Remodelling Institutional Translation

An African Perspective

Emmanuel Kobena Kuto

Doctoral student in Translation Studies, Université Sorbonne Paris Cité,
Université Paris Diderot, Paris, France, kobikuto@yahoo.com

Abstract: The combination of ethnolinguistic fragmentation, the use of European languages as official languages and low literacy rates make institutional translation indispensable in Africa. Africa literally lives by translation. However, recent studies have highlighted the paradox of (institutional) translation in Africa: no continent needs institutional translation more than Africa and yet no continent translates less than Africa. This paper argues that deficit is not the only problem with institutional translation in Africa. In addition to the inadequacy of institutional translation, its practice model is both Eurocentric and institution-centred, and therefore not suited to the specificities of Africa. A number of principles are advanced that altogether constitute an alternative practice model of institutional translation for Africa.

Keywords: institutional translation, community translation, practice model, institution-centred, ethnolinguistic fragmentation, cross-fertilisation.

Résumé: Avec son paysage ethnolinguistique fragmenté, ses langues officielles européennes et ses taux d'analphabétisme très élevés, l'Afrique vit au rythme de la traduction (institutionnelle). Aucun continent n'a autant besoin de la traduction que le continent africain. Cependant, le constat est formel : aucun continent ne traduit aussi peu que l'Afrique. Au-delà du déficit de traduction constaté en Afrique, cet article remet en cause le modèle de traduction institutionnelle pratiqué en Afrique ; calqué sur le modèle européen, il est eurocentrique et pro-institutionnel et donc peu adapté aux particularités de l'Afrique. L'ensemble de principes formulé par l'auteur constitue une proposition de modèle de traduction institutionnelle alternatif pour l'Afrique.

Mots-clés : traduction institutionnelle, traduction en milieu social, modèle de pratique pro-institutionnel, modèle de pratique pro-personnes, fragmentation ethnolinguistique, métissage.

1 Introduction

Owing to the ethnolinguistic fragmentation of the continent, the modern African nation state could not have existed without the use of metropolitan European languages as official languages. As Agbedor argues:

> *The choice of these colonial languages was to avoid any ethnic clashes that might result from the selection of any one of the competing languages.*

> *European languages were also regarded as unifying languages that would unite the diverse ethnic groups.* (Agbedor 2011, 144).

However, official languages quickly became the remedy that killed the patient. While they helped forge nation states out of disparate ethnic groups, they also resulted in community linguistic asymmetry (CLA), a language situation in which two different (and unrelated) languages are used for community transaction and community actuation. According to Puchala, transactions are 'contacts or dealings' (Puchala, 1970, 766). Transaction also includes the (daily) business and official dealings between citizens and their government, that is, between the governed and the governor. Thus, a citizen who contacts a government agency for the purpose of acquiring or renewing a passport, or any such document for that matter, could be said to be transacting. On the other hand, the community language of actuation is what Kielar calls 'the common language of a community, i.e. its polylect in the sense of a shared part or sum of the idiolects used by a given group of people' (Kielar, 2011, 78). English, French, Portuguese and Spanish are the languages of transaction or official languages in most Africa countries. They are essentially the preserve of the minority elites. The most optimistic studies estimate that less than a quarter of all Africans speak the official languages (Ouane and Glanz, 2012). At the same time, access to the good things of life – employment, health care, justice and education – is tied to the ability to speak the official languages, leading to exclusion and non-participation (Pool, 1991a, 1991b). According to Lodhi, this:

> *deprives the majority of Africans of access to knowledge, and hinders them from participating in national politics and the decision-making process. It slows down national integration and development of a nation-state, with a national culture, creates insecurity and feeling of inferiority among those who have to operate in the foreign language of the ruling elite.* (Lodhi, 1993, 82)

Official languages engender non-participatory democracy and unaccountable governance, for which Africa holds the unenviable record. Democracy and good governance thrive when politically educated citizens hold politicians accountable. Most Africans are denied political participation because its processes and outcomes unfold in the official languages. Ndlovu (2008, 146) asserts that:

> *the majority of African people have no meaningful input to these processes because of the language barrier. At the present moment, parliamentary democracy is underpinned by injustices that perpetuate the marginalization of speakers of languages other than those selected for specific official and/or national functions.*

The non-participation of citizens in the political process offers a blank check to politicians who are thus dispensed from any obligation of accountability. No wonder governance in Africa has been so problematic. Most importantly, Africans are handicapped by their inability to access, create and disseminate (indigenous) knowledge in their own languages. According to a 2012 UNESCO report compiled by Ouane and Glanz,

Published in : Ndongo-Keller, Justine ; Ntakirutimana, Évariste ; Thierno Cisse, Mame ; Van Campenhoudt, Marc (dir.), *La traduction et l'interprétation en Afrique subsaharienne : les nouveaux défis d'un espace multilingue. Translation and Interpretation in Sub-Saharan Africa: New Challenges in a Multilingual Space*, Editions des archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813003898, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813003898

Africa remains very much marginalised due to its near-total exclusion from the global knowledge society. Africans create and produce next to nothing in terms of knowledge. The report states that Africans consume, 'sometimes uncritically, information and knowledge produced elsewhere through languages unknown to the majority of its population' (Ouane and Glanz, 2012, 5). The report further highlights the extreme weakness of the publishing industry in the continent whereby a staggering 95% of all books published in Africa are textbooks and not the fiction and poetry required to fire the imagination and creativity of Africans. Also, while knowledge generated in Africa has cross-fertilised internationally, there has been very little cross-fertilisation within Africa itself of the different types of knowledge produced in the continent. According to Ndlovu (2008, 143):

> *Every ethnolinguistic polity is unique and has a different history from any other. How they interacted with the environment makes each African community a unique people with a unique language, a unique wisdom, a unique ideas and unique knowledge systems, which have the capacity to transform the socio-economic fortunes of the world for the better.*

However, this also means that African societies are compartmentalised. None of these unique societies in isolation can either withstand the gravitational pull of cultural globalisation or generate the knowledge pool required to navigate the Knowledge Society. In order to do this, indigenous African knowledges would need to fuse and blend into a hybrid yet consolidated pool; which would require in turn a more advanced form of cross-fertilisation.

A host of voices have advocated the promotion of indigenous African languages so that they may achieve at least the same functional status as the official languages. This would not only enable Africans to access services and opportunities more readily but also to participate in governance (Ajulo, 1985, Prah, 1998, Agbedor, 2011). However, no tangible progress has been made in this direction. In fact, with the advent of globalisation and the Internet, indigenous African languages have continued to lose ground to the official languages, particularly English. In any case, officialisation of African languages is a double-edged sword. There is no doubt that certain advantages accrue to native speakers of official/titular languages, and Africans using their own languages will inure tremendously to their benefit (Pool, 1991). However, if every ethnolinguistic group transacts and actuates in its language, or only transacts in its language and the official metropolitan European language, Africa will end up with hundreds, if not thousands, of hermetic sociocultural units, each of which constitutes a separate, hemmed-in and compartmentalised Africa. Each will probably have its peculiar and highly differentiated codes in terms of culture, law, economic system and most importantly, literature. Each of these Africas will exist more or less in isolation in relation to the other Africas. While members of a particular ethnolinguistic group, and all ethnolinguistic groups will be able to participate in transaction, groups that are geographically far apart (and therefore have no shared languages other than the official language) will continue to have little or no interaction, and therefore no cross-fertilisation other than that which can be accomplished using official metropolitan European languages. Since the majority of Africans do not speak the official lan-

Published in : Ndongo-Keller, Justine ; Ntakirutimana, Évariste ; Thierno Cisse, Mame ; Van Campenhoudt, Marc (dir.), *La traduction et l'interprétation en Afrique subsaharienne : les nouveaux défis d'un espace multilingue. Translation and Interpretation in Sub-Saharan Africa: New Challenges in a Multilingual Space*, Editions des archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813003898, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813003898

guages, this in effect will constitute a return to a tribal Africa, which, according to McLuhan, is characteristic of 'the barbarian or tribal man' who 'then as now, was hampered by cultural pluralism, uniqueness and discontinuity' (McLuhan 1964, 100). In other words, Africa will be back to square one, the original fragmented situation in response to which the colonial adventurers imposed their languages on Africans in the first place.

In sum, Africa has a triple (official) language challenge: exclusion and marginalisation of the majority, political non-participation, and an inability to generate and cross-fertilise knowledges in Africa. These translate into an explosive cocktail of adversities that keeps Africa permanently on its knees. Official languages cause suffering in Africa. Recent voices have advocated translation as an indispensable complement, if not a substitute, to both the exclusive use of official languages and the promotion of African languages. Ndlovu affirms that 'dialogue among African people is essential: the instrument of translation must be used to advance communication among all people, including the disabled'(Ndlovu, 2008, 142). In a poll conducted by Kelly *et al* (2012), 91.96% of respondents said greater access to translated information would help people in Africa contribute to the political process, while 95.18% of respondents said greater access to translated information would improve the overall quality of life in African countries. Gerbault (2010), Yoda (2011) and Kelly (2012) have highlighted the paradoxical status of translation in Africa: no continent has as much need for translation as Africa and yet no continent translates less than Africa. Translation in general and institutional translation in particular continue to be peripheral activities in Africa in terms of both volume and directionality.

In this paper, I argue that a gaping deficit is not the only lacuna within institutional translation in Africa. Beyond the deficit, the current practice model of institutional translation in Africa is a calque of the Eurocentric and institution-centred institutional practice model of the EU and is ill-adapted to African specificities. Institutional translation plays significantly different roles in Africa and the EU. In the EU it is a happiness-increasing luxury, while in Africa it is a suffering-reducing necessity. The former works for the institutions (Koskinen, 2008, 22) while the latter works for citizens. Africa needs a people-centred model of institutional translation to meet the peculiar needs of Africa. Kuto (2018, 70) redefines institutional translation as:

> *Translation done by, or on behalf of national and/or supranational institutions, at little or no cost to citizens, for the benefit of persons and communities, with the view to intervene positively to reduce human suffering.*

However, institutional translation as it is understood and practised currently in Africa is not calibrated to play this role, since it prioritises the delivery of institutional messages (if not institutional propaganda) to citizens with a view to securing the strategic political interests of institutions at the fastest pace and, most importantly, at the lowest cost. The need to cut costs means that institutions translate exclusively from and into the official languages with virtually no translation from and into indigenous African languages. As for translation between African languages, Yoda (2011, 124) re-

Published in : Ndongo-Keller, Justine ; Ntakirutimana, Évariste ; Thierno Cisse, Mame ; Van Campenhoudt, Marc (dir.), *La traduction et l'interprétation en Afrique subsaharienne : les nouveaux défis d'un espace multilingue. Translation and Interpretation in Sub-Saharan Africa: New Challenges in a Multilingual Space*, Editions des archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813003898, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813003898

ports that it is unheard of. This model of institutional translation has been disastrous for African governance. The following interventions could help remodel institutional translation practice in Africa. I propose a number of ways in which this might be achieved.

2 Extending the scope and directionality of institutional translation

Hitherto, the model of institutional translation in Africa has been focused on what Koskinen (2014, 5) calls the governing function of institutional translation. According to her, the core function of institutions is to govern by determining and regulating membership and ownership, legitimizing power, and controlling and socializing the young. Institutions that operate in multilingual settings therefore employ translation in the act of governance, which is to say that these institutions govern by translation. Governing by translation means translation is practiced in a controlled and regulated environment run and overseen and/or authorised by officials. Translations produced in this context are meant to orchestrate life and work in tandem with the preferences of the governing institution. According to Koskinen:

> *This approach to governing, with its focus on hierarchical governance and public institutions allows little room for dialogic and participative action between 'the governed and the governors'. In terms of government by translation, this indicates a focus on the translation activities of the institutions themselves, and also a focus on unidirectional communication from the governing institution to its subordinates.* (Koskinen 2014, 482).

Indeed, institutional translation in Africa uses translation as a means of speaking to an audience; except that the audience in this case is almost exclusively the elite and not the governed masses. This makes institutional translation in Africa a unidirectional process that precludes feedback from, and participation by the governed. African grassroots populations are not the 'target' of institutional translation because translation is done from and into English, French and Portuguese. Institutional translation in Africa caters exclusively to regional integration, professional intercultures and/or elites. An ECOWAS translator I interviewed reported that he almost exclusively translates letters, reports, concept notes, policy documents, budgets, etc. Clearly, these are not the everyday concerns of ordinary Africans. The mundane and daily existential preoccupations of ordinary citizens, how citizens actually experience regional integration, fall outside the core concerns of institutional translation. As Koskinen puts it, this is symptomatic of governance by translation which projects governance 'as a hierarchical activity of power and control'(2014, 6). Clearly, the scope of institutional translation in Africa has to expand.

Expanding the scope of institutional translation also means bringing within its ambit 'forms of translation that, while they too take place in the same or similar institutional contexts and may be regulated and controlled, to a lesser or greater degree of institutionalization, are employed for different purposes.' (Koskinen 2014, 481–482) These include all translations produced outside its immediate and direct jurisdiction,

Published in : Ndongo-Keller, Justine ; Ntakirutimana, Évariste ; Thierno Cisse, Mame ; Van Campenhoudt, Marc (dir.), *La traduction et l'interprétation en Afrique subsaharienne : les nouveaux défis d'un espace multilingue. Translation and Interpretation in Sub-Saharan Africa: New Challenges in a Multilingual Space*, Editions des archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813003898, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813003898

that is, translations produced by institutions and/or translators not directly employed by, or accountable to, integrative bodies, which inure directly, at little or no cost to citizens, and which are intended to enhance the wellbeing of persons and communities, not to serve parochial, partisan or sectarian interests.

Regarding directionality, Pokorn (2000) reports that the term has traditionally been used to indicate whether translators translate from or into their native languages. He adds, however, that the notion of directionality in contemporary Translation Studies has come to signify translation into a foreign language, variously called *theme* (Ladmiral, 1979), service translation (Newmark, 1988), inverse translation (Beeby, 1998), reverse translation/translation into second language (Campbell, 1998) and translation into the non-primary language (Grossman, 2000). Here, directionality preserves both usages for two reasons. First, I am indeed talking about the language pairs of institutional translation. Secondly, in the specific case of institutional translation for regional integration in Africa, a peculiar situation pertains whereby indigenous African languages are in fact the foreign languages. English, French, Portuguese and Spanish are the primary translation languages of institutions, and texts are rarely, if ever, translated into indigenous African languages. This, in effect means that the latter are de facto foreign languages. I therefore use the notion of directionality in the two senses identified by Pokorn.

In general, translation directionality is determined by factors including, but not limited to, ideology, politics, religion, education, information and culture. While every translator or translating institution would wish their translation to be read by as many people as possible, the translating entity has no contractual obligation to its readers. A translator is ordinarily not bound to translate the Bible or the works of Karl Max from or into any particular language; the choice to do so is essentially predicated on self-interest. On the other hand, translators in institutions that govern by translation have no such leeway in terms of directionality. Institutional translation has directionalities that are predetermined by its mandate, especially in liberal democracies, where institutions are, or are supposed to be, accountable to their constituents, in whom sovereign authority is vested. In other words, institutions that govern by translation do not, in principle, have a choice in the matter of translation directionality. In multilingual environments such as Africa, this means universal directionality, that is, translation from and into all languages of the jurisdiction.

I have to concede, however, drawing on Pym (1995a, 2006), that the high cost of universal directionality in institutional translation makes it an extravagant ideal at best and a ruinous venture at worse, especially in linguistically fragmented Africa, which embraces more than 2000 languages. However, the alternative approach of non-translation from and into indigenous languages is even more objectionable as it flouts all the creeds of liberal democracy. Now, whether the reluctance to include African languages in the directionality of institutional translation is informed by a genuine appreciation of the cost involved, or by the desire to consolidate elite power by excluding African peoples from the processes and outcomes of regional integration is a matter open to debate.

Published in : Ndongo-Keller, Justine ; Ntakirutimana, Évariste ; Thierno Cisse, Mame ; Van Campenhoudt, Marc (dir.), *La traduction et l'interprétation en Afrique subsaharienne : les nouveaux défis d'un espace multilingue. Translation and Interpretation in Sub-Saharan Africa: New Challenges in a Multilingual Space*, Editions des archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813003898, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813003898

Regardless of these considerations, national and supranational institutions in Africa could adopt the middle ground approach taken by the EU; an approach that has proven to be very efficient and relatively cost-effective. The EU and its institutions translate from and into 23 languages out of a total of 50 or so, prioritizing official and/or titular languages and using English, French and German as 'procedural pivot languages'. However this option is not entirely replicable in Africa due to the spatial limitation of African languages where 'none of them is spoken, as a *lingua franca,* throughout the entire length and breadth of any given country' (Ajulo, 1985, 11). It might be more feasible to adapt Ajulo's suggestion in respect of lingua francae to the issue of the directionality of institutional translation in Africa:

> *[. . .] the geographical area covered by ECOWAS should be delineated into cultural zones in order to determine what may be deemed the linguae francae of the sub-region. Such linguae francae which have already been reduced to writing, taught in schools and are being used by the local press could be considered for selection as ECOWAS official language.*

The idea of subzoning the African continent along the lines of regional or subregional lingua francae could also be applicable to the issue of directionality in institutional translation. The current linguistic configuration favours such an approach in North and East Africa where Arabic and Kiswahili dominate respectively. On the other hand, a subregional approach could be prioritised in West, Central, and to a lesser extent, Southern Africa where fragmentation is a lot more pronounced. Thus in West Africa institutions could translate into Wolof for the Senegambia subregion, Mande-Bambara-Manlike could be used for the Mali, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso subregion, Ewe roughly for Benin, Togo and Ghana, Yoruba for Nigeria, Benin and Togo, while Hausa stretches from Nigeria, Niger, Ghana, through Cameroun all the way to Chad. Admittedly, this arrangement does not cater to all African populations in terms of translation directionality, as large swaths of African populations remain outside these broad catchment areas. Obviously, this approach entails some more or less serious difficulties, especially at the initial stages. However, it is broadly feasible given the necessary political will. In any case, institutional non-translation from and into African languages has been disastrous for African integration.

3 Downsourcing institutional translation

I use the term *downsourcing* in the sense of 'outsourcing', while recognising the following important distinction: while outsourcing assigns tasks to external entities, downsourcing assigns tasks to units located at lower levels of the *same* entity. In the case of regional integration, the supranational institutions represent the entity while national and subnational institutions constitute lower-level units. Thus, downsourcing institutional translation would involve the delegation of some aspects of institutional translation to national and subnational governmental and non-governmental institutions. Because of their distance from the periphery, supranational institutions probably do not have a clear appreciation of the sociolinguistic and demographic dynamics of the periphery and therefore may not be well-placed to roll out African language directionality. On the other hand, national and subnational institutions are

Published in : Ndongo-Keller, Justine ; Ntakirutimana, Évariste ; Thierno Cisse, Mame ; Van Campenhoudt, Marc (dir.), *La traduction et l'interprétation en Afrique subsaharienne : les nouveaux défis d'un espace multilingue. Translation and Interpretation in Sub-Saharan Africa: New Challenges in a Multilingual Space*, Editions des archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813003898, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813003898

well placed to roll out institutional translation in African languages. In addition to having a better understanding of the sociolinguistic and demographic dynamics of the periphery, many, if not most, national and subnational institutions already have policies and structures in place that could be adapted to institutional translation directionality in African languages.

Thus, in addition to being used for intercommunity communication, Ghana's six lingua francae are used extensively in radio and television broadcasting. Together these languages constitute a broad canopy of communication and translation directionality in Ghana. There is also the Bureau of Ghanaian Languages that actively promotes publications and translation in Ghanaian languages in collaboration with government ministries, departments and agencies and universities. If the AU and/or ECOWAS devolved their institutional translation to the national government of Ghana through these policies and structures, the AU and ECOWAS would have gained six African language directionalities in Ghana alone, which would bring 27 million Ghanaians into the participatory fold of African regional integration. Replicating the arrangement across Africa would create a continent-wide public sphere that fosters conceptual and referential homogeneity and consistency. If all member States of the African Union translated the same documents and literature into their national languages, the African public sphere would be fragmented linguistically but uniform and homogeneous epistemologically, culturally, politically, and socially. Most importantly, translation between African languages would also engender the cross-fertilisation of memes that leads to the formation of common identities. It is not hard to appreciate the enormous windfall that would accrue to African regional integration in terms of hybridisation.

4 Oralisation of institutional translation

Most African languages exist in the spoken form only; or exist in the written form exclusively for purposes of proselytization. It is not known exactly how many African languages are unwritten due to the lack of comprehensive statistics. However, a study commissioned by UNESCO (Gadelli, 2004) found that only 176 African languages out of over 2000 are used in educational systems in Africa. This probably explains why literacy rates in indigenous African languages are generally very low across the continent; a situation which could hamper attempts to expand the directionality of institutional translation. The solution to this problem, it appears to me, is to prioritise oral translation in institutional translation. Oral translation is a written translation delivered orally to an audience. Through its focus on the spoken word as opposed to the written text, oral translation is particularly useful as a medium for communicating with persons and communities with reduced literacy. Oralisation of institutional translation in Africa would cater to three segments of the population: those who are literate in the official language only, those who are marginally literate in the foreign official language and/or the native African language, and, most importantly, those who are illiterate in both the foreign official language and their native African language. In fact, oral translation is particularly suited to both low-literacy communities and high-literacy communities.

Published in : Ndongo-Keller, Justine ; Ntakirutimana, Évariste ; Thierno Cisse, Mame ; Van Campenhoudt, Marc (dir.), *La traduction et l'interprétation en Afrique subsaharienne : les nouveaux défis d'un espace multilingue. Translation and Interpretation in Sub-Saharan Africa: New Challenges in a Multilingual Space*, Editions des archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813003898, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813003898

Unlike written translation, the reception of which requires not only literacy but also a minimum mass of reading comprehension skills, oral translation makes virtually no demands on the receiver, other than that he or she should not be deaf. A second advantage of oral translation is that it allows for multitasking, which also makes it time-efficient. People do not read and drive at the same time but people do listen and drive at the same time. Indeed, there are very few day-to-day activities which cannot be carried out while at the same time listening to the radio or, for instance, a spoken translation. A final advantage of oral translation is its relative ease of roll out. Rolling out oral translation requires no particular infrastructure other than the devices which are used in everyday communication – a radio set, a television set and a smart phone. Thanks to the ICT revolution, these items have become staples of modern life, not only in urban areas but also in remote rural regions. Oral translation works not only for literacy-challenged persons and communities, but also for the highly literate city dweller who commutes in slow-moving traffic and overflowing trains sometimes for hours at a time. Oral translation allows institutional translation to reach a maximum number of people instantly and at minimum cost, thereby fulfilling its mandate. In a continent where less than a quarter of the population are estimated to be fluent in the official languages, oral translation is, as it were, worth its weight in gold.

5 De-territorialisation of institutional translation for regional integration

Regional blocs are made up of nation states, which are themselves made up of different ethnolinguistic communities. In terms of group differentiation, the traditional criterion has been nationality. All actors of regional integration are first of all citizens of member countries. They act on behalf, and in the interest of, their countries and owe primary allegiance to these countries. This arrangement is predicated on the construct of the nation state, which underpins functional intergovernmentalism. It also reflects the largely idealistic and marginal precept of one nation one language, whereby political boundaries are considered coterminous with linguistic boundaries. Identifying persons as citizens of a particular state is convenient for political and legal purposes since each state or nation is an easily identifiable legal and political entity.

Group differentiation by citizenship of a nation state for the purpose of institutional translation is ill-suited to Africa for several reasons. First of all, unlike in Europe, there are huge disparities between political borders and linguistic boundaries in Africa. The result is a situation whereby some Africa languages straddle the borders of different countries which have different official languages. Thus, Ewe is spoken in Ghana where the official language is English and in Togo where the official language is French. Indeed, similar cases of cross-border linguistic fractures abound in Africa.

However, the nation-state identifier runs into difficulties with institutional translation, especially in relation to its community translation dimension. This is because community translation primarily addresses speakers of specific languages. Being a (native) speaker of a language is primarily a matter of linguistic identity and not national identity since a nation-state may include several or even hundreds of different linguistic identities. On the other hand, speakers of the same language are

Published in : Ndongo-Keller, Justine ; Ntakirutimana, Évariste ; Thierno Cisse, Mame ; Van Campenhoudt, Marc (dir.), *La traduction et l'interprétation en Afrique subsaharienne : les nouveaux défis d'un espace multilingue. Translation and Interpretation in Sub-Saharan Africa: New Challenges in a Multilingual Space*, Editions des archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813003898, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813003898

not always of the same nationality. Speakers are not necessarily citizens and citizens are not always speakers. This means that linguistic identity precedes and supersedes national identity. The major difficulty with the citizen approach to group differentiation is that it prioritises translation into the official languages thereby penalising non-speakers of official languages. Thus, by translating into only English, French and Portuguese, which are the official languages of its member states, ECOWAS excludes from its processes and outcomes the majority of its citizens who do not speak these official languages. As I shall show presently, non-translation into indigenous African languages causes a lot of suffering in Africa. Group differentiation by citizenship of a nation state for institutional translation is more suitable for jurisdictions such as the EU where everyone speaks the official language of the state.

A community translation practice that addresses people as speakers of languages instead of citizens of states, and which operates across nation-state borders, has some advantages for area-specific interventions. A good example is the Ebola pandemic that reappeared in West Africa in 2014-15. Guinea and Liberia, which were two of the affected countries, share a number of cross-border languages including Malinke, Toma, Kpelle and Bandi among others. In terms of community translation, it makes more economic sense to write and/or translate Ebola-related material such as public education leaflets into a local cross-border language spoken both in Guinea (where French is the official language) and in Liberia (where English is the official language) than to write and/or translate the same material separately into English for Liberia and French for Guinea.

Admittedly, one may make the counterfactual argument that the cost of writing and/or translating Ebola prevention campaign material into several local languages may outweigh that of translating it into English and French. Such calculations depend on definitions of cost and benefit, which may vary. But it seems clear that while the cost of translating into African cross-border lingua francae may be higher in monetary terms, the benefit in terms of reaching all speakers of that particular language with life-or death information is simply invaluable. On the other hand, while translating into English and French may be beneficial in terms of cost, it may well turn out to be a lot more expensive in terms of the number of people who do not receive vital information because they do not speak English and/or French. This is a crucial point in a continent where less than a third of the population are fluent in any of the official European languages. In the survey by Kelly *et al.* (2012), *63.07% of translators of African languages said that greater access to translated information could have prevented the death of someone in their family or circle of friends.* Local languages easily trump official European languages when it comes to oral translation, which I have identified as the preferable option in Africa.

However, the merits of language-speaker group differentiation go beyond issues of cost and communication. Through its cross-border outlook, the language-speaker approach to institutional translation fosters additional platforms of functional affinities between regional, state and non-state actors that can only further integration. The creation of the policy, legal and infrastructural frameworks required for such cross-border translations could be the occasion for acquiring useful competences that can

Published in : Ndongo-Keller, Justine ; Ntakirutimana, Évariste ; Thierno Cisse, Mame ; Van Campenhoudt, Marc (dir.), *La traduction et l'interprétation en Afrique subsaharienne : les nouveaux défis d'un espace multilingue. Translation and Interpretation in Sub-Saharan Africa: New Challenges in a Multilingual Space*, Editions des archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813003898, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813003898

serve in the joint performance of other tasks. From the perspective of translation studies, the language-speaker approach to group differentiation provides very fertile ground for new experiments. The task and challenges of creating a hybrid African language text from two different European political, legal and linguistic cultures (English and French) could open the door to ground-breaking insights.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the language-speaker approach to institutional translation can deepen regional integration at the grassroots level. First, it promotes the emergence of a cross-border collective identity that transcends the artificial identities established during the creation of modern African states. High indices of intercommunity linguistic bonding engender positive affect, which in turn minimises resistance to institutional translation. Minimal resistance allows for the formation of common conceptual and referential frameworks as well as affective codes. All these help to weave the interlocking cross-border fibre of affinities required to forge the hybrid identity that is indispensable for effective regional integration.

6 Integrating community translation into institutional translation.

According to Karl Popper (1945, 361), promoting the welfare of citizens ought to be the primary and ultimate objective of governments. I have argued that institutional translation can provide the means for attaining this objective. Thus, I have advocated a shift away from the institution-centred paradigm of institutional translation that serves almost exclusively the political and communicational needs of the governing institutions. Instead, I have advocated a shift, or rather a return, to the people-centred paradigm of institutional translation, a theory and practice of institutional translation that not only gives citizens a voice but also alleviates their suffering. However, all this remains an abstract ideal if it is not concretised in the daily lives of citizens. Now institutional translation is being rolled out in the communities through community translation, also called public service translation, ad hoc translation and liaison interpreting. Wadensjo (2001, 33), who also uses the term *social interpreting*, defines it as 'the type of translation that takes place in the public sphere to facilitate communication between officials and lay people'. Anthony Pym (2011, 77–78) suggests *community translation* as a synonym of *collaborative translation* and defines it as 'group translating where the work is largely voluntary (i.e. unpaid in financial terms)'. However, he also specifies (*op. cit.,* 79) 'that the term can also (in the United Kingdom and Australia, at least) refer to the use of written translation in the areas of "community interpreting", which has so far been quite a different sphere.' In my opinion, Pöchhacker's *assertion (1999, 126) that* the term refers to "interpreting in institutional settings of a given society in which public service providers and individual clients do not speak the same language" best describes community translation in Africa. In Africa, where there are more than 2000 different languages, and where most people neither speak nor write the official language, community translation is a lifelong existential need. Community translation represents a means of intervening upstream to forestall societal aberrations that may eventually mature into full-blown human tragedies or humanitarian catastrophes. If community translation promotes the wellbeing of citizens, then governments have a responsibility to provide such a

Published in : Ndongo-Keller, Justine ; Ntakirutimana, Évariste ; Thierno Cisse, Mame ; Van Campenhoudt, Marc (dir.), *La traduction et l'interprétation en Afrique subsaharienne : les nouveaux défis d'un espace multilingue. Translation and Interpretation in Sub-Saharan Africa: New Challenges in a Multilingual Space*, Editions des archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813003898, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813003898

service, if we concur that governments have the obligation to promote the wellbeing of their citizens (Meylaerts, 2011, 166).

I will now give a practical example of how institutional translation can reduce suffering in Africa. African countries are sadly notorious for tragic road accidents. Countless lives are lost every single day across the continent. According to the World Health Organisation Road Safety in the African Region report (2015, 1):

> *The African region has the highest estimated road traffic fatality rate of 26.6 per 100 000 population, despite having the lowest level of motorization in the world. [...] Half of all road traffic deaths in the region occur among vulnerable road users (pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists). The African region has the highest proportion of deaths among pedestrians at 39%. [...] Road traffic fatality data are vastly underreported in the region, with estimated figures almost 4 times that of the official reported figures, while the quality of data on non-fatal injuries is also of concern.*

What such reports do not highlight is the connection between road accidents and low literacy rates in Africa. It is true, as the reports state, that "enforcement of key road safety laws is weak, thus limiting the ability of legislation to achieve its full potential". However, it is also true that weak enforcement is partly due to the fact that road safety literature is generally published in English, French, Portuguese and Spanish. In Ghana, for example, the Highway Code published by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA) is in English. Driving lessons are given in English, while tests, examinations and road safety campaigns are all conducted in English. Drivers have to pass mandatory written and oral examinations with a score of at least 70% in order to obtain driving licences (Bazire and Tijus, 2009; Akple and Biscoff, 2012). Meanwhile, only about 40% of commercial drivers are literate (Akple and Biscoff, 2012.). Unable to read the Highway code, and terrified by the test and examinations, prospective drivers resort to alternative means to obtain driving licences. This situation explains not only the high level of fatalities but also the fact that most of these accidents involve commercial drivers. According to Wireko & Skouby (2016, 7):

> *Through a network known as the 'Goro boys' (errand boys) at the authority's premises, one can purchase' a driver's' license or be issued with a road-worthy certificates for defective vehicles in a record short time without undergoing through any mandatory checks and review, while those who go through the normal process and procedures take several months to obtain one.*

While it is true that corruption also contributes to this situation, the large number of illiterate and semi-literate applicants constitutes a willing and ready market for such corruption. In any case, the consequences are ghastly. Wireko & Skouby (2016, 7) report that:

> *In Ghana where 90% of transportation is by road (IBM, 2013), the case is worse. In 2012, 3,149 serious injuries and 250 deaths were recorded in*

Published in : Ndongo-Keller, Justine ; Ntakirutimana, Évariste ; Thierno Cisse, Mame ; Van Campenhoudt, Marc (dir.), *La traduction et l'interprétation en Afrique subsaharienne : les nouveaux défis d'un espace multilingue. Translation and Interpretation in Sub-Saharan Africa: New Challenges in a Multilingual Space*, Editions des archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813003898, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813003898

> *Accra alone and in 2013,there were 10,242 accidents involving 16,242 vehicles with 1,539 deaths and 1,944 pedestrians knock downs in the country. These accidents were mostly caused by human errors due to lapses and corruption in the acquisition of driver license and road worthy certificates of vehicles (Ghana News Agency, Oct 14, 2014).*

Even by African standards, this is a lot of suffering. In my opinion, both the corrupt practices and the tragic accidents that ensue can be minimized if prospective drivers can access the Highway Code in a language and form they understand completely. Most importantly, suffering will be reduced. As more road users gain a better understanding of the Highway Code, accident fatalities will be reduced, and so will the suffering.

7 Conclusion

As institutional translation extends community translation to other problematic areas (justice delivery, healthcare…), the quality of life will improve significantly. Less suffering will eventually translate to happiness, and happiness will hopefully bring peace, stability and prosperity to Africans. Thanks to this model of institutional translation, one can hope that the savage militias that ravage many African countries, and the hordes of vibrant African youths that either perish in the Sahara or drown in the Mediterranean will one day be a distant nightmare. Most critically, a people-centred institutional translation practice model as I have laid out will make translation available to all Africans in their language of maximum competence, if not in their mother tongues. This will improve the quality of life in Africa significantly.

Bibliography

Agbedor, Paul. (2009). 'The Language Factor in West Africa's Integration', in *Nations-States and the Challenges of Regional Integration in West Africa,* (Eds.) Kwame N. Ninsin, Paris: Karthala.

Ajulo, Sunday. Babalola. (1985). 'Law, Language and International Organisation in Africa: The Case of Ecowas', *Journal of African Law*, vol. 29, No. 1 (Spring, 1985), p. 1–24.

Akple, Maxwell Selase and Biscoff, Robert. (2012). 'Assessment of drivers understanding of road signs in Ghana: A case study along Ho – Afloa Togo route'. *International Journal of Business, Management and Social Sciences* vol. 3, No. 1, 2012, p. 19–25

Bazire, Mary and Tijus, Charles. (2009). 'Understanding Road Signs'. *Safety Science*, vol. 47, No. 9, p. 1232–1240.

Beeby, Allison. (1998). 'Direction of Translation (Directionality)'. In Mona Baker (éd.). *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies.* London/New York: Routledge, p. 63–67.

Campbell, Stuart. (1998). *Translation into the Second Language.* London and New York: Longman.

Ghana Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority. *The Highway Code.* Available at http://www.dvla.gov.gh/assets/quiz/Highway-Code-CDROM/highway-code/chapter-12.html, Retrieved on 10/08/2017

Fasold, Ralph. (1984). *The Sociolinguisics of Society*, Basil Blackwell.

Gadelii, Karl Erland. (2004). *Annotated Statistics on Linguistic Policies and Practices in Africa,* www.african.gu.se/downloads/gadeliireport.pdf, accessed on 24 April 2017.

Gerbault, Jeannine. (2010). « Localisation, traduction et diversités sociolinguistiques en Afrique subsaharienne : stratégies et perspectives. » *Meta* 55(4), p. 817–844.

Published in : Ndongo-Keller, Justine ; Ntakirutimana, Évariste ; Thierno Cisse, Mame ; Van Campenhoudt, Marc (dir.), *La traduction et l'interprétation en Afrique subsaharienne : les nouveaux défis d'un espace multilingue. Translation and Interpretation in Sub-Saharan Africa: New Challenges in a Multilingual Space*, Editions des archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813003898, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813003898

Grosman, Meta. (2000). 'Non-mother tongue translation–An Open Challenge' in Grossman, M. *et al.* [eds.] *Translation into non-mother tongues in Professional Practice and Training,* 21–33. Tübingen: Stauffenburg.

Kelman, Herbert. C. (1971). 'Language as an Aid and Barrier to Involvement in the National System'. In Joan Rubin and Björn H. Jernudd (éds.), *Can Language Be Planned?* Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, p. 21–51.

Koskinen, Kaisa. (2014). 'Institutional Translation: the art of governing by translation'. *Perspectives: Studies in Translation Theory and Practice*, vol. 22 (4), p. 479–492.

Kuto, Emmanuel Kobena. (2018). *Institutional translation, ethnolinguistic fragmentation and the formation of hybrid identities. A multidisciplinary study of regional integration in Africa and the European Union.* PhD thesis defended on January 13, 2018, Université Diderot Paris VII. Paris.

Ladmiral Jean-René. (1979). *Traduire : théorèmes pour la traduction*, Paris : Payot.

Lodhi, Abdulazi. (1993). 'The Language Situation in Africa Today'. *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 2 (1), p. 79–86.

Meylaerts, Reine. (2011). 'Translation policy'. In Gambier, Y. and van Doorslaer, L. (éds.) *Handbook of Translation Studies*, vol. 2, Philadelphia: Johns Benjamins, p. 163–168.

Ndhlovu, Finex. (2008). 'Language and African Development: Theoretical Reflections on the Place of Languages in African Studies', *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 17 (2), p. 137–151

Newmark, Peter. (2001). *A textbook of translation.* Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

Ouane, Adama. and Glanz, Christine. (2012). *Why and how Africa should invest in African languages and multilingual education. An evidence- and practice-based policy advocacy brief.* Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.

Pöchhacker, Franz. (1999). 'Getting Organized'. The Evolution of Community Interpreting", *in* History of Interpreting (éds.) Ingrid Kurz and Margareta Bowen, *Interpreting* 4:1, p. 125–140.

Pokorn, Nike Kocijančič. (2000). 'Translation into a Non-Mother Tongue in Translation Theory: Deconstruction of the Traditional'. In: A. Chesterman, N. G. San Salvador, Y. Gambier, Eds. *Translation in Context: Selected Contributions From The Est Congress.* Granada, 1998. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Pool, Jonathan. (1991a). 'The world language problem'. *Rationality and Society* 3, p. 78–105.

Pool, Jonathan. (1991b). 'The official language problem'. *American Political Science Review,* 85, p. 495–514.

Prah, Kwai. (1998). *Between Distinction and Extinction: The Harmonisation and Standardisation of African Languages.* (éd.), Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand.

Pym, Anthony. (2011). *Translation research terms: A tentative glossary for moments of perplexity and dispute*, in *Translation Research Projects 3*, ed. Anthony Pym, Tarragona: Intercultural Studies Group, 2011, p. 75–110. http://isg.urv.es/publicity/isg/publications/trp_3_2011/index.htm. Retrieved on 21/07/2017.

Pym, Anthony. (2006). 'Translation vs. language learning in international institutions: explaining the diversity paradox'. *Cultus*, 1(1), p. 70–83.

Pym, Anthony. (1995). 'Translation as a Transaction Cost'. *Meta* 40 (4), p. 594–605.

Wadensjö, Cecilia. (2001). 'The Interpreter's position in therapeutic encounters'. in Ian Mason (ed) *Triadic exchanges. Studies in dialogue interpreting.* Manchester: St Jerome, p. 71–86.

Wireko, Joseph & Skouby, Knud Erik. (2016). *Transition to e-government in Developing countries: The Case of Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA) e-Service Smart City Initiatives in Ghana.* AAU, Copenhagen.

World Health Organisation. 2015. *Road Safety in the African Region.* http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/road_safety_status/2015/Road_Safety_AFRO_for_Web.pdf?ua=1, Retrieved on 12/07/2017.

Yoda, Lalbil Aristide. (2011). « Traduction et plurilinguisme au Burkina Faso », dans Michael Oustinoff dir., *Traduction et mondialisation,* Paris : CNRS éditions (Les Essentiels d'Hermès).

Published in : Ndongo-Keller, Justine ; Ntakirutimana, Évariste ; Thierno Cisse, Mame ; Van Campenhoudt, Marc (dir.), *La traduction et l'interprétation en Afrique subsaharienne : les nouveaux défis d'un espace multilingue. Translation and Interpretation in Sub-Saharan Africa : New Challenges in a Multilingual Space*, Editions des archives contemporaines, ISBN : 9782813003898, doi : 10.17184/eac.9782813003898