

Evaluating the Significance of Translation in the West African Sub-Region

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Abstract

Translation over the ages has proved to be an effective tool to break cultural and linguistic barriers between different countries of the world. The diversity of peoples with multiplicity of languages inhabiting the West African sub region is among those known as under developed. They are bedeviled by poverty, famine, diseases, ethnic and religious violence. Some of these problems are generated as a result of illiteracy, fears and suspicions of the smaller groups that they will be dominated and exploited by the stronger groups. This paper advocates translation as a means of transmitting information to the grass roots and the rural population to promote peace and mutual understanding within the individual countries and within the region. The different peoples living in this part of the world need to co-operate and integrate with themselves on a common front for effective resolution of these socio-cultural problems that hinder development. What one country cannot achieve alone can be realized when countries like these get together to confront their problems.

Key words: Evaluating ,significance, translation,West Africa.

1 Introduction

Translation is an intellectual exercise which involves detaching meaning from an original text, called the source text and transferring it into another text or the target text. It is a vehicle through which ideas and information are disseminated from one culture to another. In this way it enables the exchange of ideas between a diversity of people from different cultures. Writing in the preface of *The Translator's Invisibility*, (1999) Sussan Bassnett and André Lefevère remarked that "Translation, of course, is a rewriting of an original text. All rewritings whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetic and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way"

Translation aims at communicating ideas and facts from one culture to the reading audience of a different culture and, in this way enables the exchange of ideas among people. Before the inception of the mobile phones in our villages here in Nigeria many illiterate people who have their children and relatives in distant cities and countries could communicate with them only through the mediation of younger people who attended the formal schools in their neighborhoods. They were the ones who acted as agents through whom these letters were written in the languages of their choice. Their means of communicating with those loved ones is only by letter writing and we see this phenomenon in *Le Mandat* of Sembene Ousmane. (1968) translated as *The Money Order*. They also read and interpreted the messages of their loved ones to the parents in the villages. This in actual fact is the role of the translator; communicating the mind of the writer who expresses his needs, ideas and even emotions to his target audience. Danica Seleskovitch and Marianne Lederer who are theoreticians of *the Interpretative Approach* from Paris also express this opinion in their book *Interpreter pour traduire*(1986:10). Pratima Dave Shastri (2012:3) also supports this idea when he says that " translation can resolve social problems. It can bring people together, give them a different sensibility to appreciate each make them tolerant and respectful to each other's view point".

1.1. Past and Present Role of Translation in the Society

Translation has played very important roles in the reformation and the development of the European languages and literature and is poised to do same in our society today. The translation of the Holy Bible and Classical Greek and Latin literatures flourished and was very instrumental to the inculcation of moral values to the people in the 16th Century.. It also helped to enrich the formation and establishment of many European languages and literatures. Heylen Romy (1993: 10-11) confirms this idea when he remarked that " translations enable the transfer of literary devices and models from one literature or culture to another and thus enrich, developing literatures in need of poetic models or renew established literatures that find themselves in crisis". Jeremy Munday (2001: 38) also supports this idea when he revealed that

Luther played a pivotal role in the Reformation while, linguistically, his use of a regional yet socially broad dialect went a long way to reinforcing that form of German language as standard. In response to accusations that he had altered the Holy Scriptures in his translations, Luther defended himself in his famous *Send brief vom Dolmetschen*.

It becomes very clear that translation played very important roles in the reformation and the development of the European languages and literatures and is poised to do same in our society today. By this example, one can see that translation practice across the ages has not only been instrumental to the dissemination of knowledge it has also been a risky enterprise because emphasis was laid on faithfulness to the letter. It is reported that some Bible translators William Tyndale and Etienne Dolet were both accused of heresy and blasphemy so were executed respectively in 1536 and 1546 (Jeremy Munday 2001: 37). This reveals that the concept of faithfulness has been closely attached to the exercise of translation throughout the ages. In addition to this, urbanization and civilization processes have generated an influx of people across the important cities and countries Thus diversity of cultures and languages in these metropolitan societies have created increasing needs for mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence and people have seen the need to maximize the advantages that they can derive from one another so try to enhance relationship with other communities Translation becomes inevitable in such societies because of their multi-lingual and multicultural characteristics. Roger et al (1984:6) reveal that:

There are no longer any remote islands or isolated people. An ever-denser web of crisis-crossing links and mutual dependence enfolds all nations. It is now increasingly necessary for them to turn passive independence to deliberate solidarity which can move their diversity a source of continuous and mutual enrichment and so that the future of each one may be increasingly sustained by its many links with the others.

1.1.1 The Need For Integration In The Sub-region

1.1.2

Presently, globalization has reduced the world to a “global village ” where someone could do business with another living thousands of kilometers away, without actually coming in direct physical contact with them. Since dissemination of information has been enhanced by modern technology such as the cell phone, fax and internet, bilateral trade agreements and international businesses are now contracted by different nations through these modern means of telecommunications. And translation is the tool that facilitates these businesses all over the world.

Now, about fifteen(15) nations belong to the West African Sub-region as a result of Mauritania’s withdrawal. Five out of these countries are Anglophone while the rest speak French and other languages. But there is a need for them to integrate more fully in order to maximize their benefits of globalization. Their Chief Security officers need to discuss and agree on measures and strategies that they can adopt to combat trans-border crimes, terrorism, smuggling, woman and child trafficking in order to ensure security within the region. These decisions are top secrets and should be known only to them and that is the reason translation becomes *sine qua non* in regional integration and associations. Nwabueze and Muotoo (2016:22) agree with these ideas when they say :

The truth is that with globalization, there is no hiding place any longer and nations must move together from now on, share goods and services as well as experiences in research

and technology in order to reduce hunger, poverty, achieve faster development across the globe, thereby making the world a better place for all.

Translation helps to eliminate individual and societal differences which endanger strife and hostilities and hinder developmental processes. There is need for all language barriers to be broken within Africa and especially in the Sub-region to enable countries achieve scientific, economic, political progress.

1.1.1.1 Promoting Mutual Co-Existence within the West African Countries through Literary Translation

Africa and West African sub-region have been beset with incessant problems of poverty, diseases, ethnic and religious violence. This has increased the disturbing problems of insecurity, underdevelopment and unnecessary deaths, oppression and exploitation of the weaker groups by their domineering neighbours. Literary translation can act as a tool which creates an enabling environment for peace and mutual understanding among the peoples of these countries. Presently many African writers have written literary books of renowned importance as a result of their being translated into other foreign languages. The examples of such literary works are *Things Fall Apart*, *A Man of the People* by Chinua Achebe, *The Trials of Brother Jero*, *Kongi's Harvest* by Wole Soyinka, *L'Enfant Noir* by Camara Laye, *Une Vie de Boy* by Ferdinand Oyono, *Une Si Longue Lettre* by Mariama Ba, *Le Mandat* by Sembene Ousmane, *The Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and others. Some of those written in English languages have been translated into French languages and some of those literary works in French languages vice-versa.

Some of these writers have enumerated the socio-political problems in their societies in the pre-colonial and post-colonial times, others have criticized the vices of their societies such as greed, corruption, ethnic and religious bigotries and violence. Others have condemned the oppression and exploitation of women by their male counterparts and have advocated equality and justice for all in the society. In this vein literary translation helps to create and enhance suitable environments for peaceful co-existence among the diverse population of West Africa and other works are read. To illustrate this further it has been revealed that *Things Fall Apart* has been translated into several languages. This shows then that Chinua Achebe has been able to project the Igbo cultural values of the pre-colonial and post-colonial times to a much larger audience than if his book had remained in its original form.

Pratima Dave Shastri (2012:3) succinctly argues that:

Translation crosses the linguistic, social, religious and cultural barriers, translation can remove the barriers between two languages. It can safeguard against regionalism and can promote national integration.

Considering these points, one feels that more literary texts with good cultural values should be made available to children and youths in Nigeria and other West African countries. In fact, moral and didactic implications of literature cannot be over-emphasized. It is a fact that literature entertains, and at the same time enables the reader to imaginatively project himself into the world of other people who inhabit societies other than their own. It is certainly through translation that many classical and ancient texts reach the modern man today. Susan Bassnett McGuire

(1992:43) affirms that the views of both Cicero and Horace on translation and other things were to have great impact on successive generations of translators and linguists. The implication of this that ancient texts by writers and philosophers like Aristotle, Plato, Cicero, Horace, Sophocles, Shakespeare were preserved and re-created to reach future readers through translation.

Translation played remarkable roles during the 16th century in Europe. their civilizing function in the era processes of Renaissance and reformation It contributed immensely to the progress and education of many people in that era. Salmon Pierre (1993:32) shows that French humanist writers like Joachim du Bellay, Pierre de Ronsard and others helped in establishing and enriching their vernacular language and literature through translation. The classical Greek and Latin literatures translated in that era were relative in the moral education of the Renaissance period. This shows that literary works cannot be limited by time or space.

Jeremy Munday(2012:13) supports this view when he argues that the practice of translation was crucial for the early dissemination of key cultural and religious texts and concepts. In the West, the different ways of translating were discussed by, among others, Cicero and Horace (first century BCE) and St Jerome (fourth century(CE.)

Translation can expose the target audience, be they intellectuals or local businessmen to new ideas that can broaden their perspectives about scientific or technological discoveries. Being acquainted with other people's cultures and ideas can help individuals develop certain potentials and abilities they did not know that they possessed. These new ideas can enhance scientific and technological development which in turn bring about industrialization and economic advancement of the people West Africa. Literary works from other parts of the world help young people to appreciate other peoples' cultures.

Gwendolyn Calvert Baker affirms this point when she remarked that:

What our children learn about the wide variety of people in the world around them will significantly influence the way they grow and what kind of adults they will become. It will determine whether they develop into confident, secure members of society, who respect and appreciate diversity or into adults who view others with hostility and fear because of ignorance (quoted in Amadu Maddy and Doonarae MacCann (1996:217).

In order to ensure active participation of their population the leaders of the government should pursue policies that will enhance communication. To buttress this point, Bamgbose emphasizes that effective communication is an essential factor for policymaking. Obviously this becomes more crucial in multilingual countries especially for the purpose of administration. Ajulo Babalola (2000:231) also advocates for an increase of translation activities in Nigeria by remarking thus:

Nigeria, being a multicultural and multilingual state, should be a veritable country of translation and interpreters in order to promote mutual understanding. More important is the need to translate the Nigerian constitutions, laws and all official documents of the governments in the Federation into Nigerian languages, so that Nigerians can understand and follow government work in their respective languages (231).

1.1.1.1.1 The Relevance of Translation in a Language Class

Translation can also still be relevant in a language class although the Grammar Translation method seems obsolete. The teacher can teach verbs by using the translation method. For example the French verbs/auxiliary: ETRE-To Be-and “avoir” which means “to have”. The teacher can create a better understanding in his students by conjugating them in French and showing the equivalence in English language. As far as learning is concerned an intelligent and creative teacher can borrow any material and use his initiative to make his subject interesting and rich. A creative teacher is never limited by rules, but can go out of his way to source ideas and innovations to make his subject interesting and enjoyable by his students. He can use role-plays, songs, questions, dialogues and translation to help his students have a good understanding and competence of the subject. Here is an illustration to support this idea:

French language

Avoir
J'ai
Tu as
Il/elle a
Nous avons
Vous avez
Ils/elles ont

English language

To have
I have
U have
he/she has
vous avez
you have
they have

It would sound very ridiculous to say to an Igbo person, learning French language, “I have ten years and would be very wrong to teach him Je suis dix ans

Ngozi a de la chance

Ngozi is lucky

Vous avez froid

You are cold

Obi a mal à la tete

Obi has headache

But in English language sometimes the term “avoir means “is “that is “etre”. In order to make it clear to an Igbo phone student, the teacher may write the three sentences containing the terms in different languages on the board to make it clear to the students.

To illustrate this let us examine these sentences.

1. French Languages

Tu as quel âge?

J'ai huit ans.

English Language

How old are you?

I am eight years old.

Igbo Language

Here is another example of another sentence with “avoir”.

French language

Nous avons faim.

English language
We are Hungry
Igbo language
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Pratima Dave Shastri (2012:1) supports this fact of teaching Grammar through translation when he says that:

Actually, the concept of language teaching began with Grammar translation method, where the rules of grammar, and the vocabulary items of Latin were memorized and each sentence was translated from Latin into the mother-tongue and vice-versa. It has certain drawbacks hence the method was rejected. But even today translation is a good technique to teach language.

In this era of industrialization and scientific development, a lot of information is needed to accelerate technological and economic development. Translation becomes very relevant in the developing countries situated in the West African sub region because of their multilingual nature. Countries like Nigeria, Senegal, Niger and others are characterized by multiplicity of languages and smaller dialects which create mutual unintelligibility, according to Elugbe Nigeria alone has approximately 400 languages and this phenomenon has generated a lot of mistrust and suspicion even among the different communities in the country. Thus translation becomes inevitable in order to surmount the linguistic obstacles thereby facilitating communication and the dissemination of ideas within these international associations. Alan Forrest affirms this fact when he noted that the diversity of European languages sometimes create problems to the business and activities of the European Union because the smaller member states are reluctant to allow their own languages and cultures to be encroached upon. This clearly explains the absence of any choice of language as lingua franca for the European Union so that, English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Dutch and Swedish are freely spoken within the union.

According to Alan Forrest (2000: 338)

Problems of language permeate every action of the European Union. Participants at meetings struggle daily with problems arising from the multiplication of languages which they speak: they are helped by cumbersome but reasonably effective systems of speech interpretation and document translation. Tremendous efforts have to be made to ensure that European laws say exactly the same thing in a large number of language versions.

Translation can help to bridge the cultural barriers—within these communities with multiplicity of ethnic groups and languages. This paper suggests that: since some of these countries in West African are beset with the critical crucial problems of poverty, diseases, violence and underdevelopment they should collaborate their efforts to confront and overcome them. It is obvious that wider dissemination of ideas and information through translation can help to enhance unity and integration among the peoples from the different states of these multilingual countries. Forrest Alan in Ajulo(200:340) has shown that linguistics problems in inter-national associations like the United National Organization (UNO) and the European Union (EU) are resolved through translation practices. Therefore, the document of the meeting and other interactions of the union are translated daily in the languages of the member states, consequently,

this paper suggests that important document like the constitutions and policies written in English language translated into indigenous languages in order to effectively communicate some of these important ideas to the rural population. Thus translation practices are very vital for the massive participation of the population in developmental processes.

Conclusion

This paper has studied the vital roles played by translation during the renaissance period across; especially in Western Europe .it has also seen its relativity in international associations, socio-economic and cultural activities. In Multilingual states of West Africa, it can effectively enhance communication among the rural population and the educated class as well .it can create enabling environments for mutual understanding, trust and responsibility for other people in the society. It is very useful in communicating scientific and innovative ideas on agriculture and technology that can accelerate industrialization and economic development. Through if the local languages dialects can standardized and enriched. . Through translation, many good literatures for children and youths can become real vehicles that promote international unity and cooperation in such a multilingual continent like Africa. Translation practices can enhance development and peaceful co-habitation in the West African sub region which has suffered much regional, religious violence and poverty.

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