
THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSLATION: A FOCUS ON THE IGBO LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This paper discussed the challenges of translating from English to Igbo Language. It pointed out and analysed some of the various challenges affecting translation of information from English to Igbo. In doing this, the challenges were mentioned, such as ability to choose the best method of translating, the best 'words that translates nearest in meaning to the information, level of education and linguistics knowledge of the translator among others. In, the analysis, examples were discussed and suggestions were made. The paper concluded by establishing some views on translation.

One of the current major concerns of Nigerian society is the achievement of national unity. This cannot be achieved without the use of indigenous languages. Every society has at least two languages:

- 1) Official language
- 2) Native/indigenous language.

Language is one of the ropes that bind a society together. A society is identified by its language. A society communicates to its people through language. The best way a society can communicate official information to its people is through translation from an official language to the native language, i.e. mother tongue. This is because every given member of society is a linguistic member of that society and therefore should understand better in the native language. Varieties of a language can emerge from a given language depending on many factors. So language is a means or medium of communication while translation is a way of communication in society. Language is defined by Robins (1985) as cited in Sayal and Jindal (2007:3)

“Language is a symbol system based on pure or arbitrary conventions...infinitely extendable and modified according to the changing needs of the speaker.”

Also according to Sapir (1921) as cited in Sayal and Jindal (2007:4)

“Language is purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions or desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols.”

Inferring from these definitions above, language, is seen as a major means of communication in a given society, it is considered to be, essential in the achievement of national unity in Nigeria. Being a multi-lingual society, Nigerian languages or mother

tongues or first languages (L1) are major means of communication. To reproduce the information from an official language to a native language will involve translation.

Translation is seen as one major instrument, amongst others, that will bring the government's, individual's or group's aims, views, goals and objectives to the understanding of the members of its society and will also open doors for national development. Translation of these views should be done from the official language of a society to the native/ indigenous language.

Nigerian official language is English while native languages are numerous. Translation should commence with the three major languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) as a prelude to the achievement of national unity and development.

Conversely, translating from the English language to Igbo or other native languages linguistically faces some challenges. These challenges may vary from one mother tongue to the other. In view of that, I specifically chose Igbo language. Challenges here are seen as ugly experiences which can hinder the achievement of effective translation. This paper therefore discusses the challenges of translation focusing on Igbo.

Definition of Translation

Translation, as defined by Newmark in Long (2013:109):

"Is a craft consisting of an attempt to replace a written message or statement in one language by the same message or statement in another language."

Nida, Ber and Taba. in Long (2013:108-109) defined it as:

"Translating consists in reproducing in the target language (TL), the nearest equivalent to the message in the source language (SL)."

Translation reproduces the information to its nearest or closest natural equivalent as it is written by the writer. Translation involves the source Language (SL) target language (TL) and the translator.

Source language is the language from which the translation is made while target language is the language into which the translation is made. The translator is one who does the action of translating.

In this study, the source language is English while the target language is Igbo. Craft means gifted in something that gives interest. Translating from the source language to the target language, whether by a gifted or an ungifted translator involves challenges.

Translation is also redefined by the feminist in Canada cited in Gentzler (2008:15,54) "not as a form reproduction or opposition but rather as a form of productive writing in and of itself, meshed or interconnected with 'original' writing..." in other words, translation is redefined as "a form of productive writing in and of itself, meshed or interconnected with 'original' writing ..."

This means that translation is a form of reproduced writing in and of itself which is linked with the original writing (Gentzler 2008:15,54).

Translation is concerned with the certainty or assurance that the hearer understands the translated fact. The correctness of translation is determined by the extent to which the average reader, for which the translation is made, understands it. (Nida and

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Taber 1974:1). This means that effective communication is achieved. Some challenges in translating from one language to the other can affect the certainty of the translation, which means that the precise meaning of the original message or statement (fact) is distorted. This is tantamount to no communication.

Some Challenges of Translating from the English Language to the Igbo Language

- **Many Translation Methods:** Translation methods are numerous, for example word, for word, literal, semantic, linguistic, technical translations, to mention but a few. Faced with a written message or statement to translate, and the language(s) to translate into, the next thing in the mind of the translator is how to translate this message (i.e. which method to apply?). Being able to choose the best method that will satisfy the translation is a big problem to the translator. The method chosen by the translator can mar or promote the translation, the translator, or the language and communication. For example, word for word translation can make the translator miss a salient point in the message. For example, "He did not show mercy for the robbers," when translated word for word in Igbo will read thus:

He	did	not	Show	mercy	for	the	robbers
O	me	ghiri	Gosi	ebere	maka	Ahu	ndiohi

This is wrong in the Igbo Language. The expression does not follow Igbo sentence pattern i.e. Igbo syntactic structure. It is a second language learner in Igbo that can make such a sentence above. If a translator translates using word for word, such an ungrammatical expression in the Igbo language is bound to occur. Communication is not achieved because there is no proper method of translation and no clear understanding of the message.

- **Lack of Adequate Igbo Vocabulary/ Lexicon to Translate some Newly Emerging Words:** Another challenge of translating from English, to Igbo is lack of original Igbo language words or vocabulary to translate newly emerging English words. Some new English words do not have equivalents in Igbo because language is unique and arbitrary. English and Igbo languages are naturally distinct (Sayal and Jindal, 2007:6 and Anozie, 2007:21-24). The Igbo language, being a developing language, has not got enough vocabulary or registers, to explain some expressions in the English language. Attempts to replace such English words with another word of the same meaning in the Igbo language may affect the original meaning of such words in English, for example, the word "cooker" is an English word and kitchen register. It can be described as a cooking utensil that contains both a provision for the fire and a tripod stand. Such a cooking utensil does not exist in Igboland with the exception of Nsukka and Ehaamufu that lie on the borderline of Igbo people and the north. For the fact that Igbo people did not use it in those days, there is no

original Igbo word that can replace "cooker" in translation. Igbo people have their native "cooker" which is made up of the fire 'Oku' and tripod stand 'osibeite' together called "Ekwu", therefore translating such words from English to Igbo will pose some challenges of getting one word in Igbo original register that can translate such a word to the Igbo language. Coinage or Igbolization can apply, whereby such words like "kuka" can be derived. Here 'kuka' is spelt with the Igbo language orthography/phonemes. Few other examples of such English words that do not have equivalent vocabulary or register in Igbo are "Carton," "Internet," "Global net," "Laptop," "Computers," "Ebola," "Jacket," "Dialysis," "Decoder," "Facebook," "Solar," "Fax," "Email" " etc.

- **Inability to Choose Correct Register:** One of the challenges of translation from English to Igbo is being able to choose the correct register or vocabulary that will be able to translate to the nearest in meaning or representation of the English word. Such registers are translated based on how knowledgeable the translator is in Igbo language.
- **Time Limitation:** Time limitation is one of the challenges of media translation. Sometimes, the message to be translated does not reach the translator in time for him to prepare. The translator, in order to communicate effectively; needs to search for suitable vocabulary or registers to use or study the expression in the source language and search for the equivalent in the target language and search for equivalent forms and semantic implications etc. These are the aspects of preparation he will need to make to be able to translate the message to reflect the writer's mind. These need time to search for original Igbo words that will translate to the nearest in meaning. Without enough time, the translation may be done haphazardly, which may mar the meaning and the purpose. Sometimes on the television, news are read as translators are seen trying to arrange their papers so that the reading will flow. This can be seen as a result of lack of time because before they finish, the time of news casting has been exhausted.
- **Lack of Training:** Some translators are not trained or properly trained in the art of translation. One may ask: "Is training necessary in translation? Or must one be trained before one can translate well? "The answer is that any translator needs training despite the fact that he can translate well. Being a hearer/speaker of the Igbo language, is not enough criterion for one to translate accurately, effectively and precisely. Some translators translating from English to Igbo face the problem of translating in the tenses of the source language. The Igbo language has few tenses compared to the English language. For example, English expressions of past perfect tense and past continuous tense may not be easy for untrained translators to reproduce in the Igbo language. The styles of translation, method, linguistic implication of expressions and ordering or presentation representation are salient areas of aspects of translation, and training perfects them for effective communication.
Training is the backbone of knowledge. Some different stages of translation are required if all people will have an equal opportunity to understand the message.

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Such stages include vocabulary choices, grammatical structure, interpretation, and translation of figurative expressions in the target language. This and other requirements cannot be acquired without training, therefore, lack of training in translation skills is one of the challenges of translating from the English language to the Igbo language.

- **Lack of Education:** Similar to; lack of training is lack of education. Some translators are not educated to a degree level. Some stopped at school certificate and maybe because they can read, write and speak the target language fluently, went into translation. Translations apply to every sphere of life because language is involved in whatsoever that is worth doing and worth doing well. In translation, there is need for the translator to have linguistic knowledge of both the source and target language. With education, the knowledge of word construction pattern (i.e. morphology) peculiar to the language will be known and applied to the translation. The translator can make grammatical analysis of the given message which helps him or her to translate well.
- **Lack of Finance and Government Recognition:** Another challenge inherent to translating from English to Igbo language is the lack of finance and support from the government. The translator may not have enough money to take care of all that is needed in translation like the training. The government does not recognize translation as an important instrument for the achievement of peace and unity and development in society. These are setbacks to effective translation.
- **Lack of Interest in Translation:** Many people do not understand that translation is lucrative and self-employing, hence they do not show interest in translation so as to be trained as translators or educated as linguists. Some of the translators do it because of lack of jobs hoping to drop it as soon as they get jobs of their interest.
- **Societal Challenges:** The fear of being challenged by some members of society who will want to manipulate the translation of some particular messages from the source language to the target language and the fear of being disciplined by the individual or government, for wrong information representation hinder some interested individuals from opting for translation.

Remedies to Some of These Challenges

Translation involves the use of language in a society. It strengthens the use of language and extends it to meet up with the level of development in other languages of other societies thereby experiencing tremendous growth and development.

Challenges expose needs in a particular setting; therefore, to promote translation through language use in a society, these suggestions should be implemented:

- Translation should receive reinforcement in higher institutions. For example, incoming students to language units or departments in tertiary institutions should be enlightened on the importance of translation (into the mother tongue) during departmental orientations. They should be informed about the prospects of translation as a course/career. For example, a translator is self-employed, and

the business of translating continues to exist as far as societies and languages exist.

- Awareness of the prospects of translation can create interests in young linguists and boost the interest of casual translators converting them to full and dedicated translators. This can in turn boost translation to indigenous languages especially Igbo and the other major Nigerian languages.
- There should be proper and planned education and training of the translators. Training should be included as an additional course for those educated as translators. Their training should be in the form of industrial attachment (i.e. on-the-job training), where translation should be related to language use in society.
- Individuals and institutions alone cannot meet up with the demands of translation. The government is expected to partner individuals and institutions so as to educate and train translators, finance their training by giving allowances to the trainees and also involving them in the translation.
- Society for Promotion of Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC) should establish institutions and monitor them for translators' training where emphasis should be laid on implementing the recommendations they make for the Igbo language. This will ensure that whosoever will translate into the Igbo language should be a qualified, trained and certified translator.
- Society for Promotion of Igbo Language and Culture should also liaise among its members and come up with guidelines that will guide translations and translators (ethics of translation) and then meet the government for approval. This will help to curb the harassment which translators experience from the members, of the public who will want to influence the tone of the translation of some messages. It will also protect the job of translation.
- There should be public awareness of translation and the need for translators. This can be done by creating audio and audiovisual programmes based on translating from official languages into the Igbo language (or other Nigerian languages). There is one acknowledged called "Nwa D.C" which Nwadike Okereke and Nnamdi Olebara are some of the actors but this is peculiar to Imo State. Let the idea spread. This will help tackle the challenge of ignorance of the existence of the purpose and need for translators.

Conclusion

Translation is a global phenomenon because it affects the use of language and every society in the world has at least two functioning languages (official and native) for communication within and without its community. There is the need for translation from the official language to the native languages, for proper understanding. Challenges of translating from English (as an official language of Nigerian societies), into the Igbo language as an indigenous language or mother tongue (in the same society) should give concern to every literate native speaker of the Igbo language because of their effect on the language, the Igbo society and the nation in general.

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Translating from any official language into any mother tongue in Nigeria, especially Igbo language, should be done in such a way that the purpose will be achieved (i.e. understanding which enhances cooperation towards unity). Any distortion of any message translated into the Igbo language is hazardous; therefore, all challenges should be arrested effectively so as to avoid any hazard.

Translation is enormously demanding but with the knowledge and understanding of the subject, language(s) method and stylistics of translation, the art of translation will be successful.

Individuals, translators, groups like (SPILC) and the government should unite to ensure that challenges of translation will be put to a stop while effective translation continues as communication progresses.

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