

## Translation and Its Linguistic Implications for Yoruba/ English Bilinguals.

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### Abstract

No doubt, translation has become an area of interest in linguistic research, especially, applied linguistics. Although, translation cuts across languages, yet, it is an ancient concept which is still relevant in day to day activities of people especially in media, politics, religion and education. It is against this background that this paper attempted to investigate major linguistic implications of translation on the linguistic system of individuals and society through the case study of students that are Yoruba-English bilinguals in Ondo State, Nigeria. In the course of our investigation, we observed that most of the challenges associated with translation are not problems as perceived by bilinguals but linguistic implications which cannot but manifest, at the same time, acknowledging that errors do manifest on the part of Yoruba-English bilinguals. The paper concluded on the note that the linguistic implications of translation are features associated with bilingualism.

**Keywords:** Bilingualism, language, society, interference, codeswitching.

### 1. Introduction

Nigeria is a multi – lingual nation with various ethnic groups, each having its own peculiar language and dialects being spoken in different communities. For example, Yoruba language is one of the indigenous languages in Nigeria used by the Yoruba people. Bamgbose (1971) stressed out three languages out of the indigenous languages and affirm them to be the three major languages of the nation. The three languages could be recognized to be Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba languages. Therefore, Yoruba language is a major indigenous language in Nigeria. In Nigeria, it is only very few people that speak more than one out of the three major languages which brings about communication barrier since none of these languages is being elevated to the status of National language, as the English language is adopted as a medium to bridge this communication gap in Nigeria. The English does not just find its way haphazardly into Nigeria linguistic system, but it is rather a significant legacy left behind by the colonial master. The imposition of English language as the language of education invariably made it to become the nation's medium of administration, communication, literary activities, instruction in institutions of learning and business. English language, therefore, becomes the only effective medium of communication between Nigerians from different linguistic backgrounds. Consequently, most of the national and foreign activities have to be conducted in English. The English language seems to be made a priority over indigenous languages and the government of the nation is fully aware of this fact, no wonder, Section 51 of 1999 Nigerian constitution states that:

*The business of the National assembly shall be conducted in English and in Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made therefore.*

Also Section 91 of the same constitution reads:

*The business of a House of Assembly shall be conducted in English but the House may in addition to English conduct the business of the House in one or more languages in the State as the house by resolution may approve.*

With this provision, Nigeria has actually officially endorsed English language as the nation's language. Most of her citizens are bilinguals who almost always have English as their second language.

In contemporary Nigeria therefore, an averagely educated person is bilingual. Haugen (1972) asserts that utilization of two languages by a single individual is subject to a linguistic pressure from speakers of two languages rather than one. Bamgbose (1971) realizes this and claims that the entrenchment of English language is perhaps most noticeable in the field of education. English language is a compulsory course to be studied by a child right from the lowest level of education to the highest level. The language constitutes the medium of instruction at all levels, which has to be learnt in addition to the mother tongue, making an educated individual bilingual. Generally speaking the word "bilingual" refers to a person who has the ability to use two or more languages. According to the Catford (1965), "one language is always dominant in bilingual while other languages are secondary" To him, usually the secondary language (s) is not acquired in childhood, it is through

learning after the primary language has been acquired. Therefore, the teaching of English as a second language is the process of creating bilinguals in the nation. A bilingual is described by Bamisaye (1997) as an individual who is capable of using two languages for the purpose of communication while he refers to a multilingual as an individual who makes use of more than two languages.

The native language is the speech of community, siblings, parents, relatives and friends. A child grows up to speak the native language and understand other users of the language. It pertinent to say that, every child will acquire his native language naturally just as he learns to work and relates with the environment. The acquisition of the native language takes place unconsciously in a non formal situation.

There had been the need to translate since the arrival of foreign traders and missionaries in Nigeria. There was the need for them to communicate with the people especially chiefs and elders, as such, the missionaries produced their own translators either by training native speakers in English or making use of those victims of slave trade who had not forgotten their indigenous languages. Therefore, translation becomes a social activity that cuts across various fields and nations across the globe.

## 2. Translation

With the recent development in linguistics, translation has become a more acceptable means of communication in modern times than in the past. In translation process, two languages are involved: the source language and the target language. Hence, it requires someone who is a bilingual to translate. Kolawole (2001) defines translation as process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another language. Catford (1965) opines that translation is:

*The replacement of textual materials in one language (usually the source language) by equivalent textual materials in another language (target language)*

These definitions place premium on textual materials which underlines the fact that, translation is based on exchange of meaning of text in another language. Hence, it is not the entire text of the source language that is translated or replaced by target language equivalent. Dostert, quoted by Lock and Booths (1955: 124) defines translation as:

*The branch of the applied science which is specifically concerned with the problems or the fact of the transparency of meaning from one set of patterned symbols into another set of patterned symbols.*

Translation does not only bring two languages in contact but two cultures in contact. In essence, a translator is a bilingual who is competent in the two languages involved.

According to Olumuyiwa (1997), 'Bilingualism refers essentially to a situation whereby two languages co-exist within a speech community. A bilingual who is translating is expected to express the message he is translating in the best expression in the target language in order to avoid errors. Therefore, translation can be said to be the effective rendition of textual materials in one language to another language without altering the true meaning of the source language. The process of translating idea into another linguistic form constitutes the main stages in a performance model, just as a speaker does not think of individual ideas one after the other. So, the speaker does not produce a string of words one after the other. Translation could be through the oral medium that is spoken and written medium. The oral translation which could also be referred to as interpretation precedes written translation.

## 3. Statement of the Problem

Translation as a linguistic concept has received attention by various scholars. Most of the studies on translation have approached translation by identifying its implications as problems and challenges (see Kolawole 2001, Ogundimite 2002). As it is observed that this gap exists in previous studies, this paper intends to make a shift from the perception of certain linguistic notions as problems in translation but linguistic implications which should be explored in linguistics.

## 4. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The paper is set out with the aim of investigating the linguistic implications of translation among Yoruba-English bilinguals for the purpose of achieving the following objectives:

- i. to identify the features of translation among Yoruba - English bilinguals;
- ii. to examine the identified features; and
- iii. to discuss the features as linguistic implications of translation.

## 5. Research Methodology

This research has been set out to present and analyze some data that have been collected from our subjects. The

data were collected in the line with the subject of our discussion which is translation. It is however important to note that, the data have been vetted and only relevant and necessary discussion will be presented for analysis. In this research work, the researcher made use of research instrument of questionnaire for the purpose of conducting a translation exercises. The researcher personally distributed the questionnaire to students and after the senior secondary school students filled the appropriate area that concerned them, they later returned the questionnaire to the researcher from which linguistic features of translation were identified. It is however important to note that, the data have been vetted and only relevant and necessary observed instances of relevance to our discussion were presented for analysis.

## 6. Linguistic Implications of Translation

### 6.1. Language Transfer

Language transfer is a resultant effect of language contact which can be said to exist in a situation whereby two or more distinct languages are spoken within a linguistic community. According to Weinreich (1974) “two or more languages will be said to be in contact if they are used alternatively by the same person.” Also, Francis (1967) claims that ‘language contact is the presence in close geographical, political and economic proximity of communities making use of different languages.’

In second language learning, it is assumed that whether a learner is consciously aware of it or not, he brings influences of the first language to bear on the second language, positively or negatively. When the influence is positive, learning is promoted and enhanced but if the influence is negative, it hinders the effective learning of the second language by what is known as Linguistic interference. Thus, language transfer becomes an important characteristic of second language learning. Weinreich (1974) while commenting on language transfer says:

*The term interference implies the arrangement of patterns that result from the introduction of foreign elements into the more highly structured domains of language, such as the bulk of the phonemic system, a large part of the morphology and syntax and some areas of vocabulary.*

Weinreich used the term ‘interference’ to cover language transfer and the effects of cross- linguistic influence which varies according to the context of the language contact situation.

We observe from the result of the students that certain instances of language transfer manifest as follows.

Yoruba language	English translation as influenced by Yoruba language
1 Ba mi pe asobata	Assist me with shoemaker
2. Won nti lodi lati esin	They have been quarelling since last year
3. Afoso ni iya mi	My mother is a washer woman.

The sentences are regarded as meaningful contextually but we observed that they are instances of language transfer for Yoruba-English bilinguals. Since, the standard way of translating the three sentences are supposed to be:

- 1 Assist me with a cobbler.
- 2 They have been keeping malice since last year.
- 3 My father is a launderer

### 6.2. Code Mixing

The concept of code mixing cannot be separated from clear manifestation of dual languages in the mind of the people. According to Appel and Musysken (1987) ‘code mixing is the use of two languages in a sentence’. Lindholm and Padilla (1978) supporting this say ‘An interaction that occurs within a sentence boundary and which does not transfer a semantic interference from one language to the other’. Though, Akinkurolere and Abuya (2013) posit that ‘The concept of code mixing is closely associated with code switching’ but the fact remains that code mixing operate intra - sententially while code switching operates inter - sententially.

The introduction of elements from one language to another is an alternation of the second language and not a mixture of the two as argued by Haugen (1972) but, the fact still remains that the admixture of codes or lexical items of two or more languages within a single sentence is code mixing and instances of these have been observed to abound in the language of Yoruba – English bilinguals.

From the few instances of code mixing observed from the translation exercise given to the students, the concept mainly arose as a result of the culture of Yoruba language. It is quite difficult, if not impossible to translate one's thought which is affected by the culture of the language to another different language because culture of one language differs from another. Culture could be defined as the totality of people's way of life in a specific community which is closely attached to language. This is reflected in the following:

**Yoruba language** **English translation as influenced by code mixing**

1 O se Moinmoin	She prepared Moinmoin
2 Obirin naa wo aso Oleku	She wore Oleku style
3 Mo feran lati je Fufu	I like eating Fufu

These examples would be difficult to be translate without employing code mixing since words such as Moinmoin (food), Oleku ( style of cloth), and Fufu (food) are associated with the culture of Yoruba language and no expression in English language could convey the exact meaning of the words.

**6.3. Pidgin English Appropriation**

Pidgin English is simple to learn especially for those who benefit from its usage. It is to a considerable extent, regionally based because of the fragmentary outlook of its grammar and when compared to English language, it is easier to learn and utilize for communication especially in informal setting. In the course of translation, we observed that students tend to appropriate some lexical items which can be traced to Pidgin English; a language that has developed based on some existing social conditions in a multilingual society which can be said to be having linguistic effect on the translation act of most Yoruba – English bilinguals who make use of Pidgin-English. The fact that they have learnt Pidgin-English reduces their ability to perform effectively when translating Yoruba language into English language for different purposes, sometimes for reinforcement and at times for emphasis. The interesting point in the Pidgin-English appropriation is the fact that it cannot be attributed to either source or target language, but other language of the environment as a linguistic implication of translation. Some of the sentences observed to have been influenced by Pidgin English are the following:

**Yoruba language** **English translation as influenced by Pidgin**

1 Pupo ninu won koi ti de gan	Most of them have not come sef
2. Ma sa lo sibe	I will go there sah
3. O ni ki o sun	She was asked to dress
4. Ore timotimo ni won	They are tight friends
5. Oma naa to le soro ka	The chid can't even talk, talk less of walking ma so ti irin

The standard way of translating the sentences in English language should be

1. Most of them have not come.
2. I will go there.
3. She was asked to shift
4. They are intimate friends
5. The child cannot even talk, let alone walk.

**6.4. Nigerian English Appropriation**

In recent times, Nigerian English has become an accepted variety of the Standard English. Nigerian English exhibits a considerable number of items that can really be identified as 'Nigerian'. Nigerian English is constructed not as 'mistake' but as a legitimate Nigerian version of the 'International' English which has developed over the years.

In the course of translation exercise by the Yoruba- English bilinguals, certain words that are not Standard English words are employed by the translators.

Yoruba language	Nigerian English
1. Mi o ni owo rara	I am completely broke
2. Ona na kun fun orisirisi koto	The road is full of gallops
3. E rora lo ose yen	Manage that soap
4. Ma ya lati wo e ni ile iwosan	I will branch at the hospital to see you
5. O ma sokale ni ile Abiye	He will drop at Abiye' s house

If these sentences are to be translated in Standard English, they will be;

1. I have no money on me
2. The road is full of pot holes
3. Economize that soap
4. I will check on you at the hospital
5. He will alight at Abiye's house

In translation, there is the always the tendency for students to employ Nigerian English, which has been heavily debated by scholars as a variety of Standard English (see Ayoola 2001, Ajewole-Orimogunje 2013). Therefore, it can be regarded as a variety of the standard or international language because the Standard English needs to be understood globally, and accorded international acceptance.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper has explored different linguistic implications of translation as features associated with the concept rather than problems. Although, there are other problematic factors affecting translation such as errors of concord or grammatical errors. Yet, the usefulness of translation in English language and to the society at large cannot be overemphasized. Therefore, the need to meet this demand by providing students with the opportunity to gain an insight into the requirements of a professional translator in a globalised world as a mediator between languages and cultures, where businesses, institutions and governmental organizations through incorporation of translation practice in the English language course content.

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