The Role of Translation in Enhancing Security in the West African Sub-Region

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Abstract: Security which has been described as the state of being secure or protection from physical harm is very vital in any environment. It is also obvious that security of human lives and property must be guaranteed for any meaningful progress to take place in any society. This work therefore seeks to examine the role of translation in enhancing security in the West African sub-region. In the course of this work, we did extensive review of existing literature. It was revealed that translators could, through the exercise of their functions, contribute to the reshaping of the attitudes of human beings whose negative tendencies greatly contribute to the insecurity of lives and property in some of the countries in West Africa. It was therefore suggested that relevant professionals in the translation industry should be engaged to produce the kind of works needed to achieve this purpose.

Key words: Translation · Security · Mediation · West Africa

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that West African sub-region is beset with political, social, economic and cultural problems. [1] observed that "Africa and West African sub-region have been beset with incessant problems of poverty, diseases, ethnic and religious violence". He went further to state that "this has increased the disturbing problems of insecurity, underdevelopment and unnecessary deaths". The quotations above clearly highlighted the two major problems of West African countries. These are underdevelopment and insecurity. It is obvious that the sub-region is grossly underdeveloped. There is no good drinking water for the greater number of the people. There are no jobs for the millions of the unemployed. Electricity is far-fetched. The roads are death traps. Diseases are ravaging the people and hunger is everywhere. One does not need to be a renowned economist to observe these simple indicators of underdevelopment. The issues of development are however beyond the scope of this work. The present study is centred on security.

It is also likely that the security issues in the sub-region may have contributed to the underdevelopment experienced in most parts of West Africa. In Nigeria, for instance, the devastating effects of activities of herdsmen and Boko haram are very visible around the country. There are security issues in Mali and Guinea Bissau. In fact, a UN Report released in 2011 states that among the sixteen countries of the sub-region, only Ghana has been stable. This implies that there are security issues in all the other member countries (Cape Verde, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Niger, Nigeria and Togo). If there are security issues in all these countries, it becomes very easy to appreciate why the sub-region is underdeveloped. It is also easy to understand why the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has been unable to fulfil its mandate of ensuring the economic integration of the states in the sub-region. It also explains why there are unnecessary deaths in most parts of West Africa especially Nigeria. It might not be out of place to view security issues as the number one problem of the West African sub-region. Every effort should therefore be geared towards finding a lasting solution to the problem. This explains why this study is targeted at contributing towards this effort.

Translation is a professional activity that ensures that a valuable body of knowledge encoded in a foreign language is made accessible to the speakers of a second language usually called the target audience. The translator who exercises this function has good knowledge of the language and culture of the original text. He also has similar knowledge of the language and culture of the target audience. In exercising his professional duties, he can and has often positively influenced his readers.

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It is in realization of the above that we have undertaken to examine the role of translation in enhancing security in the West African sub-region. In the course of this study, we will examine the concept of security. The security situation in West Africa will equally be examined. There will be a segment on the concept of translation. Translation and security in West Africa will finally be x-rayed before the conclusion.

The Concept of Security: The word security is derived from the latin word securitas in the mid 15th century. Thesaurus.com defines security as "safety or freedom from danger, risk" Wikipedia presented a more comprehensive definition of the term as follows:

> Security mostly refers to protection from hostile forces, but it has a wide range of other senses. For example, as the absence of harm (freedom from want); as the presence of an essential good (food security); as resilience against potential damage or harm (secure foundations); as secrecy (secure telephone line); as containment (a secure room or cell); and as a state of mind (emotional security)

In spite of the various shades of meaning presented above, it might be appropriate to examine how this same concept is perceived by experts in information technology. [2] states that:

> Security, in information technology (IT), is the defense of digital information and IT assets against internal and external, malicious, and accidental threats. This defense includes detection, prevention and response to threats through the use of security policies, software tools and IT services.

From the foregoing, it becomes obvious that the term security means different things to different people in different domains. To the ICT expert, the term has a lot to do with the protection of IT assets and data. In economics, the meaning of the term is determined by the department in question. The banker has a number of meanings for it while the stock broker also has specific meanings for the same term. We have taken this broad view because the concept is being reviewed .For the purposes of this study; however, our interest is on what Wikipedia described as National security and Human security. With regard to National security, the free encyclopedia, Wikipedia states as follows:

National security refers to the security of a nation state, including its people, economy and institutions. In practice, state governments rely on a wide range of means, including diplomacy, economic power and military capabilities

The definition of national security above is very revealing. It is interesting to note that national security involves not only the protection of the state as an entity but also the protection of the citizens as well as its institutions. Wikipedia also clarifies the issue of Human security as follows;

> Human security is the name of an emerging paradigm which, in response to traditional emphasis on the right of nation states to protect themselves has focused on the primacy of the security of people (individuals and communities). The concept is supported by the United Nations General Assembly, which has stressed "the right of people to live in freedom and dignity" and recognized that "all individuals, in particular vulnerable people are entitled to freedom from fear and freedom from want.

The concept of primacy of security of people is worth discussing further. This implies that the security of citizens of any nation state should be the top priority of all agencies responsible for the protection of the lives and property in any society. This is very interesting. This statement must sound very strange to most people in West Africa, who have known nothing but fears all through their lives. If actually there is primacy of security of people as well as the statement that "all individuals in particular vulnerable people are entitled to freedom from fear and freedom from want" under the statutes of the United Nations, then something must be wrong somewhere.

It is either that the representatives of the United Nations, who give them reports about West Africa, usually present false reports to the world body or the rules in the statutes are meant to serve the whites only. This is because almost all Africans except those who hold political offices and their cronies live in fear and want from birth to death. Having clarified the concept of security, we will, in the next segment, examine the security situation in West Africa.

Security Situation in West Africa: Security situation in West Africa is a source of great concern to all those who

value human life. [3] observed that; "Human security is an extremely serious issue in West Africa. Many internal conflicts have undermined security over the past two decades". The above view is equally shared by [4] when he said that "ECOWAS's past and future role is and will be to build a truly integrated security and economic community to confront regional problem". Indeed the countries in West Africa are confronted with not only economic problems but also security issues. There are rebel activities in the Northern part of Mali. [5] made reference to this when he said that:

"It is quite unfortunate that Mali, a country that used to be an ocean of stability in West Africa, has degenerated to what it is now. The Berlin 1884 decision to partition Africa was done in accordance of the interests of colonizing powers". They divided the continent along artificial boundaries and most of the region's current instability can be linked to the wars of liberation.

Adefuye did not only hint that there is problem in Mali but he also analyzed the plausible cause of these crises in the sub-region. He went further to identify Guinea Bissau as another country where there are issues of security arising from "importation of arms and pervasive trafficking in the military". In Nigeria, there are human security issues arising from the activities of Boko Haram and herdsmen. With regard to the issues in Mali and Nigeria, [6], Malian Ambassador to the United States said;

The situation in the North is completely destabilized and there is a crisis of government and leadership. The mobilization of the separatist movement and international groups (AQMI and Boko Haram) in the Sahel has proven to have deleterious effects on security and human rights

It is indeed very true that these armed groups-Al-Qaeda au Maghreb Islamique (AQMI) which originates from Algeria and operates in the North of Mali and Boko Haram in Nigeria are causing a lot of havoc in the sub-region thereby exacerbating human security issues in the affected parts of West Africa. As we observed earlier, a UN Security Council Report released in 2011 on security challenges in West Africa states that only Ghana is free from security challenges out of the 16 countries in the sub-region. The report identified what it described as

"four emerging security threats" in West Africa as follows: Drug trafficking and organized crime, Terrorism, Challenges of democratic governance, Piracy.

People who engage in any of the activities mentioned above usually endanger the lives of their victims and sometimes their own lives too. The result is that there are incidents of human right abuses, suffering among the people and untimely deaths. It is pertinent to note that it is humans who inflict these pains on their fellow humans. To tackle some of these challenges governments especially in West Africa have often opted for the deployment of their arsenals of warfare. If these challenges have remained with us in spite of the military option often preferred by the governments of the sub-region, it means that the option might not be very potent after all. It is our contention in this paper that since human beings are at the centre of all these crimes, a more appropriate option could be the adoption of an education plan to inculcate positive attitudes in these misguided individuals. There is no person that received the right type of education that would deliberately inflict pains on his fellow human being. That it is happening is an indication that their teachers did not do their jobs well or they passed through a system that marred rather than make them. It is in the light of the above that we have chosen to examine the contributions translation could make in this direction.

The Concept of Translation: Translation as a concept has been defined in various ways by experts in the field. In spite of the differences in the way this concept is presented, the consensus is that it is a professional activity that involves the conversion of a text written in one language usually known as the source language into a second language called the target language for the sole purpose of making the text accessible to speakers of the second language. [7] views translation as a "linguistic exercise". [8] describe it as "a tool for linguistic engineering". In her contribution, [9] defines it as a "written communication that involves the transfer of a message from a source language to a target language". All the definitions given above highlight the most essential feature of this professional activity. That is, it is a linguistic exercise. Usually two languages are involved –one in which the original text is written and another into which the source text is converted. Competence in the two languages is a necessary condition for the translator to excel in his job.

It is pertinent to note that translation is not only the transfer of linguistic structures of the source text to the equivalent linguistic structures of the target text. It also involves a passage from one culture to another especially where literary and other general texts are involved [10]; [11]; [12]; [13]. This implies that the translator is not only conversant with his two working languages but he is also very familiar with the two cultures mirrored by the two languages in contact. In translation, therefore, the translator mediates between the two cultures. The translator is therefore a unique professional who mediates knowledge across cultural lines. In translating both pragmatic and literary texts, he does so in full cognizance of the norms of the two cultural groups in question. This makes him the best professional that is competent enough to communicate some message expressed in a text in one language into an equivalent message in another language without breaching the cultural norms of the target linguistic community.

There is no doubt that there are many professions in the world today. Each of these professions makes valuable contributions to advance the cause of humanity. As we said earlier in this work, translation plays key role in solving social problems by communicating new but very valuable ideas to people. In an article entitled "Evaluating the Significance of Translation in the West African Sub-Region, [14] quoted Dave Shastri as having said that "translation can resolve social problems. It can bring people together, give them a different sensibility to appreciate each other and make them tolerant and respectful to each other's view point". The same author concluded his work by stating that:

> In multilingual states of West Africa, translation can effectively enhance communication among the rural population and the educated class as well. It can create enabling environments for mutual understanding, trust and responsibility for other people in the society.

The above explains why we contend in this paper that translation has a great role to play in addressing the human security issues in West Africa. There is no doubt that the multilingual nature of the environment can lead to breakdown in communication in some areas and inefficient communication in others. These are circumstances that can create challenges in security depending on the issues at stake. Whenever multiple languages are involved in any communication act, the translator must mediate to achieve harmony. He is the only one with the requisite

professional skills to bring about effective communication between people who speak different languages. Nigeria alone has well over four hundred languages [15]; [16]. One can therefore imagine the total number of languages in West Africa and how this multiplicity of languages impacts on communication among the different citizens of the sub-region. Having clarified the concept of translation, we will now take a look at the specific role translation could play in enhancing security in West Africa.

Translation and Security in West Africa: The point has to be made, on a general note, that the translator is a noble professional who positively influences development in all aspects of the economy in any society [17]. In an article entitled "Getting Started in Literary Translation: the Making of a literary Translator, which was published by The American Literary Translators Association in 2003, Renato Poggioli was quoted as having said that "the gifted translator is an alchemist who changes a piece of gold into another piece of gold". The changing of a piece of gold into another piece of gold is an expression that encapsulates the nature of the translator's job. It stresses the fact that in exercising his duty, he should ensure that what he presents to the target audience is the replica of the source text in all its ramifications. It also gives an indication as to the kind of text a genuine translator may work on. It is not any kind of work that is worthy of the translator's time. It must be such that influences the society in a very positive way. Anything to the contrary is a product of misguided and perverted mind. Having made this clarification, we will now concentrate on how translation can contribute towards raising individuals that will not be security-risk in the West African sub-region.

It is obvious that human security issues are created by humans. Whether it is Al-Quaeda in Mali or Boko Haram and herdsmen in Nigeria, each of the groups is composed of human beings. Those who generate ethnic conflicts in various parts of West Africa are also human beings. Even the sponsors of these groups are human beings some of whom are in government while some others are not. Those who make and supply the guns and bombs they use are human beings. Since there is no arms' manufacturing factory anywhere in West Africa, it is only proper to assume that this latter group includes mainly foreigners from some parts of Europe and other Western countries. These are the various groups that are responsible for the human security issues in West Africa. They act the way they do because of the orientation they

have about life through the education they received and the literary works they were exposed to. It is our contention here that these various groups had a very wrong orientation and imbibed the wrong values hence they chose to present themselves as conflict generators instead of being peace builders. The attitude of all these people can be reshaped through translation [18]; [19]; [20].

Bernacka stressed that "translation can shape the options and attitudes of recipients while Anyabuike observed that the "Holy Bible which has shaped the lives of many and which has revolutionized religious practice in the entire world, was originally written in a language no other group but the Jews could have deciphered". [21] concluded by stating that:

Translation therefore can lead to better understanding among the different linguistic groups, enhance harmonious coexistence and create a more favourable climate for economic, political and social activities. Unknown to many, anybody that has gone through the formal system of education has benefitted in one way or the other from translated works. Most of the educational theories in use in our schools today are derived from philosophies and theories propounded by Greek and French philosophers. The ideas of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Rene Descartes and Denis Diderot have continued to influence teaching and learning in one way or the other.

It was Jean-Jacques Rousseau who said that once a child has been taught to reason, he has no need for further education. Most of these philosophies have greatly influenced the way the curricula of our schools are structured. That is why today Logic is one of the courses offered in the Philosophy Departments of our universities. Rousseau was quite right when he implied that the essence of a child's presence in the school is to learn how to reason. The question is the group of people who derive pleasure in killing their fellow humans, do they reason at all? If they do, what kind of reasoning do they do? The various groups of human beings, both whites and blacks, who are responsible for the heinous crimes committed against their fellow humans, what kind of reasoning do they do? All in all, the translator did his job well by presenting the facts as they are. If anything still goes wrong after the translator has done his job, the teachers and others around the learner should be held responsible.

In an attempt to reform people with deviant behavioural patterns, the literary translator also makes available different literary works that inculcate positive values in the target audience. [22] highlighted some of the literary works produced by African writers as follows:

Presently many African writers have written literary books…The examples of such literary works are*: Things Fall Apart, A Man of the People* by Chinua Achebe. *The Trials of Brother Jero, Kongi's Harvest* by Wole Soyinka; *L'Enfant Noir* by Camara Laye, *Une Vie de Boy* by Ferdinand Oyono; *Une Si Longue Lettre* by Mariama Ba; *Le Mandat* by Sembene Ousmane; *The Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and others. Some of those written in English Language have been translated into French and vice versa

He went further to add;

Some of these writers have enumerated the socio-political problems in their societies in the pre-colonial and post-colonial times. Others have criticized the vices of their societies such as greed, corruption ethnic and religious bigotries and violence. Others have condemned the oppression and exploitation of women by their male counterparts and have advocated equity and justice for all in the society. In this vein, literary translation helps to create and enhance suitable environments for peaceful coexistence among the diverse population of West Africa.

When these works are written by the authors and translators make them accessible to people that could not access the original language, it is to spread the positive values espoused by the authors. These books are written and translated for both the political leaders and the led. They are meant to be positively influenced by the ideas in these works. It is unfortunate that vices still persist in West Africa in spite of the numerous works produced by writers and translators. Most African leaders get into office to fatten their bank accounts thereby spreading poverty and discontentment and fuelling violence. They fail to make good use of these literary works presented to them to modify their ugly behavior and work to improve the lots of their people and develop their countries. There is no doubt that if the young ones are made to read these valuable books; they will grow up to be peace makers rather than conflict generators.

It is also important to note that apart from positively reshaping the attitudes of recipients of translated works, translation also intervenes directly to resolve issues arising from linguistic barriers. Issues may arise as a result of misunderstanding caused by differences in language. This is the view expressed by [6]:

> In the application of peace building and conflict prevention strategies it has been proven that differences in terminology not understood, planning cultures and approaches between various actors working in conflict area, the difficulty of understanding each other and the assignment of attribution constitute a major challenge. The situation is largely linked to the language barrier. It is equally explained that the lack of consensus on vocabulary can create confusion and forms a barrier to harmonized or coordinated approach.

The quotation above has highlighted the serious problem facing people who speak different languages and who have to cooperate in one way or the other. Assogba Metondji made this assertion in his research work entitled "Language and Regional Integration in ECOWAS: Challenges and Prospects". He made it clear that lack of consensus on the meaning of one word could be a source of confusion. When such impasse arises, a translator is called in to mediate. He does his research and clears the confusion. The system begins to function normally again. These are some of the ways that translation resolves conflicts and enhances the security of the sub-region. With three working languages-English, French and Portuguese, the existence of a sub-regional body such as ECOWAS, is predicated on the possibility of translation. This explains why there are a number of translators working with ECOWAS. What remains, however, is for the sub-regional body to sponsor the translation of more valuable literary works especially in West African languages and popularize the utilization of such works in schools in the sub-region to facilitate the acquisition of the desired values by individuals and future leaders of different countries in West Africa. If this is done, the sub-region may begin to think of a better future with positively oriented individuals who will work towards having a crisis-free environment.

CONCLUSION

The work focused on the role of translation in enhancing security in the West African sub-region.

The concept of security in this context was clarified as the state of being secure or protection from physical harm. The major security threats in the sub-region were highlighted. Prominent among such threats is terrorism. The paper contends that translation could facilitate the reshaping of the attitudes of the human elements that play active role in the generation and execution of these crises. It was therefore suggested that the sub-regional body, ECOWAS, should sponsor the translation of valuable literary works in West African Languages. Such works will obviously facilitate the acquisition of the desired positive values by individuals and future leaders of the sub-region.

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