Bridging Languages: Exploring Selected English-based African Novel Titles in Kiswahili Abstract

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Abstract
African literature is a compelling medium through which the intricate tapestry of the region's cultures, traditions, and historical narratives is conveyed. The narratives often reflect the socio-political landscapes and cultural identities inherent in African societies, which makes these works important resources for understanding the region's historical trajectory and contemporary issues. African English-based novels serve as an important conduit for conveying the region's cultural and socio-political narratives. Translating their titles into Kiswahili facilitates cross-cultural engagement by bridging the linguistic and cultural gaps. This study conducts a linguistic analysis of 19 selected African English-based novel titles and their Kiswahili translations. It focuses on how language, culture, and literature intersect in the translation process. The analysis applies the Structural Functional Translation Analysis (SFTA) framework to examine how Kiswahili morphological and syntactic structures accommodate and preserve the literary function and cultural resemblance of the original English titles. The study argues that the translated titles maintain both linguistic integrity and cultural relevance within the target language. The study contributes to the discourse on how Kiswahili functions as a cultural and linguistic bridge in African literary translation.

Keywords: *English-based African Novels, Structural Functional Translation Analysis, Kiswahili Translations, Bridging Languages*

INTRODUCTION

African literature is a rich and diverse tapestry of narratives that reflect the region's cultures, traditions, and histories. These works encompass

various genres and employ unique linguistic features and storytelling techniques. They often address socio-political and cultural identities (Omuteche, 2015, 2019; Sone, 2018). Kiswahili, widely spoken in East Africa, serves as a linguistic bridge that facilitates access to English-based African literature and promotes cross-cultural understanding and solidarity. It functions as a unifying lingua franca across ethnic groups and permeates education, the media, and the government (Sebonde, 2018; Marjie, 2021). Bridging the linguistic gap between English and Kiswahili requires effective translation. The growing prevalence of Kiswahili translations of English texts highlights the increasing scholarly and cultural importance of Kiswahili (Feruzi & Japhari, 2022). Flavia (2014) comments that literary translation into Kiswahili carries symbolic cultural significance, exemplified by Nyerere's Kiswahili translations of Shakespeare. However, despite the enormous cultural, lexical, and grammatical features in African English novel titles that complicate direct translation into Kiswahili (Marjie, 2024), available literature (Flavia, 2014) has focused more on full texts than on titles.

This study applies the Structural-Functional Translation Analysis (SFTA) framework to a corpus of African English novel titles translated into Kiswahili. SFTA emphasizes structural mapping to achieve functional equivalence by reconstructing the source title within Kiswahili's morphological and syntactic framework. It balances sociocultural factors with linguistic norms to ensure that translated titles function appropriately within Kiswahili culture, align with local socio-literary standards, and preserve both meaning and reception. The Structural-Functional Translation Analysis (SFTA) framework was developed to meet specific analytical needs in studying translated texts, especially African literature translated into Kiswahili. It integrates structural linguistic and functionalist perspectives to analyze both form and communicative purpose. It emphasises the relationship between source and target language structures while considering cultural and contextual factors. Refined through corpus-based research, SFTA offers novel methodological tools that link structural features to their functional roles in translation. Bakrim (2023) links this approach to Toury's (2012) norm-governed translation process and Hermans' (1999) concept of translation norms as social constructs. The framework assumes that Kiswahili morphology can substitute for English syntactic structures, a position supported by Hurskainen (2019) and computational studies. Esher (2022) identifies specific rules for subject markers, object marking, and negation,

showing how lexical adaptation and structural preservation intersect in evaluating translated titles. The selected titles reflect key African literary themes, colonialism, post-colonial identity, gender roles, cultural conflict, and socio-political issues, and often incorporate proverbs and idioms to create cultural resonance (Kumar & Gladwin, 2025). A textual analysis method was employed to examine the linguistic and stylistic devices in these titles.

This study focuses on grammatical shifts, lexical recalibration, functional preservation, and typology variation in the translation of novel titles from English into Kiswahili. This study contributes to African literary translation by deepening the understanding of Kiswahili patterns and expanding the application of the SFTA framework within East African literary contexts. It diverges from a translation of a literary work to one that looks at the linguistic perspective of the titles. The analysis is limited to nineteen novel titles translated into Kiswahili, focusing exclusively on titles and considering the East African literary language as the target cultural context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review examines the key scholarship that underpins the analytical framework of the present study. It begins by situating the study within the sociocultural and institutional contexts of African-to-African translation on Kiswahili title translation practices and the unique perspectives they offer. Subsequently, it outlines the theoretical traditions informing the framework, including functionalist and norm-governed perspectives, and discusses the methodological contributions of the Systemic Functional Translation Analysis (SFTA) framework under the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The review also addresses the typological differences between English and Kiswahili morphology that impact translation strategies. Finally, it highlights prior applications of structural-functional approaches to related translation problems and identifies the research gap this study aims to fill through a multi-title corpus analysis of African English novel titles translated into Kiswahili.

Title Translation in Africa-to-Africa Context

African literature holds a significant place in global literary discourse because of its rich exploration of complex societal issues, identity dynamics and human experiences (Kumar & Gladwin, 2025). Renowned authors such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Chimamanda Ngozi

Adichie have shaped narratives that address colonialism, gender roles, cultural identity, and independence struggles. These themes offer insights into cultural heritage, historical injustices, and post-colonial identity, as reflected in titles such as Achebe's 'Things Fall Apart' and Soyinka's 'A Death in the King's Horse' (Chen, 2023). Obobolo (2016), Gheorghiu (2001), Bazzi (2022), Wu et al. (2022), and Mounassar (2023) discuss the symbolic power of titles in European books. They note that these serve as initial points of contact that capture core narrative motifs. This symbolic significance underscores the importance of translation. Translation plays a crucial role in bridging linguistic divides, particularly between English and Kiswahili, with Kiswahili serving as a unifying lingua franca in East Africa (Sebonde, 2018; Marjie, 2021). Kiswahili translations of African English literature facilitate cross-cultural understanding and solidarity, extending the reach of African narratives to a broader audience. However, discussions by Flavia (2014), Marjie (2024), and Kabio-Danlebo & Marjie (2025) posit that translating titles presents unique challenges because of their dense cultural, lexical, and grammatical features, which complicate direct transposition into Kiswahili. Despite the growing importance of Kiswahili literary translation, scholarship has predominantly focused on full texts rather than titles, leaving a gap in our understanding of how titles function within the translation process.

Within African-to-African translation contexts, Kiswahili title translations carry significant socio-cultural influence. Mazrui (2016) argued that translation is a complex interaction among culture, history, and politics, in which the title's cultural language influences the reader's engagement. This development is supported by the emergence of a distinct Kiswahili literary style, shaped by historical translation efforts and influential figures such as Sheikh Shaaban Robert, which continue to guide current practices in title translation (Maitaria & Momanyi, 2018). Empirical studies, such as Marjie's (2024) and Kabio-Danlebo and Marjie's (2025) analyses of Nollywood movie titles, reveal strategies, including ellipsis, borrowing, and paraphrasing, noting that they do so to adapt to Kiswahili audiences rather than to preserve literal meaning. Similarly, Flavia (2014) and Waliaula (2019) documented cultural-lexical substitutions in Kiswahili literary translation. This shows a norm-governed approach focused on audience recognition. For the present study, Kabio-Danlebo and Marjie's (2025) parallel framing is relevant because title translation is not a surface-faithful operation but a balance between preserving the source and repositioning it for recognition in the target cultural space.

These findings position Kiswahili-title translation from English-language novels as a literary event that requires dedicated scholarly attention.

Theoretical and Methodological Foundations

The theoretical foundation for analyzing title translation integrates functionalist and norm-governed perspectives. Nord (1997) frames translation as purposeful. Its success is measured by the effect of the target text on its audience, a principle that Sdobnikov (2019) and Remonato (2022) extend to title translation. They posit that the title's role is a paratextual and commercial decision point. Hermans (1999) and Bakrim (2023) contribute to norm theory by describing translation choices as governed by social and cultural constructs. Socio-cultural dynamics influence operational decisions throughout the process. Their framework prioritizes preserving hierarchical social meanings to meet the cultural expectations of the target readership. Zuo & Peng (2014) show SFL's applicability to literary title translation. It links contextual source configurations to typological adjustments in the target titles. Structural-functionalism further informs this approach by treating titles as semiotic networks whose internal balance must be preserved in translation.

Methodologically, this study draws on Structural-Functional Translation Analysis (SFTA) as a focused framework that adapts its principles specifically to translation. SFTA examines how Kiswahili morphological and syntactic structures are adjusted to preserve the communicative functions and literary meanings of English novel titles. The SFTA framework was developed to analyse translated texts, particularly African literature, and in our case, English translations into Kiswahili. Integrating structural linguistic and functionalist perspectives, it examines form and communicative purpose by relating source–target language structures to cultural and contextual functions. Refined through corpus-based studies, it provides tools for systematically linking structural features with their functional roles in translation processes and outcomes.

Linguistic and Contextual Considerations in Kiswahili-English Translation

A critical linguistic consideration is the typological asymmetry between English and Kiswahili. Kituku & Muchemi (2023) and Lusekelo (2025) discuss Kiswahili's complex morphology, characterized by noun-class systems and head-marking (subject prefixing) and agglutinative verb structures. These may contrast with English's syntactic reliance on word

order and function words. Hurskainen's (2019) computational analysis highlights Kiswahili's morphological capacity to encode grammatical information that English expresses syntactically, necessitating restructuring of information during translation. This asymmetry is supported by broader Bantu linguistic research (Gibson, 2019; Marten et al., 2007; Wal, 2015). Prior applications of structural-functional frameworks to translation studies include Liu and Li's (2022) tracing of SFL-based translation analysis, and studies such as Arenberg's (2016) examination of Kiswahili translations of 'Things Fall Apart', which interprets renaming decisions as audience-oriented. Flavia's (2014) cataloguing of East African Kiswahili literary translations provides empirical grounding for cultural-lexical substitution patterns expected in title translation. Other studies, including John's (2023) work on sign-language translation and Alex's (2022) research on Kiswahili drama translations, highlight the broader cultural and performative dimensions of translation in East Africa.

Despite these contributions, a gap remains in title corpus analyses that apply a unified structural-functional framework to African English novel titles translated into Kiswahili. Existing research tends to focus on single texts or different registers (Marjie, 2024; Flavia, 2014; Arenberg, 2016). This study addresses this gap by combining theoretical traditions and operationalizing them through a systematic procedure that moves from morphological analysis to functional profiling and typology classification. These thereby elucidate translation strategies found in English-Kiswahili title pairs.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Structural-Functional Translation Analysis (SFTA) model integrates structuralist linguistics with functionalist translation theory (Nord, 1997; Luo, 2025) to analyze how cultural and linguistic norms influence the translation of African English literary titles into Kiswahili. Xiao et al. (2024) posit that the model aligns with the Parsonian action framework in translation studies, which views translation as social action governed by the norms and conventions of the target culture. The core tenet of SFTA treats literary titles as semiotic systems whose stability depends on balancing the source text's semantic intensity with the socio-literary conventions of the target culture (Gheorghiu, 2001). Briffa & Caruana (2009) and Marjie (2024) admit that titles function as communicative stimuli that must preserve the informative, expressive, and appellative

functions of the original within the translated context. The framework centers on the linguistic mechanics of semantic and structural mapping. Pym (2016) holds that functional equivalence is achieved through precise transposition of linguistic features between language systems. The analytical process systematically identifies the core semantic markers within the source title and re-establishes them within the morphological and syntactic constraints of the target language. According to Briffa & Caruana (2009), a translated title should be juxtaposed to check for equivalence in the target reader rather than the surface correspondence of its lexical items. Linguistically (Pym, 2016), the framework focuses on comparing the structure of languages to achieve similar functions in translation.

SFTA views socio-cultural factors as essential constraints that must be balanced against linguistic rules to ensure that the translated title functions appropriately within the target culture. Bakrim (2023) argues that this perspective aligns with Toury's (2012) concept of translation as a norm-governed process, where operational, preliminary, and initial norms guide the translator’s decisions at every stage. It also corresponds to Hermans' (1999) view of translation norms as a socio-cultural construct that collectively influences all translation acts within a given system. The framework assumes that variations in Kiswahili morphology can functionally replace the syntactic nuances found in English literary titles. According to Hurskainen (2019), the morphological features of Kiswahili serve as equivalents to syntactic structures expressed differently in English, a concept supported by computational and contrastive studies of Kiswahili-English translation.

In Kiswahili, the verb encodes information that English distributes across auxiliary verbs, tense markers, and aspectual adverbs; this contrast is observable in applicative, causative, stative, and reciprocal extensions, as well as in extended verb forms (Stump, 2022). Where this dense agglutinating morphology meets the analytic morphology of English, morphotactic rules govern the surface form of the translated title. Esher (2022) explains that this framework includes specific rules for placing subject markers, marking objects, and expressing negation. This contrastive approach to morphology clarifies how lexical changes and structural consistency interact, offering a detailed classification system to assess how effectively translated literary titles function. The framework positions the translator as a mediator reconciling the source language's

structural demands with the target reader's pragmatic expectations. Nord (2019) contends that this mediating role is particularly evident in title translation, where the title serves as the initial point of cultural contact between the work and its new audience.

Analytical Framework Under SFTA

The study adopts the Structural-Functional Translation Analysis (henceforth SFTA) framework to examine how English titles are translated into Kiswahili. Rather than approaching title translation from a cultural or ideological perspective, SFTA is grounded in two complementary linguistic dimensions: grammatical structure and the communicative function that the title must serve**.** The first principle of SFTA prioritises a translation's function and communicative purpose over word-for-word equivalence (Arenberg, 2016; Flavia, 2014). Literature on African translation (Mazrui, 2016; Mbithi et al., 2025) frames this principle socially, as enabling communication across languages, and a title identifies and sells a book even when wording changes. Marjie (2024) observes that translating between English and African languages, such as rendering titles into Kiswahili, often amounts to information repackaging, making the title catchy for the target market.

Another tenet of SFTA acknowledges that English and Kiswahili are varieties, with direct consequences for title translation. Kituku & Muchemi (2023), Lusekelo (2025) and John (2023) explain that English is largely analytic, with grammatical relations indicated by relatively fixed word order and separate function words. Kiswahili, by contrast, is a Bantu language with SVO order and rich morphology. It has grammatical relations marked by prefixes and suffixes, nouns are organised into classes, and concordial agreement appears on adjectives, demonstratives, and verbs (Kituku & Muchemi, 2023; Lusekelo, 2025). Mbithi et al. (2025) and Nyangeri (2014) claim that, in Kiswahili-focused translation, adjustments typically involve shifts in nouns, objects, or abstract concepts. It treats these shifts as expected linguistic responses that align the English surface with Kiswahili grammar rather than as losses. Beyond reordering words and prefixes, SFTA treats two adjustments as central: transposition[1] and lexical recalibration[2]. Transposition is a shift in which a

[1] Transposition refers to a translation strategy where a word or phrase changes its grammatical category during the translation process.

[2] Recalibratory translation, as described in the study's analysis of African English novel titles translated into Kiswahili, refers to a translation strategy where the translated title aligns

word changes grammatical category during translation; for instance, an English conjunction may be replaced in Kiswahili by a verbal process (Mbithi et al., 2025; Nyangeri, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative comparative textual-analysis design to examine English-language African novel titles and their Kiswahili translations. The design was appropriate because the study focused on interpreting the linguistic, semantic, functional, and cultural changes that occur when literary titles are translated from English into Kiswahili. Rather than measuring numerical patterns, the study compared each English title with its corresponding Kiswahili rendition to establish how meaning, form, literary effect, and culture-specific references were represented in the target language. The unit of analysis was the novel title and its Kiswahili translation. Each title pair was examined as a linguistic and literary text. The analysis considered the grammatical structure of the titles, lexical choices, semantic meanings, pragmatic or communicative functions, and culturally marked expressions. Attention was also given to translation shifts, including additions, omissions, substitutions, and restructuring, where these affected the meaning or effect of the title. The study used a comparative approach. First, the English title was examined to identify its structural form, key lexical items, literal and implied meanings, and literary or cultural significance. The corresponding Kiswahili title was then analysed using the same criteria. The two versions were compared to determine whether the Kiswahili translation retained, modified, reduced, or expanded the meaning and function of the English title. The findings were subsequently interpreted in relation to the cultural and linguistic contexts of both languages.

Data Collection Process

Data were collected purposively from nineteen (19) English-language African novels and their corresponding Kiswahili translations. Purposive sampling was used because the study required texts that were relevant to the research objectives and that allowed direct comparison between an English title and its Kiswahili version. Only novels written by African authors and accompanied by verified Kiswahili translations were included in the corpus. Data were collected purposively from nineteen (19)

structurally with the source title at one level but adjusts one or more lexical items to better fit the target language's literary and cultural norms.

English-language African novels and their corresponding Kiswahili translations. These nineteen (19) paired titles formed the study corpus and were selected because they were relevant to the research objectives and allowed direct comparison between each English title and its Kiswahili rendition. To guide the selection of the novels, each selected novel had to have an available Kiswahili translation in order to facilitate comparison between the source and target titles. The corpus included titles addressing diverse African experiences, such as colonial encounter, cultural conflict, gender relations, religion, political change, migration, social inequality, and personal identity. These themes were relevant because they often contain cultural and ideological meanings that may influence the translation of literary titles into Kiswahili.

For each selected novel, bibliographic information was recorded, including the author's name, the publication date of the English version, the title of the Kiswahili translation, the translator's name, and publication details for both versions. The English and Kiswahili titles were then arranged in paired form to enable systematic comparison. The complete list of the nineteen (19) novels and their publication details is provided in Appendix 1.

The collected title pairs were analysed qualitatively in stages. First, each English title was examined to identify its syntactic structure, lexical components, literal meaning, implied meaning, and possible cultural references. Second, the Kiswahili version was analysed to establish how these features had been rendered in translation. Third, the two titles were compared to identify similarities, differences, and translation shifts. The analysis focused on four main areas: structural shift, functional effect, cultural implication, and overall evaluation. Structural shift referred to changes in grammatical form, word order, length, or lexical composition between the English and Kiswahili titles. Functional effect examined whether the Kiswahili title retained the communicative and literary purpose of the original title. It included its ability to suggest theme, create curiosity, or convey a particular tone. Cultural implication considered how culture-specific meanings, values, symbols, and references were transferred, adapted, or omitted in the Kiswahili translation. The evaluation assessed the extent to which the Kiswahili title represented the meaning and effect of the English title.

The findings were organised in a comparative table showing each English title, its Kiswahili translation, the identified translation shift, the resulting functional effect, and relevant cultural implications. This procedure enabled the study to identify recurring patterns in the translation of African literary titles from English into Kiswahili.

DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents the analysis of 19 selected English-based African novel titles and their Kiswahili translations using the SFTA framework. The corpus includes titles associated with themes such as colonialism, post-colonial identity, gender roles, cultural conflict, and socio-political change. The analysis focuses on how linguistic structure, lexical meaning, literary function and cultural implications are retained, modified, or substituted in the Kiswahili renditions.

The analysis was conducted in four stages. First, each English title and its Kiswahili equivalent were classified according to grammatical structure such as a noun phrase, verb phrase, adjectival phrase, or prepositional phrase. It specifically focused on the internal morphological structure. It looked at the classification of the Kiswahili equivalent in the same manner. Their internal morphological structures were then compared to identify structural shifts between the source and the target titles. Second, lexical and semantic choices were examined, including literal and figurative meanings, idiomatic expressions and culturally specific references. Third, the literal and cultural functions of each English title were identified in relation to its source readership. Finally, the Kiswahili translation was assessed to determine whether it preserved, modified, or replaced the source title's linguistic, literary and cultural functions. See the summary in Table 1.

Table 1:
Structural Shifts, Functional Effects, Cultural Implications, and Evaluation of the 19 English–Kiswahili Novel Title Pairs

Source Title	Target Title	Structural Shift and Functional Effect	Cultural Implication	Evaluation
Arrow ofGod	Mshale wa Mungu	Preserves original possessive meaning with Kiswahili linker *wa*, replacing English genitive 's'	Preserves cultural reference to divine arrow	Effective preservation of grammar with Kiswahili possessive construction
No Longer at Ease	Hakuna Tena Tulizo	Expansion from English adverbial phrase to Kiswahili existential-negation construction; gives more explicit and expanded in Kiswahili	*hakuna* and *tulizo* convey calm/relief	Functional equivalence maintained
Weep Not, Child	Usilie, Mtoto	English verb phrase fused with negator into single Kiswahili verb form plus noun; preserves imperative verbal negation form	Direct cultural alignment in comforting expressions	Structural fidelity of Kiswahili verbal morphology with the English phrase
Petals of Blood	Machozi ya Damu	Lexical shift from floral metaphor (*petals*) to embodied human imagery (*tears*); changes metaphor from beauty to grief/emotion	Shift reflects cultural preference for emotional imagery over floral metaphor	Creative adaptation preserving literary function through culturally resonant metaphor
The Trials of Brother Jero	Masaibu ya Ndugu Jero	Structural preservation (possessive noun phrase) with lexical substitution using kinship term; maintains notion of hardship/trials	*Ndugu* used to reflect local religious/social role, title adapted for stage performance	Effective cultural adaptation with structural fidelity
Kongi's Harvest	Mavuno ya Kongi	Transposes English genitive 's' to Kiswahili possessive construction with *ya*; retains possessive with Kiswahili noun phrase construction	Uses a culturally appropriate linguistic form	Accurate and structural adaptation preserving original meaning
The River Between	Njia Panda	Lexical substitution and semantic shift: *river* → *path*, *between* → *intersection*; preserves literary function of division between communities	Cultural adaptation replaced with more familiar spatial metaphor in Kiswahili context	Functional equivalence achieved through culturally relevant metaphorical recalibration

Source Title	Target Title	Structural Shift and Functional Effect	Cultural Implication	Evaluation
A Grain of Wheat	Ngano Isiyomera	Expands quantifier-noun phrase to relative clause; preserves image of grain through description of ungerminated wheat	Uses Kiswahili relative clause to reflect cultural preference for descriptive imagery	Effective preservation of literary function with Kiswahili morphological structure
The Concubine	Mke Mtukufu	Paraphrase Lexical substitution: *Concubine* → *Honoured wife*; softens ambiguity of source term, shifts from intimate/ambiguous to honourable status	Adapts title to a culturally positive term in Kiswahili, enhancing reader accessibility	Successful cultural recalibration balancing fidelity and audience reception
Things Fall Apart	Shujaa Okonkwo	Adaptive reconfiguration: English metaphor → Kiswahili protagonist-centered title with adjective + name; shifts focus from abstract collapse to heroic figure	Reflects Kiswahili audience preference for protagonist focus; aligned with cultural values	Deliberate audience-oriented adaptation; functional inversion introduces affective language
The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born	Wema Hawajazaliwa	Structural shift from relative clause to noun compound; lexical substitution: changes focus from physical beauty → *moral goodness* to moral/ethical quality	Reflects cultural emphasis on moral virtues over physical appearance	Communicative equivalence achieved with culturally resonant lexical and structural choices
The Lion and the Jewel	Simba na Mwanamwali	Lexical substitution and metaphor shift: natural images → social personifications preserves juxtaposition of strength and value using culturally familiar social roles	Metaphor moves from animal/precious object to male elder and maiden social archetypes	Culturally meaningful adaptation preserving thematic contrast
So Long a Letter	Barua Ndefu kama Hii	Structural shift: noun phrase plus simile suffix added (*like this one*); adds comparative explicitness, shifts from attributive modifier to simile construction	Reflects Kiswahili cultural norms where the address (kama hii) points the text within shared social space.	Highly effective; Kiswahili comparative structure provides a concrete, engaging title that aligns with the novel's epistolary form

Structural Translation

The study investigated and found that six of the nineteen titles in the corpus preserve the grammatical category of the source title while substituting only the lexical items. The following titles illustrate structural translation, in which the Kiswahili version broadly preserves the grammatical function of the English source title.

1. Arrow2 of God - *Mshale wa Mungu*
2. No Longer at Ease - *Hakuna Tena Tulizo*
3. Weep Not, Child - *Usilie, Mtoto*
4. Petals of Blood -*Machozi ya Damu*
5. The Trials of Brother Jero -*Masaibu ya Ndugu Jero*
6. Kongi's Harvest - *Mavuno ya Kongi*

In examples 1-6, the English title, a possessive or verb-modification structure, is translated by Kiswahili patterns: a linker wa, negative verb form and the object-marker construction. The titles in examples (3) *Usilie, Mtoto*, and (4) 'Kongi's Harvest' *Mavuno ya Kongi*, are the most linguistically instructive of the six. The English title is a verb-apposition construction 'weep' with a negator, then 'child'. Kiswahili affixes the negation to the verb stem itself through the form *usilie*, which comprises the second-person singular subject marker *u-*, the negative *si-*, and the verb root *-lia*. The *lia* 'cry' then becomes *lie* because it uses the subjunctive form. This results in a single Kiswahili verbal form, *usilie*, for the two English items 'weep' and 'not'. 'Kongi's Harvest' *Mavuno ya Kongi* also uses the Kiswahili possessive form with the *wa* linker instead of the English genitive 's' marker. It is worth noting that Kiswahili does not have the genitive 's. The study notes that the linguistic function of the source title is preserved. In this case, the reader is addressed, and the addressee's identity is established, especially for *mtoto*. The English adverbial phrase in example (2), 'No Longer at Ease', is expressed as *Hakuna Tena Tulizo*. It is expanded into a full Kiswahili existential-negation construction: *hakuna* prefixed with *tena* 'again/still' and qualified by the noun *tulizo* (relief, calm). While the English form has fourteen letters, the Kiswahili version has sixteen. The Kiswahili rendition uses five syllables plus an existential predicate. The function is identical to its English equivalent.

Recalibration of Literary Translation

The remaining titles in the corpus structurally align with the source at one level but adjust one or more lexical items. This is done in a manner that the target language corresponds to the literary language of the source.

7. *The River Between - Njia Panda*

8. *A Grain of Wheat - Ngano Isiyomera ((*countable also in this category for its lexemic shift)
9. *Petals of Blood - Machozi ya Damu*
10. *Mine Boy - Mfanyakazi wa Migodini*
11. *The Great Ponds - Maziwa Makuu*
12. *The Concubine - Mke Mtukufu*
13. *The Outcasts - Waliotengwa*
14. *The Downfall of Gods - Kuanguka kwa Miungu*

Six examples (7-12) from the eight titles fall under the recalibration typology. 'Petals of Blood' may be retained in both Sections 5.1 and 5.2 because it preserves a comparable noun-phrase structure while also shifting the central lexical image from *petals* to *machozi* ("tears"). The most prominent one is 'The River Between 'Njia *Panda*. The English title contains a natural image (river) and the spatial preposition 'between'. The Kiswahili rendition translates the meaning of the image. The translator chose *njia* 'path, way' and *panda* 'intersection, crossing' in place of the original word 'between'. The literary function of the title, which is to render the division between two communities, is preserved by the Kiswahili rendition. The source cultural marker, 'the river ', is replaced by a more accessible verbal noun *panda*, which describes the meeting rather than the landscape that frames it. Example (8) 'A Grain of Wheat' *Ngano Isiyomera* preserves the literary function through a different nominal class process. The English title is a quantifier-noun construction. The Kiswahili version retains the quantifier *ngano* 'grain/wheat'. It uses the relative-clause marker *isiyo* with the verb *mera* 'germinate'. Here the construction becomes 'wheat that has not germinated'. The English image of the single grain is recast as an image of an ungerminated harvest. Kiswahili uses the morpheme *isiyo* meaning 'not... that is...', but the literary function is preserved.

Additionally, 'tears' translated into *machozi* for the English source's petals in example (9), is analysed as a lexemic field shift. The English 'petals' is used culturally for beauty. In Kiswahili, *machozi* means 'grief', which embodies emotion. The two-word sequence *machozi ya damu* is grammatically equivalent to the source 'Petals of blood', but the metaphor shifts from floral imagery to embodied human imagery. The title in example (12), 'The Concubine' *Mke Mtukufu* illustrates a subtler lexical choice. The English source word 'Concubine' is rendered as *Mke Mtukufu*, a phrase meaning 'the honoured/venerated wife'. The translator opts for a paraphrase of a source word that the reader would otherwise

receive in an unfamiliar register. *Mtukufu* 'honoured' supplies the structural equivalent of the English title's ambiguity between intimacy and honour.

Protagonist-Based and Communicative-Equivalence Literary Translation

The following titles exemplify protagonist-based or communicative-equivalence translation, in which the Kiswahili version prioritises audience accessibility, social meaning, or literary effect over close lexical correspondence.

15. Things Fall Apart -Shujaa Okonkwo
16. The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born -Wema Hawajazaliwa
17. The Trials of Brother Jero -Masaibu ya Ndugu Jero
18. The Lion and the Jewel - Simba na Mwanamwali
19. Kongi's Harvest -Mavuno ya Kongi

The Kiswahili translation of 'Things Fall Apart' is *Shujaa Okonkwo in example* (15). The lexical transfer involves introducing the proper name *Okonkwo* into the title, whereas the English title did not include a proper name. The literary function is inverted. The English title reflects the novel's tragic end, whereas the Kiswahili title centers on the protagonist's name. The Kiswahili adjective *Shujaa* 'warrior', 'hero' rather uses the affective language that the English title sets up indirectly through the imagery of collapse. This translation is classified as adaptive reconfiguration. The findings corroborate Arenberg's (2016) and Herman's (1999) documentation of the Kiswahili translation of Achebe's novel as a deliberate, audience-oriented readjustment. Furthermore, 'The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born' is translated as *Wema Hawajazaliwa* in Kiswahili, as shown in example (16). The translation involves two simultaneous structural moves. The first is a shift from a relative-clause predication in English, a clausal structure involving an adjectival phrase and a negative perfect construction, to a noun-compound phrase in Kiswahili. The second is a language recast. The translator chose the Kiswahili word *wema*, which means moral goodness and abstract ethical quality, in preference to the cosmetic word *urembo* (physical beauty). The Kiswahili version uses a 'moral gift that has not yet entered the world', which is absent from the English title. The analysis resonates with John's (2023) study, which examines the equivalence-oriented choice of title communicative function in Kiswahili literary reception.

Another communicative translation is seen in the translated version of 'The Trials of Brother Jero' in Kiswahili as *Masaibu ya Ndugu Jero* (example 17). The structural pattern of the Kiswahili version mirrors the English source. This is a possessive noun phrase framed by a noun of personal 'hardship', 'trials' as *masaibu,* and a title name compound *Ndugu Jero*, 'Kinsman/Brother Jero'. The choice of *Ndugu* as the title for a religious brother in English is significant. The Kiswahili word denotes familiar kinship as a role of the trickster-pastor in Soyinka's play is locally convertible to that of *ndugu* 'kinsman', brother''. Alex (2022) argues that this type of classification translation practice is exemplary of language for stage performance rather than reflective reading. Also, 'The Lion and the Jewel' is translated as 'Simba na Mwanamwali' as seen in example (18). The English source juxtaposes an animal image, a 'lion', with a precious object image, a 'jewel'. The Kiswahili version juxtaposes a male social image, Simba, a man's name, standing for the village elder figure. This is used with a female social image, *Mwanamwali*, a 'maiden'. The metaphor moves from a natural image to a social image. 'Kongi's Harvest' in example (19) is rendered as *Mavuno ya Kongi*. With this, the translation proceeds with lexical substitution. The possessive with the genitive or 's is used in Kiswahili with what is known as the 'a of association' or the possessive prefixes. This is equivalent to 'of'. This shows that Kiswahili does not have that direct expression with the 's.

Transposition Translation

'Kongi's Harvest' is translated into Kiswahili as *Mavuno ya Kongi*. This is a type of translation where Kiswahili transposes the words by the use of the 'a' of association. In such constructions, the noun 'Harvest' is used with a possessive prefix with the noun; hence, *mavuno ya Kongi*. More to the discussion is Mariama Bâ's 'So Long a Letter'. It is translated into Kiswahili as *Barua Ndefu kama Hii*. The title passes through two translation strategies. It is worth noting that Bâ's original French *Une si longue lettre* was translated into English as *So Long a Letter* (Amissine, 2015; Warner, 2016 and Igbinovia et al., 2025). The Kiswahili version structurally shifts from the English source through the noun-phrase construction *barua ndefu* 'a letter long'. It then adds the simile suffix *kama hii* 'like this one', a comparative form which shifts the language from the attributive in English 'so long a letter'. 'The Concubine' *Mke Mtukufu* is also transposed with different words. Other words with structural transposition are 'Things Fall Apart' *Shujaa Okonkwo,* Petals of Blood' *Machozi ya Damu* where the petals are changed with machozi, The River Between '*Njia Panda etc.*

DISCUSSION

This section interprets the corpus findings by examining how structural, recalibratory, transpositional, and functional-substitution strategies preserve the literary and communicative functions of English titles in Kiswahili through different grammatical and lexical resources.

Functional Equivalence and Linguistic Mechanisms

The study found that Kiswahili translations of African English novel titles operate on the principle of functional equivalence (Flavia, 2014). Across the corpus, the literary function that an English title performs for its source audience (forecasting, addressing, anchoring, evoking, narrating) is preserved in Kiswahili. At the same time, the formal resources through which the function is realised vary widely (Marjie, 2024). The pattern is most visible in the comparison between structural translation *Mshale wa Mungu, Usilie, Mtoto* and recalibrated and transposed titles such as *Njia Panda, Mke Mtukufu, shujaa Okonkwo etc*. The most distinctive case in the corpus, *Shujaa Okonkwo*, shows that functional equivalence can also be achieved through functional substitution or transposition. The English title forecasts an end state of social collapse, 'things fall apart', while the Kiswahili title anchors the reader on the protagonist and proposes heroic stature rather than collapse. The function is not the same, so the substitution is strategic. This choice is corroborated by Arenberg (2016) and Doosti (2015) as a strategic and audience-oriented adaptation.

The corpus shows how Kiswahili morphology and syntax realise functional equivalence (Flavia, 2014). While Kiswahili expresses negation within the verb form *usilie*, English uses an auxiliary and a separate negative marker. The genitive linker *wa* in Kiswahili corresponds functionally to the English possessive marker 's'. Existential negation constructions such as *hakuna* allow Kiswahili titles to express negation through a predicate. In *Ngano Isiyomera*, *isiyo* functions as a relative clause marker that supports adjectival predication. The lexical choices *wema* ‘moral goodness’, *machozi* ‘tears’, and *panda* ‘crossing’ recalibrate the source imagery while preserving literary, affective, or spatial function for Kiswahili readers. These examples show that translators make functional decisions with the target reader in mind rather than following the source text word for word (Gheorghiu, 2001; Amissine, 2015; Igbinovia et al.,2025; Kabio-Danlebo and Marjie, 2025). This target-oriented approach is also evident in *Mke Mtukufu*, where ‘concubine’ is rendered through a moderate paraphrase and in *Barua Ndefu kama Hii*, where the comparative suffix element is added to enhance the title.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that the translation of African English novel titles into Kiswahili functions as a language functional practice rather than as a word-for-word substitution. Across a corpus of nineteen titles, the English title is examined for its grammatical category, its lexemic content, and the literary function it performs for the source reader. The Kiswahili title is examined for the same three dimensions in the target language. The SFTA framework shows its analytical ability to accommodate the corpus. They identify functional strategies where they exist and indicate functional substitution. The findings situate Kiswahili literary translation within the broader African-to-African translation practice, in which African titles treat their source English titles as guides to the work rather than as templates for form. The translation choices documented in this corpus reveal a stable pattern of functional preservation under formal variation, with one principled case of functional substitution marking the strategic boundary. Thus, the underlying claim is that African English novel titles translated into Kiswahili are rendered through language functional strategies that reference the target reader rather than through word-for-word substitution.

This study contributes to the ongoing debate about how Kiswahili functions as a cultural and linguistic bridge in African literary translation, supporting audience engagement through culturally resonant adaptations. The study validates the SFTA framework as a strong tool for analyzing translation beyond surface equivalence. It reiterates the importance of socio-cultural norms in shaping translation decisions. These findings have practical implications for translators and publishers aiming to balance fidelity with cultural relevance, encouraging culturally sensitive and audience-oriented translation practices.

The study acknowledges inherent limitations in the corpus that influence the breadth and applicability of its conclusions. The relatively modest number of titles and the exclusive focus on Kiswahili translations narrow the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other African literary works or linguistic contexts. Moreover, the analysis reveals that equivalence between source and target titles is not uniformly complete. There are instances where translation involves nuanced negotiation, resulting in partial or contested equivalence. These variations arise from deliberate choices that balance linguistic, cultural, and functional considerations. This has to do with the complexity of achieving straightforward equivalence in literary title translation. Recognizing these

factors provides a balanced context for interpreting the results and identifies clear directions for future research. This study, thus, lays a foundational groundwork for further exploration of African literary translation practices.

Future research could expand this analysis to other literary genres and target languages and investigate audience reception to assess the effectiveness of functional translation strategies.

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Appendix 1
Table of Summary Data

No.	English Book Title and Author	Kiswahili Translation, Translator and Year (where applicable)	Translation Typology and Grammatical Mechanics Applied
1.	Things Fall Apart (Chinua Achebe, Nigeria 1958)	Shujaa Okonkwo (Clement Ndulute, 1973)	Protagonist-centred adaptive reconfiguration: Process to Entity transposition. Replaces a literal geographical relationship phrase with a single, stationary noun that captures the abstract idea of a crossroads.
2.	Arrow of God (Chinua Achebe, Nigeria, 1964)	Mshale wa Mungu (Hafid Shamte,1987)	Adaptive reconfiguration: Symmetrical Structural Alignment. Direct word-for-word matching where the connecting word shifts its form naturally to match the specific noun class of the arrow.
3.	No Longer at Ease Chinua, Achebe Nigeria)	Hakuna Tena Tulizo (Standard Curricular Edition,1993)	Communicative translation: Process-to-Entity Transposition. Negative adverbial phrase to an existential negative clause, Hakuna.
4.	The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born (Ayi Kwei Armah, Ghana)	Wema hawajazaliwa (Abdilatif Abdalla, 1976)	Communicative-equivalence literary translation: Syntactic-to-Morphological Compression. Condenses a long, seven-word English sentence structure into a two-word phrase by using Kiswahili's agglutinative verb structure.
5.	The trials of Brother Jero (Wole Soyinka, Nigeria)	Masaiba ya Ndugu Jero (A. S Yahya, 1971)	Communicative translation: Symmetrical Structural Alignment. Keeps the exact phrase structure of the original title but uses a stronger semantic noun in Kiswahili.
6.	The lion and the Jewels (Wole Soyinka, Nigeria)	Simba na Mwanamwali (Kuria Ngugi, 1975)	Communicative translation: Symmetrical Structural Alignment. Keeps the simple noun-and-noun structure unchanged.
7.	Kongi's Harvest (Wole Soyinka, Nigeria)	Mavuno ya Kongi (T.S. Sengo, 1982)	Communicative translation: Symmetrical Structural Alignment. Flips the English possessive structure to match the Kiswahili possessive rule of placing the item owned before the person who owns it.
8.	Song of Lawino (Okot p'Bitek, Uganda)	Wimbo wa Lawino (Paul Sozigwa, 1975)	Translation with structural retention: Symmetrical Structural Alignment. Direct word-for-word structure symmetrical with the Kiswahili possessive structure.
9.	Song of Ocol ((Okot p'Bitek, Uganda)	Wimbo wa Ocol (Paul Sozigwa, 1977)	Translation with structural retention: Symmetrical Structural Alignment. Direct word-for-word structure symmetrical with the Kiswahili possessive structure.

10.	Weep Not, Child (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Kenya)	Usilie, Mtoto (also known as Mtafiti Mja na Kijana) (John William Murila, 1971)	Symmetrical Structural Alignment: Communicative literary translation. Preserves the imperative negative structure.
11.	The River Between (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Kenya)	Njia Panda (John Ndugu Githuku, 1974)	Communicative literary translation: Process-to-Entity Transposition. Replaces a literal phrase with a single noun that captures the abstract idea of a crossroads.
12.	A Grain of Wheat (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Kenya)	Ngano Isiyomera (Samuel Mushi, 1979)	Communicative literary translation: Phrasal-to-Clausal Expansion / Reshaping. Expands a simple English description phrase into a metaphorical clause (active, detailed description clause that explicitly states what the grain is doing)
13.	Petals of Blood (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Kenya)	Machozi ya Damu (Peter Ngugi, 1999)	Communicative literary translation: Symmetrical Structural Alignment. Keeps the identical phrase layout intact but changes the literal word "petals" for "tears.
14.	The Outcasts (Bonnie Lubega, Uganda)	Waliotengwa (Juma R.R. Alidina, 1975)	Communicative literary translation: Syntactic-to-Morphological Compression. Collapses an English plural noun and its article into a single Swahili verb form that functions perfectly as a standalone descriptive name.
15.	Mine Boy (Peter Abrahams, South Africa)	Mfanyakazi wa Migodini (S. A Kandoro, 1976)	Communicative literary translation: Syntactic-to-Morphological Compression. Collapses an English plural noun and its article into a single Swahili verb form that functions descriptively.
16.	The Downfall of Gods (Timothy Wangusa, Uganda)	Kuanguka kwa Miungu (Isaac Mrina, 1984)	Communicative literary translation: Symmetrical Structural Alignment. Maintains the exact structure as Kiswahili but uses a noun gerund (an action word that behaves like a noun base in the phrase.)
17.	The Great Ponds (Elechi Amadi, Nigeria)	Maziwa Makuu (East African Publishing House, 1978)	Communicative literary translation: Symmetrical Structural Alignment. Uses the direct noun-and-adjective structure as well as uses a specific water body from ponds to lakes.
18.	The Concubine (Elechi Amadi, Nigeria)	Mke Mtukufu (Standard Secondary Edition, 1981)	Communicative literary translation: Symmetrical Structural Alignment. Uses the noun-adjective structure and upgrades the word's underlying meaning from an unofficial partner to an exalted wife.
19.	So Long a Letter (Mariama Bâ, Senegal)	Barua Ndefu kama Hii (Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2011, Reprint)	Functional transposition via English intermediary. Phrasal-to-Clausal Expansion / Reshaping. Transforms an abstract English exclamation about size into a clear, direct comparison phrase that references the physical letter.