

**Translation: A panacea to Nigeria's social problems**

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**Abstract**

*Nigeria, a multilingual country has been stratified and partitioned along the lines of language affiliations. A country considered by many as having great potentials, has seen itself stagnated due to misunderstandings brought about by language diversity. This paper seeks to proffer translation as a major instrument of positive change to the problems posed by language diversity in Nigeria, both at national and international levels.. Translation, which means rendering a message in one language into another, has over the years proven itself a worthy tool in bringing about social changes thus enhancing personal, interpersonal and group relationships which Nigeria needs. Nigerians need to work together as one people but this cannot be possible without effective communication which translation can enhance. Translation will help the different ethnic groups in Nigeria to communicate effectively with one another without compromising the autonomy of any. It serves as a mediator through which barriers in communication, even in international relations are removed. This paper uses the descriptive method of research to expose the social problems of Nigeria and how Translation could help to solve them.*

**Introduction**

The country Nigeria as we know is a political creation of the colonial masters. A country that existed in fragmented entities, as different cultural and linguistic independent entities, were brought together under colonial management and forced through a lot of cohesion, to exist together as one. This unification, though on paper effective, has witnessed a lot of cracks over the years and at every moment there is a near disintegration phenomenon occurring, when even the citizens expect the inevitable: disintegration, which never comes but keeps being averted. But the truth is that this country faces a lot of social problems which when taken care of can go a long way towards making Nigeria great.

Many of the problems that Nigeria is experiencing stem from the lack of patriotism among Nigerians. This is because the average Nigerian first sees himself as a member of an ethnic group before seeing himself as a Nigerian. Every consideration, both on the part of the masses or in governance is affected by these ethnic divides.

Nigeria also needs to improve its international status and relate well with today's world. This can only be possible if it possesses the languages of these countries that make waves. English, French language, German, Spanish and Chinese languages are highly rated

in the world chart because of what they can offer. Surely, not every Nigerian will ever speak these languages but more Nigerians could be trained as translators to bridge the gap in communication with these nations.

### **Nigeria's social problems**

Nigeria's main problem is far from being economic but mainly social, as the country is blessed with abundant natural and human resources. Its problems are mainly linguistic and cultural and this has led to many other problems that take their roots from these ones. Be they called political, social, religious, economic, security or educational problems, all these problems emanate from the country's divergences in language and culture as ethnic groups are divided along these lines. These divisions affect political choices, votes, education and business. Agwu shares this view and thus states that,

*...understanding cultural and linguistic values of the nation is paramount for any current or future development project hoping to succeed. The social character of language and its function as key transactional instrument for the communication of human groups makes it both the supreme divider and at the same time the invisible instrument for uniting people. (26-27)*

All the different ethnic groups in Nigeria would stop at nothing for self assertion. The recent trend in Nigeria where only three Nigerian languages are viewed as the major languages, and the only ones to enjoy favourable education policies and government attention, does not at all augur well with the so called minority groups or minority languages. They see these government policies as a way of suppressing them and a way of helping to annihilate their language and people . No ethnic group can just sit down and watch this happen. While discussing "Choosing a national language for Nigeria" Olagoke (197) clearly states that there is no linguistic group in this country, however minor, that would like to see any language prevail other than his own and failing that, they will not allow any other to take its place.

Every individual has the right to use his own native language, and any attempt by anyone to stop an individual from doing that is always viewed with suspicion. Adekunle went further to state that "Four hundred mutually intelligible languages are spoken natively by members of two hundred and fifty ethnic groups that inhabit this country."(177) Instead of the government trying to suppress some and encourage others, it would be safer for her to encourage each of these languages to develop. This will give a sense of belonging to all the groups and by so doing help to build a sense of patriotism and oneness which is needed for Nigerians to work together and develop. Language diversity should not pose a problem to human development rather it should aid human development if well managed.

According to Ezeani and Nwankwo, "Successive Nigerian governments have made several attempts at solving the problems that have perpetually retarded Nigerian

development.”(100) But the big problem is that instead of solving these problems new ones emerge to further compound the existing ones with the result that the country keeps on going down the drain. From oil glut that affected the Nigerian economy to religious wars and intertribal wars, to the menace of kidnapping to the scourge of Boko haram insurgency to corruption, to the various quests for self determination by the different ethnic groups. Only God knows by what name the next set of problems would be addressed.

### **Translating for a better Nigeria**

Translation is basically a linguistic activity. George Steiner sees the “study of translation as the study of language.”In a multilingual and multiethnic context, language plays a very important role in uniting and dividing people. This makes Nigeria a fertile ground for translation. Translation has been known to play a major part in social integration as it furnishes nations with a variety of messages to enhance the appreciation of self and of others. It provides information that helps one to understand the other’s point of view and aspirations. Translation can make ethnicity that is today Nigeria’s major problem, to become a thing of the past. Most of the intertribal wars, prejudices, misunderstandings of different magnitude are offshoots of language variations that cut the circuit of communication. They are as a result of world views that are either misunderstood or not recognized at all.

*Translation is not just an interlinguistic act but also an intercultural exchange. This is so because according to Lotman “No language can exist unless it is steeped in context of culture and no culture can exist which does not have at its centre the structure of the natural language” (57)*

The translator marries both the words with which the message is constructed and the context of the source text to construct meaning. He further permeates the target language which is hosted by a target culture. The cultural coordinates of the message is matched with the cultures of the target language. It is only when this has been done that the correct equivalent can be transferred and only then can a translation be adjudged faithful to the original.

Therefore for translation to take place, the two languages that form the tools of translation are equally important. The case in the present Nigeria where some languages are seen as more important than the others can be changed through translation since every language is understood to be a means of communication of a certain group of people and no one can communicate with any group of people without knowing their language. When this realization is made, more effort would be geared towards the development and study of the various Nigerian languages with the view to reaching all linguistic groups of the country.

Introducing translation studies in our schools will encourage the learning of all the Nigerian languages instead of only a few of them. The earlier concept of translation was

that of a language pedagogical tool. It was a tool that enabled new languages to be learnt. Translation studies of then entailed the comparing of languages. The study of translation is the study of language. Its study therefore helps to study, understand and develop languages.

Language is not static but keeps evolving. It is common knowledge that languages borrow from each other; the developed and the underdeveloped languages alike. Newmark further informs us that “language is an ever-changing, ever enriching entity. We need to update our repertoire[...]New words are coined, borrowed, blended, compounded and modified according to the changing needs of the people” (58)

It is this ever changing language that the translator uses in the everyday exercise of his duties. As he does his work he can borrow a word as it is in the original, borrow a language structure, transpose a word or use any technique he finds best to do his work. In some cases the translator does not find an equivalent reality that corresponds to the message he wants to pass across. He therefore has no other choice but to replicate the message as it is in the target language. Many words, sentence structures, and expressions have found their entrance into other languages through the work of translators. Translation therefore helps in the up-date of languages as well as the study of languages. It can therefore help to transform many of our native and underdeveloped languages to developed languages.

Translation can also help the political development of Nigeria. With translation, political aspirants will have the opportunity of reaching the length and breadth of Nigeria during their campaign. Also the minority groups, who without translation may not have a voice, as they rely on few people to air their views on the polity of the nation, can now naturally air their innermost feelings and views through their native languages, with the translator bridging the gap in communication.

Marketers can also through translation get to the grassroots. It is only when the awareness of a product has been created that customers go in search of the products. This awareness can only be created through language. The marketer does not need to know all the languages of the world to be able to market his products. He just needs a translator that is conversant with the culture and language of the target audience, to be able to create the awareness required for the product to thrive. That same way, if Nigerian products are packaged with the literature of each product in many Nigerian languages, it will go a long way towards the improvement of the health of Nigerians, as the application and usage of the products would be better done.

The need for translation in Nigeria’s public places is very expedient. Human mobility is in the increase. Even Nigerians with language difficulties find themselves moving out of their native homes to other places either forced by circumstances or by self volition. For example many Northerners were forced to relocate to the South-eastern States of Nigeria during the intertribal wars in Jos or the Boko Haram insurgences at the different northern States. That same way many Easterners have relocated to the North in search of greener pastures. The Federal Government of Nigeria, through the National Youth Service Corps, has also encouraged the movement of Nigerians to ethnic groups different from theirs. The

migrants in such circumstances always face the language problem. Learning a language is not automatic. Translation is the automatic solution to language difficulties. It clears language barriers.

Even in the health sector translation is key. It bridges the gap between the medical personnel and the illiterate sick citizens that need medical attention, who cannot explain themselves before the doctor due to language barrier. This is particularly necessary in the remotest part of Nigeria where doctors sent by the Nigerian government and some international bodies have only the English language as their major means of communication. In such situations only translator can help the illiterate villagers.

In law, the national constitution needs to be translated into the numerous Nigerian languages for every Nigerian to understand the laws of the land. It is said that ignorance of the law is not an excuse but it is also true that it is when one is aware of what the law says that the person is better disposed to avoid any form of infringement.

Even in other spheres of life translation proves itself an invaluable tool. The nation needs to train more translators to bridge the gap of communication and thus touch more lives. Paying more attention to translation will go a long way towards solving the problem of unemployment in our dear country. According to Pai,

*Globalisation has made the world a small place. It is inhabited by hundreds of communities with different languages, social set-ups, culture and attitudes and their own specific world views. The technological boom has opened up the possibilities and opportunities of interaction and communication among these communities. Translation is the only means to meet these needs... Globalisation has made the whole world multilingual... speaking two languages involves a fair amount of translation. And it has been found that that people who know two or more languages, always take up the task of translation without realizing the complexities of the activity.”(ix)*

The average Nigerian speaks at least two languages; English language and a mother-tongue. Many Nigerians naturally play the role of translators without training but remain ignorant of what they would gain by training themselves in the field.

In the sphere of revamping our economy translation has a major role to play. Not just that Nigeria loses a lot of money by engaging foreign translators to undertake the numerous translation responsibilities which the nationals cannot undertake, it also limits its area of operation as the many things that Nigeria produces are not packaged to international standards. Packaging to international standard would mean making the literature of the various products in at least three international languages. The result is that these Nigerian products are confined within the shores of this nation. Take for example Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry which has witnessed a rapid and continuous growth since inception. This is an industry that would have grown more than its present state should the producers take the extra pain of translating all the films into as many international languages as possible. We can imagine the number of Chinese and Indian

films that flood the Nigerian market. Most of these films are merely subtitled and yet they have found a large market in Nigeria. Nigerian home movies can sell more than these other films if the extra burden of translation is undertaken for all the films. This will not only improve the nation's economy. It will also help to popularize and immortalize our artists. When translated into other Nigerian languages, every Nigerian would be able to watch the films in their native languages. Interculturality could be enhanced through this as well as mutual understanding among Nigerians.

The same goes for the Nigerian artists; novelists and dramaturges. They can only attain international acclamations when their works are exposed to people of other cultures to evaluate, appreciate and enjoy. The fames of Shakespeare, Victor Hugo, Aime Cesaire and our dear Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Chimanda Adichie and their likes came through translation. None of the works of the aforementioned artists was not translated into at least twenty international languages. Were it not for translation these works would have been stalked away in some infamous Nigerian libraries where only the few Nigerians that have a reading culture would have been able to access and assess them.

Tourism is a major area that can catapult the Nigerian economy into the next level if well managed. Countries like France, United Arab Emirates, make a lot of money through tourism and will never neglect this sector. In Paris the capital of France for example, the Eiffel tower, which is a landmark in France had 64 million visitors in the year 2005 and only God knows how many Euros the country must have made from tourism alone. France was visited by 85.7 million foreign tourists in 2013, making it the most popular tourist destination in the world. France ranks fifth in tourist spending behind the United Kingdom, United States, China and Spain.[...]In 2012, travel and tourism directly contributed EUR77.7 billion to French GDP. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tourism\\_in\\_France](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tourism_in_France))

As tourist groups register for the excursion, guides are allocated to them to take them around. These guides are multilinguals, who also switch over to the work of translators whenever the need arose in the course of their work as guides.

Translators can help in discovering tourist attractions, can work as guides to the tourists by helping them to understand the places and relate well with the environment. Translators can help research into existing tourist centers in other countries so as to help build our own tourism by writing guide pamphlets for tourism or by holding international discussions about the centers, creating awareness of their existence.

Translators are also needed in the hospitality industries like hotels where the tourists and other strangers converge. A translator is a good material for the work of a guide as he has two languages or more at his disposal. It is only natural that people do not appreciate what they have. The numerous tourist attractions which we have in this country can better be appreciated by foreigners but only when there are people around to help them do that in a language that they understand. Only then would more people get to know the places, talk about them to their nationals and encourage them to come and see things for themselves. A case where a tourist attraction like Ogbunike cave would have only one person to explain



to tourists and only in vernacular cannot help such a place to grow. Worse still, the translator-guide has no office in the tourist centre but has to be alerted in his house of the presence of visitors before he comes out.

Nigeria needs to popularize these tourist centers by uploading information about them. Several translated versions of the information in the internet would enable more people to read about these centers in their own language. This they need to do not only in the Nigerian languages but in as many languages of the world as possible. As many languages as is possible should be made to know the natural treasures that Nigeria holds since it is only through these treasures that we can distinguish ourselves from the rest of the world. These natural endowments are nature's gifts to humanity and we can showcase our own better with the help of translators.

### **Conclusion**

Translation and translation studies could be the long sought solution to the social problems Nigeria is currently facing. Nigerians need to unite and develop one vision and view themselves as one people. They must learn to live together and respect one another and work together towards a common goal. Translation will enhance the interethnic and international communication necessary for this to take place.

Vacancies for the position of translators remain untapped in this nation and many translation tasks are left undone due to inadequate manpower in this area. But if Nigeria should pay more attention to translation, it would go a long way towards developing the Nigerian Languages, achieving national unity, ensuring a better understanding of one another, improving its education system, revamping the nation's economy and immortalizing the names of some deserving Nigerians. Every sphere of human life today is affected by communication. Translation is that aid which Nigeria needs to unlock interpersonal, intertribal and international communications.

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