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COLONIAL BLINDNESS AND COUNTER-VOICES IN HEART OF DARKNESS: A PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH TO CRITICAL AWARENESS IN TRANSLATOR TRAINING

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is one of the most examined texts in English literature. Since its publication in 1899, the novella has prompted a number of critical interpretations regarding representation, racism, and imperialism. Although the critique is generally interpreted as a critique of European imperialism, it is not comprehensive. Conrad reveals the brutality and duplicity of imperial expansion, highlighting the disparity between the romanticized discourse of civilization and the true nature of exploitation. Edward Said emphasizes that even books that critique empire are nevertheless intertwined with imperial discourse [5]. Consequently, Conrad's novella can be interpreted as simultaneously denouncing and perpetuating colonial attitudes – a central discourse in postcolonial studies, which frequently denounces colonialism while inadvertently maintaining its ideology and marginalizing African voices. This study investigates the utilization of *Heart of Darkness* in translator training to enhance students' critical awareness of colonial discourse, ideological language, representation, and marginalized voices.

The novella challenges nineteenth-century imperial ideology and exposes the violence and corruption that underlie Europe's purported civilizing mission in Africa, making it an anti-imperialist work. Kurtz's demise symbolizes the ethical degradation inherent in unrestrained imperial authority. Nonetheless, as Brantlinger [3] observes, this message is muddled by the novella's dependence on contemporary racial ideology and its absence of African perspectives.

This limitation can be explained by the idea of "colonial blindness" in the text. While Conrad raises ethical issues of imperialism, he does not give African characters agency or narrative sovereignty. Most of the characters of Africa are nameless and silent and marginal. They are background figures in a story that is about the lives and interests of Europeans. The African continent itself is often represented through images of primitivism, mystery and gloom. These are the type of portrayals that help reinforce a narrative that defines Africa through a European gaze, not an African gaze. Thus, colonial blindness points to the limits of Conrad's critique. The novella does condemn colonial exploitation, but it does not entirely escape the racial hierarchies and cultural assumptions that shaped European thought

in the late nineteenth century. The novella can thus be read both as a critique of empire and as a product of imperial rhetoric.

Above all, Chinua Achebe's postcolonial critique posed one of the most serious challenges to Conrad's reputation. Achebe notes that Conrad reduces Africa to "a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity" [1, p. 788] by silencing African characters and denying them their identities and placing them in a background where the European characters determine themselves. African characters in this way are stripped of identity, voice and historical presence, reduced to objects not subjects of the narrative. Achebe's input amounted to a sea change in the critical appraisal of the novella. Today, the question of whether Conrad was simply "for" or "against" imperialism is less examined than his role within the colonial representational structures. This move has prompted readers to consider what experiences are silenced, whose voices are heard, and how literary texts can serve to reinforce larger structures of power. Achebe's critique, from a translator-training perspective, provides an important basis for developing students' critical awareness of ideological language, silenced voices and the ethical responsibilities involved in translating culturally and politically charged texts.

Homi Bhabha [2] contends that colonial discourse is inherently unstable due to its contradictory portrayals of colonised peoples. In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, this instability is evident as Africa and Africans are depicted through conflicting images: the continent is both threatening and alluring, while Africans are shown as primitive yet possessing a vitality that challenges European superiority. Such contradictions expose the anxieties and unresolved tensions at the heart of colonial ideology, and show how colonial authority is subverted by the very representations it seeks to impose. Such contradictory representations can be regarded as examples of ideologically loaded discourse in the context of translator training that students need to identify before translating culturally and politically sensitive texts.

The paper argues that a useful starting point for the training of translators of *Heart of Darkness* is to consider the interaction between colonial blindness and postcolonial counter-voices. Conrad's novella reveals the brutality, deception and moral decay of the European empire but also reproduces modes of representation that marginalise African subjects. Achebe's and other postcolonial critics' interventions demonstrate the importance of analysing not only what the text exposes but also what the text hides. From a pedagogical perspective, this tension may be useful to translation and interpreting students in building critical awareness of ideological language, representation, silenced voices and cultural otherness. The study thus suggests that *Heart of Darkness* can be useful material for pre-translation analysis, prompting students to recognise how literary texts are shaped by power relations and how translators must approach culturally and politically charged texts with ethical sensitivity.

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