

Analysing the Styles and Approaches in Oseni's Arabic Translation of the Old Nigerian National Anthem

تحليل الأساليب والمقاربات في الترجمة العربية لأوسيني للنشيد الوطني النيجيري القديم

Rahman Lawal¹, E-mail: lawal.r@ksu.edu.ng, Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Kogi State, Nigeria
Ridwan Akinkunmi Rabiu², E-mail: ridwan.rabiu@kwasu.edu.ng, Kwara State University Malete, Nigeria



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Abstract

Given the profound significance of the Nigerian national anthem in representing collective identities of the Nigerian populace. This study examined the translation approaches, styles and strategies employed in Oseni's Arabic translation of the old Nigeria National Anthem (1978-2024). This study aims to evaluate the efficacy of the translation strategies adopted by the author while considering their implication for cross cultural communication. The methodological frame work for this research is the qualitative, auto-telic and content based approach. Grounded in the field of translation studies, the research employs a comparative analysis and methodology to scrutinize linguistic nuances and culture adaptation adopted. This research employed eclectic theoretical approach which includes equivalent theory, Skopos theory, and cultural translation theory. Through a careful examination of Oseni's translation, this research work revealed that Oseni takes into account the purpose, function, and cultural nuances of the text in the source language in translating to the target language. The author also adopts stylistics devices such as rhythm and imagery to colour his translation in the recipient language in order to aesthetically attract the attention of his target audience. This work also contributes to advancing the understanding of translation theories and practice particularly with the reading of national symbols and identities. In conclusion, this work shows that trans-lingual translation involves the knowledge of extra-linguistics features such as culture and context, cosmological as well as sociological features embedded in the original text and how they are infused in the target language without distorting meaning.

Keywords: National Symbol, Translation, Language Contact, Inter-language, Cross Cultural Communication

ملخص البحث

نظراً لما يمثله النشيد الوطني النيجيري من دلالة رمزية عميقة في تجسيد الهوية الجماعية للشعب النيجيري، تتناول هذه الدراسة الأساليب والمقاربات والاستراتيجيات الترجمية التي اعتمدتها أوسيني في ترجمته العربية للنشيد الوطني النيجيري القديم (1978-2024). وتهدف الدراسة إلى تقويم مدى فاعلية هذه الاستراتيجيات، مع تحليل انعكاساتها على التواصل بين الثقافات. تعتمد الدراسة إطاراً منهجياً نوعياً قائماً على التحليل الذاتي



الغائي وتحليل المحتوى، وتنطلق من حقل دراسات الترجمة، موظفة المنهج المقارن للكشف عن الدقائق اللغوية وأدوات التكييف الثقافي المعتمدة في النص الهدف. كما تستند الدراسة إلى مقاير نظرية انتقائية تجمع بين نظرية التكافؤ، ونظرية الغاية (Skopos)، ونظرية الترجمة الثقافية. وتبين نتائج التحليل أن أوسيني يراعي الغرض التداولى والوظيفة التواصلية والدلالات الثقافية للنص في اللغة المصدر عند نقله إلى اللغة العربية، كما يوظف أدوات أسلوبية مثل الإيقاع والصورة البلاغية لإضفاء بعد جمالي يعزّز تقبّل النص لدى المتلقى العربي. وتقسم هذه الدراسة في إثراء النقاش النظري والتطبيقي في دراسات الترجمة، ولا سيما في ما يتصل بترجمة الرموز الوطنية وتمثيلات الهوية. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن الترجمة العاشرة للغات لا تقتصر على النقل اللغوي، بل تستلزم وعيًا بالعناصر خارج اللغوية، بما في ذلك السياق الثقافي، والأبعاد الكونية والاجتماعية الكامنة في النص الأصلي، وسبل تمثيلها في اللغة الهدف دون الإخلال بالدلالة.

الكلمات المفتاحية : الرمز الوطني، الترجمة، التفاعل اللغوي، التداخل اللغوي، التواصل بين الثقافات

A. INTRODUCTION

National anthem is one of the national symbols of a sovereign state, this also include national pledge, national flag, coat of arms etc. Fornäs¹ explains what an anthem is, he opines that:

An anthem as well as a hymn is a song or praise made for communal singing. It should preferably be reasonably easy to remember and to sing, making it tempting and irresistible to join in singing and this activity of participation is intended to spill over into some level of identification with what the anthem stands for. In this way, anthems are constructed to emotionally boost collective identification, through the medium of voice and sound.

Akingbemi² in his work explains the content and function of national anthems. He asserts that “National anthems serve as potent symbol of collective identity, embodiment of values, aspiration and cultural heritage of a nation”. Further-more, Bristow³ describes national anthem as:

¹ J Fornäs, ‘Signifying Europe’, *Bristols: Intellect*, 2012, p. 150.

² O A Akingbemi, ‘The National Anthem and National Identity in Nigeria’, *Journal of Black Studies*, 40(2) (2010), pp. 357–74.

³ Bristow M.J., ‘National Anthem of the World’, *Cassel*, 2006, doi:Retrieved from <http://www.amazon.com> on 17th May, 2024.

A generally patriotic musical composition that evokes and eulogizes the history, tradition and struggle of its people, recognized either by a nation's government as the official song, or by convention through use by his people".

Ilyasu and Evans⁴ in their own thought define it as "a self-identifying symbol of a nation, country, state, and a group of people in an area with self-identifying popular, who regards themselves as a nation". The old Nigerian national Anthem "Arise O Compatriots" which was used for a period of forty-six years (1978-2024) was composed by John, Ben and Eme. Ikechukwu⁵ explains the social contents of the Nigerian national anthem when he explains that "this national anthem consists of pregnant expression of Nigerian unity, resilience and aspiration for a brighter future". These researchers observed that Nigerian national anthem promote unity of purpose and camaraderie among all the entities under the umbrella of the Nigerian state. The translation of a national anthem into different language is a multifaceted endeavor involving complex linguistic and cultural consideration. Verma⁶ gives credence to this assertion when he opines that:

The problem of mixing a delicate distinction between what constituted a faithful rendering and what was a stylistic variation was a major issue for centuries; the correct interpretation of the original and its loyal recreation in the other language has always been the central issues in all translation activities.

To the best of these researchers knowledge, little or no attention has been given to a trans-lingual translation of Nigeria national anthem to different indigenous languages, most especially in a country with many languages like Nigeria. However, the following related research works on Nigerian national anthem and other nation anthems can be made point of reference. Silaghi-Dumitrescu⁷ in his work examines the contents of two hundred sovereign states national anthems. He explains that the recurring themes in all of the anthems analysed include:

ancestry/past, beauty, build/work, country name, courage, democracy, enemy, ethnicity, family, man, woman, fight, flag/Colours, forever/never, future, geographical references, glory, independence/freedom, joy/happiness, home/mother/fatherland, law/governance, leader, love, loyalty, peace, poverty/wealth, pride, religion, revolution, sacred, sacrifice, salvation, sorrow, treason, tyrant/chains, unity, win/victory.

This thematic classification of different anthems by Silaghi-Dumitrescu (2020) shows that it is all encompassing that talk about history, religion, gender, politics and

⁴ B.m and Evans Ilyasu O.A, 'Political Leadership in Nigeria: Our National Anthem and National Pledge', *Africology: The Joy of Pan*, 12(1) (2018).

⁵ J A Ikechukwu Odase, B.B & Akpan F.F., 'Arise O Compatriots (Nigeria's National Anthem)', *Nigeria Federal Ministry of Information*, 1978.

⁶ S Verma, 'Modern Applied Linguistics', *Trinity Press: USA*, 2008.

⁷ R Silaghi-Dumiretsu, 'Topics in National Anthems', *Journal of Language and Literature*, 20(2) (2020), pp. 288–306, doi:10.24071/joll.v2.2541.



governance and other social factors. Amernovi and Grumah⁸ in their work examine language use in the derivation and dissemination selected West African national anthems which include the anthem of Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Gambia the Gambia. These authors observed that some of the figures of speech these countries used to flower their anthems aesthetically include repetition, apostrophe, oxymoron, imagery, rhythm and metaphor. This is because in Africa, the mode of expression is as important as the message itself.

In Nigeria, research works abound on the Nigeria national anthem and other national symbols. Few of such works include Faniyan⁹ who carried out a stylistics analysis of the Nigerian national anthem. Also, Muhammed and Ayeni¹⁰ in their work examined the link between Nigerian national anthem, national pledge and the country socio-economic development. These researchers observed that there is a missing link between the contents of Nigerian national anthem and pledge and the quality of life of the citizens which the author hinged on bad leadership. They opine that “the only factor standing between Nigeria and greatness is bad leadership”. Odebode¹¹ also examined pragmatically the contents of the Nigerian national anthem. He asserts that “the Nigerian national anthem is not just designed as an ordinary political song. Pragmatically, it is intended for praying and informing the Nigerian populace”.

We observed that while there are few works on Nigerian national anthem linguistically as alluded to by Odebode¹² when he opines that “the study which is born out of dearth of linguistics research on the Nigerian national anthem” little or no work has been carried out on Nigerian national anthem from intra-lingual translation perspective. This is the vacuum this research aim to fill using Oseni Arabic rendition of the Nigerian national anthem as a case study and selected theories of translation as instrument of research. This study aims to examine translation styles and strategies adopted in translating Nigerian national anthem from English to Arabic language.

Zakariyau Oseni

Zakariyau Oseni was a professor of Arabic Literature who retired from the University of Ilorin in 2020. He is the current chief Imam and Waziri of Auchi in Edo state. He is a polyglot fluent in English, Arabic, Yoruba and Etsako languages. Obafemi (2017, p. iii) echoes the creativity of Oseni when he opines that “Zakariyau Oseni is an outstanding scholar and he wields a great deal of creative finesse that carves a niche for him amidst many of his peers and colleagues”. Some of his work works of art include “Spark in the Dark” (2001), “The Silver Lining (2004)”, “Celebrating Independent Nigeria and Other Poems (2011)”, “The Superb, Graceful Mama and Other Poems (2015)”. The literary work in which the Arabic translated Nigerian old National anthem

⁸ C R and Grumah G Y Amernovi, ‘A Thematic Analysis of the National Anthems of English West Africa’, *The Journal of Applied Linguistics and Applied Literature: Dynamics and Advance*, 7(1) (2020), pp. 141–51, doi:10.22049/JALDA.2019.26509.1130.

⁹ G Faniyan, ‘A Stylistics Analysis of the Nigerian National Anthem and Pledge’, 2012.

¹⁰ A T Muhammed, ‘A Taxonomy of Problems in Arabic-English Translation: A Systemic Functional Linguistics Approach’, *Ph.D. Thesis, University of the Western Cape*, 2011.

¹¹ I O Odebode, ‘A Socio-Pragmatics Study of the Nigerian National Anthem’, *IJLLC*, 7(3) (2020), doi:10.19044/lle.v7no3a2.

¹² Odebode, ‘A Socio-Pragmatics Study of the Nigerian National Anthem’.

was extracted from is titled “The Nigerian Play in Arabic (Al-Tabaqat Al-Ulya- The Upper Class)”¹³.

Translation and Translation Theories

Translation is the rendering of function, form and meaning of a text from one language to another. Newmark¹⁴ in Rabiu et al¹⁵ explains translation as rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way the author had intended. He explains that we cannot understand translation without explaining the attribute a translator needs to possess. One of the attributes is being a bilingual or perhaps a polyglot that can be endorsed as an authority in the two languages because of his translation style or methods. Bassnett and Lafevere¹⁶ explains that “Translation plays crucial role in preserving cultural identity and national symbols”.

For its theoretical framework, this work will adopt a flexible eclectic approach that draws on three translation theories, which are Equivalent theory of translation, Skopos theory of translation and Cultural theory of translation to examine and analyse translation styles and strategies adopted by Oseni in his translation of the old Nigeria national anthem from its language of origin i.e. English language to Arabic language. Rabiu et al¹⁷ explain that “Translation theory is the method of translation used for a certain type of text and it depends on the functional theory of language. The nature of a text in the SL determines the approach that a translator will adopt in his or her translation. A text whose attention is basically on the function adopts a translation theory that is distinct from a content-based text or language”.

Equivalent translation theory became prominent in the field of translation from the early 1950s. Some of the proponents of this theory are Jacobson (1959), Catford¹⁸, Nida¹⁹ etc. Jakobson (1959) explains that “inter-language translation involves substituting messages in one language not for separate code units but the entire messages in some other language”. Vinay and Darbalnet (2000, p. 83-93) in Ghanoomi classify equivalent translation strategy into two which are direct translation and oblique translation. Direct translation involves mechanism such as borrowing, literal translation and calque while oblique translation involves translation strategies such as transposition, modulation, adaptation and equivalence.

Skopos theory on the other hand was developed by Vermeer in the 1970s and can be traced to the Greek language where it means “purpose”. The bedrock of the Skopos theory is functionality of the translated text. The Scopos rule according to Du²⁰ is “translate, interpret, speak and write in a way that enables your text /translation to function in the situation in which it is used and the people who want to use it and precisely in the way they want it to function”. This shows that Skopos translation takes into

¹³ Z I Oseni, ‘AL-TABAQAT AL-CULYA (THE UPPER CLASS)’, *Auchi: Darun-Nur*, 2006.

¹⁴ Newmark P., ‘A Textbook of Translation’, *Prentice Hall International: U.S.A.*, 1988.

¹⁵ R A Rabiu et al., ‘Assessment of Indigenous Radio Broadcasters’ Translation Strategies and Words Usage: A Study of Sobi 101.9 FM Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria’, *Tasambo Journal of Language, Literature, and Culture*, 1(1) (2022), pp. 10–19, doi:<https://dx.doi.org/10.36349/tjllc.2022.v01i01.002>.

¹⁶ S and Lafeverre Bassnett A. (Eds.), ‘Translation, History and Culture’, *London: Pinter*, 1990.

¹⁷ Rabiu et al., ‘Assessment of Indigenous Radio Broadcasters’ Translation Strategies and Words Usage: A Study of Sobi 101.9 FM Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria’.

¹⁸ I Catford, ‘A Linguistics Theory of Translation’, *Oxford: Oxford University Press*, 1965.

¹⁹ E and Taber Nida C.R., ‘The Theory and Practice of Translation’, *Leiden: Brill*, 1969.

²⁰ X Du, ‘A Brief Introduction to Skopos Theory’, *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2(10) (2012), pp. 2189–93.



cognizance the context of situation when translating from the source language to the target language. Muhammed²¹ explains what context of situation entails in translation. He explains that “according to SFG, context of situation determines the meaning of a text and thus translation can be regarded as a process of re-establishing situational context in the target language. A translator therefore should try his or her best to preserve the register in translation”.

Culture is the way of life of a group of people. Cultural translation theory takes into account the cultural nuances and context of culture of text in the source language and the mechanism to be adopted in rendering same in the target without any cultural vacuum. Newmark²² in his work explain “cultural word” as distinct words that are peculiar to one language and cannot be easily transfer or translate into another language. Newmark²³ classified the following terms as cultural words. They are, “ecology, material culture, social culture, Organization, gesture and habit”. Some of the contextual factor for translation process to include “purpose of text, cultural and linguistic level of the targeted audience, recency of word etc.

The main thrust of this work is to examine features and tenets of Equivalent theory, Skopos theory and Cultural translation theory that were used by Oseni in his effort to translate the old Nigerian national anthem (1978-2024) from English language which is the source language to Arabic language which is the target language, and how this help in the domestication and indigenization of the national anthem to Arabic language native speakers who are the Shua Arab that can be found in Borno state, North-Eastern Nigeria and other L2 speakers of Arabic language in Nigeria, as research has shown that Arabic is the second most popularly used foreign language after English language in Nigeria.

B. RESEARCH METHODS

This paper adopts a qualitative method of research which involved a content analysis of the Arabic translated version of the old Nigerian national anthem (1978-2024). The Arabic language data set were extracted from Oseni (2006) literary work titled “AL-TABAQAT AL-^CULYA” ‘The Upper Class’ while the original English version of the old Nigerian national anthem was extracted from Gombe State Government, Diary (2010) through the research work of Muhammed and Ayeni (2018). This paper will examine translation styles and strategies adopted by the author using theories of translation such as Equivalent theory, Skopos theory and Cultural translation theory as our instrument of analysis.

C. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Data Presentation

Nigeria National Anthem

The Nigerian National Anthems consist of two stanzas

The First Stanza

Arise O Compatriots

Nigeria’s call Obey

To serve our fatherland

²¹ Muhammed, ‘A Taxonomy of Problems in Arabic-English Translation: A Systemic Functional Linguistics Approach’.

²² P., ‘A Textbook of Translation’.

²³ P., ‘A Textbook of Translation’.

With Love and strength and faith
The labour of our heroes past
Shall never be in vain
To serve with heart and might,
One nation bound in freedom
Peace and Unity

The Second Stanza

O God of creation direct our noble cause
Guide our leaders right
Help our youth the truth to know
In love and honesty to grow
And love in just and true

Gombe State Government, Diary in Muhammed and Ayeni²⁴

The Arabic Translation

First Stanza

Afiq mawatini
Ajib da'wata Naijiriya
Nakhadim watanana
Hubba, quwwatan, thiqatan
Fa a' maal abtalina
Lan tadh-haba abathan
Watanana wahidan
Muhrarran saliman

Second Stanza

Ya ilaha al-khaliq
Hudaka an-Nabil
Washington Quwwatana
Wa allim shubrananal haqqa
Taqadduman bil mawaddah
Wa yahyaw bil insaf
Liyudrika al-maali
Haythu yasudu As-salam

(Oseni²⁵)

Data Analysis of the Translated Text

Oseni's Arabic interpretation of the Nigerian National Anthems presents a fascinating case study for the application of translation theories in understanding the choice made by the translator. Through a detailed analysis informed by various theoretical frame work insight can be gained into the translation styles as explained below:

Literal versus Free Translation

²⁴ Muhammed, 'A Taxonomy of Problems in Arabic-English Translation: A Systemic Functional Linguistics Approach'.

²⁵ Oseni, 'AL-TABAQAT AL-CULYA (THE UPPER CLASS)'.



Oseni's approach to the translation appears to strike balance between the literal and free translation strategies while striving for fidelity to source texts. Oseni also adapts the translation to suit the linguistic and cultural nuances of the Arabic speaking audience. This balance is evident in his treatment of key phrases and metaphors present in the original anthem.

The key phrases include "serve our fatherland with love and strength and faith", "the labour of our heroes past", "guide our leaders right" and "help our youth the truth to know". These are translated as "Nakhadim watanana", "hubban quwwatan, thiqatqn", "Faamal abtalina" "wahdi Quwwatana", and "wa allim shubranana haqq". These key phrases in the target language i.e. Arabic reveals Oseni's balance in literal versus free Translation.

The Equivalent Theory

In applying the equivalent theory mechanism, Oseni demonstrates a nuanced understanding of both formal and dynamic equivalence, while certain lexical choices and syntactic structure closely mirror those of the Original Nigerian national Anthem. Oseni prioritize the original meaning and sentiments of the text from the source language which is English language. This is particularly evident in his translation of culturally specific references in his translation of the first two lines of the first Stanza of the national anthem which read thus "Arise Compatriots", "Nigeria's call Obey" as "Afiq mawatini", "Ajib da'wata Naijiriya" as he opts out for dynamic equivalence to ensure great understanding and comprehension by his target audience. For easy communication, Oseni also makes use of direct translation mechanism of borrowing in the second line of the first stanza of the national anthem "Nigeria's call Obey" where he borrowed the word "Nigeria" rendered as "Naijiriya" in his translation of the second line as "Ajib da'wata Naijiriya".

Skopos Theory

Oseni's translation strategies align closely with the principle of Skopos Theory, which emphasize the purpose or function of the target text, by considering the communication goals of the Arabic version of the Nigeria national anthem. Oseni ensures that his translation serves the intended function with the Arabic speaking cultural context. This includes adaptation of linguistic preferences prevents among Arabic readers. Specific example is seen in Oseni's use of arrangement of sentence pattern in the "Verb-subject-object" word order that is used in Arabic as against the "Subject-verb-object" word order prevalent in the English sentences of the Nigeria national anthem.

Descriptive Norms

Adherence to description norms especially those specific to Arabic Literature and culture is apparent throughout Oseni's translation. He navigates linguistics and stylistic convention in Arabic poetry ensuring that the translated anthem resonates with aesthetics sensibility of the Arabic speaking audience. Additionally, Oseni incorporate cultural references and idiomatic expression familiar to Arabic readers for their enhancing the accessibility and authenticity of the translation. We observed that one of the syntactic differences the author navigates between the source language and the target language is the syntactic differences in word arrangement within a sentence. While English language operates Subject Verb Object word order which the original text follows, Arabic language which it was translated to operates Verb Subject Object. The ability to wriggle from this syntactic conundrum shows the author proficiency in the two languages.

Cultural Translation Theory

Oseni's translation reflects the principle of cultural Translation theory whereby he mediates between the source and target language cultures to facilitate cross cultural communication. Through strategic cultural adaptation and localization, Oseni ensures that the spirit and significant of the Nigeria National anthems are preserved in its Arabic language rendition. These include preserving the symbolic relevance of certain phrases such as "Compatriots", "One nation" and "Our heroes" translated as "Watanan Wahidan" and "Abtalina" which are contextualize within the cultural framework of the target audience. [We should highlight the cultural words in the English version and how it was translated to Arabic].

Stylistic Analysis

Oseni's stylistic choice plays a crucial role in shaping overall tone and aesthetic appeal of the picture device including rhythm, and personification contributes to the lyrical quality of the Arabic rendition. In the national anthem, the word "Nigeria" is personified and given human attributes. Examples of such personification include "Ajib da'wata Naijiriya" that is "Nigeria calls obey". Oseni also continuously makes use of verbal nouns such as "Hubba, quwwatan, thiqatan" to replace nouns such as "Love, strength and faith" in the source text. Also in last line of the first stanza of the old national anthem, Oseni used two verbal nouns "Muhrarran saliman" to replace the nouns "peace and unity". By monitoring the optic essence of the original anthem, Oseni capture the emotions and power forever inherent in the old Nigerian National anthem.

D. CONCLUSION

The study provides insight into the translation styles and strategies used in Oseni's Arabic translation of the old Nigeria National Anthems using an eclectic approach of different translation theories. Therefore, by applying translation theories, this research contributed to a deeper understanding of translation practices in cultural preservation context. Further investigation into intersection of translation studies and cultural identity is recommended to advance scholarly understanding in this area.

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Author Contributions Statement

Lawal, Rahman contributed to the conceptualization and design of the study, development of the theoretical framework, and collection of primary and secondary data. The first author also played a leading role in the analysis and interpretation of data, particularly in relation to Arabic translation and cultural analysis, and drafted the initial version of the manuscript.

Ridwan Akinkunmi Rabiu contributed to the refinement of the research methodology, linguistic and theoretical analysis, and the writing and critical revision of the manuscript



to enhance its scholarly quality, coherence, and terminological accuracy. The second author also participated in the validation of the analysis and discussion of the research findings.

Both authors jointly reviewed, edited, and approved the final version of the manuscript and take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the work.

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Data Availability Statement

The data used and/or analyzed in this study consist of textual materials, including the English version of the old Nigerian National Anthem and its Arabic translation as presented in Oseni (2006), as well as related secondary sources. These materials are derived from published sources that are publicly available. No new datasets were generated for this study.

Any additional analytical notes or supporting materials are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no financial or non-financial conflicts of interest that could be perceived to influence the design of the study, the analysis or interpretation of the data, or the preparation of the manuscript. The authors received no funding from any organization that could give rise to a conflict of interest.

AI Use Statement

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used **ChatGPT (OpenAI)** solely for language editing, including improvements in grammar, clarity, and readability. The authors reviewed and edited the content and take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the work.

Additional Information

Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to: ridwan.rabiu@kwasu.edu.ng

List the ORCID iD for each author (if available) using the full URL format. ORCID ensures unambiguous author identification and accurate attribution of scholarly work.

[Lawal, R],  <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-3932-3941>

[Ridwan Akinkunmi Rabiu],  <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-6509-2487>

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