

Literary translation, symbolic development and inclusion in South Africa

**Author:**Maricel Botha¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Department of Academic Literacy, Faculty of Humanities, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Maricel Botha,
maricelbotha@gmail.com

Dates:

Received: 09 Mar. 2021

Accepted: 24 June 2021

Published: 28 July 2021

How to cite this article:

Botha, M., 2021, 'Literary translation, symbolic development and inclusion in South Africa', *Literator* 42(1), a1798. <https://doi.org/10.4102/lit.v42i1.1798>

Copyright:

© 2021. The Authors.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Post-apartheid South African society remains characterised by significant social asymmetries and the need for development. Yet development should encompass not only meeting people's material needs to ensure survival, but also the attainment of higher social ideals such as solidarity, citizenship and inclusion. Literary translation involving local languages has been posited as one way of attaining such ideals, yet this postulation requires further investigation. The main objective of this article is to investigate the intersections between literary translation and social transformation in South Africa from the perspective of symbolic development, which is accompanied and complemented by a consideration of symbolic exclusion. The focus is firstly on the theoretical connections between literary translation, development and inclusion and secondly on the practical disjunctions between these. The article finds that in theory, there is ground to promote literary translation as a means towards symbolic development because of its ability to equalise language statuses and promote intercultural appreciation. Yet, the highly commodified nature of literature amidst the continuation of socioeconomic inequalities as well as the position of English in literature detract from translation's ability to foster symbolic development realistically within society at large, at least for the moment. From a theoretical perspective, the utility of incorporating development into translation studies remains significant, however, and translation studies could benefit from further investigation of translational development locally, mainly for its ability to direct research practically towards socially beneficial goals, specifically when combined with exclusion.

Keywords: literary translation; symbolic development; symbolic exclusion; South Africa; transformative translation.

Introduction

Development is the focus of the interdisciplinary field of development studies, which is defined by Mönks et al. (2017) as:

[A] multi- and interdisciplinary field of study that seeks to understand social, economic, political, technological, ecological, gender and cultural aspects of societal change at the local, national, regional and global levels, and the interplay between these different levels and the stakeholders involved. (p. 13)

This encompassing definition suggests a host of possible interpretations and conceptualisations of development, but all these have in common an interest in human progress and well-being in society. According to one interpretation of the current discourse of development, some further dominant assumptions presently include a normative assumption that development is positive and a practical assumption that development can be achieved (Ziai quoted in Madrueno & Tezanos 2018). Post-developmentalists, or anti-developmentalists, have criticised development as an ideology expressive of Western hegemony and Western ideals of advancement (see Ramírez-Cendrero 2018). Whilst such criticism is valid as far as development, and more specifically sustainable development, is understood in organisational policies and frameworks, the danger of anti-developmentalism is passivity in the face of some very severe social injustices. In response to the critics of development, Clammer (2012) states:

For whatever the critics of the concept of development might rightly say, it does nevertheless name the pressing issues of the day. These are the great ethical and practical questions of our generation. Furthermore, rather than approach these problems in a mood of pessimism and defeatism, a revitalized and constructive conception of development fuels our intellectual and moral excitement. For here are the truly nontrivial issues really worthy of serious commitment. (p. 8)

The current article supports Clammer's perspective, arguing that there exists a positive and necessary side to development apart from its political misapplication and that the attainment of developmental goals should be actively pursued.

Read online:

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

Suggestions to investigate development in relation to translation have only been voiced rather recently (see especially Marais 2012). This is perhaps surprising, given the course that translation studies has taken since the so-called cultural turn. Translation's link with development is 'natural' in relation to observations regarding translation that have come to the fore within the translation sociology movement (an offshoot of the cultural turn). This movement views translation from a sociological perspective and has highlighted translation's important and often hidden social role, particularly in the context of unequal power dynamics (see eds. Wolf & Fukari 2007). Translation sociology's description of translation's important social nature also undergirds the relationship between translation and development, and the influence of power asymmetries on translation trends is equally relevant in both cases. This is because translation is able to promote or hinder development depending on the influence of various power vectors. Of course, translation may contribute to development both positively and negatively at the same time, yet dominant power holders tend to direct general trends in one of these directions. In this sense, a development perspective on translation can be subsumed within translation sociology. Yet, when the emphasis is placed on development, research may be directed more pointedly towards practical and ideal considerations of translation's social functioning than within translation sociology more broadly. This is because development sets forth a definite goal and an objective not necessarily present in sociologically oriented translation research in general, which may be theoretical or diagnostic rather than being necessarily or directly aimed at social reform via translation.

To my mind, it is possible to describe two levels of intersection between translation and development. This article follows on a previous article (Botha 2019) in which translation practices in democratic South Africa were investigated in relation to what was termed *practical development*. This term describes the type of development that hinges on people's ability to participate practically in society and relates to the communicative accessibility of public services such as healthcare, legal representation and protection. In relation to public service delivery, the local situation has for a long time been characterised by English dominance, a lack of legal recognition of translation as a language policy implementation mechanism and a general absence of adequate translation services in the provision of social services (see Beukes 2006, e.g.). Considering that functional English literacy is not widespread in South Africa (Desai 2016), this situation was seen to pose a major obstacle to practical development, excluding many South Africans from effective participation in society and hindering their functioning in society at the most basic level. However, it was pointed out that even if translation services were to improve significantly according to the practical suggestions provided, social development would mainly be realised as far as it relates to survival and a very basic form of social functioning. This is because English literacy represents a communicative prerequisite for upward

social mobility as long as English continues its dominance in the prestigious domains of South African society. Additionally, the ideal level of development does not only ensure people's social survival or even upward social mobility, but overcomes hindrances to full social integration that are symbolic rather than material.

This article focuses on this ideal symbolic level of development, which is particularly important in view of South Africa's oppressive history. South Africa's colonial and apartheid history not only hindered economic and other material forms of development, but stripped people of their humanity and dignity and caused psychological marginalisation and oppression. This level of development therefore dovetails with notions of transformation in post-apartheid social discourse and, in its application here, relates to matters such as intercultural reconciliation, tolerance, acceptance and belonging as prerequisites for social integration. Within the context of the need for post-apartheid social transformation of this symbolic kind, literary translation between local languages has been suggested as a way forward, most notably by poet-activist Antjie Krog. Her perspective on the social role of literary translation can be summarised in the following statement (Krog 2003):

Translation is essential if we are to learn to live together on this planet. We have to begin to translate one another. (p. 271)

Krog's promotion of literary translation as a socially transformative tool fits into a theme which enjoys a strong presence in her writing: coming to terms with South Africa's oppressive past and forging new spaces for belonging in post-apartheid South Africa (see Van Niekerk 2016). Krog's ideas on post-apartheid transformation, though lauded as compelling by some, have also been described as 'superficial, emotional and ideologically driven' and 'even "propagandistic" and non-intellectual in nature' (Van Coller & Strauss 2019:1). Furthermore, hindrances to literary translation's ability to function transformatively are significant.

This problem gives rise to the main purpose of this article: to consider both the possibilities and obstacles surrounding literary translation as a means towards the most ideal forms of social transformation in South Africa from the perspective of symbolic development. There are significant connections between development and social exclusion in this regard, and links between these two concepts will be drawn for reasons of theoretical utility and relevance to the South African context. The questions underlying this purpose of the writing are as follows: (1) What are the theoretical links between literary translation, symbolic development and exclusion in South Africa, and, (2) can literary translation promote symbolic development and inclusion in a way that actually benefits underdeveloped and excluded citizens broadly? The latter question hinges on the assumption that literary translation may have academic benefit or gestural worth in the sphere of 'high literature', rather than real

worth to many citizens. A second purpose underlying this writing is to consider the implications of the findings for a development perspective on translation. This aspect of the writing mainly has theoretical relevance to South African translation studies.

The following section ('Symbolic development and symbolic exclusion') is dedicated to theoretical deliberation and involves an exposition of symbolic development and a discussion of the intersections between exclusion and development. The section 'Literary translation's potential to facilitate symbolic development' investigates literary translation's theoretical ability to effect symbolic development and inclusion with specific reference to literature's role in society and to translation's ability to stimulate language development, supplement literatures and promote intercultural awareness and appreciation. Thereafter, hindrances to translation's ability to foster symbolic development and inclusion in practice are discussed in the section 'Material and ideological constraints and the position of English', with reference to post-apartheid social conditions including socioeconomic realities, the commodified nature of the traditional literary system and the potential role of English as a hypercultural or widely accessible 'culturised' medium. Finally, a discussion of the consequences of a developmental perspective on translation is presented in the section 'Implications and conclusion'.

Symbolic development and symbolic exclusion

It has been pointed out that symbolic development can be contrasted with practical development and that it hinges on elevated social ideals rather than mere survival in society. To further expound the meaning of symbolic development, some observations by John Clammer, in a book called *Culture, development and social theory: Towards an integrated social development* (2012), are worth mentioning.

Clammer (2012:10) emphasises the need to re-humanise development which, he claims, has degraded into anti-humanism and has neglected glaring humanitarian problems. One area of advancement related to this ideal of re-humanisation has been the introduction of ethical debates into development discourse. This has entailed connecting development with what the author calls *spirituality*, 'such that development comes to be seen as a personally and socially transformative process leading to greater sociality, levels of self-development and harmony' (Clammer 2012:11). Clammer (2012:11) suggests fleshing out this perspective by considering people's 'existential' needs, rather than simply their 'empowerment'. Clammer (2012:14) defines this distinction by quoting Sulak (1992), who states that 'the crucial dimensions of human life are not economic but existential [*and relate*] to our needs for leisure, contemplation, love, community and self-realization'.

Other phrases used in connection with the so-called 'existential' needs in this book include 'transformation of consciousness', 'transformation of the quality and purpose of relationship in society' and 'aspiration and desire' (Clammer 2012:14). Whilst I do not personally believe that the true realisation of the most elevated existential needs can be met by efforts of social engineering, and translation in this case, as this would be to trivialise and systematise what may truly be considered spiritual, I do certainly see value in acknowledging a level of social development that transcends a state in which survival needs and basic prerequisites for social empowerment have been met. Although the realisation of these matters does not equate with true human fulfilment, they may indeed be able to realise a higher degree of social stability and foster positive social coexistence and are therefore important.

To my mind, it is difficult to speak about this level of development in the South African context without referring to exclusion, and for this reason a discussion of exclusion and the way it potentially links productively with development is provided here. The term *social exclusion* began its existence in France in the 1960s in relation to exclusion brought about by poverty, but it eventually came to refer to non-economically induced exclusion (Silver 1994:532). It has since developed into a multidimensional concept which is as abundant in interpretations as the term *development*. Walker and Walker (quoted in Byrne 2005) describe it as:

[T]he dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political or cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society. (p. 2)

Development's divisibility into material and symbolic types corresponds with the description of two levels of social exclusion in exclusion literature. What Hilary Silver (1994:532) calls *spiritual* or *symbolic exclusion* relates to the description of symbolic development whereas what she calls *material exclusion* relates to what I have called *practical development* earlier. Symbolic exclusion¹ has psychological and representational rather than material and tangible consequences and relates to social identity constructs. In relation to language, symbolic exclusion may result from unequal language representation, especially in prestigious or culturally expressive spheres, such as literature, effecting cultural marginalisation and alienation.

Linguistic inequalities in South African literature are characterised by the virtual absence of literature in the indigenous African languages (Möller 2014) and of translation involving the African languages, compared to literary and translational productivity and vitality in English and Afrikaans (see Kleyn 2013; Möller 2014). (Simply because of the differences in literary publishing trends, I group Afrikaans with English as an ex-colonial language in this writing, rather than considering it an indigenous language, although it can certainly be considered indigenous.) These

1. This term is preferred to spiritual exclusion as *spiritual* evokes a transcendent state or quality which I believe development efforts cannot achieve, as has been explained.

clearly set forth excluding trends in literary publishing that were entrenched during apartheid, and these literary trends may in turn be seen as a reflection of lingering socioeconomic realities inherited from apartheid (see Rotich, Ilieva & Walunywa 2015). Problematic connections between such linguistic imbalances in literature and post-apartheid social identity are at the heart of the promotion of African language literature and literary translation as means towards social transformation.

Such problems were pointed out by, amongst others, Neville Alexander early on in South Africa's democracy, with Alexander (1996:1) indicating that linguistic inequalities in South African literature raise serious cultural-political issues. Sixteen years later, at the end of his life, these issues still plagued Alexander. In relation to the important power potential of language as a 'transmission mechanism of "culture" or, more popularly, its role in the formation of individual and social identities' (own emphasis), Alexander (2012) made the following statement:

[B]eing able to use the language(s) one has the best command of in any situation is an empowering factor and, conversely, not being able to do so is necessarily disempowering. The self-esteem, self-confidence, potential creativity and spontaneity that come with being able to use the language that has shaped one from early childhood (one's mother tongue) are the foundation of all democratic polities and institutions. To be denied the use of this language is the very meaning of oppression. (p. 4)

Alexander is clearly referring to language use in the context of what is described here as symbolic development and whilst literature is not mentioned explicitly, references to creativity and spontaneity are certainly applicable to literary expression. What is interesting about this statement is Alexander's implication of (purposeful) exclusion in his references to mother tongue expression being denied and to linguistic oppression. This introduces the first important benefit of considering development in relation to exclusion: the implication it has for agency.

Connecting exclusion with development gives rise to a view in which the underdeveloped classes do not simply exist as such because they have yet to become developed as part of some gradual process of social evolution, for example, but because specific socioeconomic and political factors and actors withhold that possibility. Whilst a lack of development may easily be attributed to 'inevitable' if not 'natural' and in any case very abstract social forces, combining it with exclusion offers a more direct unveiling of the role of agents (read: perpetrators). Thus, whilst exclusion is systematic in the sense that 'it is about the character of the social system and about the dynamic development of social structures' (Byrne 2005:2), it has important implications for agency, as it is 'something that is done by some people to other people'. Linking symbolic exclusion with agents is somewhat more complicated than linking practical exclusion with agents. In the domain of language, this is because language use in certain social spheres that are particularly expressive of

symbolic exclusion, such as the literary system, is often not constrained by language policy. These cases of language use tend to rest on the political will of language speakers rather than on governments and organisations. Yet social disempowerment and the hidden advancement of language hegemony, which *are* more directly influenced by such agents, may (unconsciously) prevent speakers from exercising political will. Although this makes it harder to assign responsibility for obvious language asymmetries, such as those that exist in South African literature, the appropriate critical lenses may indeed successfully uncover links to agency even in more complex relationships of society, language and exclusion.

A second benefit of combining exclusion with development, which also relates to the complementary nature of the differences between the two concepts, is the possibility it offers to render development 'measurable' to some extent. Although it cannot measure people's feelings of exclusion or sense of being underdeveloped, it can give an indication of such realities apart from people's awareness of them. This measurement potential is helpful given the tendency for development to be rather vague or diffuse. Linguistic exclusion, by contrast, is fairly easy to determine or observe by considering trends of language representation in relation to the number of speakers of a certain language, for example, particularly in prestigious social spheres in the case of symbolic exclusion.

The concept of development, in turn, remains useful as the major orientational descriptor by virtue of its implication of a positive goal or destination and even a process (the latter perhaps implying the need for gradual and cumulative types of reform). Thus, whereas exclusion can be conceptualised as a watershed, and is somewhat stagnant in this regard, development points to a process. Development's dynamism complements exclusion's demarcating ability and focuses attention on the processes needed to overcome it. Therefore, exclusion has diagnostic benefits, whereas development has positive procedural and transformative implications.

Literary translation's potential to facilitate symbolic development

The literary system is not the only or most important sphere in which translation may operate developmentally. Yet, literature deserves attention in relation to symbolic development and symbolic exclusion for at least two reasons. The first is that it is a social domain which, being independent of the tokenistic and somewhat artificial 'reforms' brought about by language policy changes since democratisation, continues to display a large degree of linguistic inequality, pointing towards developmental discrepancies. The second reason is literature's important representative function in society, by which it serves as 'society's sensual memory' (Farshi 2011:46). Literature may be seen to construct an aesthetic representation of society (or a society) as a form of social reality. These aesthetic representations, though not

necessarily presented as truth, nevertheless play a role in the identity construction of a society in the sense that they create a national narrative within which citizens either may or may not find a place. In fact, literature's employment of fiction rather than 'truth' has been described as a major area of potential within a cultural and social understanding of literature. Fluck (1983) likened the fictional nature of literature to a type of simulation or testing ground:

In its freedom to arrange, to construct and to correct reality according to our own norms and interests, fiction permits us tentatively to reformulate, complement or oppose the social and cultural constructions of reality, and it is exactly in this tentative, playful nature that one unique value of literature as a symbolic strategy can be found. [...] [L]iterary communication as a distinct form of symbolic expression might, in other words, be conceived as a deliberately experimental mode of action with its own potential for modifying and redefining, for unfolding and testing cultural perceptions. (p. 365)

The fact that literature uses highly artistic means to live out its social purpose is also significant. 'Writerly' or 'literary' language possesses a very high degree of affective value, comparable perhaps only with language use in religious spheres (perhaps followed by media and politics). It often conveys deep and personal sentiments and offers amongst the highest expressions of the creative or artistic capacity of languages. In this regard, it intersects with feelings of cultural worth and belonging in meaningful ways.

The question now is how translation may help to even out imbalances present in the South African literary system that can be interpreted as symbolic development disparities and capitalise on literature's special ability to foster feelings of worth, belonging and so on, via the medium of language. The role of literary translation in this regard is, to my mind, twofold. Firstly, translation possesses an ability to elevate language statuses by encouraging lexical expansion and expressive dexterity, supplementing and expanding literatures in particular languages and demonstrating comparability with prestigious languages. Secondly, literary translation may foster intercultural understanding and appreciation by introducing readers to otherwise inaccessible cultural products and simulating intercultural interactions. Both of these effects of literary translation potentially have significant psychosocial consequences and relations to symbolic development and inclusion and are therefore investigated in some more detail.

Literary translation's ability to raise language statuses has been proven historically. One local example is the employment of literary translation in the elevation of Afrikaans from a kitchen language to a language of higher function and a language of *culture* in the 20th century. Literary translation into Afrikaans from 'prestigious' Western European languages began in the early 20th century and became a tradition, peaking during the period of high apartheid. Between 1958 and 1965 almost 40% of the entire body of Afrikaans literature consisted of translations (Kleyn 2013:44). This trend helped to establish the language's

vocabulary and status as a literary language. Although translations were not esteemed as highly as original literary productions (which were also being produced at an enormous rate), literary translation nonetheless displayed the ability of Afrikaans to convey the highly esteemed Western world's top literary achievements and supplemented the body of Afrikaans literature with renowned works. The establishment of this literary translational trend was an important reaction to cultural oppression following the outcome of the South African war and literary translation played a role in evening out cultural statuses. Sol Plaatje's early 20th century translations of five of Shakespeare's plays into Tswana (of which only two were published) were similarly motivated by a desire to display the expressive potential of the Tswana language and comparability with English in particular (Schalkwyk & Lapula 2000), although the limited extent of this translation meant limited effect on the actual status of the language. Nevertheless, it is worth noting Schalkwyk and Lapula's (2000) perspective that Plaatje's translations were by no means a sign of subservience to colonial culture, but a subtle form of resistance within the greater struggle for the recognition and valuation of African culture against its oppression and marginalisation by Western culture. Within the current social context, literary translation may similarly offer a necessary response to the marginalisation of the indigenous African languages and may help to even out language statuses, facilitating feelings of cultural worth and belonging in society. Development and inclusion have a literal aspect to them in this case. By literally developing languages and literatures and literally including marginalised languages in a nation's literary system, symbolic inclusion and the attainment of symbolic development can be promoted.

Translation's ability to foster intercultural respect, the second important function of literary translation in the light of development and inclusion, is a matter Antjie Krog has taken the lead to advocate. Krog has promoted cross-cultural and multidirectional translation as a necessity in post-apartheid social transformation and has done much to further multilingualism through translation. Her 2003 book, *A change of tongue*, contains her deliberation concerning the transformative role of translation, which Claire Scott (2006) explains as follows:

Krog deals with the issues of transformation and translation both explicitly, as political and literary phenomena, and implicitly, as social and personal experiences. The author-narrator in researching the translation of poems learns, 'This is the only way to learn about yourself in the world, by translating what others are saying'. [...] Translation becomes more than the act of rendering a text into another language. *It is a way of engaging with difference and a means of gaining a sense of belonging in a new or changing context.* (p. 81, [author's own italics])

In a book chapter dealing with translation as reconciliation (Krog, Morris & Tonkin 2010), Krog engages in conversation with Rosalind Morris and Humphrey Tonkin about this transformative role of translation. Here, Krog defines translation as reconciliation, as 'a bringing together, a

bringing of things to one another so that we understand and access one another from where we come from instead of accepting or forcing people to be “processed” into English before they are acceptable’. Although Krog recognises the potentially unifying role of English (an important matter which is discussed under the next heading), she advocates the need for authors to be able to write in their own languages without being limited. This view sees translation as an avenue for the preservation of linguistic distinctiveness and a means of supplementing and sustaining mother tongues (Krog et al. 2010:33), whilst promoting intercultural understanding, appreciation, sympathy and acceptance by exposing readers to unfamiliar and celebrated aspects of different cultures. Translation in this context is a celebration of cultural achievement and its role is interculturally pedagogical. Such motivation undergirds Krog’s own transformative translation projects. One example is *Met woorde soos met kerse* (2002), an Afrikaans anthology of poetry translations from 10 indigenous languages, which received the South African Translators’ Institute’s translation prize for its contribution towards uniting people through translation (Strauss 2006:182). Along the same lines, *the stars say ‘tsau’* (2004) and *die sterre sê ‘tsau’* (2004), English and Afrikaans collections of /Xam poetry, respectively, were published with a desire to display the inherent power, refinement, sophisticated thought and perceptions of the earth, death and cosmos in the poems in order to establish a respect for the humanity of others (Krog 2004). Again, the fictional role of literature may be seen as a particular asset within this conceptualisation of literary translation. Fluck (1983:365) explains that ‘the fact of a *tentative* scenario [...] may invite our imaginary participation in experiences we have not undergone yet or are afraid or hesitant to undergo’ and that fiction ‘allows the anticipation of concepts and ideas which in reality have not yet found another means of expression or which could only be expressed under danger’. In this context, translation has an opening function, allowing what Fluck calls ‘imaginary participation’ in otherwise inaccessible literatures and an entry into a realm of experience which may be impossible or unlikely otherwise. Yet, these experiences need not remain in the imaginary world. Fluck (1983) explains as follows:

For certain impulses or visions that cannot yet find any other form of expression within a society, the literary text may even provide the first or the only entry into a culture. Once these ideas have been made communicable and have been inscribed within a culture as possible models they may eventually inspire a more direct course of action or practice. Simulation becomes stimulation in this case. (p. 366)

So, translation’s allowing participation in ‘simulated’ intercultural experiences and engagements with difference may stimulate such experiences in reality.

In the conclusion of the chapter on translation as reconciliation (Krog et al. 2010), Morris praises the convincing nature of Krog’s argument (which the previous references to Fluck support), yet recognises the existence of certain limitations:

What you are advocating, I think, is translation that works against the grain of universalism while enabling communication across difference. What is so compelling about your argument is that it holds out hope for the enlargement and transformation of dominant language worlds in and through the process of translation. In the end, of course, what you propose would entail a nearly total overhaul of language policy and language pedagogy in South Africa. It’s daunting, to be sure. And such a process can only unfold over time, and with major institutional support. (p. 35)

The theoretical links between literary translation and the achievement of symbolic development, as summarised in this quote, are indeed compelling. Yet, the very real practical complications are deserving of more attention. Instead of linking these with language policy and pedagogy, as Morris does, I would distil the main issues into material and ideological hindrances as well as the presence of an at least temporarily more feasible alternative to achieving inclusion and development via literature than translation. These three factors, which complicate the remedial potential of translation, are discussed in the below section.

Material and ideological constraints and the position of English

The first obvious hindrance to the employment of literary translation in developmental and inclusive ways is the continuation of economic inequality since democratisation (see Rotich et al. 2015). This hinders the likelihood of symbolic development in general because it is difficult to expect people to experience symbolic development and inclusion whilst they are materially underdeveloped and excluded as a result of social circumstances that favour an elite. A type of Maslowian-needs hierarchy therefore comes into play and disrupts efforts to achieve widespread symbolic development. This also affects the likelihood of development via literary translation more directly. There has been a continuation of high degrees of illiteracy since the abolition of apartheid and continued poverty renders books unaffordable to many. This has caused the absence of a reading culture amongst the most underdeveloped and excluded sections of South African society and has accounted to a large extent for the lack of literature in the indigenous South African languages. These problems beg the question of how the most underdeveloped and excluded citizens can benefit from the transformative potential of literary translation if literary books are not within reach. These socioeconomic factors significantly hinder translation’s potential to penetrate the most affected levels of society.

In addition to these hindrances, there are ideological factors that limit the potential for translation to function developmentally and inclusively. These include, firstly, perceptions of the African languages as inferior or backward or as languages of identification, but not of prestige. Möller (2014:62) indicates that apartheid’s malevolent promotion of the African languages and the legacy of Bantu education may have caused a negative association with African language literature in some areas, although views of the African

languages simply as non-literary, vernacular languages are probably more common hindrances. Neville Alexander (2005:2) has referred to the perception amongst African language speakers of their own languages as incapable of becoming languages of power in the dominant domains of society as Static Maintenance Syndrome, a phenomenon he identifies as a disabling attitude (see also Chauke 2020; Hilton 2010).

Such factors create a complicated environment for black South African writing, which Maake (2015) explains as follows:

The question of choice of language is an act of entering into canonised spaces which also implies both freedom and at the same time limitation and fixity of boundaries of identity – a paradox which dictates painstaking negotiation. [...] [T]here is always the challenge of speaking to or writing for a specific community and remaining within the setting, milieu and context of that community, which speaks a particular language, thus circumscribing one's freedom of social communions and linguistic mobility, so to speak. (p. 14)

Maake (2015:15) does recognise the benefit of mother tongue writing, arguing that it offers self-assertion, making one the 'supreme master' of one's narrative. This self-assertion can also be broadened to cultural assertion in relation to the achievement of symbolic development. Yet Maake (2015:15) also refers to writing in a mother tongue (other than English) as an act of self-sacrifice because it entails 'speaking to the deaf', that is, to 'those who do not, cannot or shall [*sic.*] not read in that language'. Thus, writing in a mother tongue other than English offers creative liberty, yet black South African authors' choice to write in English suggests that the constraints of mother tongue writing dominate.

Regarding English, the question is, moreover, whether black South African authors' choice (or need) to write in English necessarily excludes the potential for symbolic inclusion in the literary system or whether this could be achieved in other ways. An important alternative which comes to mind is theme and genre and other forms of literary expression as representations of culture. In this regard, indigenised English or Englishes may indeed serve as effective linguistic expressions of culture in the place of mother tongues, at least whilst mother tongue publishing remains under severe economic constraint. From another perspective, English may also offer a way to promote inclusion by de-emphasising cultural divisions altogether. To elaborate these alternatives to translation that English might offer in the local context, I, somewhat paradoxically, again refer to Antjie Krog. Krog highlights the unique position of English in South Africa by explaining that apartheid's emphasis on different local languages created separation, which in turn created 'a desire for intellectuals and artists to speak in a South African voice and not a Zulu voice, or a Xhosa voice' (Krog et al. 2010:21). She further explains that non-racialism versus multiracialism governs the choice for English and explains that 'it is also a case of English having a ready-made vocabulary in which we could be equals' (Krog et al. 2010:21). The distinction between non-racialism and multiracialism introduces an important

complication to the attainment of symbolic inclusion and development by means of translation. As a way to attain linguistic and therefore cultural representation in order to achieve social cohesion, translation couples with symbolic development and inclusion mainly in relation to multiracialism. Yet, from the perspective of non-racialism, symbolic development via inclusion could just as well be attained by fostering an inclusive South African identity which transcends linguistic and cultural distinctions, some might argue. The history of English in South Africa as a unifying language and liberation language indeed hints at its potential to promote symbolic development in this way. Krog et al. (2010) explains in this regard:

The first scent we received of a non-ethnic, non-racial South African-ness was within English. All the other languages appear as ethnic. There's an Afrikaans voice and a Zulu voice, but these cannot claim to be a South African voice. In South Africa, you want to be part of that larger community, you want to respond and you want to be in conversation with the other voices. And English has such a tone. (p. 27)

This statement might seem reductive and insensitive to the colonial baggage which English also inevitably carries, which is perhaps why Krog nonetheless asserts that writing in English should not be a requirement for being a South African author and why she envisions a scenario where a translated voice could enrich South African English (Krog et al. 2010:27). This again points towards multiracialism (expressed via translation and indigenised English) as a solution to exclusion, which indeed seems to offer a better remedy to the type of exclusion which plagues South African society in the wake of apartheid injustices than the 'universalism' to which Morris referred in an earlier quote. Universalism offers an alternative scope for belonging, but not one which fosters reconciliation and a coming to terms with the past as effectively as acknowledging cultural diversity. Of course, one could argue that English could be enriched without translation, given the problem of the small audiences and the limited reach of indigenous language writing. African authors such as Chinua Achebe and several local authors have proven that English is well able to flaunt the flavours of local languages and cultures. Whilst this must be seen as a type of cultural concession in light of the colonial legacy of English, given the constraints of indigenous language publishing, indigenisation of English nevertheless seems to offer at least a temporary answer to the need to assert an African presence in the literary scene more immediately than indigenous language publishing would allow.

The implication, then, is that translation's role in effecting symbolic inclusion and development via literature in far-reaching ways might be idealistic rather than practical, at least within the current socioeconomic and linguistic landscape.

Implications and conclusion

This article has pointed out the noteworthy theoretical links between literary translation and what was broadly termed

transformative translation from the perspective of symbolic development and inclusion. These links lie in literary translation's potential effect on language statuses, and therefore cultural prestige, and intercultural appreciation. However, it was shown that these are unlikely to produce symbolic development and inclusion amongst the underdeveloped and excluded sections of society for both practical and ideological reasons within the current social context. Practically, illiteracy and poverty represent two significant factors within a complex of phenomena that hinder symbolic development overall, but also limit African language publishing and reading and therefore the reach of translations into these languages. Similarly, Static Maintenance Syndrome amongst African language speakers is one major ideological factor that results in preferences for English in higher social spheres. Against this background, indigenised English may offer a more feasible mechanism for cultural expression and the promotion of symbolic development and inclusion in the literary sphere for the time being. Whilst this does not solve the major practical hindrances to literature's ability to affect large-scale symbolic development and inclusion, it does offer a broader reach for the moment.

The bleak outlook on literary translation's current value as a tool for encompassing symbolic development by no means implies that literary translation involving the indigenous languages should not be pursued and promoted by academics. If approached purely ideologically, for example, there is indeed much ground to promote the production of indigenous language literature and literary translation involving these languages from the perspective of decolonisation, for example. There might exist, in other words, a need to promote the equalising of linguistic representation in literature as a positive response to past imbalances quite apart from its effect on the masses of excluded citizens and for the sake of literary transformation in and of itself. The same can be said of, for example, the academic value of transformative literary translation. The purpose of this writing was not to dismiss transformative literary translation. However, the concept of development focuses attention on the goal of human social advancement and on the underdeveloped sectors of society, and in this particular context, and particularly when merged with concepts of social exclusion, literary translation was shown to possess limited worth in rendering broad-based social benefit for now. A change in social or ideological conditions would require a re-evaluation of this conclusion, of course, and a different national literary context may also lead to different findings, even within Africa. Furthermore, this research has not considered the potential for translation to effect symbolic inclusion in other social spheres such as print media, television, government administration and religion, for example. It is possible that translation's promotion of language representation in social spheres which are less economically constrained might paint a somewhat different picture of translation's symbolic utility. However, the needs hierarchy which renders

symbolic development less likely in the face of continued material underdevelopment remains a complicating factor in these social scenarios too.

These comments might then raise the question of the benefit of a developmental perspective on translation. I believe that two main benefits exist. The first is that a development perspective might help delineate the beneficiaries of transformative translation or translation as reconciliation by forcing one to consider who would actually be reached by such types of translation. If transformative translation practices are not yet able to successfully affect a significant proportion of the citizenry, as a development focus has pointed out in relation to literature, necessary questions can be raised concerning the scope or destination of translational activism. Secondly, if the underdeveloped remain beyond the scope of translation's transformative benefit, then development might help to consider how this could be changed. This is because, when approached positively, development's implication of a process and a destination means that things cannot end with a pronouncement of inevitable inequality. Development forces consideration of a way forward. Whilst this article does not allow much room for such consideration, one reaction to this might entail recognising the necessity of a holistic approach towards translation as a social instrument. This means acknowledging that promoting transformative translation without emphasising the necessity of basic material reform is likely to yield a situation where reform is limited to academic or purely literary realms or it benefits those who have already attained a degree of material development. Another response might be to focus attention on the more immediate goal of material development via translation or to unveil the agents involved in effecting or maintaining linguistic and other types of social underdevelopment. Being able to tie development to agents was seen to be an advantage of merging development with social exclusion and a combined approach which relates development to exclusion is advocated for further research along these lines for this reason. Thus, the implications of matching translation studies with development studies, and exclusion, are positive, even though the potential of literary translation to effect symbolic development and inclusion was shown to be limited amidst the current social conditions.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that there are no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced the writing of this article.

Author's contributions

The author alone contributed to the design and implementation of the research, to the analysis of the results and to the writing of the manuscript.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for a research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article, as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in the submitted article are the author's own and not an official position of any affiliated institution.

References

- Alexander, N., 1996, 'Mainstreaming by confluence: The multilingual context of literature in South Africa', *World Literature Today* 70(1), 9–12. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40151843>
- Alexander, N., 2005, 'The potential role of translation as social practice for the intellectualisation of African languages', Keynote Address Delivered at the XVII World Congress of the International Federation of Translators, Tampere, 04th–07th August.
- Alexander, N., 2012, 'The centrality of the language question in post-apartheid South Africa: Revisiting a perennial issue', *South African Journal of Science* 108(9–10), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajs.v108i9/10.1443>
- Beukes, A.-M., 2006, 'Translation in South Africa: The politics of transmission', *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 24(1), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.2989/16073610609486402>
- Botha, M., 2019, 'Translation and development: (non-)translation and material exclusion in South Africa', *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 37(3), 247–261. <https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2019.1671882>
- Byrne, D., 2005, *Social exclusion*, 2nd edn., Open University Press, Berkshire.
- Chauke, L., 2020, 'The attitudes and opinions of young students towards their own language: The case of Tsonga-speaking students at the University of Johannesburg', *International Journal of Language Studies* 14(2), 73–88.
- Clammer, J., 2012, *Culture, development and social theory: Towards an integrated social development*, Zed Books, London.
- Desai, Z., 2016, 'Learning through the medium of English in multilingual South Africa: Enabling or disabling learners from low income contexts?', *Comparative Education* 52(3), 343–358. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2016.1185259>
- Farshi, G.S., 2011, 'Literature as a social system: The case of literary adaptation', in *International Proceedings in Economics and Development Research*, vol. 26, pp. 44–48, IACSIT Press, Jakarta.
- Fluck, W., 1983, 'Literature as symbolic action', *Amerikastudien* 28(3), 361–371.
- Hilton, N.H., 2010, 'University students' context-dependent conscious attitudes towards the official South African languages', *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 28(2), 123–132. <https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2010.519109>
- Kleyn, L., 2013, 'n Sisteemteoretiese kartering van die Afrikaans literatuur van die tydperk 2000–2009: Kanoniserings van die Afrikaanse literatuur', PhD thesis, Dept. of Information Studies, University of Pretoria.
- Krog, A., 2003, *A change of tongue*, Random House, New York, NY.
- Krog, A., 2004, *The stars say 'tsau'*, Kwela Books, Cape Town.
- Krog, A., Morris, R.C. & Tonkin, H., 2010, 'Translation as reconciliation: A conversation about politics, translation, and multilingualism in South Africa', in H. Tonkin & M.E. Frank (eds.), *Translator as mediator of cultures*, pp. 17–35, John Benjamins, New York, NY.
- Maake, N., 2015, 'Negotiating ironies and paradoxes of mother tongue education: An introspective and retrospective reflection', *South African Journal of African Languages* 35(1), 11–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02572117.2015.1056456>
- Madruño, R. & Texanos, S., 2018, 'The contemporary development discourse: Analysing the influence of development studies' journals', *World Development* 109, 334–345. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.05.005>
- Marais, K., 2012, 'Development and translation', in Y. Gambier & L. Van Doorslaer (eds.), *Handbook of translation studies*, vol. 3, pp. 26–31, John Benjamins, Amsterdam.
- Möller, J., 2014, 'Multilingual publishing: An investigation into access to trade books through the eleven official languages in South Africa', Master's dissertation, Dept. Information Studies, University of Pretoria.
- Mönks, J., Carbonnier, G., Meller, A. & De Haan, L., 2017, 'Towards a renewed vision of development studies', *International Development Policy* 8(1), 1–18.
- Ramírez-Cendrero, J.M., 2018, 'Limits and contradictions of post-developmentalism as a heterodox approach to capitalist development', *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 29(4), 68–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10455752.2017.1334220>
- Rotich, R., Ilieva, E.V. & Walunywa, J., 2015, 'The social formation of post-apartheid South Africa', *Journal of Pan African Studies* 8(9), 132–155.
- Schalkwyk, D. & Lapula, L., 2000, 'Solomon Plaatje, William Shakespeare and the translations of culture', *Pretex: Literary and Cultural Studies* 9(1), 9–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/713692698>
- Scott, C., 2006, "'How do I understand myself in this text-tortured land?': Identity, belonging and textuality in Antjie Krog's A change of tongue, Down to my last skin and Body bereft", Master's dissertation, Dept. English, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Silver, H., 1994, 'Social exclusion and social solidarity: Three paradigms', *International Labour Review* 133(5), 531–578.
- Strauss, H., 2006, 'From Afrikaner to African: Whiteness and the politics of translation in Antjie Krog's A change of tongue', *African Identities* 4(2), 179–194. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725840600761112>
- Sulak, S., 1992, *Seeds of peace: A Buddhist vision for renewing society*, Parallax Press, Berkeley, CA, quoted in J. Clammer, 2012, *Culture, development and social theory: Towards an integrated social development*, Zed Books, London, p. 14.
- Van Coller, H.P. & Strauss, D., 2019, 'Letterkundige en wysgerige kanteekeninge by die transformasie-trilogie van Antjie Krog' [Literary and philosophical marginal notes regarding the transformation trilogy of Antjie Krog], *Literator* 40(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.4102/lit.v40i1.1512>
- Van Niekerk, J., 2016, 'baie worde': *Identiteit en transformasie by Antjie Krog*, Van Schaik, Pretoria.
- Walker, A. & Walker, C. (eds.), 1997, *Britain divided*, CPAG, London, quoted in D. Byrne, 2005, *Social exclusion*, 2nd edn., Open University Press, Berkshire, p. 2.
- Wolf, M. & Fukari, A. (eds.), 2007, *Constructing a sociology of translation*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam.
- Ziai, A., 2015, 'Post-development: premature burials and haunting ghosts', *Development and Change* 46(4), 833–854, quoted in R. Madruño & S. Texanos, 2018, 'The contemporary development discourse: Analysing the influence of development studies' journals', *World Development* 109, 334–345. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12177>