care. Possible vaccines and some specific drug treatments are under investigation. »
« Mbòtaay biy sàmm wèrgi yaramu nitñi ñòngi saytu garap bu koy facc wala ñakk buy àràte ci jàngoro ji. »

The non-translation of the English statement in italics is arguably attributable to the deliberate omission of the translator who, perhaps, has considered that those terms carry non-essential meaning. However, when considering the single meaning of that statement particularly throughout the key terms « supportive care », we can notice that the omission has a real impact on the equivalence of the two texts. It's not at all a loss according to Soubrier and Thuderoz (2010) ; this is in perpetual balance with gains or compensations (Molina & HurtadoAlbir, 2002). In the same perspective communications by specialists show the importance given to the phrase « supportive care » which is translated into french as « soins de support » in the fight against coronavirus. We can, for example, quote, from the official Facebook page of Curie institute, the comment by Dr Carole Bouleuc, head of the department of supportive care: « More than ever before, the supportive care are important for the patients and we have decided to continue their use. » So the omission of « supportive care » by the translator is misinterpretation of the full meaning of the statement. In addition to that, the term is so complex that it does not help to grasp its meaning, particularly when it comes to translate it into Wolof. In an effort to rectify, we can suggest:

« Fàggutéefi paj mi moo waral ñi èpp ci aji-tawat yi dañuy wér». (Supportive care explain why most of the patients recover)

As regards the translation of the second sentence, it shows an unnecessary amplification in the interpretation of the meaning of the source text: « Mbòtay biy sàmm wèrgiyaramu nitñi » (word for word = the organisation that is in charge of the health of the population). In fact, a simple linguistic translation focusing on the given words would be fine to establish the equivalence between the two texts. That addition is redundant as for some part of the meaning and tends to confer on WHO the exclusive right to look for a vaccine against Covid-19. To avoid the risk of such an understanding, we could say:

« Fiinu tollu, ñòngi saytu garap bu koy facc wala ñakk buy àràte ci jangoroji. »
(Possible vaccines and some specific drug treatments are still under investigation.)

(iii) « Who is at risk of developing severe illness? » /
« Ñan la jangoro ji gënë gawa dal? »

The translation of the first statement of this question reveals a loss of at least ten words compared to the source text. (See italics):

« *While we are still learning about how COVID-19 affects people, older persons and persons with pre-existing medical conditions (such as high blood pressure, heart disease, lung disease, cancer or diabetes) appear to develop serious illness more often than others.*

Jangoroji ñimu gënë gawadal mòy magatyi ak mag yu werulyi, ñinga xamne dano am jangoroy xol, wala ñu am ay jafe-jafe ci den, wala ñu am feebaru “cancer” wala “diabete”.

In the perspective of an exhaustive communication of the knowledge around the virus, it is important to precise that all the manifestations of the disease are not known yet. Such a precision could have the advantage of inviting people to show great prudence and vigilance in relation to other unusual symptoms likely to appear in each person or people living with them. That precision could be:

« Doonte peegaguñu màndargay jàngoroji yépp, li wóor mooy... »
(Although all the manifestations of the illness are not known yet, we know that, ... »

(iv) « What can I do to protect myself and prevent the spread of disease? » /
« Lanla mënë def ngir àru ci jangoroji walama bañko lawal? »

In the source language, the last question of the leaflet gives practical and almost exhaustive answers in a simple style. However, the text in Wolof shows that accessibility to the source text seems not to be sufficient to express the whole message. Instead, there is an omission of a whole segment of the message throughout a good thirty of words as mentioned hereunder.

« Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately. Why? Droplets

spread virus. By following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19 »

« Déel taf sa gémmin ak sa bakan ak “mouchoir” bòoy sèxët wala ngay tissoli, bòoko amul nga diko def ci sa cõñcu. »

In their analysis of the meaning units in the source text, the translator probably considered it inappropriate to re-express the entire passage. However, this uncompensated loss of meaning in the rest of the text cuts out essential elements of the overall prevention message. A crucial aspect in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic is the treatment that should be given to objects essential for prevention such as masks and handkerchiefs. This information is therefore just as important as the statement that the translator felt was more useful to include. Thus, a possible translation of

« Then dispose of the used tissue immediately. Why? Droplets spread virus. By following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19 »

could be: « Li waral ma ne la danga war a sànni musuwaar bi nga jëfandikoo ba noppi mooy tuflit yi dañuy wasaare Wiris bi. Su nu toppee li ñu nu digal ci tisli, dinanu aar ñi nu wër ci soj, sibiru ak coronawiris. »

The last message segment of our corpus shows not only losses but also additions that are clearly commentary related.

« Avoid shaking hands and hugging, for the reasons mentioned above. Stay at home as much as possible, following the rules indicated by the authorities »

« Bul di joxe loxo wala ngay fòon ci ay lex. Tòogal sa kër bu sa yaram néexul. » The translation of the verb "hugging" is rather curious in Wolof; whereas the term known to render "to hug" in Wolof is "fóon", the translator has overtranslated by adding to the idea of "hugging" that of "putting one's lips on another's". This addition seems to us to be all the more inappropriate and somewhat exaggerated here since the transmission of the virus can happen through a simple physical contact with others. Moreover, when taken literally, these terms are likely to shock the cultural consciousness of Senegalese Wolof speakers. There is therefore a problem of adaptation and acceptability of the meaning in the target language, probably caused by the loss of a whole section of the statement ('for the reasons mentioned above'). The translation of the rest of the statement, "Stay at home as much as possible, following the rules indicated by the authorities", has shown a deviation resulting from a free commentary "Tòogal sa kër bu sa yaram néexul" (Stay home if you are ill). Rather than a contraction, namely due to the halving of the number of words in the Wolof version (from fourteen to seven), this is a free translation which introduces units of meaning different from those carried by the source statement. Thus, a global translation of this segment, incorporating the comments above, would take the following form:

« Bul di joxe loxo wala ngay foonante. Toogal sa kër te nga sàmmoonte ak digley waa kër doktoor »
 (= Don't shake hands and hug. Stay at home and follow the rules indicated by health specialists)

Conclusion

Translation quality assessment also enables to re-question the translator's approach and understand their choices in reformulating the form and the content of the target text. As a rule, the translation technics used by the Wolof translator presents some weaknesses that tend to truncate or amplify the meaning of the source text. Indeed, between losses, additions and overtranslation, the translation task has proven to be sometimes based upon free interpretation close to mere commentary. These deviations from the message tend to become abusive explicitation. It's true that the specificities of the Wolof language are likely to restrict the translator's leeway to make free choices, which sometimes forced them to resort to borrowing, amplification or simply loss without compensation. The difficulties the translator face are mainly due to the terminological level relatively low of the target language. In domains such as health, the choice of the terms is a fundamental step in the decision-driven process of the translation (Durieux, 2009). In their endeavours to interpret and reformulate the statement of the source text, the translator faces, sometime, difficulties due to other aspects than terminology. Actually, the adaptation of the meaning units of the source text has particularly suffered from some lack of relevant translation procedures. This methodological failure, quite common in the translation of pragmatic texts, is mainly due to a lack of theoretical knowledge in the domain. This is the result of a simplistic representation of translation both as a process and a result. By taking translation as a language shift, the establishment of a correspondent network between the two texts, the translator tends to focus the re-expression process on the paradigmatic axis. And, given the improper inadequacy between the two terminological stocks of Wolof and English, that approach usually leads to some loss of meanings, additions, over-translations or simple creations. The analysis of the Wolof translation of our corpus shows some cultural inadequacy and significant differences on the whole global preventive message from the source text. Thus, with a larger corpus, we assume that these translation errors could be a non-negligible risk, not in terms of "physical distancing" but semantic distancing of the target message from the source one.

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