

# Integrating Cultural Aspects of the Target Audience in Literary Translation: A Case Study of *Barua Ndefu kama Hii*

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## **Abstract**

*This study examines the importance of considering the cultural aspects of the target audience in literary translation using the novel Barua Ndefu kama Hii. Clement Maganga translated this novel into Barua Ndefu kama Hii from So Long a Letter, originally written by Mariama Bâ in French as Une si Longue Lettre. The results of the analysis show that, to a large extent, the translator considered the cultural elements of the target audience by applying Polysystem Theory, whereby smaller cultural systems of the target language are reflected in the translated text. The study highlights the importance of cultural consideration in persuading target readers, enhancing comprehension, minimizing difficulties in selecting appropriate equivalents, and preventing potential cultural conflicts. The findings imply that literary translators should be trained to systematically analyze target-culture norms during translation, while educators and curriculum developers should integrate culturally oriented translation theories into translator training programmes to promote culturally responsive and authentic literary translations.*

**Keywords:** Culture, Target Audience, Literary works, Translation, Literary Translation

## **INTRODUCTION**

Translation is the primary tool for communication between communities that use different languages (Palumbo, 2009). It involves the transfer of information from one community to another. Due to the importance of translation, the transfer of information must be done with great care to ensure that the message, from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL), is understood by the readers of the target language. The care required in transferring information should be especially high in the translation of literary texts. This is because these texts are much more difficult to interpret than other types of texts (Bassnett, 2002). The

difficulty arises from the presence of cultural elements that need to be transferred while considering the target culture, as various scholars from different parts of the world, who have dealt with the translation of literary texts, explain. Recent advances in translation quality assessment tools such as MAS-LitEval, highlight that preserving cultural nuance and stylistic fidelity remains a significant challenge for both human and Artificial Intelligency-assisted literary translation (Kim et al., 2025).

Among researchers outside Tanzania highlighting the challenges of translating literary texts is Cain (2001), who analyzed how cultural learning shapes the translation of Australian novels and how “reading positions” influence comprehension (Cain, 2001). Makinen (2010) examined translation challenges in the Harry Potter series, focusing on the adaptation of cultural references for Finnish audiences. Tanjour (2011) studied *The Virgin and the Gipsy* in the UK context, identifying difficulties related to preserving nuanced social mores. Ezika (2012) explored the translation of *Oliver Twist* into Igbo in Nigeria, particularly addressing the treatment of English personal names. Bustani (2014) researched broader cultural mediation in literary translation in the United States, emphasizing intercultural conveyance.

Similarly, in Tanzania, scholars have investigated literary translation challenges arising from small cultural systems within the target language culture. Malangwa (2005) analyzed the translation of *The Merchant of Venice*, Mtui (2008) examined *Oedipus Rex*, Pembe (2010) focused on *Song of Lawino*, and Feruzi (2011) studied *Nitaolewa Nikipenda*. They consistently underscore that effective translation requires deep insight into the literary and cultural elements embedded in source texts.

In light of these small systems, Even-Zohar’s (2000) polysystem theory offers a valuable framework. He contends that translated literary works must be viewed within a dynamic literary system composed of multiple subsystems, urging translators to map and negotiate these cultural micro-systems within broader literary conventions (Even-Zohar, 2000). Through the work of the preceding scholars who have examined literary text translations, we see that the issue of cultural representation in novels translated into Kiswahili has not been sufficiently addressed, especially in terms of the Polysystems Theory. Despite the expansion of Kiswahili literary translation, limited scholarly attention has been given to how target-culture elements are represented and negotiated in translated novels, especially when examined through the lens of Polysystem Theory.

This study therefore seeks to investigate how cultural representation of the target language is constructed and mediated in the Kiswahili translation of *Barua Ndefu kama Hii*. The study aims to examine how target-culture elements are represented, negotiated, and shaped within the Kiswahili literary polysystem through the translation of *Barua Ndefu kama Hii*.

### **Synopsis of *Barua Ndefu kama Hii***

*Barua Ndefu Kama Hii* (originally *Une si longue lettre*, translated as *So Long a Letter*) by Mariama Bâ is a powerful and emotionally resonant epistolary novel that explores the inner world of Ramatulai, a recently widowed Senegalese woman. Written as a long letter addressed to her close friend Aisatu who is living and working in the United States as a translator at the Senegalese embassy the novel unfolds as a deeply personal narrative that reflects on love, betrayal, womanhood, and resilience within a patriarchal society.

The letter begins with Ramatulai informing Aisatu about the sudden death of her husband, Modu Falli, who passed away in a car accident. However, the letter soon becomes much more than a message of grief; it turns into a powerful testimony of a woman confronting the injustices and limitations placed on her by her culture and religion. Ramatulai recounts how, after many years of marriage and raising a family together, Modu Falli betrayed her by marrying a much younger second wife, as permitted under Islamic and traditional customs. This polygamous union deeply hurt Ramatulai and caused emotional and financial instability for her and her children, leading to their eventual abandonment.

Despite societal expectations and pressure from her community to remarry or conform, Ramatulai chooses to raise her children alone. Her refusal to become a part of the widow inheritance system or to accept another marriage proposal challenges the norms that expect women to be dependent on men. Instead, she chooses dignity, self-respect, and independence, advocating through her life for the possibility of self-reliant womanhood. As the novel progresses, Ramatulai not only mourns her husband's death but also reflects on broader issues facing women in Senegalese society such as early marriage, forced marriage, widowhood, polygamy, and the interruption of girls' education. Through her memories and commentary, she offers a powerful critique of cultural and religious practices that uphold gender inequality. Her voice is both personal and

political, touching on the struggles of motherhood, friendship, tradition, and the search for self-worth.

The letter serves as a bridge between the past and the present, as well as between two women who have chosen different paths in life Ramatulayi who remains in Senegal, and Aisatu who has sought freedom abroad. Through this correspondence, the reader is offered an intimate view into the emotional and psychological landscape of African women caught between tradition and modernity. A landmark in African literature, *Barua Ndefu Kama Hii* is celebrated not only for its poignant and poetic style but also for its fearless advocacy for women's rights. It remains one of the most influential feminist texts in postcolonial African literature, portraying a woman's quiet strength and her determination to redefine her life beyond the constraints of a patriarchal society.

## **POLYSYSTEM THEORY**

The polysystem theory, introduced by Itamar Even-Zohar in the 1970s, is rooted in Russian formalism and significantly impacts translation studies by extending beyond traditional linguistic translation theories (Munday, 2008). According to Even-Zohar, various social symbol systems such as language, literature, economics, politics, and ideology should be understood as interconnected systems rather than isolated elements. These systems are not independent structures but rather open frameworks composed of multiple interrelated subsystems, forming a dynamic polysystem where components interact, overlap, and influence one another.

In this context, literary works should not be analyzed in isolation but as integral parts of a broader literary system. Even-Zohar (2000) argues that the status of translated literature within a literary polysystem is fluid and depends on specific conditions. He identifies three scenarios in which translated literature assumes a central role: when a literary system is in its early stages of development, when it is weak or marginalized and relies on external influences, or when it is undergoing a crisis or transformation, creating a gap that translation helps to fill.

Furthermore, Even-Zohar asserts that the position of translated literature within the polysystem influences translation strategies. When translation holds a central position, translators are more likely to challenge established norms, adopt innovative approaches, and embrace a foreignization strategy that prioritizes the source culture. Conversely,

when translated literature is on the periphery, translators tend to conform to existing literary conventions, favoring a domestication strategy that aligns with the target culture. Within the Polysystem Theory, foreignization and domestication are descriptive rather than prescriptive concepts, shaped by historical and cultural contexts, with no inherent right or wrong approach.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study is based on a qualitative research study that employed two complementary data collection methods, text analysis and in-depth interviews to explore the translation of literary texts. The qualitative approach emphasizes reflective engagement, enabling researchers to connect diverse insights and produce rich, descriptive interpretations through respondents' narratives (Awasthy, 2019; Nassaji, 2015). Drawing on descriptive qualitative methodology, the study used thematic analysis to remain closely tied to the data, minimizing interpretive transformation while identifying emergent codes and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sandelowski, 2010).

Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) systematic stages, beginning with familiarisation through repeated reading of transcripts and text excerpts to develop an overall understanding of the data. This was followed by initial coding, where meaningful units were highlighted and inductive codes were assigned closely to participants' language. Related codes were then organised into preliminary themes during the theme development stage, after which these themes were reviewed and refined by comparing them with both coded extracts and the entire dataset. Once confirmed, the themes were clearly defined and named to capture their conceptual focus. The final stage involved reporting, where the themes were integrated with textual analysis and relevant theoretical perspectives to produce a coherent and data-driven interpretation.

For the text analysis component, the research involved an exhaustive, line-by-line reading of both the source text and its translation. *So Long a Letter* was selected as the primary source due to its frequent use of culturally-specific signifiers and idiomatic expressions, making it an apt case for investigating translational subtleties (Nyandwi & Bazimaziki, 2019). In addition to the primary texts, secondary literature such as scholarly articles was reviewed to provide triangulation and contextualize interpretive frameworks.

The interview phase involved nine participants: three translators, four literary scholars, and two Kiswahili/translation educators. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, based on their expertise in translation and Kiswahili literature, followed by snowball sampling to identify additional knowledgeable respondents. Participants reflected on challenges encountered during translation such as preserving cultural references and managing intertextual signifiers offering nuanced accounts that were transcribed verbatim, coded inductively, and then classified into themes following standards of qualitative descriptive research (Magilvy & Thomas, 2009; Willis et al., 2016). These interviews yielded rich, data-near insights, affirming that effective literary translation demands a deep sensitivity to both source- and target-culture systems, a conclusion supported by Even-Zohar's (2000) Polysystem Theory.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study adhered to established ethical standards for qualitative research. Participants were provided with detailed information sheets and signed informed consent forms before interviews commenced. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymising all names, institutions, and identifying details. Audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored on password-protected devices. Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional research ethics committee, ensuring compliance with national and institutional guidelines for research involving human participants.

### **Integrating Cultural Aspects of the Target Audience in Literary Translation by *Barua Ndefu kama Hii***

This section presents and discusses the importance of considering the cultural aspects of the target audience in the translation of literary works, using the novel *Barua Ndefu kama Hii* as a case study. By applying the Polysystem Theory, the study has identified various roles of incorporating the target audience's culture in translation. These roles include persuading the target readers, ensuring better comprehension of the work, avoiding difficulties in finding appropriate equivalents, and preventing cultural conflicts.

### **Persuading the Target Readers**

The research findings demonstrate that considering the target audience's (TA) culture in translation influences readers' engagement with the work. The translator of the selected novel has used culturally relevant equivalents to appeal to the target audience. Similarly, the author has

deliberately adjusted certain elements in the source text (ST) to reflect the TA's culture. This adaptation has been carried out either through omission or modification of elements.

Omission is evident at the beginning, where the word *Dear* in the phrase *Dear Aissatou* from the source language (SL) has been left out in the target language (TL). Ideally, the translation should have read *Mpendwa Aissatu* (*Mpendwa* being the equivalent of *Dear*). However, this omission was intentional, as the translator saw no significant impact on meaning or comprehension for the target audience.

Additionally, certain elements have been modified in translation. For example, character names have been adjusted to align with the TA's cultural norms. In Kiswahili, personal names often end with a vowel. The research found that the translator altered character names by adding vowel endings to make them more familiar to the target audience. Refer to Pair 1,

#### **Pair 1**

**SL:** Tamsir, purge yourself of your dreams of conquest (pg. 58).

**TL:** Tamsiri, zitapike hizo ndoto zako za kutaka kuniposa (pg. 78).

In the above quote, the name *Tamsir* was modified by adding the vowel "i" at the end, becoming *Tamsiri*. Ezika (2012), in her study on the translation of *Oliver Twist*, examined the challenges and strategies involved in translating character names and settings. She found cultural representation in literary translation through character names. For instance, the name *Oliver Twist* was translated as *Akabuogu*, meaning "a hand is a battle," to align with Igbo culture. This demonstrates that translators often modify character names when necessary to resonate with the cultural background of the intended audience. In Pair 2,

#### **Pair 2**

**SL:** The smell of the Lakh cooling in the calabashes pervades the air, exciting (pg. 5).

**TL:** Harufu ya ugali wa mtama uliowekwa katika vibuyu ili upate vuguvugu hewani na kututia hamu ya kula (pg. 7).

The element *Lakh cooling*, instead of being translated as a Senegalese dish made from millet and eaten with fermented milk, has been translated as millet porridge. The translator used "millet porridge" intending to



persuade their readers because porridge is a well-known, popular, and widely consumed dish among Swahili speakers. Similarly, in Pair 3,

### **Pair 3**

**SL:** I did not mind being a ‘stick-in-the mud’ (pg. 77).

**TL:** Potea mbali nikiitwa ‘zilipendwa’ (pg. 104).

The element *stick-in-the-mud* has been translated as *zilipendwa*. The term *zilipendwa* is commonly used in Swahili-speaking communities to refer to things, people, situations, or matters that are outdated. Therefore, the equivalent *millet porridge* in pair 2 and *zilipendwa* in pair 3 are closely tied to Swahili culture, which captures the readers’ attention. Considering the environment and culture allows readers to create mental images and visualization through familiar elements.

The respondents stated that when a translation focuses on the target language (TL), the target audience feels connected to the work. Furthermore, they perceive that all the elements written in the text relate to them. This aspect helps the target language readers engage with the work more enthusiastically. One respondent stated that:

Translators of literary works use captivating and comprehensible language tailored to the intended audience to effectively convey the message, preserve the aesthetic quality of the original text, and emotionally engage readers. This requires not only linguistic fluency but also cultural competence and literary sensitivity. In translating novels into Swahili, for instance, the translator must ensure that the target audience can connect with the cultural references, idioms, tone, and rhythm of the language used. The translator’s task is not merely to replace words from one language with those of another, but to re-create the experience, mood, and literary value of the original work in a way that resonates with Swahili-speaking readers. If readers of a novel translated into Swahili fail to experience the cultural and literary essence inherent in the Swahili language such as its proverbs, metaphorical expressions, oral traditions, and storytelling style they are likely to find the translation lacking in authenticity, emotional depth, and narrative power. As a result, they may not fully enjoy or appreciate the literary work, which can undermine the purpose of the translation itself. A successful literary translation must, therefore, go beyond linguistic accuracy to ensure cultural and stylistic relevance, allowing the translated text to feel as natural and impactful as an original Swahili literary creation.



This explanation highlights that culture is a crucial aspect of translating literary texts. Bassnet (2013), in his research on communication in translation, emphasizes the need to persuade readers of translated literary texts. He states, “In literary translation, one of the key aspects to consider in attracting and persuading the target audience is their culture. This aligns with the translator’s selection of equivalents that exist within the cultural environment of the TL.

Additionally, research has revealed that the artistic use of language, particularly through idioms and proverbs, appeals to the TL audience by evoking emotions that stimulate their interest in reading. Refer to Pair 4,

#### **Pair 4**

**L:** The University has its own large number of despairing rejects (pg. 18).

**TL:** Hata katika Chuo Kikuu halaiki kubwa ya wanafunzi hushindwa na wengine hukata tamaa (pg. 25).

The element “rejects” has been translated as *hukata tamaa* (loses hope). The idiom *kata tamaa* is deeply rooted in Swahili culture, meaning a state in which a person loses hope in something and completely gives up on it. Moreover, the use of various idioms and proverbs in *Barua Ndefu kama Hii* demonstrates how the translator employed artistic techniques rooted in Swahili culture to make the Target Language audience eager to read the text. Polysystems Theory emphasizes that translation must be associated with various systems surrounding the life of the TL audience to ensure natural readability. The audience should not feel like they are reading a translated text but rather perceive it as an original work. These ideas grant translators the freedom to incorporate new elements into the TL, omit certain aspects of the SL in the translation, and refine some elements to persuade the target readers.

#### **Making Readers Understand**

Translators of literary works consider the culture of their target audience to ensure that the work is well understood. Taking into account the culture of the SL enables readers of the TL to encounter familiar elements from their everyday lives. As a result, the intended message reaches them more easily. Awadalbari (2018) emphasizes that one of the key qualities of a translator is having a deep understanding of both the source culture (SC) and the target culture (TC) to provide an accurate translation. This means that if a translator lacks sufficient knowledge of both the source and target

languages, they are likely to distort cultural meanings during translation. Considering the cultural aspects of the TL in translated novels, particularly through thematic and stylistic adaptation, helps TL readers grasp the intended message more easily.

In terms of content, Swahili-translated novels depict messages that reflect the realities of Swahili life. Research has shown that *Barua Ndefu kama Hii* has been translated in a way that aligns with the culture of the TL because its themes relate to the daily life of the TL audience. For instance, in Pair 5,

#### **Pair 5**

**SL:** I sought refuge in God, as at every moment of crisis in my life (pg. 82).

**TL:** Nikamkimbilia Mungu, kama nilivyokuwa nafanya kila mara mkosi uliponijia katika maisha yangu. (pg. 112).

The element *crisis* has been translated as *mkosi* instead of *baa*. The translator chose *mkosi* because it is a widely recognized word in Swahili society, meaning something believed to bring misfortune to a person. Furthermore, *Barua Ndefu kama Hii* allows the TL audience to understand the intended message through religious beliefs that reflect Swahili culture. For example, in Pair 6,

#### **Pair 6**

**SL:** We buried our milk teeth in the same holes and begged our fairy godmothers to restore them to us (pg. 1).

**TL:** Meno yetu ya utotoni yalipokuwa yaking'oka tuliyachimbia katika mashimo yale yale na tuliomba msaada wa panya ili aturudishie meno mengine mazuri zaidi (pg. 1).

The phrase *we buried our milk teeth in the holes and begged our fairy godmothers to restore them to us* has been translated as *Meno yetu ya utotoni yalipokuwa yaking'oka tuliyachimba katika mashimo na tuliomba msaada wa panya ili aturudishie meno mengine mazuri zaidi*. Ramatulayi narrates this to Aisatu as a way of reminiscing about their childhood. Likewise, when TL readers encounter this passage, it evokes childhood memories since it is common for children to bury their fallen teeth in a hole or throw them onto the roof with the belief that they will receive better teeth.

Similarly, the theme of parenting is portrayed following Swahili culture to help the TL audience understand the SL more easily. Ramatulayi narrates:

**Pair 7**

**SL:** Did Modou appreciate, in its full measure, the void created by his absence in this house? Did Modou attribute to me more energy than I had to shoulder the responsibility of my children? (pg. 53).

**TL:** Je, Modu alishawahi kulipima pengo kubwa aliloliacha katika nyumba hii? Je, alikuwa amenipa nguvu zilizokuwa zaidi ya zile za kwangu ili niweze kuwasaidia wanangu wafanikiwe? (pg. 71).

The data presented above highlights how Ramatulayi is entrusted with the responsibility of taking care of her family and her husband. She finds herself in a difficult situation, asking many questions, indicating dissatisfaction with Modu's behavior of neglecting the family. This issue is very real for the Swahili community, where women are associated with caregiving. The presentation of themes that touch on real-life issues for the target audience is one of the important aspects that allows this audience to understand the translated text.

Furthermore, one of the respondents explained that in Swahili society, students who use translated novels such as *Barua Ndefu kama Hii* in their learning process understand them just as well as novels originally written in Swahili. This is because, considering the small-scale systems within the TT, such as literature, history, culture, and the environment, target audience reads TT as if it were ST. In the selected novel, Ramatulayi says:

**Pair 8**

**SL:** The assimilationist dreams of the colonist drew into its crucible our mode of thought and way of life. The sun helmet worn over the natural protection of our kinky hair, smoke-filled pipe in the mouth, white shorts just above the calves, very short dresses displaying shapely legs (pg. 24).

**TL:** Ndoto za mkoloni za kututaka tufanane nayo zilianza kutoa athari. Akili na utu wetu ulianza kuingia katika utamaduni wake, tukaanza kuvalishwa kofia ati kwa ajili ya kuzilinda nywele zetu zilizokamatana, wengine wakivuta mitemba itoayo moshi mdomoni na kuvaa kaptura nyeupe juu ya

magoti, ambazo ni nguo fupi mno zilizoacha miundi na mapaja mazuri nje (pg.33).

Through the data presented above, the system of colonial history is outlined in a way that reflects the target audience. Swahilis, like other Africans, were colonized by the Europeans. Colonialism left a cultural impact on the Swahili community. When readers of the TT encounter issues of colonialism in a translated novel, it is easier for them to understand because their society has experienced that historical period. On this basis, novels translated into Swahili, in addition to strengthening Swahili culture, allow the Target audience to understand the target text more easily. This issue is also discussed by Tymoczko (2007). In his book on the analysis of comparative theory in literature, he states that three factors can affect the selection of synonyms by a translator to make the target audience understand the translation. These factors are the text being translated, the translator, and institutional reasons (which involve cultural factors). Tymoczko's ideas are related to our argument that the use of the target audience's culture in translation makes the translated text more comprehensible.

### **Avoiding the Difficulty of Finding Accurate Equivalents**

When a translator considers the culture of the target audience in their translation, they will avoid the difficulty of finding accurate equivalents for concepts that do not have direct equivalents in TL. Nida (1964) & Newmark (1988) state that cultural equivalents are categorized into five main groups: ecology, flora and fauna, customs and traditions, politics, and religion. Due to cultural differences (based on these categories) between the ST and TT societies, the translator should use concepts that are familiar within the target culture. Additionally, a translator of literary texts has the freedom to use various methods, as discussed by Malangwa (2005) in her research on the cultural impact in translation. Her findings align with the translation strategies for cultural texts proposed by Newmark (1988). These strategies include transference, cultural substitution, active synonym definition, semantic translation, compensation, cultural borrowing, and cultural hybridization.

In the selected novel, the use of the strategy of transference has been considered to avoid the difficulty of finding equivalents. For instance, in Pair 9,

### **Pair 9**

**SL:** The new brassiere or the one bought at the second-hand market (pg. 8).

**TL:** vitamba vipya vilivyonunuliwa kwa muuza mitumba (pg. 11).

The element "second-hand market" is translated as "mitumba" instead of "soko la mara ya pili." The word *mitumba* is widely known by Swahilis as they use second-hand items in their daily lives. When a reader encounters the word *mitumba*, it evokes images of everyday life in their community. It is important to note that Swahilis live in third-world countries that receive many used goods, especially items like clothes and utensils from developed countries. Wearing second-hand clothes is something familiar to them. In Pair 10,

### **Pair 10**

**SL:** By the way of reply, I am beginning this diary, my prop in distress (pg. 1).

**TL:** Ili nikujibu, nafungua hili daftari ambalo nalifanya kama nguzo ya kujiegemezea katika vurumai lililonipata (pg.1).

The element "diary" is translated as "daftari" instead of "shajara." The consideration of the target culture helped the translator realize that there was no need to use "shajara" because Swahilis are not accustomed to keeping records in a diary. Therefore, the equivalent "daftari" is more widely understood than "shajara."

### **Avoiding Cultural Tensions**

Literature is a product of society; thus, it carries the culture of the society in question. When a translator considers the culture of the target audience in their translation, they instill trust in the target audience by showing that their culture is valued and preserved. This also helps protect the cultural practices of SL and prevents the target audience from glorifying the culture of another society, thus avoiding cultural tensions that could arise from historical, temporal, and economic differences between the source and target communities.

In *Barua Ndefu kama Hii*, the translator has adjusted certain aspects to avoid cultural tensions. We see how the words of Farmata to Ibrahim Salli have been adapted in a way that aligns with the target culture without causing any conflicts. She says:

## Pair 11

**SL:** Then warn your mother. We or I shall go to see her tomorrow to announce your crime (pg. 85).

**TL:** Basi, mweleze mama yako. Kesho tutakwenda au nitakwenda kumwona kumzungumzia mahari (pg.115).

In the data presented above, Ibrahim Salli, who impregnated Ramatulayi's daughter, is surrendering to her to ask for forgiveness for the things he has done. Farmata, who was present during the conversation, decides to provoke Ibrahim Salli by telling him that she will go to his home to discuss the dowry with his mother. Here, the word "warn" has been translated as "eleza" (explain) instead of "onya" (warn), and the word "crime" has been translated as "mahari" (dowry) instead of "faini/adhabu" (fine/penalty). This is a deliberate misinterpretation because, in Swahili culture, admonishing a mother is considered harsh language. A mother is expected to be respected and loved. Swahili people speak to mothers with polite language to honor them. The Swahili culture values the practice of dowry payment before marriage, which is why the translator has used a phrase to refer to dowry.

Research has highlighted how adherence to the target culture helps prevent cultural conflicts. One of the respondents explained:

In Swahili literature, novels must align with the customs and traditions of the Swahili people. There has been much debate about the freedom to depict love and sexual events openly. By nature, Swahili people do not discuss matters of love, sex, and intimate body parts directly but use euphemisms. For example, Professor Bertoncini daringly referred to the novel *Dar es Salaam Usiku* in English as "the first erotic novel in Swahili" because it discusses matters of romance in an open manner, which is different from what is typically accepted in Swahili culture. The issue of adhering to ethics among Swahili people is complex, which is why we have witnessed the banning of songs such as *Chura* by Snura due to moral misconduct. Always, freedom must have its boundaries to avoid misuse. In depicting such matters, the author can use various artistic techniques; for instance, euphemisms and symbolism to allow the reader to interpret these things for themselves.

The excerpt highlights how writers, translators, and literary critics must consider the culture of the target community. In *Barua Ndefu kama Hii*,

we see how Daba tells her mother that Binetuu has found a man (lover) who gives her money to buy new clothes. She says:

**Pair 12**

**SL:** Oh, I have a sugar-daddy who pays for them (pg. 35).

**TL:** Nguo hizi nazipata kutokana na mfuko wa mzee mmoja. (pg. 46).

Through the data presented above, Binetuu appears to begin a romantic relationship with Modu, who is of the same age as her father. Modu has been giving Binetuu money to buy new clothes. We see that the translator has used the term *mzee mmoja* (an elderly man) instead of *hawara* (lover) to soften the harshness of the words because the Swahili community is not accustomed to directly mentioning words associated with love and sexuality. The use of *mzee mmoja* reflects respect, as opposed to the term *hawara*.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

This study concludes that cultural factors are fundamental to the translation of literary works. The analysis of *Barua Ndefu kama Hii* shows that effective incorporation of cultural elements from both the source and target contexts enhances translation quality, accuracy, and acceptability. The findings answer the research questions by demonstrating that cultural awareness and intercultural competence significantly influence how meaning is interpreted and conveyed, enabling translators to meet the expectations of diverse audiences and produce contextually appropriate translations.

The study contributes to translation theory by reinforcing culture-oriented perspectives that view translation as a culturally embedded practice rather than a purely linguistic exercise. In practical terms, it highlights the importance of equipping translators with strong cultural and intercultural competencies. However, the study is limited by its focus on a single text and translator and by the absence of reader reception or translator perspectives, suggesting the need for broader, multi-text and multi-method approaches in future research.

### Recommendations

#### *For Translators*

Translators are encouraged to engage continuously with diverse literary texts from multiple cultural contexts to deepen their cultural awareness



and intercultural sensitivity. Such engagement enhances their ability to interpret culturally embedded meanings and to make informed decisions when handling culture-specific expressions. Translators should also consciously choose between domestication and foreignisation strategies, depending on whether the communicative goal is to align with target audience expectations or to preserve and foreground the distinctiveness of the source culture.

### ***For Trainers and Lecturers***

Translation trainers and lecturers should place greater emphasis on cultural and intercultural competence as core components of translation training. Teaching approaches should integrate comparative cultural analysis, case studies of literary translations, and practical exercises that require students to justify their cultural translation choices. Encouraging critical reflection on cultural transfer will better prepare trainee translators for real-world translation challenges.

### ***For Curriculum Developers***

Curriculum developers are advised to design translation programmes that systematically incorporate culture-focused modules alongside linguistic training. Courses should include exposure to literary texts from diverse cultural backgrounds, translation theory on culture, and applied intercultural communication. Embedding culture as a transversal theme across translation courses will ensure that graduates possess both technical and cultural competencies.

### ***For Policy Makers in Language and Culture***

Policy makers should support policies that promote multilingualism, literary translation, and intercultural exchange. This includes funding translation projects, supporting translator training initiatives, and encouraging the inclusion of culturally diverse texts in education systems. Such policies would strengthen the role of translation in cultural preservation, mutual understanding, and cross-cultural dialogue at national and regional levels.

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