



## **Ngugi wa Thiong'o: A Translator of Gikuyu Language –A Study**

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### **Abstract:**

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is a celebrated Kenyan author, playwright, and activist. He is an influential figure not only in African literature but also in translation studies. Ngugi's feat as a translator is significant of his commitment towards linguistic decolonization and cultural restoration. Through his translations, Ngugi endeavors to bridge linguistic divides while preserving the integrity and richness of African native languages and cultures.

Ngugi's translated works are characterized by his dedication to promoting indigenous African languages in the literary domain, challenging the dominance of colonial languages such as English and French. His translations often resist against linguistic imperialism, advocating for the recognition and revitalization of African languages as vehicles for literary expression and feelings.

Similarly, Ngugi's translations go beyond mere linguistic conversion; they are inspired with socio-political significance, reflecting his advocacy for social justice and cultural empowerment. By translating works into African languages and from African languages into English language, Ngugi aims to democratize access to literature, making it more inclusive and accessible to diverse audiences around the globe.

Thus, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's role as a translator extends far beyond the act of linguistic conversion. It is a testament to his commitment to linguistic diversity, cultural revitalization, and social change. His translations serve as powerful tools for reclaiming agency, challenging hegemonic structures, and fostering a more inclusive and equitable literary landscape in Africa and beyond Africa.



## **Introduction:**

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is not only celebrated for his literary works but also for his profound contributions to translation. Through his efforts for translation, Ngũgĩ has bridged cultural divides, amplified voices, and preserved indigenous languages like Gikuyu. This article tries to explore Ngugi wa Thiong'o's role as a translator, exploring his motivations, methodologies, and the impact of his work on global literature.

1. **Ngugi's Motivations and Philosophies:** Ngũgĩ's journey as a translator is deeply rooted in his commitment to decolonizing language and literature. Central to his philosophy is the idea that language is not neutral; it carries power dynamics and reflects historical injustices. His decision to translate his own works from Gikuyu, his native language, into English, stems from his belief in the importance of linguistic diversity and the need to challenge the dominance of colonial languages.

Ngũgĩ advocates for linguistic and cultural sovereignty, asserting that the choice of language in literature is inherently political. Through his translation, Ngugi tries to empower marginalized voices and validate indigenous languages as mode of expression for his feelings towards his country, language, people and culture. His translations oppose linguistic imperialism, reclaiming narratives and identities that have been suppressed by colonial oppression and suppression.

2. **Ngugi's Methodologies and Approaches:** Ngũgĩ's approach to translation is motivated by his background as a writer, scholar, and activist. Through his novel 'Devil on the Cross', he employs a multifaceted methodology that goes beyond linguistic transference to encompass cultural, historical, and ideological dimensions. Ngũgĩ is mindful of the nuances embedded within languages, striving to capture not only the literal meaning but also the cultural connotations and contextual significance of words and phrases that carry the essence of Africanism.

In his translations, like 'Wizard of the Crow' Ngũgĩ prioritizes fidelity to the original text while also recognizing the necessity of adaptation for cross-cultural understanding. He navigates the complexities of translation by balancing linguistic faithfulness with creative



reinterpretation, ensuring that the essence of the source text is preserved while making it accessible to the audience around the world. Ngũgĩ's translations thus serve as bridges between cultures, facilitating dialogue and exchange while celebrating linguistic diversity.

**Impact and Legacy:** Ngugi wa Thiong'o's contributions to translation extend far beyond the realm of literature. They resonate deeply with broader discourses on language rights, postcolonialism, and cultural heritage. His translations of the novel like 'Matigari' have enriched the global literary landscape by introducing readers to diverse perspectives and narratives previously marginalized or overlooked. But the aura of his talent radiated all over the world.

In addition to this, Ngũgĩ's advocacy for indigenous languages, used in his novels originally published in Gikuyu, has inspired a new generation of writers and translators to reclaim their linguistic heritage and challenge dominant paradigms of translation. His emphasis on linguistic diversity and cultural authenticity has catalyzed discussions on the ethics and politics of translation, prompting scholars and practitioners to reconsider their approaches considering decolonial frameworks.

### **Characteristics of Ngugi wa Thiong 'O's Translation:**

Ngugi's translations emphasize several key characteristics as follows:

- **Decolonization of Language:** Ngugi advocates for the decolonization of language in literature and translation. He argues against the continued dominance of colonial languages like English and French in African literature and calls for the promotion and use of indigenous languages.
  - **Cultural Authenticity:** Ngugi believes that translations should capture the cultural authenticity of the original text. This means not only translating the words but also conveying the cultural nuances, idioms, and references that may not have direct equivalents in the target language.
  - **Resistance to Linguistic Hegemony:** Ngugi's translations are often seen as a form of resistance against linguistic hegemony. By translating works into African languages, he aims to elevate the status of these languages and challenge the dominance of colonial languages in the literary world. He also want his works translated into other languages should do the same.
  - **Accessibility and Inclusivity:** Ngugi's translations aim to make literature more accessible and
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inclusive to a wider audience, particularly those who may not be fluent in colonial languages. By translating works into African languages, he opens up literature to communities that have been historically marginalized. According to him this will extend the importance of native languages beyond their territory.

- **Empowerment and Identity:** Ngugi sees translation as a means of empowering marginalized communities and strengthening cultural identity. By promoting African languages in literature, he fosters a sense of pride and ownership among African writers and readers. According to him this will be helpful especially for the women who are always suppressed from number of field to make progress in.

### **Conclusion:**

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's journey as a translator exemplifies the transformative power of language and the enduring legacy of cultural resistance. Through his translations, Ngũgĩ has not only enriched the literary canon but also championed the rights of marginalized communities to speak and be heard in their own voices. His work serves as a testament to the inseparability of language from issues of power, identity, and liberation, inspiring generations to come in the ongoing struggle for linguistic and cultural justice. Eventually, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's approach to translation is deeply rooted in his commitment to decolonization, cultural authenticity, resistance against linguistic hegemony, accessibility, inclusivity, empowerment, and identity. His translations serve not only as linguistic bridges between cultures but also as instruments of social and political development.

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