

## OXYMORONS: THE TRANSFER OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE INTO THE IGBO LANGUAGE.

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### **Abstract**

*Language functions not only as a tool for communication, but also as a carrier of culture, a framework for thought and a medium of artistic expression. Among the devices that give language its rhetorical depth is the oxymoron; a figure of speech that brings contradictory or opposing terms together to produce a paradoxical effect. Oxymorons, as rhetorical devices that combine seemingly contradictory terms (e.g., deafening silence, bittersweet), offer unique insight into linguistic creativity and cultural expression. While oxymoron is common and well understood in English, the Igbo language though rich in metaphor, proverbs and figurative speech does not always accommodate the direct rendering of semantic contradiction in the same structural form. This disparity creates difficulties in maintaining the rhetorical tension, stylistic nuance and communicative intent of oxymoronic expressions in translation. This study therefore examines the prospects of translating oxymorons from English into Igbo, focusing on how they are rendered meaningfully in the Igbo language. The objectives of the study include identifying oxymorons in selected English literary and conversational texts, translating them into Igbo language, analysing the translations with a focus on the techniques and choices made by translators and evaluating the extent to which the translated expressions correspond to the English equivalent. The research is grounded in Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/1995) Comparative stylistic Model of Translation, Nida's (1964) Theory, Reiss & Vermeer (1984) Skopos' Theory and Sperber & Wilson (1995) Relevance Theory. Skopos' Theory (Reiss/Vermeer, 1984) and Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) stand out as the most practical and adaptable frameworks for the translation exercise while Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) comparative model of translation supports structured / tabular presentation of translation data. A qualitative descriptive approach is employed. A corpus of 117 English oxymorons was identified from literary texts, collections and everyday discourse, from which 50 were selected for analysis as the study sample. Each is translated into its functional Igbo equivalent. The translations are evaluated using semantic equivalence, cultural contextualization and stylistic resonance. Data are further validated through consultations with the Igbo language experts and textual comparison with indigenous rhetorical forms. Findings reveal that English oxymorons often align with Igbo expressions that reflect similar philosophical dualities, particularly in proverbs and idiomatic speech. Many oxymorons are effectively translated using creative equivalents, semantic rephrasing and cultural analogies. The results underscore the depth of rhetorical and semantic possibilities in the Igbo language and its ability to accommodate complex linguistic forms. The study recommends the use of a functionalist translation model, informed by both cultural competence and contextual awareness. It further advocates for the compilation of Igbo rhetorical glossaries and expanded training for translators in stylistic translation techniques. In conclusion, this research affirms the expressive capacity of the Igbo language in literary and rhetorical translation. It enriches scholarship in translation studies, cross-cultural linguistics, and African language development, offering new directions for the study of figures of speech in indigenous African languages.*

**Keywords:** Oxymoron, Translation, English, Igbo, paradox, Rhetorical figures, Equivalence, Cultural transfer

### Introduction

Language functions not merely as a medium for communication but also as a repository of cultural identity, cognitive patterns and aesthetic expression (Ngugi, 2009). One of the stylistic devices that vividly illustrates this creative potential is the use of oxymoron; an expression that combines seemingly contradictory terms (deafening silence, bittersweet and seriously funny) to produce a striking thought-provoking effect (Leach, 1969). By juxtaposing opposites, oxymorons create cognitive dissonance that draws attention to social contradictions, satirical critiques or aesthetic subtleties, thereby enriching the interpretive experience of language (Eagleton, 2019). The translation of oxymoron however, presents substantial challenges. Oxymorons resist literal interpretation and their meaning is often embedded within both linguistic structure and cultural context (Newmark, 1988). This problem is particularly acute in translating from English into Igbo, as the two languages differ not only structurally but also culturally in how they encode paradox, irony and abstraction. English, with its well-developed literary and rhetorical traditions, can deploy oxymorons with a wide range of stylistic nuances, whereas Igbo employs proverbs, oral narratives and figurative speech to convey complex ideas, often using strategies that do not directly mirror English forms (Emenanjo, 1990). In a similar note, scholars have also shown that in the context of Igbo language, figurative expressions are often reinterpreted through culturally familiar images and idioms rather than reproduce literally (Emenanjo, 2015). Consequently, translators are often required to make interpretive choices, balancing semantic fidelity with the preservation of rhetorical effect.

This study, therefore, investigates the strategies, limitations and creative decisions involved in translating English oxymorons into Igbo. Drawing on literary texts, journalistic discourse, everyday conversation and dramatic dialogue, it examines how translators manage semantic contradiction, stylistic nuance and rhetorical force. It adopts theoretical frameworks such as Nida's dynamic equivalence model (1964), Newmark's communicative and semantic approaches (1988), and Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) procedures to evaluate equivalence and fidelity in Igbo translations, situating the analysis within broader debates on meaning, style and cultural mediation.

The study addresses a gap in translation scholarship. While much research exists on metaphor, idiom, irony and paradox (Touy, 1995), oxymoron translation remains underexplored, especially in African language contexts. Oxymorons combine opposing meanings and require more than lexical substitution (Bolognesi et al., 2024). They demand sensitivity to linguistic structure, cultural logic and stylistic norms. Key concerns include how English oxymorons can be meaningfully rendered in Igbo, the strategies employed and the extent to which rhetorical intent is preserved. This research examines a range of oxymoronic expressions, translating them into Igbo using multiple strategies while analyzing the linguistic, cultural, and stylistic factors shaping these choices. Its objectives include identifying oxymorons, rendering them in Igbo, analyzing translation techniques, exploring syntactic and cultural challenges and evaluating how well translations preserve semantic and rhetorical force. The study highlights translation as an intercultural negotiation rather than a mechanical process.

The study's significance is both theoretical and practical. It contributes to debates on equivalence in translating figurative language (Newmark, 1988) and extends these frameworks to African languages by identifying strategies for preserving paradox and nuance. It also demonstrates the expressive capacity of Igbo, thereby challenging assumptions about the limitations of African languages (Venuti, 2013). By drawing on Igbo proverbs and oral traditions, oxymoron shows how culturally grounded equivalents can maintain rhetorical force (Ezenwa-Ohaeto, 2016).

Finally, the study contributes to postcolonial and decolonial perspectives by affirming the intellectual and literary legitimacy of African languages. It demonstrates that Igbo can convey complex rhetorical forms

like oxymorons, supporting bilingual education, literary scholarship, and translation theory from an African perspective. This study provides a foundation for research on rhetorical devices, bilingual lexicography and expressive strategies in African languages.

This study is limited to the identification and translation of oxymoronic expressions with a focus on analyzing their semantic structure, stylistic function and rendering into Igbo within a qualitative translation framework.

## 2.0 Literature Review

This section explores key works and debates in translation theory, with emphasis on oxymoron. It examines conceptual, theoretical and empirical perspectives.

An oxymoron is a figure of speech that combines contradictory terms to create paradoxical effects. According to Wale (2011), oxymoron is a rhetorical figure that juxtaposes semantically contradictory terms within single expression for stylistic effect. Oxymoron as a figure of speech, poses unique challenges for translators and its meaning emerges, not from the individual words but from the interplay between them (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). Traditional rhetoric situates oxymorons as a subtype of paradox, frequently encountered in poetry, philosophical texts and literary discourse, where they evoke tension, irony and cognitive engagement. For instance, expressions such as “cruel kindness,” “seriously funny” and “virtual reality” simultaneously convey semantic contradiction and rhetorical harmony. Modern cognitive linguistic approaches explain that oxymorons stimulate conceptual blending, merging conflicting frames in the mind to generate novel meaning (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). Oxymorons intentionally juxtapose apparently contradictory or opposing terms in order to produce a thought-provoking rhetorical effect and reveal deeper meaning (Abrams and Harpham, 2015; Cove, 2024). The term itself, derived from the Greek roots *oxy* (sharp) and *moron* (dull), exemplifies its own inherent contradiction, reinforcing the self-referential nature of the figure. Oxymorons differ from irony, paradox and antithesis due to their deliberate and condensed rhetorical structure, that enhances stylistic beauty, conciseness and emotive resonance. For example, “deafening silence” is more striking and cognitively engaging than the verbose “the silence was very loud.” The creation of effective oxymorons often relies on unexpected or non-obvious oppositions. Harris (2008) observes that unfamiliar pairings such as “visionary blindness,” “living death,” or “illuminous darkness” require deeper interpretive effort from the reader, stretching language beyond conventional binaries and encouraging reflection on layered realities. Oxymorons can appear at the word level, either as dependent morphemes like *preposterous*, *superette*, *pianoforte* or *brunch*, or as independent morphemes in expressions like “painful pleasure”, “bittersweet”, and “speech writing”. At the phrase level, contradictory elements may belong to the same syntactic class, as in “drowsy and vivacious” or different classes, as in “seriously joking” or “serious joke” (Chuan Yu, 2008). Grothe (2009, as cited in Flayih, 2009) notes that contrastive elements may even be separated by prepositions, as in “darkness at noon” or “addition by subtraction”. Flayih (2009), categorizes oxymorons into objective, subjective and punning types; highlighting the range of literal, opinion-based and contextually nuanced contradictions, exemplified by phrases such as “pretty ugly”, “Microsoft works”, and “jumbo shrimp”. Functionally, oxymorons attract attention, condense meaning, generate humor, convey sarcasm and produce ironic contrasts; Hamlet’s “I must be cruel only to be kind” presents a typical example. (Flayih, 2009). In Igbo, paradox-like expressions, proverbs and narrative constructions can achieve similar effects, even when direct oxymorons like “jumbo shrimp” are absent. Examples include *nkenke enyi, o di mkpụnkpu eme ire*; which capture the conceptual tension inherent in English oxymorons.

Translation, particularly of figurative language like oxymorons, extends beyond literal word substitution; it is an interpretive and creative act that balances semantic fidelity, stylistic effect and cultural resonance (Catford, 1965; Newmark, 1988). Translators must navigate semantic opposition, cultural resonance and structural compatibility, while adapting to target-language norms. Igbo, with its rich system of symbolism, tonal nuance and proverb-based idioms, provides fertile ground for conveying oxymoronic logic, though

the syntactic form may differ. Proverbs such as “*o nwuru anwu n’utu, o sie ike n’abali*” (He died in the morning but became stronger at night) and “*Ujo abughi ujo, ma e jiri ya mee ihe*” (Fear is not really fear if it is put to use) exemplify culturally embedded paradoxes, demonstrating the adaptability of Igbo rhetorical structures to express contradiction (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003).

The type of Genre, further shapes the translation of oxymorons. Literary texts demand aesthetic and emotional resonance; political discourse favors satire or irony while religious texts highlight mystical paradoxes such as “*virgin birth*” or “*divine madness*” (Brisk et al., 2025).

Translators of Igbo language should consider register, style and audience reception and employ strategies such as literal retention, idiomatic substitution, explicitation, amplification or selective omission. Additionally, interlingual and intersemiotic shifts may be required, particularly when metaphor, proverb or tonal nuance conveys the oxymoronic effect (Jakobson, 1959).

Igbo syntax, as a Benue-Congo language, relies heavily on constituent order and serial predicate constructions to express complex relations (Zimmermann & Amaechi, 2025). Translators often leverage prepositional and relational elements such as “*na, nke and n’ime*” to preserve semantic tension in oxymorons, aligning with Vinay and Darbelnet’s (1995) modulation and transposition strategies and Nida’s (1964) principle of dynamic equivalence. Cultural, contextual and pragmatic considerations are central, as semantic contradiction in Igbo is frequently embedded in proverbs, idioms and narrative forms, requiring adaptive strategies for effective translation (Nwankwo & Eze, 2020; Akinmade & Ajayi, 2022).

Translation techniques (borrowing, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence, adaptation, omission, expansion and compensation) remain central tools for preserving meaning, style and cultural nuance in oxymoronic translation (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958; Newmark, 1988; Molina Martínez, 2022; Putri Kemangi, 2023).

Theoretical frameworks further illuminate translation practice. Skopos’ Theory (Vermeer, 1989; Schaffner, 2012) emphasizes purpose-driven translation, allowing flexibility in structure and lexical choice to achieve the intended communicative effect in the target culture. Nord’s (1997) Loyalty Principle complements this by mandating fidelity to both the source author and target audience, balancing ethical responsibility with functional adaptation. Nida’s (1964) dynamic equivalence prioritizes audience response over strict literal fidelity, crucial when translating oxymorons whose rhetorical or emotional effect might otherwise be lost. Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) provides insight into interpretive effort, highlighting the need to balance cognitive load with cultural accessibility. Cognitive-linguistic perspectives, including Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Blending Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Fauconnier & Turner, 2002), explain how conceptual contradictions are mentally processed and suggest strategies for reconstructing blended meanings in Igbo. Sapir-Whorf’s (1921) hypothesis of linguistic relativity, reinforces the influence of cultural and linguistic frameworks on the conceptualization of oxymorons, while Derrida’s (1978) Deconstruction Theory legitimizes preservation of ambiguity and multiplicity of meaning. Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) provide practical procedures for mapping source and target texts while Nord’s (1997) ethical refinement ensures translator accountability. Collectively, these frameworks highlight the need for a nuanced, context-sensitive approach that integrates cognitive, cultural and linguistic insights.

Empirical studies corroborate these theoretical perspectives. Adebayo (2016) demonstrates that translators often rely on paraphrase, contextualization or cultural substitution when direct oxymoronic equivalents are absent in Yoruba and Igbo. Nwachukwu and Okoro (2023) show that oxymorons increase cognitive load in bilingual readers, activating both semantic conflict resolution and cultural frame switching. Chukwu (2019), highlights that literary and idiomatic context, allow more effective rendering of oxymorons than everyday discourse. In another note, Okafor and Ogu (2022) emphasize translator competence and training, noting low recognition and accurate translation rates for oxymorons among students and professionals.

Adeyemi (2024) highlights the limitations of machine translation in handling oxymorons, emphasizing the superior performance of human translators in achieving culturally and rhetorically coherent results. Emecheta (2022) underscores the cultural embedding of paradoxical logic in Igbo proverbs and oral tradition; demonstrating that successful translation requires both linguistic dexterity and cultural insight. Collectively, these studies affirm that translating oxymorons demands a multifaceted approach, blending cognitive awareness, rhetorical sensitivity and cultural literacy to maintain semantic tension, stylistic effect and audience resonance.

This study adopts a qualitative research design, specifically using a descriptive-analytical approach. Given that the objective of this research is to examine how oxymorons in English are translated into Igbo while also evaluating the semantic, syntactic, cultural and rhetorical implications, qualitative methods offer the most appropriate framework. The research also integrates comparative textual analysis and functional equivalent assessment, enabling a deep evaluation of both linguistic form and translational strategies. The use of qualitative method enables the identification and interpretation of patterns, shifts or losses in meaning that occur during the translation process. This research employs primary and secondary sources of data. Selected English texts like *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne, *Death and the King's Horseman* by Wole Soyinka, *Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare are the primary sources. The choice of these texts is informed by both linguistic and stylistic considerations relevant to the study of oxymoron in translation. First, these texts are stylistically rich in oxymoronic constructions. In addition, they provide a cross-cultural framework essential for translation studies. Moreover, the selected works are widely studied and critically documented, ensuring the availability of secondary literature to support interpretation and validation. Secondary Sources include journals, theses and published articles on translation theory, oxymoron and Igbo stylistics; online and printed corpora of English and Igbo literary texts, empirical studies on figurative language and its cross-cultural rendering. The secondary sources were selected based on their direct relevance to oxymoron, figurative language, stylistics and translation studies.

The researcher identifies 117 oxymoronic expressions from selected English literary texts. Out of this number, a sample size of 50 was chosen considering the scope of the study. The selection is based on purposive sampling, focusing on oxymorons that are structurally clear, contextually meaningful within the text and relevant for translation into Igbo. These were extracted, documented, translated into Igbo language and analysed comparatively. The study employed qualitative analysis of the contents and contrastive linguistic analysis. The analysis was grounded in Skopos and Relevance Theories. These frameworks help the researcher to adopt different strategies where necessary. Furthermore, Vinay and Darbelnet's model of translation procedures (e.g., modulation, transposition, equivalence, adaptation) were used to classify the strategies used in each translation. To ensure validity, the researcher cross-validated translations with multiple experts and ensured that each oxymoron and its Igbo counterpart are interpreted within context. Reliability was ensured by following a systematic translation evaluation protocol and conducting repeatable linguistic procedures across all examples.

#### **4.0 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

This chapter presents and analyses selected oxymoronic expressions in English alongside their translations into Igbo. Each item is examined for its semantic tension, stylistic intent and cultural adaptability in the target language. The translations are categorized based on the translation strategies outlined by (Vinay and Darbelnet, 1958; Newmark, 1988). Source Language and Target language are abbreviated as SL and TL respectively in the analysis

#### 4.1 Data Presentation

Table presenting English and Igbo oxymorons, meaning and translation strategies

No	English Oxymoron	Igbo Equivalent	Meaning	Translation strategies	Analysis
1	Act naturally	Kpaa agwa n'udi gi	Be yourself	Explication	Implied meaning in SL is made explicit in TL. "Act" as used here, is to behave in a strange way. Naturally (not acting) contradicts "act"
2	Active sleep	Ikwo ụra	Subconscious activity	Modulation	The TL interprets the concept rather than preserving the contradiction thus prioritizing meaning over stylistic effect. Oxymoronic impact lost.
3	Alone together	Anyị nọrọ onwe anyị iche iche	Being with someone but feeling or acting alone	Explication	Additional elements are introduced in the TL to clarify meaning, thus leading to meaning preservation in the way it feels natural in TL
4	Appear invisible	Ịpụta n'udị ahụanya	To be present in a way that no one notices	Modulation	The TL changes the perspective into culturally meaningful reinterpretation. Oxymoronic compact lost but meaning retained.
5	Awfully good	Ajọ mma	Extremely good, despite using negative adverb	Modulation	There is direct lexical mapping. Oxymoronic contrast and meaning preserved.
6	Beautiful nonsense	Mma efu	Appears attractive but lacks meaning or value	Modulation	The paradox of aesthetic value and meaninglessness is preserved through the use of "efu" meaning "nothing" in the TL. There is meaning retention.
7	Bittersweet	Oñụ juputara na mwute	Something pleasurable with pain	Explication	The compact oxymoron is expanded into a descriptive phrase that expresses mixed emotions. Meaning is preserved but form is lost.
8	Bitter truth	Eziokwu na-agbawa obi	Truth that needs not to be said	Explication	The metaphorical bitterness is interpreted as heart-breaking truth. Meaning retained but imagery shifted and stylistic effect lost.
9	Blind sight	Otigbara anya ahụghị ụzọ	Seeing without actual vision	Explication	It is a situation where one sees but is ignorant of things happening around. This is metaphorical blindness. Meaning is preserved.
10	Broken whole	Mmadụ Ịghasa	Feeling empty emotionally	Modulation	The paradox (complete yet broken) is reduced (shattered person) thus losing its duality. There is cultural resonance. Oxymoronic compact lost.
11	Burning ice	Akụmmiri na-ere okụ	Frozen yet hot or conflicting emotions like joy and sadness	Literal	The phrase, "na-ere okụ" is burning in the TL and its phrasal nature resonates with the TL syntax. The compact nature of the SL retained.
12	Clearly confused	Mgbagwoju anya doro anya	Being obviously not clear-minded	Modulation	Oxymoron is preserved in Igbo. Semantic contradiction between clarity and confusion maintained.
13	Constant change	Mgbanwe na-adịgide	Ever-evolving but unending	Literal	Tension between continuity and change is retained, with restructuring for natural TL expression.

14	Controlled chaos	ogbaaghara a haziri ahazi	Disorder that is still being managed	Modulation	Oxymoron preserved in Igbo. The tension between disorder and control is preserved. The TL example is culturally interpretable.
15	Cruel kindness	Amara jogburu onwe ya	Terribly harsh kindness	Modulation	Semantic contradiction between benevolence and harshness explicated in Igbo, maintaining both stylistic irony and intelligibility.
16	Deafening silence	Nkịtị na-echi ntị	Silence so intense that it feels loud	Modulation	Tension between silence and perceived sound preserved in the TL in a way that resonates for the people; meaning and style retained.
17	Deliberate mistake	Mmehie a kpacha anya mee	A purposeful error	Explication	SL is made explicit in TL, preserving contradiction and communicative clarity.
18	Dry lake	Ezu tara ata	A body of water that is dry	Modulation	Paradoxical coexistence of presence and absence explicated in TL Meaning retained. Style preserved.
19	Eloquent silence	Ọ gbara nkịtị okwu juru ọnu	Silence that says much	Explication	The perspective of SL is changed in the TL. While SL states it as silence that is expressive, the TL re-states it as real silence with a lot of words.
20	Foolish wisdom	Amamihe ofeke	Displaying wisdom unnecessarily	Modulation	TL example achieves the compact nature of oxymoron. There is a change in perspective from wisdom that is foolish to wisdom of a foolish person. Meaning is preserved.
21	Found missing	Chọputara na ọ na-efu efu	Officially discovered to be missing	Explication	Contradictory notion of presence and absence explicated in Igbo. Semantic clarity achieved.
22	Free prison	Mkpọrọ onweghị nche	Freedom in confinement	Explication	Paradox of confinement and freedom rendered in TL. When in prison, you are caged but being free in prison shows you are not really caged.
23	Friendly enemy	Enyi bụ onye iro	An enemy in disguise of a friend.	Modulation	Contradiction between friendship and enmity conveyed in Igbo, retaining stylistic and semantic tension
24	Genuine imitation	Nñomi yiri ezigbo ya	Real fake	Modulation.	Tension between real and imitation expressed. “Nñomi” is imitation in TL. Conceptual nuance preserved.
25	Good thief	Ezigbo onye ohi	A thief who is really a thief without doubt.	Literal	Morality versus illegality directly rendered in Igbo, maintaining both semantic tension and stylistic effect
26	Growing smaller	Itwanye na mpe	Decreasing	Modulation	Paradox of growth and reduction rendered in Igbo, preserving conceptual tension and readability
27	Impossible possibility	Ekwe ekwe kwere n’ute ekwere	Something unlikely yet potential	Modulation	Contradiction between impossibility and potential, preserved in Igbo. Style, meaning and cultural intelligibility preserved.
28	Living dead	Onye dị ndụ nwurụ anwụ	Biologically alive mentally and spiritually dead	Equivalence	Paradox of biological life with spiritual death explained in Igbo, culturally and semantically resonant but no syntactic correspondence.

29	Loud whisper	Izu gbaputara okpurukpu okwu	A whisper that is strongly impactful.	Explicitation	There is a shift from sound-based contradiction to a communicative event in the TL. Though oxymoronic structure is lost.
30	Minor crisis	Obere oghaaghara	A small problem	Modulation	Small-scale urgency rendered in Igbo, maintaining semantic tension and stylistic clarity.
31	Open secret	Ihe nzuzo putara ihe	Known but hidden truth	Explicitation	Known, yet hidden contradiction conveyed in TL. Semantic tension and cultural intelligibility achieved.
32	Original copy	Mbiputa mbu	First production	Literal	The TL version, for semantic resonance restructures the SL adjective-noun order, into a more natural noun plus modifier structure.
33	Passive-aggressive	Iwe obi	Subtle but hostile behaviour	Modulation	Meaning is retained with loss of passive - aggressive complexity and a shift in the psycho-behavioural to an emotional state in the TL.
34	Plastic glass	Gulaasi roba	Glass made of plastic	Literal	Material contradiction preserved in Igbo, maintaining conceptual clarity and cultural intelligibility.
35	Pretty ugly	Ezigbo njo	Something unpleasant	Modulation	Contradiction of beauty and ugliness conveyed in Igbo, preserving semantic tension and stylistic effect.
36	Random order	Nhazi enweghi usoro	Disorganized arrangement	Explicitation	Disorder in structure preserved in Igbo, maintaining semantic tension and stylistic clarity.
37	Same difference	Ndi iche n'otu uzọ	Not truly different	Modulation	Paradox of similarity and difference rendered in Igbo, maintaining semantic tension and rhetorical effect.
38	Serious joke	Ajo egwu	A joke that carries truth or seriousness	Modulation	Contradiction of seriousness and playfulness preserved in TL. Meaning and cultural clarity preserved.
39	Seriously unserious	Mkpacha anya akpoghi ihe ihe	Acting unserious with hidden seriousness	Explicitation	Contradiction of seriousness within playful behaviour preserved. TL uses reduplication to achieve intensity and negation to derive "unserious"
40	Silent scream	Mkpu adaghi uda	Deep emotional pain	Literal	Deep emotional pain conveyed silently in Igbo, maintaining paradox and stylistic impact.
41	Small crowd	Obele igwe mmadu	Few people together	Literal	Paradox of small group preserved in Igbo, maintaining semantic tension and clarity.
42	Small load	Obele ibu	To carry a load that is small/light	Literal	Contradiction of size and assumed weight preserved in Igbo, maintaining semantic clarity.
43	Student teacher	Onye nkuzi no omumu	Someone learning and teaching	Explicitation	Contradiction of learning and teaching directly conveyed in Igbo, maintaining semantic clarity.
44	Sweet sorrow	Mwute di utu	Happy and sad feeling usually in parting	Literal	SL and TL share lexical mapping hence the literal rendition of SL into TL. Meaning, style preserved.
45	Sweet Tears	Anya mmiri onu	Joy too emotional that it evokes tears	Modulation	Contradiction of tears and joy preserved in Igbo, maintaining stylistic effect and cultural resonance.

46	Synthetic natural	Emereme ekerechi	Artificially natural	Modulation	Artificiality and naturalness juxtaposed in Igbo. Meaning and style retained.
47	True myth	Ezi akukọ ihe emenwughị eme	A myth that has facts	Explicitation	Contradiction between fact and myth preserved in Igbo with semantic resonance and cultural readability.
48	Virtual reality	Mputa ihe na ntaneti	Digitally created experience	Adaptation	Contradiction of virtual and reality preserved in Igbo with semantic and cultural intelligibility.
49	Working holiday	Ezumike a narunyere oru	Resting but still working	Explicitation	Rest combined with labour preserved in the TL which spells out the hidden meaning.
50	Zero tolerance	Anabataghị mperi	No patience	Modulation	The SL is reframed from numerical metaphor (zero) to a verbal negation structure hence, shifting perspective from abstraction to action.

## 4.2 Data Analysis

The data consists of 50 English oxymorons translated into Igbo, each analysed based on the stipulations of the Theoretical Frameworks adopted for the study. Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) comparative Model of translation, supports structured and tabular presentation of translation data. The table presents the English source-language (SL) oxymorons alongside their Igbo target language (TL) translations, their contextual meanings, the translation strategies employed, and an analysis of the translation outcomes with respect to the degree of semantic tension, rhetorical effect, and cultural adaptability.

### 4.2.1 Translation Strategies and Their Frequency

Among the identified strategies, Modulation emerged as the most frequently used. It involved altering the perspective or point of view to align with Igbo linguistic and cultural patterns. Example “found missing” “*A chọputara na o na-efu efu.*” Others arranged here in the order of ranking: Explicitation is used when it is necessary to make the meaning more explicit in the Igbo context, such as “*deliberate mistake*” rendered as “*mmehie a kpacha anya mee.*” Literal translation is employed for oxymorons that retained meaning and poetic force when directly rendered, such as “small load” translated as “*obele ibu.*” Adaptation is applied where cultural substitution is necessary. For instance, “*virtual reality*” is adapted as “*mputa ihe na ntaneti.*”

### 4.2.2 Semantic and Cultural Implications

#### a. Complexity of Oxymorons

Oxymorons inherently carry internal contradiction that requires careful negotiation in translation. For example, “*awfully good*” combines positive and negative intensifiers. Its Igbo equivalent “*ajọ mma*” (literally, ‘bad good’) retains this ironic polarity through modulation.

#### b. Cultural Compatibility

Certain oxymorons, such as “*cold fire*”, posed challenges due to their metaphorical density. Their Igbo rendition often required metaphorical expansion, such as “*okụ na-ere nwayọọ*”, meaning fire that is suppressed or fire that is not as hot as expected. This resonates well with the Igbo conceptualization, where coldness is used to represent a suppressed state or restrained condition.

### 4.2.3 Idiomatic Sensitivity

Many oxymorons belong to idiomatic or colloquial English, which required idiomatic substitution in Igbo. For example, “alone together” is translated as “*Anyị nooro onwe anyi ichie,*” invoking the paradox of emotional solitude within physical proximity, common in relationship contexts. In this example, English stresses the paradox of being alone yet in company while the Igbo rendition reframes it as remaining by ourselves in separation. The meaning is preserved but the point of view is shifted into a form that feels natural in Igbo.

Burning ice is translated as “*akummiri na-ere oku*” in Igbo. In this example, the point of view is shifted. Instead of saying burning ice directly, the Igbo expression reframes it as cold that burns.

“Sweet tears” is translated as “*anyammiri onu*” while “sweet sorrow” is translated as “*mwute di utu.*” Literal translation of “sweet tears” and “sweet sorrow” will be realized as “*utu anyamiri*” and “*utu mwute*” respectively. The literal translation does not blend with Igbo nuance. Using culturally familiar metaphors to explain “sweet tears” and “sweet sorrows” as “*anyammiri onu*” and “*mwute di utu,*” not only capture the bittersweet feelings but blend with the Igbo nuances as the Igbo idioms most times, use physical imagery to convey emotional contrast. In this case “*anyammiri*” resonates with the emotional contrast of happiness and sadness which is the same emotional blend that oxymoron carries; hence we can say tears of joy, oxymoronically expressed as joyful tears, to express an extreme joy. In the same context, we can express “sorrowful tears” oxymoronically as “sorrowful laughter” which is laughter that does not really depict joy but sorrow. Literal translation “*utu mwute,*” does not capture the sweet sorrowful feeling in Igbo language as much as “*mwute di utu*” has captured.

This is in line with intersemiotic shift proposed by Jakobson (1959) where he states that metaphor, tone, irony or proverb may serve as oxymoronic equivalent in Igbo language. As seen from the Igbo examples, oxymoron’s contradiction is not just a matter of placing two contradictory words side by side but also through imagery, cultural metaphor, proverbs and intonation.

#### 4.2.4 Challenges Identified

Lack of direct lexical equivalents: For figures like oxymoron, equivalence becomes more complex. Many English oxymorons could not be mapped word-for-word in Igbo, demanding creative thinking. You may preserve meaning (semantic equivalence) and effect (pragmatic equivalence) but lose form (structural contradiction).

Preserving contradiction: Maintaining the paradox without distorting meaning or coherence proved difficult.

Sociolinguistic sensitivity: Expressions involving irony or social commentary (e.g., friendly enemy, good thief) often needed contextual reshaping to resonate within Igbo value systems.

#### 4.2.5 Effectiveness of the Translation Strategies

Among the strategies, Modulation stands out as the most frequently used, preserving both contradiction and meaning. For instance, controlled chaos is realised as “*ogbaaghara a haziri ahazi,*” Explication is the second most productive in conveying meaning; reasons being the implicit nature of TL oxymoron and the need to make it explicit in the TL to ensure clarity, avoid ambiguity and bridge cultural differences. For example, culturally densed oxymoron such as “eloquent silence” is translated as “*o gbara nkiti okwu juru onu.*” This aligns with Igbo communicative norms that value silence as wisdom. Literal technique ranked third in this work because some words have direct equivalents in the TL and SL grammar can be transferred without distortion of forms and meaning. Examples “small load” is translated as “*obele ibu,*” “while small crowd” as “*obele igwe mmadu.*” Despite this strength, literal technique does not capture figurative or contextual meaning and this explains why it is complemented by other techniques such as modulation and explication. Adaptation is less frequent because it is only needed for culture-bound expressions. Example from the table: “Virtual reality” translated as “*mputa ihe na ntaneti*”

### 4.3 Summary of findings

This section summarizes the main findings of the study using the research objectives and questions.

#### 4.3.1 Research question 1: What are the most common English oxymoronic expressions?

There are about 50 most commonly used English oxymorons selected from English literary texts, conversational texts and everyday discourse. They include: Active sleep, appear invisible, beautiful nonsense, awfully good, among others. This fulfils the objective number one.

#### 4.3.2 Research question 2: How are oxymorons translated from English into Igbo?

They are translated using multiple theoretical frameworks of Skopos 1978, Nida's 1964 dynamic equivalence, Sperber and Wilson 1995 relevance theory, Vinay and Darbelnet 1958 translation techniques among others.

#### 4.3.3 Research question 3: To what extent do Igbo translations correspond to the English

The Igbo translations correspond greatly in a few instances where the syntactic structure of the source language (SL) matches that of the target language (TL) and the technique used in such cases is literal technique. Some examples include: "small crowd" "*obele igwe mmadu*," "Small load"—"*obele ibu*," among others. It corresponds to a certain extent where the Igbo examples maintain the same concise nature as the English examples but loses the syntactic correspondence due to the placement of adjectives after the noun. Examples: "good thief" – "*ezigbo onyeohi*," "genuine imitation" – "*nñomi yiri ezigbo ya*." Though the adjectives come after the nouns in the Igbo examples, unlike the English examples, the stylistic structures and semantic tensions are preserved. To a great extent, the introduction of preposition helps to achieve semantic resonance but the concise nature is lost. This is in line with established translation strategies such as transposition and modulation as proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), which allow for shift in grammatical structure. The introduction of prepositional elements in Igbo translation is not a deviation but a linguistically and theoretically motivated strategy for effectively rendering oxymoronic expressions.

#### 4.3.4 Research question 4: What challenges do translators face in translating oxymoron?

This analysis reveals that translating oxymorons from English to Igbo is not merely a lexical exercise but a cultural dialogue. Oxymorons challenge translators to preserve not just semantic contents but also rhetorical effect and stylistic nuance. Strategies like modulation, explicitation and literal translation enable effective renditions, while adaptation is limited in scope. Ultimately, the translator's role extends beyond language transmission to cultural mediation, ensuring the poetic, ironic or philosophical force of oxymorons is not lost but recast meaningfully for the Igbo audience.

#### 4.3.5 Research question 5: What are the implications of these findings on both languages?

The findings of this study reveal several important implications for translation theory, practice, and cross-cultural communication. First, the translation of oxymoron from English to Igbo demonstrates that semantic contradiction is often language-specific and direct equivalence is rarely achievable. As a result, translators frequently employ strategies such as modulation, explicitation and adaptation to preserve meaning rather than form. This supports the argument of Vinay and Jean Darbelnet (1958) that oblique translation procedures are essential when structural and cultural differences exist between languages.

In addition, the findings highlight that cultural context plays a crucial role in interpreting and reproducing oxymoronic expressions. Many English oxymorons rely on abstract or stylistic contrasts, whereas Igbo tends to favour contextual clarity and culturally grounded expressions. Consequently, translators may either neutralize the contradiction or recreate it using culturally relevant imagery. Finally, the study implies that equivalence in oxymoron translation is largely functional rather than formal. This aligns with functionalist approaches in translation studies, where the goal is to achieve a similar communicative impact on the target audience rather than replicate the exact linguistic structure. In this sense, some oxymorons are retained, while others are paraphrased or restructured to maintain intelligibility.

### 5.1 Conclusion

Oxymorons, with their deliberate contradiction in terms, serve as a powerful rhetorical device in literature and everyday discourse; their translation demands not just a grasp of vocabulary but a deep understanding of context, tone and figurative meaning. From the analysis of 50 English oxymorons and their corresponding Igbo translations, it is evident that modulation emerged as the most employed strategy for conveying the dual nature of meaning inherent in oxymorons. This approach allowed for the retention of

both conceptual and stylistic essence. Other strategies such as adaptation, literal translation and explicitation, were also employed. The study emphasizes the importance of cultural and semantic sensitivity in rendering oxymorons whose underlying logic may differ across languages. Though the study records a number of oxymoronic expressions that have one to one correspondence with their English equivalence, there are a lot others that require more than lexical substitution. The study concludes that successful translation of oxymoron requires more than lexical substitution but demands attention to cultural literacy, semantic notions and grammatical structure.

## 5.2 Recommendations

This study recommends the need for translators to be trained in advanced rhetorical, poetic and figurative language techniques, especially across culturally divergent languages; since a lot of researchers are pointing to the difficulties in translating oxymoron. The study further recommends developing Igbo literary corpora rich in stylistic devices to support creative equivalence in literary translation, so that writers can draw on these insights as a guide in translating oxymorons.

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