

**French language and translation studies in Nigerian Universities in the 21st century:
Retrospection and prospection**

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Abstract

In this paper, a cursory look at the French language and Translation studies in Nigerian Universities in the 21st century in a retrospective and prospective manner is done. Translation studies in most Departments of French, Foreign or Modern European languages have in this century figured in both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. One is enjoined to look at the journey so far given the constraints and challenges encountered in the course of teaching the discipline over the years. This is very pertinent as Nigeria had produced and is still producing writers in French language that are acclaimed internationally and nationally. New trends in the French language are discovered, researched and heralded by Anglophone researchers and academics especially from West Africa and particularly from Nigeria. The survival of the French language, as said by one of the presidents of France, is dependent on African countries, and Nigeria is one of such countries. The French language has come to stay in Nigeria and as a result, the importance of translation studies cannot be over emphasized. Translation studies, though not yet a department of its own is a course taught at all levels of tertiary institutions. The crucial nature of the proliferation of the discipline across Nigeria in the 21st century emphasizes its importance and demand in meeting the needs of the global world.

Introduction

The origin of the French language in Nigeria dates as far back as the nineteenth century (Adebisi, 1) and consciously and unconsciously, translation has always been an integral part of French language acquisition either formally or informally. It is interesting to note that translation studies as a course was introduced even at Advanced level French of West African Examination Council (W.A.E.C) and at the National Certificate Education (N.C.E) in the acquisition of a foreign language, especially French. Thus, translation also became a course to be reckoned with in the acquisition of a degree in Modern European or Foreign Languages as well as some Linguistics and English and Literature departments across the country, the region and Africa as a whole.

Tidjani-Serpos (2013) thinks that the challenges of the teaching and learning of French should also include the training of diplomats, teachers, Security personnel, Bilingual

Secretaries, and Translators-Interpreters. The latter falls in line with the current article examining translation studies in the Nigerian universities in the 21st century especially as one looks at the past, the present and the future.

The need to establish translation training courses became paramount in language departments all over the nation especially with Nigeria's participation in Economic Communities of West African States (ECOWAS), African Union (AU) and other related international organisations. Its importance cannot be over emphasized. Unfortunately, there were very few translation specialists in the country when the discipline kicked off. In a retrospective manner, this work will look at translation courses at degree level and postgraduate level before taking a look at the current trends and eventually a prospective view will be taken to ascertain a possible reengineering into the innovative discipline.

The oldest university in Nigeria, University of Ibadan did not start a postgraduate course in Translation until very recently. This paper will thus take a panoramic view of translation studies in the Nigerian Universities as it relates to the teaching and learning of the French language as well as the professional inclinations. It is pertinent to note that critiques from the tertiary institutions where French is studied are increasingly beginning to examine the challenges encountered in this discipline. Simpson (2007), Timothy-Asobele (1999), Iloh (1997, 2005), Soyoyo & Mayanja (2012), Tar (2012), Mebitaghan (2013), Afolabi (2014), Mufutau Tijani (2015), Mary Nyong and Festus Akintoye (2015) and others that space and time would not permit to mention, have consistently questioned and pondered over the challenges involved in the teaching of translation as a discipline in Nigerian universities, polytechnics and colleges of Education. For the purpose of this article, we will restrict ourselves to only the Nigerian universities for now.

Universities where Translation is taught at the undergraduate level include University of Benin, University of Lagos, University of Ibadan, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, University of Calabar, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, University of Port-Harcourt, University of Ilorin, Lagos State University, University of Jos, Abia State University, Uturu, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Federal University Ndufu-Alike Ikwo, Ebonyi State, Abakaliki, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Osun State University, University of Maidugiri, Bayero University, Kano etc. Tijani (2015) cited eleven universities, one Translation Institute and the Nigeria French Language Village, Badagry as samples.

Undergraduate programme

Translation programme in the undergraduate level all over the country is a course taught to students for the fulfilment of an undergraduate degree. This course is usually introduced to students at the 300 level, that is, a year into the final year of graduation. This means that undergraduate students study the course for two years and most often two hours are allotted per week for two semesters for two years. There is no uniformity in the students course description as this also varies from university to university. Some simple exercises are

translated from English to French and vice versa without any theoretical basis. Some universities incorporate basic theories of translation art or science as the case may be. Gone are the days when so much emphasises were placed on theories. According to Uwajeh, “Translation Studies have traditionally been done in foreign languages departments of Nigerian universities. That is, they are done not only for French Studies but also for German Studies, Spanish Studies, Portuguese Studies, Arabic Studies, and so on” (3). This course at this level enables students to ascertain their comprehension of the Foreign language especially French. Students are engaged in the translation of themes and versions. Emphasis at inception tended towards the simple theory of Vinay and Darbelnet’s *Stylistique comparée du français et de l anglais*. This book became the reference point of most translation activities although many have abused it.

Undergraduate students do not understand the objectives of this discipline until they find themselves at the point of making a choice for an area of specialization for a graduate or post-graduate course. It is important to stress that translation as a degree programme was on the same pedestrian as other courses, so, this must have contributed to its insignificance at that level. It took a new dimension in the 80s with the introduction of National Association of Translators and Interpreters (NATI) with Professor Ekundayo Simpson as its pioneer president. NATI awaken the consciousness of many university lecturers teaching one foreign language or the other and these in turn drove in new zeal into their students who also began to see the viability and importance of translation studies in Nigeria, West African sub-region and Africa as a whole. There was thus a sudden surge among foreign language graduates to specialize in translation.

Postgraduate programme

Most universities with Departments of French or Foreign or Modern European Languages undertake postgraduate programmes and Translation Studies is one of the programmes but the challenges are the lack of qualified manpower to adequately handle the translation discipline. Students who have no iota of theories have enormous task and lecturers are laden with herculean tasks of tolerating the students who usually have to manage with jobs that leave them no room to attend lectures or study. Their performance at the masters’ classes is nothing to write home about. It is pertinent to have knowledge of the origin of translation discipline in Nigerian Universities.

Translation courses in the University of Benin, Benin City for instance are embedded as language courses in the Department of Foreign Languages beginning from early 80s even though the University has been founded in the early 70s while the Foreign Languages Department started as a Department of French in 1975. It began as a unit of the Department of Modern European Languages and Linguistics and later metamorphosed into the Department of French in 1975. By 1979, the introduction of German turned it into Department of Foreign Languages.

It is worthy of note that Professor Ekundayo Simpson from the University of Lagos then had struggled to convince the university authorities of the need to commence a postgraduate programme in Translation. It is also pertinent to put on record that as the only specialist in the country then, and a lecturer with the University of Lagos then, it was in the University of Benin he saw his fulfilment in 1983 as a visiting Professor in translation. The objectives of the Postgraduate programmes aim at fostering independent scholarship, competence in research and analysis as well as in-depth knowledge in a chosen area of specialisation. A Postgraduate student is expected to master a special field, learn the methods of investigation and make an original contribution to knowledge. Postgraduate work was thus available in three areas, viz.: French Literature, African and Caribbean Literature in French, and Translation (English/French, French/English). The Masters' programmes cover the three areas while the Ph.D. programme covers the first two. By implication, the Ph.D. programme does not cover Translation. Thus, the Department offers programmes leading to the award of degrees in M. A. French; M. A. Translation; M. Phil French; and Ph.D. French. For a Masters' Degree in Translation therefore, the scope of study covers the theory of translation principles and techniques as well as translation of general and specialised texts in both languages.

Prerequisites for admission requirements are a good Bachelor's degree in French or its equivalent. There must be evidence that the candidate has had sufficient training in translation. This brings to mind the undergraduate training in translation. One may ask, the undergraduate training in translation for two years, are they sufficient to enable a postgraduate specialisation in it? The postgraduate programme is expected to last for 24 months. The course work lasts for one academic session after which the candidate devotes the second academic session for research and thesis in one of the areas specified. The finished work or thesis must be externally assessed and defended before an External Examiner. But usually, the remaining academic year is not adhered to strictly as often candidates exceed one academic session in the course of completing their research and thesis. Candidates are required to do written examinations relating to the respective course work; and in addition, their theses will be assessed both internally and externally.

Many Universities introduced translation as a course for the undergraduate classes but many still do not teach the course, yet their students are prospective students of Translation at the postgraduate level in other universities.

Nyong and Akintoye (2015) contributed immensely in their article on the "Challenges of Translation Studies in French in Nigerian Universities at the Post-graduate Level" where their list reduced drastically because not all the universities teaching Translation at the undergraduate levels teach it at the post-graduate level. They however mentioned only five universities with the exclusion of University of Lagos. There exist other universities that are silent on the teaching of Translation because the lecturers are either not necessarily specialists or trained in the discipline and as such are inaccessible or are unavailable.

The course contents and outlines have changed slightly over the years. One has deliberately avoided mentioning Interpretation course because this is a more technical course than the translation per se. At this juncture therefore, suffice it to say that the enthusiasm with which translation was introduced, Interpreting also was, but only one candidate was admitted. Since the where withal to man it was not readily available, it was systemically shelved. The lectures delivered by Professor Ekundayo Simpson distinguishing between translation and interpreting brought the consciousness that it was a more tedious and technical discipline. The only student admitted and graduated was in 1984 for a diploma in Interpretation. Even though the course is not being pursued, the course outline for postgraduate diploma in Interpretation were not different but had courses in Interpretation. Candidates are to specialise in either Literary Translation or Scientific and Technological Translation. No project is expected at the end of the course work; but students preferred to enrol for a Masters' programme.

In 1982 – 1987 academic sessions, the course outline for M. A. Translation was as follows: Advanced Composition, Methodology of Research, Appreciation to Textual Analysis, Theory and Practice of Translation, Critical Appreciation of Literary Translation, Documentation and Terminological Research, Administrative Translation, Dissertation. In 1989, the senate of the University of Benin approved and amended new and harmonised postgraduate programmes of the Department of Foreign Languages, precisely on the 26th of April making it compulsory for all postgraduate students to offer the same courses in the first semester of their admission. This constitutes the current status of Translation studies in the university. It will be necessary to explain further here that the pioneer academic staff reduced tremendously as many left the University for Greener Pastures. The few qualified staff had to readjust so as not to allow the programme to die. The postgraduate diploma in Translation and Interpretation, Scientific and Technical Translation specialisation died a natural death. This explains why some beautiful courses were dropped. It would be worth describing the course descriptions that is now offered. This course deals with the translation of documents issued by national and international administrative bodies; fields covered will include health, technology, foreign affairs and co-operation. Special attention will be paid to the stylistic peculiarities of the various administrative documents: letters, speeches, minutes of meetings, reports and others.

By 1985 when the University was graduating its first set of postgraduate students, translation inclusive, University of Lagos was just commencing its first admission of postgraduate/diploma candidates in translation and Interpreting. The qualified manpower resources were not as available as in University of Lagos. According to Timothy-Asobele, the programme started in 1992 (62).

University of Lagos has a professional Master's degree in Translation and Interpretation. The Department of Modern European Languages offers a two year programme leading to the award of a professional Master of Arts in Translation (MAT) (Timothy-Asobele, 63). One interesting thing is that the courses include Interpretation

(Consecutive and Simultaneous). The programme thus include courses like Introduction to Note-Taking and Precis-Writing in Consecutive and Simultaneous Interpretation, General Theory of Linguistics and Semantics, Advanced Technical and Scientific Translation amongst the major courses in Translation. This was the University of Professors Ekundayo Simpson, Union Edebiri, Samuel Ade-Ojo, Timothy- Asobele and Victor Ariole.

The University of Jos has the likes of Professor Victor Aire, an international interpreter and translator. University of Nigeria, Nsukka now has the likes of Anthony Nwanjioku while University of Port-Harcourt with Professor Acho Akakuru cannot be ignored.

The University of Ibadan has started a postgraduate programme in translation especially a doctoral programme because their students find it difficult to get admission to specialize in translation because of the broad spread of the Master's degree where students are initiated into all fields. Some of us had admired and envied their products but time and space is beginning to tell on these products. According to Nyong & Akintoye, the translation discipline taught in some universities like University of Ibadan is "French Studies, a course comprising of a little bit of everything: grammar, literature, linguistics, translation, etc." (7). E.O. Arowolo of the Modern Languages Department, University of Ibadan has other specialists that are yet to be known by the others.

Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma awards doctoral degree in Translation. It is ironical because University of Benin that long started Translation at postgraduate level is yet to award doctoral degree in Translation. Emphasis is laid on theme translation with the explanation that translation will serve as a means of linguistic perfection of the foreign language. Students are expected to translate English texts into French. In translation world-wide, apprentice-translators and professionals are encouraged to translate from the 'unknown' to the 'known' language. Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti has a sound team of Translation specialists who are hardly seen at our conferences to share their experiences. The University also has run a translation programme at the post-graduate level. The University of Maidugiri for instance has the likes of Bassey Antia, an international figure in translation but the insurgency has cut him off from us.

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka has the likes of Professor Emmanuel O. Ezeani who is a specialist in Language and linguistics and as such could produce doctoral students in language and linguistics. Translation, being an applied linguistic was no problem. The team is comprised of Olivia Ezeafulukwe , Theodora Onuko, Enoch Ajunwa and Asadu Felicia all translation specialists.

Nkoro I. Obisike of the Department of Foreign Languages and Translation Studies, Abia State University, Uturu cannot be ignored in the translation of French-English-Igbo.

There are many other universities where translation is taught like Usmanu Danfodio University, Sokoto with Umaru Kiro Kalgo in the Department of Modern European Languages and Linguistics. Bayero University, Kano also has a department of French.

Each of these universities had pockets of translation specialists as well as good bilinguals and multi-linguals not necessarily trained to kick-start translation programmes in

their universities. Many more universities still have specialists that are not known and hidden specialists all over. Time and space will not allow me to mention all the names like Professors Tunde Ajiboye and Bariki of the University of Ilorin.

Academic staff

Academic staff allowed to take part in postgraduate programmes of the Department must be Senior Lectures and above. Those who teach courses in translation are those with additional qualifications in Linguistics, Stylistics and Comparative Literature. From Tijani's (2015) paper, the number of translation specialists that responded to his research questionnaires were only nineteen from fourteen universities. Although he complained that many respondents did not reply, this shows that there are quite a little more of the specialists who did not respond. This, however, goes to also show and prove that the specialists or trained manpower are very few. What can be done especially as over the years, solutions and recommendations had been proffered? It only goes to buttress the fact that specialising in French Studies is not synonymous with specialising in translation per se. Although many of the translation 'trainers' had not actually trained or specialised in translation discipline, yet majority of them supervise works in translation. Many of them are however very good translators and interpreters by experience, like Professors Tundonu Amosu and Gregory Simire of both Lagos State University and University of Lagos respectively.

Prospection

Over years, the role of language departments in the Nigerian universities has contributed to the growth of the Translation discipline but a lot still needs to be done. The role played by the then National Association of Translators and Interpreters (NATI) facilitated the rapid setting up and mounting of translation programmes in various departments. The same association suddenly translated to Nigerian Institute of Translators and Interpreters (NITI), restricting exclusively its activities to professional translators and interpreters thereby excluding and killing what it originally nurtured. The reawakening of translation studies in the universities applies to departments where translation training is offered whether in an academic or professional manners. Asobele (1999: 202) had relied on the recruitment of translation and interpretation trainers from among these Modern European or Foreign Languages academia. These language departments have not outlived their usefulness but must be encouraged to improvise where facilities needed for manpower training in this field are lacking. Many universities offer translation programmes at Masters' level but lack the where-withal to man a Ph.D. programme. There are some universities where Translation Studies are offered at the doctoral level. Tijani also thinks that there is need to "harmonize translation theory and practice in Nigeria Foreign Languages' Departments" (6). He also cited works done by Soyoye and Mayanja (2012), Tar (2012) and Afolabi (2014) as these had focused on works on the teaching of Translation in Nigeria. Mariam

Birma will definitely bring to bear her personal experience as a conference translator and interpreter what Prof Tundonu Amosu, even though not a specialist in translation and interpretation, but had shared his experience as a translator and interpreter like Mariam Birma of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the French language has come to stay in Nigeria. Translation discipline should be properly harnessed and given its pride of place in the country. The professional body of translators and interpreters should come together. Notices of meetings and workshops organised by NITI should endeavour to get to the institutions where translation is taught early enough to enable teachers of the discipline participate actively and make meaningful and useful contribution in the field. Whether the practice of translating is ‘quack’, unprofessional or not, NITI and NATI (if this still exists) must damn the ego display plaguing Nigerian professionals of all walks of life and get down to real business. Translation is taught in Colleges of Education, Polytechnics and Universities. There is the need to harness all it takes as French is not the only language where translation studies are taught.

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