

Translation and Cultural Integration in Nigeria

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Abstract: Every patriotic Nigerian would readily agree that the greatest need of this country at this point in time is national cohesion. The country may have made some progress in some other areas but the question of national unity has been very elusive since independence in 1960. This work therefore seeks to examine the role of translation in cultural integration in Nigeria. Existing literature was reviewed and our findings revealed that translation could be the missing link in the cultural integration efforts in Nigeria. It was therefore suggested that the resources of translation should be harnessed to enhance cultural harmony in the country.

Key words: Translation • Culture • Integration • Cultural harmony

INTRODUCTION

The geographical entity called Nigeria celebrated her political independence in 1960. Like some other countries, Nigeria has had some challenges which include ensuring cultural integration among her numerous citizens. It has, however, been observed that the country has well over four hundred indigenous languages [1, 2]. This implies that the country has well over four hundred cultural groups, language being an element of culture and a vital instrument for its expression [3]. With these numerous cultural groups, Nigeria could be classified as one of the most culturally diverse countries in the continent of Africa if not in the world. It is therefore not surprising to find conflicts arising from cultural differences in different parts of the country. Inability to adequately address some of these differences has often led to avoidable communal conflicts sometimes leading to loss of human lives. In all the geo-political zones of the country, none has been spared these conflicts arising from cultural differences. There is conflict between people from Ebonyi State and their neighbours from Cross River State. The Ife/Modakeke problem is another case in point as well as the most recent imbroglio between herdsmen and some communities in the country. These are all cases whose origin could be traced to cultural differences.

It is obvious that for a country to achieve effective cultural harmony among its diverse cultural groups there must be political will on the part of the leaders to unify its citizens. It is this political will that will propel such patriotic leaders to take certain steps for the overall

benefit of its citizens and the general growth of the country. One of the necessary steps is the harnessing of the skills of professionals to achieve the desired goals. Seasoned practitioners in the translation industry could play very key role in this regard. Translation is a professional activity that ensures that a text written in one language is made accessible to speakers of a second language. With a diligent application of his skills, the translator ensures some level of correspondence between two different languages and harmony between two distinct cultures. It is in realization of the above fact that we have undertaken, in this study, to examine translation and cultural integration in Nigeria. To properly examine this topic, we will take a look at the concept of culture. The issue of cultural integration will also be examined. There will also be a discussion on the role of translation in cultural integration. Finally, there will be a comprehensive analysis of our findings before the conclusion.

Culture as a Concept: Since this work is centred on cultural integration, it is pertinent that we fully grasp the meaning of culture. Literature is replete with definitions of this term as each expert seems to approach the definition from his own perspective. The Chambers 21st Century Dictionary defines it as “the customs, ideas, and values of a particular civilization, society or social group especially at a particular time” [4] was quoted by Ezema as having defined culture as “a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meaning and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behavior”. The above two definitions seem to agree that

culture has to do with the values and ways of life of a people. The first definition ends with “at a particular time” thereby highlighting the dynamic nature of culture. This perhaps explains the variations in the behavioural patterns of generations of people from the same community. For instance, the birth of twins is today heralded with joy in Igbo land while in the traditional society, it was abhorred. [5] defined culture as:

A complex collection of experiences which condition daily life, it includes history, social structure, religion, traditional customs and everyday usage

In his contribution, [6] added;

We can assert that culture is the totality of people’s way of life encompassing all aspects such as their mode of greeting, dressing, dancing, and feeding as well as their religious, political, social, legal and economic lives. The languages the people speak as well as their technological inventions constitute vital aspects of their culture.

The two definitions above highlight that culture has to do with all aspects a people’s life. It should be noted, from all that has been revealed above, that any serious attempt to understand the way of life of any group of people must begin with a thorough understanding of their culture. It is also worthy of note that religion and language are vital elements of culture. These two elements are very crucial for this study which seeks to examine ways of achieving cultural harmony in the Nigerian state. People’s use of language as well as their approach to religion goes a long way in determining how peaceful the society will be. Religion and language could be used for the wellbeing of the citizens and the growth of the society. They could also be effective weapons in the hands of unpatriotic leaders for the running down of the society. It is obvious therefore that some cultural practices could uplift a given society or corrode its image and hamper the achievement of harmony among its people. Having clarified the concept of culture, we will examine at this point the idea of cultural integration.

Cultural Integration: The word “integration” is defined by the Chambers 21st Century Dictionary as “the process of integrating” while the same dictionary also defines integrate as “to fit parts together to form a whole” or to mix people or cause people to mix freely with other groups

in the society”. The two definitions above are relevant in the context of this study. Cultural integration therefore could mean fitting two different cultures together to form a whole or to cause people of a given culture to mix freely with those of other cultures. As we highlighted earlier, culture encompasses all aspects of life of any given social group. These aspects may include their social, religious, economic, educational, judicial, technological and linguistic inclinations. Each cultural group exhibits these inclinations in a peculiar way. Given the definition of integration as provided by the Chambers 21st Century Dictionary, one could assert that cultural integration could mean either harmonizing the peculiarities of a given cultural group with those of another cultural group or getting members of a given cultural group to effectively cooperate with another group in their day to day activities in spite of their peculiarities. The latter is more plausible and more easily realizable than the former. In the next segment, we shall examine the role translation could play in achieving this seemingly herculean task.

The Role of Translation in Cultural Integration:

Translation brings together two languages and by implication two cultures. This coming together of two cultures often leads to “a synthesis of two cultures-the culture of the original and the culture of the target literature [7]. [8] also said that “translation is an agent or instrument that brings about an integration of cultures” while [9] shares the same view as follows “translation can play a number of different roles such as unifying or constructing new knowledge about foreign, lesser known cultures”. While Niranja Mohanty sees translation as agent of cultural integration, Varma states that translation synthesizes two cultures while Bernaka made it clear that translation could unify cultures. Both “synthesis” and “unifying” are two words that have similar semantic import as integration. This implies that these authors are also of the opinion that translation has great role to play in cultural integration. What remains is to highlight the specific role translation plays in this direction. To this end, [10] states as follows:

When we translate, we should not only focus on the distinction between the foreign language and our mother tongue. We should also pay attention to the numerous features shared by the two languages. Not only differences exist in different languages but also a great deal in common between them.

Very often people hold the erroneous view that, because they belong to different tribes or countries, they could not have anything in common with those from other places. This belief alone accounts for the apparent gulf that exists between people of diverse nationalities. This affects not only people's perceptions of others but also the quality of their relationships in all aspects of life. People tend to associate more freely with those they feel they share a lot in common with. It is also true that people are inclined to be far from those who do not speak the same language with them without knowing that these different languages often express common cultural realities [11]. This implies that any serious attempt to bring people from the different ethnic groups in Nigeria together either socially, culturally, religiously or economically should begin with a conscious effort to make them know their areas of commonness. This could be achieved through translation. The translator works with two languages at any given time. As a skilful professional, the translator is not only conversant with the two languages he is working with, but he is also very familiar with the two cultures in contact. This makes it possible for him to be the only professional that is capable of seeing through both cultures and identifying their similarities and differences. Translation can also provide the basis for elements of a foreign culture to be absorbed into the culture of the receptor-language as highlighted below by [12].

Translation is an agent or instrument that brings about an integration of cultures. I do not underestimate the problems involved in the translational process and I do not ignore the areas of untranslatability between specific language pairs. However, in advancing the argument, I assume that language, like religion, is an identity-intensifier, and that it not only retains the deposits of culture but also transmits those deposits in the process of translation

There is no doubt that during the translational process, some elements of the foreign culture could "percolate" or filter into the culture of the receptor language. This no doubt could lead to the enrichment of the less developed cultures. It also leads to a situation where the users of the receptor language get used to the foreign linguistic elements that got filtered into their mother tongue through translation. Literature is replete with foreign linguistic elements that have made their way

into other cultures. This has been made possible through either the translational process or through interaction between citizens of different cultural groups and facilitated by translation.

From the foregoing, it becomes very clear that translation has a lot to offer towards cultural integration among the diverse cultural groups in Nigeria. The first is that through translation, some areas of commonness among the different cultural groups could be highlighted. Most people often view one another as strangers just because they come from different ethnic or cultural groups. They hardly imagine that there could be any commonalities among them. The translator could, through his professional service, bring these common cultural realities to limelight. The translator can also deliberately introduce foreign lexical elements into the receptor language, thereby reducing the wide gap between people from the two cultures. The literary translator also contributes enormously towards facilitating understanding among people from different cultures. The literary translator could make accessible to readers works that could enable them to "to know how other people live and behave, act and react, think and enjoy" [13]. Perhaps, it might be pertinent to note that translation profession is predicated on facilitating cultural integration and achieving effective cooperation among people who speak different languages. This view is shared by [14] who describe translation as an activity that ensures "wider-reaching communication among the various language communities". Any communication gap among individuals and groups could generate conflicts. Therefore anything that eliminates conflicts invariably promotes harmony in one way or the other. Having briefly highlighted the specific role of translation in cultural integration, we will in the next segment discuss our findings in this work with some more specific examples.

Discussion on Findings: Translation has been described as the passage from one culture to another [15], [16], [17], [18]. Consequently, it is the practitioners in this field that have the competence to discern the common features existing between two or more divergent cultures. The focus of this study is translation and cultural integration in Nigeria and it has earlier been stated that cultural integration in this context should be understood to mean either to cause people of a given culture to mix freely with those of other cultures or fitting two different cultures together to form a whole. This therefore will form the basis of our discussion in this segment. There is no

doubt that when the behavioural patterns of a cultural group are fully understood by members of another cultural group, human interaction is facilitated and cooperation among the individual members of both groups is enhanced. The literary translator can be of much help in this direction.

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* has been translated in several languages of the world. This book gives the reader all he needs to know about the way of life of the Igbo people. Such a reader could give almost all the Igbo names; he could also explain their culinary habits, their dressing patterns, their mode of worship, their attitude to work as well as all other relevant aspects of the culture of the people. With this basic knowledge the reader will always know how to get on well with the average Igbo person. There are other literary artists that have published works that expose the cultures of the other parts of Nigeria. For the Yoruba culture, the works of Wole Soyinka and Karim Barber could be very useful while Wikipedia attests to the existence of Hausa literature as follows, "there is a large and growing printed literature in Hausa which includes novels". No matter the language in which these literatures are written, a good translator can always make them accessible to the speakers of other Nigerian languages. This way, the citizens get to know themselves better and relationships could be more cordial as a result.

The more developed countries of the world have since realized the need for this kind of understanding; hence they have always engaged the services of translators to achieve this purpose. Just recently, the Czech Ambassador to Nigeria, Mr Pavel Mikes highlighted the role of Arts in bringing different peoples of the world together during an Arts Exhibition in Lagos. On that occasion, he disclosed that five Nigerian literary works have been translated into Czech Language. According to him, the literary works translated include those of Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe and Chima Amada Adichie. One can imagine the wisdom in this effort as well as in the choice of works that are likely to give users of Czech Language the opportunity of getting acquainted with the different cultures in Nigeria.

The mutual understanding existing between people of different cultures as a result of these translated works could further be cemented by deliberately highlighting the common features in these cultures. Let us examine the following illustrations with three officially recognized local languages in Nigeria.

English	Igbo	Yoruba	Hausa
We respect our customs	anyi na-asopuru omenala anyi	a bowo fun asa wa	muna daraja a l' adunmu
We love our neighbours	anyi huru ndi agbata obi anyi n'anya	a feran awon aladugbo wa	muna kaunar makwabtamu
We are not thieves	anyi abughi ndi ohi	awa ki ise ole	ba mu zama barayi ba
We respect our women	anyi n'akwanyere umunwanyi anyi ugwu	a bowo fun awon obirin wa	muna girmama matanmu
Our people are predominantly farmers	ndi anyi bu ndi oru ugbo kachasi	awon eniyan wa ni awon agbeti o niju pupo	jama ' armu yawanci manoma ne

Note: The above are some common cultural attitudes among the three major cultural groups in Nigeria. Translations in the local languages are provided by Google Translators. Errors in spelling are highly regretted.

The fact that these cultural attitudes could be expressed easily with the linguistic resources of each of the cultural groups implies that such practices exist at some degrees in these societies. This is the opinion expressed by [19] when he said that:

Every community has adequate linguistic resources for the expression of its cultural realities. Any aspect of life not captured linguistically has no relevance in the life of the community at that particular time

In view of the above quotation, one can state that Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo cultural groups cherish these positive cultural attributes. If these and other values exhibited by members of the other ethnic groups are isolated and popularized, individuals may gradually begin to focus on these values that unite them rather than on their differences. The impact of this development on the lives of the citizens will surely be enormous. The point has to be made that it is the translator who, through the diligent application of his professional skills, can identify and highlight these commonalities among the people.

When Mohanty said that "some deposits of culture are transmitted in the process of translation", it is true. It is common knowledge that individual members of a certain cultural group often deliberately adopt the dressing patterns of other cultural groups. For instance, most Nigerians often appear in suits like the whites. Adoption of dressing patterns of other cultural groups is not a good example of the "cultural deposit" referred to above. The cultural deposit that is transmitted in the process of translation is usually a linguistic item- a word, a phrase or a clause. Literature is replete with languages

whose lexical items include words from other languages. A lot of French words are used in English and vice versa. This practice is not limited to European languages alone. Our local languages also borrow from other languages. Let us examine the following expressions in three Nigerian languages:

English	Igbo	Yoruba	Hausa
Good morning	ututu oma	e kaaro	kyau safe
How are you?	Kedu ka i mere?	Bawo ni o se wa?	Yaya kuke?
I am fine	adim mma	mo wa daadaa	ina lafiya
Come here	bia ebe a	wa nibi	zo nan
Good bye	ka o di	O dabo	ban kwana
Come and eat	bia rie nri	wa ki O jeun	zo ku ci
Money	ego	owo	kudi

Note: As usual, translations in local languages are provided by Google Translators. Errors in spelling are highly regretted.

I have often heard some Igbo speakers use the above expressions in Yoruba and Hausa languages. It is also possible that Yoruba and Hausa speakers might have used any of the expressions other than their own at one time or the other. Some might argue that the users of the borrowed expressions may have come in contact with the original owners of the language but this is not always the case. Irrespective of how one came in contact with any of these expressions, one thing is certain and that is there must have been an act of translation even if it is by an untrained user of the source language before the new speaker begins to make effective use of the borrowed expression. When the user of the new language asks the question what does this word or expression mean? He usually expects a translation or an explanation in a language he is more familiar with. However, when we begin to pay attention to the development of our local languages, it may become necessary for professional translators to prepare a bilingual version of these local languages and make them accessible to those who may need them in future. This certainly will eliminate errors associated with translations effected by untrained hands.

From the foregoing, it becomes obvious that the translators are the seasoned professionals who work in subtle ways to shape the destinies of men and nations. This perhaps explains why the developed countries of the world have never failed to engage them at the most critical periods of their national life. Nigeria cannot be an exception. The country should seek the services of her professionals especially the translators so as to reverse her dwindling fortunes in some vital aspects of the national life.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we examined Translation and Cultural Integration in Nigeria. The concept of culture was x-rayed and we highlighted that culture has to do with the totality of the people's way of life. The issue of cultural integration was also clarified as well as the role of translation in bringing about cultural integration. The study revealed that cultural integration could be said to exist when citizens of a given country that belong to different cultural groups interact freely as well as when elements of a given culture are absorbed in a different culture. It was equally brought to limelight that translation practitioners have the competence to bring about harmony between two or more different cultures through the diligent application of their professional skills. It was therefore suggested that the elusive cultural integration in the country could be effectively addressed only if the relevant professional skills are effectively harnessed for the sole purpose of achieving this objective.

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