Tomi Adeaga, Translating and Publishing African Language(s) and Literature(s): Examples from Nigeria, Ghana and Germany

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**REFERENCES**


1 Language has been one of the most hotly debated issues in the field of African literature since the 1960s. The subject of translation has also intermittently occupied centre stage, with discussions exploring the possibilities of translating literary works from African languages into European ones, and vice versa. The questions surrounding the conversion of African texts written in English or French into other European languages have, however, received much less attention. In this regard, Tomi Adeaga's *Translating and Publishing African Language(s) and Literature(s)*, which focuses on the translation, publishing, and reception of Anglophone (and, to a lesser extent, Francophone) African literature in Germany, constitutes a highly original contribution to the domain of African studies.

2 Adeaga's book opens with an introduction describing the context in which her research was conducted and clearly outlining the structure and aims of her work. The volume is then divided into three main sections, each of which further contains one to three chapters. The first part delineates the methodological approaches that have informed the study: on the one hand, the author provides an account of reception theory and considers its possible applications to twentieth-century African literature influenced by
orality; on the other, she examines theoretical issues more particularly related to translation studies in order to lay the foundation for her subsequent assessment of the German versions of two Ghanaian and two Nigerian novels, namely Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Kojo Laing's *Search Sweet Country*, Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* and Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. The second part of the book concentrates on the publishing of African literature in Germany, suggesting reasons for the industry's relative lack of vitality and proposing possible solutions. The third part deals with the reception of this literature, and provides a close examination of the influence and legacy of the 1980 Frankfurt Book Fair, whose main theme was African writing. Adeaga convincingly advances a triple explanation for the relatively modest sales and lukewarm reception of African novels in Germany: first, the poor translations of such literary works; second, the existence of racist clichés that still shape the expectations of the German readership; and third, inadequate publishing and marketing strategies.

3 Adeaga's study is based on a wealth of research. The non-academic sources she cites, including interviews with translators and publishers, are particularly enlightening, for they invariably remind one that much remains to be done in the dissemination and understanding of African literature outside the narrow circle of specialists. The author also raises a number of challenging issues concerning the translation of African literary texts into German. For example, one of her most interesting points relates to the difficulties inherent in the rendering of West African Pidgin, a linguistic code mixing English and West African languages, but which has no German equivalent. Such a case clearly emphasizes that the translator's task is not simply one of "imitation", but truly one of "re-creation" (53).

4 Paradoxically, however, the strong point of Adeaga's study, i.e. the impressive amount of material it tackles, also tends to become its weakness. Indeed, one sometimes feels that complex subjects would have deserved more extensive treatment, or that promising textual investigations do not fulfil their true potential. For instance, Adeaga announces in the last chapter that a comparative examination of over two hundred articles and reviews written in German on African works will be undertaken, but the actual analysis turns out to be sketchier than one might have expected. One also feels that some of Adeaga's evaluations might have benefited from greater terminological precision. In one case, the syntactic rhythm of a translated passage is commented upon favourably because "[t]he words are alive and they spring out of the quotation" (76). Such occasional impressionistic comments are, unfortunately, supplemented by a number of typographical errors, misspelled names, erroneous dates, and a puzzling use of commas that tend to mar the author's otherwise enjoyable writing style.

5 Despite these reservations, Adeaga's work is a most valuable investigation into a fascinating yet under-researched topic. The volume carefully examines the interrelatedness between the translation, publishing and reception of African literature in Germany, always with a view of seeking to remove existing stumbling blocks. The book may not offer all the answers it sets out to provide, but this is probably because, as Adeaga puts it herself, "[t]he complexity of translation knows no end" (323).
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Daria Tunca has worked as an assistant in the English Department of the University of Liège, Belgium since 2001. In early 2008, she completed a PhD thesis entitled “Style beyond Borders: Language in Recent Nigerian Fiction,” which attempted to approach the works of several Nigerian writers from a perspective including elements of stylistics, sociolinguistics and literary criticism. She edits an online bibliography of works by and about Ben Okri (http://www.l3.ulg.ac.be/okri) and maintains a website on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (http://www.l3.ulg.ac.be/adichie).