

## LEXICAL GAPS AND THE POSSIBILITY OF THEIR TRANSLATION: EXAMPLES FROM AMINATA SOW FALL'S *THE BEGGARS' STRIKE*

Dufua Sharp-Akosubo & Michael Ngongeh Mombe

Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Port  
Harcourt

### Abstract

This study entitled "Lexical Gaps in the Translation of *The Beggars' Strike*", deals with source-language words and/or expressions that have no equivalent or are non-existent in the target language, and that constitute, therefore, what is called lexical gaps in the target language. Specifically, it aims at investigating the translatability of lexical gaps in *The Beggars' Strike*" (which is the target text of Aminata Sow Fall's novel, *La grève des Bàttu*), and the strategies used by the translator to solve the problems posed by such lexical gaps. The study adopted the cultural translation theory which emphasises diversity of cultures as well as the Interpretive Theory of Translation which gives pre-eminence to translating the meaning of a text and not its words taken in isolation. Four research questions guided this study in line with the objectives. The findings buttress the point that lexical gaps, whether they be culturally grounded or simple words, do not denote an impossibility of translation as they can be expressed through various translation techniques such as borrowing, adaptation, or domestication among others. The study recommends that in case of borrowing, footnotes or a glossary should be used to expatiate words or expressions which are unfamiliar to target readers.

**Keywords:** Lexical gap, culture, equivalent, adaptation, domestication

### Introduction:

It is obvious that with a good translation one does not need to read through the source text for a better understanding of the text in question (target text). As a matter of fact, many a times such target texts are considered as original works by uninformed readers until they are confronted with the presence of a language substratum or borrowed words that point clearly to the source text or language. Indeed, a closer look at some of these "faithful" translation works could reveal the existence therein of lexical gaps which theoreticians like Peter Newmark (1988) refer to as cases of untranslatability. For the purpose of this study, we considered certain source-text words – in *La grève des Bàttu* – which do not have equivalent words in the target text – *The Beggars' Strike*. This study aims, therefore, at investigating the translatability of lexical gaps in our corpus and the solutions proffered by the Translator. Our objectives are to:

- define what is a lexical gap;

- evaluate the problems lexical gaps pose in general to a translator
- identify lexical gaps in the work selected, notably *The Beggars' Strike*, and
- assess the translator's ways of circumventing the problems posed by the said lexical gaps.

Four research questions guided this study. They are:

- What is a lexical gap?
- What problems do lexical gaps pose to the translator?
- What are the lexical gaps in *The Beggars' Strike*?
- How did the translator overcome the problems posed by the presence of lexical gaps in *The Beggars' Strike*?

To be more specific, the study endeavoured to answer the following questions: What are the source-text words or terms that cannot be found in the target language and constitute, for that reason, a lexical gap? Are they culturally grounded or simple lexical items or expressions of language? Could it be said that the words in question are untranslatable? What translation techniques did the translator use to resolve this thorny problem?

The fact that translation has always been possible in practice does not preclude translation scholars or theoreticians from asking questions about untranslatable words or cases of untranslatability. Works on untranslatability belong in general to two classes, namely linguistic approaches that lead to an impossibility of translation, and discursive approaches that affirm the opposite. Among the many theoreticians and translators in the first class, can be found Sapir and Worf (1956) for whom the impossibility of translation derived from the fact that every language has its unique way of splitting and structuring reality (e.g. Eskimoos who have thirty different words to describe snow), as well as Catford and Newmark. Catford (1965) expounded this theory in his book *Linguistic Theory of Translation*: "Cultural untranslatability arises when a situational feature, functionally relevant for the source language text, is completely absent from the culture of which the TL is a part. For instance, the names of some institutions, clothes, foods and abstract concepts, amongst others." In effect, Catford (1965:101) held that: "to talk of 'cultural untranslatability' may be just another way of talking about colloquial untranslatability: the impossibility of finding an equivalent collocation in the TL. And this would be a type of linguistic untranslatability." In other words, Catford reduced cultural untranslatability to a type of linguistic untranslatability, that is to say, it is due to lack of equivalent linguistic or cultural elements in the target language.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study adopted two theories, the first is the cultural translation theory presented most significantly by Homi K. Bhabha in a chapter entitled "How Newness Enters the World: Postmodern Space, Postcolonial Time and the Trials of Cultural Translation" (in *The Location of Culture*, 1994/2004). This theory emphasises diversity of cultures and a discursive approach to cultural

translation. The other one is the Interpretive Theory of Translation propounded by Danica Seleskovitch and Marianne Lederer.

### **Cultural Translation Theory**

Cultural translation theory explores how translation is not just a linguistic transfer but also a negotiation of cultural identities, histories, and ideologies. It posits that translation involves cultural adaptation and transformation rather than mere word-for-word substitution (Bassnett, 1998). The theory was significantly developed by Homi Bhabha (1994), who introduced the idea of the "third space"—a hybrid cultural zone created through translation. This theory emphasizes that translation can challenge power dynamics and reshape cultural narratives (Venuti, 2017).

This theory emphasises diversity of cultures and a discursive approach to cultural translation. It gives pre-eminence to translating the meaning of a text and not its words taken in isolation. Thus, it counters the notion of untranslatability canvassed by some linguists like Catford (and also Peter Newmark) as discussed above.

#### **Interpretative Theory of Translation:**

The Interpretative Theory of Translation (ITT), also known as the theory of sense, was developed by scholars at the *École Supérieure d'Interprètes et de Traducteurs (ESIT)* in Paris, particularly by Danica Seleskovitch and Marianne Lederer. This theory argues that translation is not merely a direct transfer of words from one language to another but involves three key stages: comprehension, deverbalization, and reformulation (Seleskovitch & Lederer, 1995, p. 23).

1. Comprehension – The translator first understands the meaning of the source text beyond its literal words, considering context, culture, and intention.
2. Deverbalization – The translator separates meaning from linguistic form, focusing on the underlying sense rather than individual words.
3. Reformulation – The translator expresses the same meaning in the target language, ensuring naturalness and clarity.

This theory highlights the importance of cognitive and contextual factors in translation, emphasizing that translators should prioritize sense over literal equivalence (Lederer, 2003, p. 45). It is particularly influential in conference interpreting, where rapid understanding and reformulation are essential instead of looking for correspondences. According to Inyang (2010, p. 68), the idea of translation by correspondence is a mistaken affirmation of the impossibility of translation:

According to the Interpretive Theory of Translation, translation by correspondence allows its advocates, including Newmark, to discuss problems of translation that are in fact fake problems. They include words which are considered untranslatable because they cannot be transcoded (i.e. words taken out of context whereas in context and within a text, anything can be translated.) ...

Lederer (1994), cited by Iman Sridi (2014, p. 135), affirms that « all words taken in isolation are untranslatable »; [However, at the level of the text,] « anything can be translated because words are actualised and assume meanings that can be re-expressed»

Very pertinent to this study are the definitions of cultural translation and lexical gaps in translation.

### **The Concept of Culture in Translation: Cultural Translation**

The recognition of the important role culture plays in translation is what led to the cultural turn or shift in Translation Studies in the 80's, with many definitions of the concept put forward since then. According to Bassnet (2014, p. 92) cultural translation refers to the process of translating not just words but also cultural concepts, values, and norms from one language to another. It goes beyond linguistic equivalence and focuses on adapting meaning to ensure cultural appropriateness and comprehension for the target audience. Also worthy of note here is the definition given by Conway (2012),

Cultural translation is a concept with competing definitions coming from two broad fields, anthropology/[ethnography](#) and cultural/[postcolonial](#) studies. (...) For anthropologists, foreign cultures are “carried across” to domestic readers in textual form, as described in articles and books, while for cultural studies scholars, what is “carried across” is not so much culture as it is the people who leave their place of origin and enter a new locale, bearing their culture with them.

Thus, it is a well-known fact that Translation Studies does not concern itself with only language issues but also with cultural matters. Cultural translation is part of cultural anthropology in the sense that it is a discipline which questions translation through cultural differences. The following are some key aspects of cultural Translation:

1. Intercultural Mediation – The translator acts as a bridge between cultures, ensuring that the translation captures both linguistic and cultural nuances (Venuti, 2017, p. 55).
2. Adaptation vs. Literal Translation – In some cases, direct translation is not effective, and adjustments are needed to reflect cultural realities (Bhabha, 1994, p. 224).
3. Postcolonial and Anthropological Perspectives – Cultural translation is often discussed in postcolonial studies, where it refers to the translation of cultural identities, traditions, and ideologies between dominant and marginalized cultures (Spivak, 2000, p. 12).

For example, translating humour, idioms, or religious references requires cultural sensitivity to avoid misinterpretations. A well-known example is the translation of brand slogans — companies often modify their messages to fit local cultural norms rather than providing a word-for-word translation.

Thus, it is a well-known fact that Translation Studies does not concern itself with only language issues but also with cultural matters. Cultural translation is part of cultural anthropology in the sense that it is a discipline which questions translation through cultural differences. Having looked at the explanation of

the theories adopted and the concept of cultural translation that are vital for this work, we shall now look at our research questions.

### **What is Lexical Gap in Translation?**

According to Newmark (1988) and Baker (2011), lexical gaps refer to instances where a word or phrase exists in the source language but has no direct equivalent in the target language. These gaps can arise due to cultural, conceptual, or linguistic differences between languages. For example, certain cultural practices, objects, or emotions that are specific to one language group may lack a direct lexical counterpart in another. Baker (2011, p. 56) explains that these gaps are especially pronounced when translating idiomatic expressions, culturally bound terms, or specialized jargon. Similarly, Newmark (1988, p. 102) notes that lexical gaps pose significant challenges in achieving both semantic and pragmatic equivalence, particularly in literary and technical texts.

Global Language Services (2024) sees lexical gap as a term used to describe the absence of a word in a particular language where it is present in another.” It goes on to affirm that they are several types of lexical gaps, namely:

1. Phonological gaps – potential words which are permitted by the phonotactic rules of the language but wouldn’t make any sense.
2. Morphological gaps – words which could exist based on the morphological and grammatical rules of word formation in a given language (including the stem and affixes) that aren’t actual words.
3. Semantic gaps – also called an ‘accidental gap’ or ‘lacuna’; this is a word with a distinct meaning which is missing from the vocabulary of a language.

As a matter of fact, lexical gaps exist in all languages in respect of translation. The following are two examples of lexical gaps in English listed by Global Language Services (2024): 1. Schadenfreude: a German word which describes the pleasure one feels from someone else’s misfortune. This word doesn’t exist in English though there is a word derived from ancient Greek, “epicaricacy” which is rarely used. 2. Fargin – a Yiddish word which describes the joy one feels at the success of others.

Some other examples of lexical gaps in English given by Day Translationsblog (2018) are as follows:

1. In Czech language, they say “vbyafnout”. But there is no equivalent English word for it though it means in English the act of jumping out in order to scare a person. (...) 4. In English, there is no word available to describe the action of looking into the distance, but for the Japanese, it is called “boketto”. 5. You scratch your head in an effort to remember something. It is the long description of the action in English. For Hawaiians however, they call it “pana po’o”.

One notable lexical gap in English is the fact that it has only one verb, “to know”, to account for a pair of verbs in Spanish, i.e “conocer” and “saber”, and also in French, i.e “connaître” and “savoir”. Thus, it behoves the translator to

know that the French do say “connaître quelqu’un”, meaning “to know someone”, but never “savoir quelqu’un”; and again that they do say both “connaître quelque chose” and “savoir quelque chose”, meaning “to know something”. Pidgeon English filled this gap with the verb “sabi”. But it has no nuance in meaning between “know” and “sabi” as seen in Spanish or French.

### **Methodology**

One major difficulty in translation has to do with filling lexical gaps which occur when a word or expression in the source language (SL) has no direct equivalent in the target language (TL). Generally speaking, translators’ resort to many options, notably choosing between borrowing (with or without a footnote), and coining or rephrasing words or expressions of the source language which do not exist in the target language. This study looked at how the translators tackled this challenge based on the following peculiarities of the word or expression:

#### **Culture-Specific Words or Expressions**

Munday (2016, p. 98) explains that a Translator will actually have a challenge translating culture-specific words or expressions that do not exist in the target language. He gives the following examples:

- The Danish word *hygge* (a sense of coziness and well-being) has no exact English equivalent.
- The Japanese term *tsundoku* (積ん読) refers to the habit of buying books and letting them pile up unread, which lacks a precise counterpart in many languages.

Translating such words that do not have direct equivalents from the target languages constitutes a real problem to a translator. But a cultural reference or an explanation would do here.

#### **Loss of Meaning and Nuance**

According to Newmark (1988, p. 74), Lexical Gaps can lead to semantic loss, as translators struggle to convey the full emotional, cultural, or connotative weight of a term. For instance:

- The German word *Fernweh* (a longing for faraway places) is often translated as “wanderlust,” but the two words have slightly different connotations.

This happens quite often in translation without any explanation as we shall see in some examples below.

#### **Risk of Over-Explanation**

Venuti (2017, p. 120) explains that to compensate for lexical gaps, translators may need to paraphrase or add explanations, which can make the translation wordy or unnatural. For example:

The Arabic word *tarab* (طرب), which describes a deep, almost ecstatic emotional response to music, requires a long explanation in English. Again this study revealed the authors’ attempt to over-explain which is as a result of the loss of meaning or nuance created by lexical gaps.

#### **Difficulty in Technical and Legal Translation**

In technical, legal, and medical translation for instance, missing terms that a translator is not able to convey the meaning into the target language can

create ambiguities or legal risks. Malmkjær (2010, p. 102) explains that some legal concepts, such as the German *Schadenersatz* (compensation for damages), may not have a direct equivalent in other legal systems. In this situation, a translator may have to adapt or explain such concepts if they are not fully understood.

### Challenges in Machine Translation (MT)

Baker (2018, p. 62), looking at the challenges from the angle of Machine Translation, underscores that Lexical Gaps present a major hurdle for Machine Translation, as literal translations may be misleading or incorrect. Without cultural awareness, AI-based translation tools often fail to capture the intended meaning.

### Results and Discussion

Most of the lexical gaps in *Beggars' Strike* can be classified as semantic gaps – also called an ‘accidental gap’ or ‘lacuna’ as they deal with source-language words having a distinct meaning which is missing from the vocabulary of the target language. The list is long and far from being exhaustive. Some of the words or expressions and their French translations as found in *The Beggars' Strike* are as follows: not exhaustive as we chose to omit many Wolof words or expressions used by the author together with their French transcription such as on page 17, *Gaa ñi am na lu xew* – also written in French: “quelque chose est arrivé” (Something’s happened.) and on page 18, *Xana daal atte yalla la!* With the French transcription, “C’est un coup du sort.” (It must be fate). The following are examples of lexical gaps found in the target-text *Beggar's Strike*:

S/No.	ST - <i>La grève des Bàttu</i>	TT- <i>Beggars' Strike</i>
1	Baasi salté: chapitre 5, p. 54	A delicious couscous p. 39
2	Baay jagal: chapitre 2, p.17	Mending pots and pans chapter 2 p.10
3	Beeco: chapitre 2, p. 18	Pagne p.11
4	Bóóli: chapitre 14, p. 116	Bowls p. 88
5	Boroom bàttu: chapitre 2, p.15	Crowd of beggars chapter 2, p. 8
6	Boroom bàttu: chapitre 2, p.17 Il se convertit au boroom bàttu sans bàttu, mais main tendue.	He became a ‘bàttu-bearer without a bàttu’ simply holding out his hand for alms. chapter 2 p.10
7	Boubous: p. 18	Boubous p. 11
8	Bouts de bois: chapitre 2, p. 17. “Pour nourrir et habiller ses deux épouses et ses huit bouts de bois...”	had two wives and eight children to feed and cloth p. 10
9	<i>Céy yalla!</i> Chapitre 1, p. 13	Chey yalla! P. 7
10	Cuuraay: chapitre 2, p. 19	Intoxicating smoke of Cuuraye

		incense p. 12
11	Gongo: chapitre 2, p. 19	Captivating perfume of gongo p. 12
12	Jom: chapitre 4, p. 76. “vertu de jom	“virtue of jom which constitutes a restraint on any reprehensible behavior p. 56
13	Marabouts: chapitre 1, p.8	Marabouts chapter 4 pp. 4, 31
14	Monsieur Dabo: chapitre 3, p. 20	Monsieur Dabo p.18
15	Ndéysaan : chapitre 4, p. 31. “d’ététernels ndéysaan”	Endless exclamations of ‘Ndesan!’ p.21
16	Serigne Birama: chapitre 1, p. 9	Serigne Birama p.4
17	Sokhna: chapitre 1, p. 9	Sokhna, chapter 1 p. 4
18	Talibés: chapitre 1, p. 5	Talibés chapter 1, p. 1
19	Tiem: chapitre 4, p. 43	Not translated p. 31
20	Toubabs: chapitre 3, p. 26	White people p. 17
21	Turki: chapitre 1, p. 12	<i>turki</i> , was translated as it is on page 6

### Culturally Grounded French Words in the Source-Text and Their Translation

Boubous: (chapitre 2, p. 18).

Collins Dictionary defines boubou as a long flowing garment worn by men and women in Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, and some other parts of Africa. Christa Clarke (2023, para. 1) stated in her blog that the origin of the word boubou “is a French distortion of the Wolof word *mbubb* which refers to a loose-fitting ankle-length caftan worn in Senegal.” Thus it is little wonder the word is commonly used in the above-mentioned countries. However, this kind of garment is hardly known as “boubou” in Nigeria where it is rather called “babariga” in the North and “agbada” in the South-West. We suggest, therefore, that a brief explanation of the words “babariga” and “agbada” be added as a footnote to the translation.

Bouts de bois: (chapitre 2, p. 17.)

Jenny (2010) provides in his blog a useful information on the origin of the expression “bouts de bois” whose literal meaning in English is “bits of wood”. He stated in that Blog that in Senegal and Mali, “according to tradition, you don’t count people, for fear of attracting the attention of the gods to what a large household you have. Instead, you count “bouts de bois,” bits of wood, useless to the gods.” Thus, the narrator said “huit bouts de bois” (eight bits of wood) in accordance with the belief of the people. But this cultural dimension of the source-text is completely lacking in the target-text as the translator chose to translate the expression “eight children”.

Marabouts: (chapitre 1, p.8)

Both Collins and Cambridge dictionaries list “Marabout” as an English word. Among the various meaning they give to the word marabout, let’s retain the



following: for Collins, one of the meanings of the French word “marabout” is “a type of African witch doctor” while for Cambridge, it is among others, “a Muslim religious leader or teacher, especially in North Africa.” Though the use of this word is widespread in North Africa, Senegal and the Sahel as well as Côte d’Ivoire, it is not that common in Nigeria. Nigerians talk of “Alhajis” and “Mallams”, rather than “Marabouts”. Here again, there is no gainsaying the use of footnote to explain the connection between these three words could enhance the reception of the text by target readers.

Monsieur Dabo: (chapitre 3, p. 20)

Cambridge Dictionary translates the French word “monsieur” differently as “Mister”, “man, gentleman” and “Sir”. Concerning the last option (Sir), it explains its usage as “a polite form of address (spoken or written) to a man”. But the fact that it can be used separately as “Oui, Monsieur” meaning “Yes, Sir”, or as an epithet to a name like “Oui, Monsieur Dabo” with the same meaning of “Yes, Sir”, and not “Yes, Sir Dabo” creates a semantic gap in English. Even the expression “Yes, Mister Dabo” does not capture the politeness inherent in the French expression. This must be the reason why the translator gave the same French expression, “Yes, Monsieur Dabo” in the target text. Again, we are of the opinion that adding an explanation here as a footnote could be quite helpful to target readers.

Toubab: (chapitre 3, p. 26)

YourDictionary (2024) defines Toubab is a word which refers to a person of European descent (“a White man”), and it is used most frequently in the Gambia, Senegal, Guinea and Mali, and also Côte d’Ivoire. It states also that it is most likely derived from the Wolof word for Europe “Tougal”; and it draws an analogy between the word Wolof meaning the people of Jollof, and Toubab meaning the people of Tougal (Europe). In Nigeria, most people do not know this word, Toubab. The common word Nigerians use to describe or refer to people of European descent is “Oyibo”. So the translator settled for the word “whites” which is global, instead of “Oyibo” which is more local.

The examples canvassed above show the difficulties in translating lexical gaps consisting of culturally grounded words or expressions and the need to resort to borrowings and footnotes.

### **Borrowed Words/Expressions in the Source-Text with or without Footnote**

It is noteworthy that the author of the source text, Aminata Sow Fall, dealt with the lexical gaps in her novel written in French by using many borrowed words and expressions from her vernacular language, Wolof and adding a footnote to most of them. This translation approach consisting of borrowing words from the source language and explaining them with footnotes is an alternative to rephrasing or explaining the words in question as shown in the following examples in *La grève des Bàttu*.

## Borrowed Words/Expressions in the Source-Text with Footnote:

S/No.	ST - <i>La grève des Bàttu</i>	With Footnote	Translation of footnote
1	Baasi salté: chapitre 5, p. 54	couscous préparé avec une sauce délicieuse	a couscous prepared with a delicious sauce
2	Baay jagal: chapitre 2, p.17	Réparateur	Repairer
3	Beeco: chapitre 2, p. 18	petit pagne qui se porte en dessous d'un plus grand pagne.	little cloth worn under a wrapper
4	Bóóli: chapitre 14, p. 116	grande assiette creuse	Big hollow plate
5	Boroom bàttu: chapitre 2, p.15	Les mendicants. Ils tendent, pour demander l'aumône, le bàttu qui est une petite calabasse.	Beggars. They stretch out the <i>bàttu</i> which is a little calabash in order to ask for alms.
6	Cuuraay: chapitre 1, p. 19	Encens	Incense
7	Gongo: chapitre 1, p. 19	Encens	Incense
8	Tiem: chapitre 4, p. 43	expression de mépris	Spiteful way to address someone
9	Turki: chapitre 1, p. 12	habit qui se porte sous le boubou ou le caftan	Dress worn under a flowing gown or caftan

## Borrowed Words/Expressions in the Source-Text without Footnote:

S/No.	ST - <i>La grève des Bàttu</i>	No Footnote	Not Translated
1	Jom: chapitre 4, p. 76.		
2	Ndéysaan : chapitre 4, p. 31.		
3	<i>Céy yalla!</i> Chapitre 1, p. 13		

**Borrowed Words/Expressions in the Source-Text and Their Translation:**

A good example of borrowed words/expressions in the source-text is the word *Bàttu* which has nothing to do with the French word *battu* (beaten – past participle form of the verb *battre* which means to ‘beat’). *Bàttu* is the name

given in Wolof to a kind of wooden bowl or calabash which is commonly used by beggars in Senegal to ask for alms. These begging bowls are the tools and insignia of beggars in the region and in a metonymic sense, they stand for the beggars themselves.

There is no gainsaying that within the setting of the novel – notably the environment where the story takes place and which, by the many linguistics (Wolof names and words), religious and socio-cultural indices, refers to the Sene-Gambia – the use of this metonymy can be easily understood because of the shared knowledge of the link between *Bàttu* and beggars. But the case is completely different in the target text setting where the word *Bàttu* is unknown. The translator must, therefore, find a corresponding word in the target language or, where this does not exist, resort to an oblique way of translating *Bàttu*. In other words, s/he must go beyond seeking a word-for-word translation – which Seleskovitch and Lederer call transcoding – and look at the meaning of the sentence and interpret it so as to render a sense-for-sense translation that will correspond to or remain faithful to the ‘vouloir dire’ of the author. We believe this is what Dorothy S. Blair did by translating the said title as *The Beggars’ Strike* and not as *The Bàttu Strike*. However, the translator’s position here contrasts sharply with her approach in translating the same word as *bàttu* on page 8, and adding an explanatory note: “the calabash which serves as a begging bowl”.

Another example of borrowed word found in the source text is “talibés” which is derived from Arabic into French. Rowan Hughes (2020) stated that

The Senegalese talibé system has its roots in the 14th century but it has evolved dramatically since about the 1960s, from a respected system of religious education and character building into a fraught system of exploitation. Today, predominantly rural families entrust their sons to urban-based Islamic teachers known as marabouts. However, instead of receiving the anticipated Islamic education, tens of thousands of these “talibé” children typically experience conditions of deprivation, extreme corporal punishment and being forced to beg for daily quotas of money as well as their own food for 8 to 10 hours a day. The United Nations considers the talibé system today to be a form of modern slavery.

From the above quotation, it is obvious that the word “talibés” has a significant religious and socio-cultural dimension and its usage is specific to Senegal and some neighboring countries such as Gambia and Mauritania. But in Nigeria which is outside that geographical spread, such a word is quite unknown, and besides, it has a corresponding word which is called ‘almajiri’ or ‘almajirai’ in the plural. Kabiru (2010) defines this term as follows:

In Nigeria, the word “Almajiri” means those who left their villages or town, parents, relations, and friends in search of Islamic religious knowledge and scholarship.

Okonkwo (2017) expatiates on its origin:

The term “Almajiri” is a Hausa word for pupil or student and emanates from the Arabic word ‘AlMuhajir’ which means a seeker of Islamic knowledge. (...) The Almajiri system in Northern Nigeria started around the 11th century in Kanem-Borno and was later replicated in the Sokoto Caliphate after the triumph of the Jihad led by Sheikh Uthman Dan Fodio.

We cannot help but observe the notable similarity between these two systems of talibés and Almajiris. Therefore, merely italicizing “talibés” instead of translating it as ‘almajiris’ does not help the intended Nigerian readers and their likes but constitutes rather a lexical barrier to the understanding of the target text. This obstacle could have been remedied by the use of a footnote explaining that the word talibé is called Almajiri in Nigeria.

However, the translator is justified not to choose a footnote, and opt rather for a foreignization of the target text. Indeed, by introducing this word which is unfamiliar to readers of the target-text, she contributes through this translated work in enriching the vocabulary of people from other geographical areas. Thus, we find here the double function of translation: revealing or exposing linguistic and socio-cultural elements expressed in the source text and importing or introducing same into the target text

Some other vernacular words, phrases or expressions which the translator chose to leave untranslated are Sokhna, Serigne and Chei yalla! To mention but a few. According to Fatou Sow (2002. P71),

The male title Serigne (nowadays used for ‘Mr’) designates a religious man; the female title Sokhna, (now used for ‘Mrs’) either designates the female relative of a Muslim holy man, or a woman who has religious knowledge and learning.

In the context of the target text, let’s say in the Nigerian environment, these words could easily have been translated as Alhaji or Mallam (a word derived from Hausa and meaning in Nigeria and other parts of Africa, a Muslim religious teacher, a learned man or a scribe), and Alhaja (a female relative of a Muslim holy man) respectively. As a matter of fact, this word ‘Mallam’ translates perfectly another word ‘Marabout’ which means a Muslim saint and is from French and Portuguese through Arabic. However, the translator chose not to translate them but rather to use them as borrowed words, signaling their foreignness by putting them in italics.

**Other source-text words in Wolof are:**

*turki*, (ST - p. 12) This word was translated verbatim (as *turki*) on page 6 of the target text without any explanation nor a foot note to explain what it meant. Let’s recall here that the author of the source-text did use a footnote to explain that *turki* meant a cloth worn under a flowing gown or caftan. Here again, the translator could have simply borrowed a leaf from the author who used foot notes on several occasions to explain the many vernacular words in her text.

*Ndéysaan*: This is a common Wolof interjection listed by Janga Wolof website (2025) in “Comprehensive Guide to Wolof Interjections”. It expresses pity, sympathy, or disappointment; similar to “Oh no!” or “What a shame!” in English. Once more, the translator’s choice of borrowing this vernacular word could have been backed with a footnote explaining it.

### Conclusion

This study of the lexical gaps in the translation of *The Beggars Strike* highlights the difficulties in finding appropriate words in a target language where particular words of the source language do not have equivalent in the said target language. These difficulties can lead to a situation of apparent untranslatability which is a cause of loss in translation when the translator chooses to omit the source-text word or expression in the target-text. But considering the emphasis laid by the Cultural Translation Theory on diversity of cultures and a discursive approach to cultural translation as well as the pre-eminence given by the Interpretative Theory of Translation to translating the meaning of a text and not its words taken in isolation, this study looked at the possibility of translating lexical gaps in *Beggars’ Strike* even where it seemed impossible.

The study found that the translator used various techniques such as borrowing and explanation to translate cases of lexical gaps in the target text. For instance, she borrowed the Wolof word *bàttu* on page 8, and added an explanatory note to it: “the calabash which serves as a begging bowl”. Also, she borrowed the French word “*talibés*”, merely italicizing it, instead of translating it as ‘*almajirai*’. Though this does not help the intended Nigerian readers, the translator succeeds in enriching the vocabulary of the target readers by domesticating this word. But in some other cases as shown above in sub-section and in the used of words such as “*Sokhna*”, “*Serigne*” and “*Chei yalla!*”, to mention but a few, the translator chose to omit the source-text words, not minding the loss in translation. This shortcoming could have been remedied by the use of footnotes in line with the author of the novel who used a lot of borrowed words from her vernacular Wolof language and resorted to explaining them in footnotes.

Finally, this study has shown that the lexical gaps in *Beggars’ Strike* are very much translatable. Even the ones left untranslated by the translator can be translated using the methods or techniques of borrowing, explanation and footnote. The study recommends, therefore, the correct usage of the above-mentioned translation techniques to solve lexical gaps problems. In addition, Translators may choose to use a glossary where they decide against the use of footnotes.

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