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**DEVELOPMENT OF ARABIC LANGUAGE
& LITERATURE IN NIGERIA
DURING 50 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE**

BOOK ONE

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THE ROLE OF TRANSLATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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Introduction

Daily occurrences in the ever changing world of today underline the great significance and relevance of translation in all endeavours.

In the various fields of knowledge such as education, science and technology, mass communication, trade and business, literature, religion, tourism, etc., the use of translation appears to be consequentially indispensable. Domestic and international events in the world, latest discoveries of all kinds of knowledge as well as the accessibility to literature of various languages are made plausible through translation.¹

Throughout history, translation has made inter-linguistic communication between peoples possible. From the theoretical perspective, translation can be seen as a science; however, practically speaking, it is more of art than of science. Whether translation is considered as science, art or craft, a good transfer of meanings, notions and ideas in the source language (henceforth SL) which is the original, should be made into the target language (henceforth TL). It is when this is guaranteed that a good translation is conducted.²

Moreover, it is a well known fact that the most prominent trait of human beings throughout history has been the various methods of communication be it linguistic or paralinguistic through which knowledge of other nations in the world are tapped and judiciously utilized. These types of knowledge are preserved for subsequent generations. Undoubtedly, it is through language communication that this is made feasible. However, the only hindrance and hurdle to this end is the linguistic disparity in the world. Fortunately, through the use of translation, all linguistic barriers between linguistic backgrounds are trashed out and better communication and reciprocal understanding are made possible between nations of today's world.³

What is translation?

According to Webster's New World dictionary, the word "to translate" is defined as the followings:

- (1) to move from one place or condition to another; transfer; specify;
- (2) to put into the words of a different language;
- (3) to change into another medium or form to translate ideas into action; to put into different words; rephrase or paraphrase in explanation;
- (4) To transmit (a telegraphic message) again by means of an automatic relay.⁴

Furthermore, Lewis⁵ notes that "translate" is of Latin origin "trans+latus", which denotes "carried across". As to Foster, translation is the act of transferring through which the content of a text is transferred from the SL into the TL. Disregarding culture, Catford⁶ states that "translation is the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language". In his own definition of translation, Lefevere⁷ asserts that "translation is a process of communication whose objective is to import the knowledge of the original to the foreign reader. In the same vein, Savory⁸ is of the conviction that translation is made possible by an equivalent of the idea that lies behind its different verbal expressions. Besides, commenting on the definition of translation, Brislin⁹ articulates thus: The general term referring to the transfer of thoughts and ideas from one language (source) to another (target), whether the languages are in written or oral form; whether the languages have established orthographies or do not have such standardization or whether one or both languages is based on signs, as with sign language of the deaf. In a similar position, translation to Robinson¹⁰ "is an intelligent activity involving complex processes of conscious and unconscious learning". He further asserts that "translation is an intelligent activity requiring creative Problem-solving in novel, textual, social and cultural conditions". Simplifying the definition of translation, Sugimoto¹¹ notes that: Simply speaking, translation is the exchange of one set of clothes for another set of clothes that will cover the same meaning or thought.

However, when we think of translation culture, first we must understand its background and give some thought to the age in which it was born.

Translation and language development

A language is not merely a collection of words and of rules of grammar and syntax for generating sentences, but also a vast interconnecting system of connotations and cultural references whose mastery, according to linguist Mario Pei,¹² "comes close to being a lifetime job". Besides, translation is considered as food for the development of a young language.¹³ Viewed in this light, it is said that: Translation has served as a school of writing for many authors. Translator, including monks who spread Buddhists texts in East Asia, and the early modern European translators of the Bible, in the course of their work have shaped the very languages into which they have translated. They have acted as bridges for conveying knowledge between cultures; and along with ideas, they have imported from the source language, into their own languages, loanwords and calques of grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary.¹⁴ At this juncture, it is worth noting to explain briefly the disparity in the meanings of the two terminologies erroneously used interchangeably by several language learners, i.e. translation and interpretation. Translation has been defined extensively by various writers and has been cited on the previous pages. However, interpreting or interpretation is "the facilitation of oral or sign-language communication, either simultaneously or consecutively, between two, or among more, speakers who are not speaking, or signing, the same language."¹⁵ The term "interpreting" rather than "interpretation" is preferentially used for this activity by Anglophone translators, to avoid confusion with other meanings of the word "interpretation". The role and importance of translation in a mosaic of cultures, peoples and languages in a country like Nigeria is apparent.

In Nigeria, for instance, peoples of different cultures and languages are linked to one another and therefore are in need of cohesive element to bind them together. The only tool that is capable of achieving this end is translation. It is considered to be that indispensable cohesive element which mediates between the over 450 different Nigerian ethno-linguistic and cultural groups and entities. Translation manages power relations between ethno-linguistic communities within a society, respects citizens' linguistic rights and ensures intercommunity communication.

It is unfortunate that Nigeria has not adopted a clear-cut national language policy. We should learn from Indonesia which is also multilingual in nature with 750 language nationalities. According to Professor Godswill Obioma, the Executive Secretary of the Nigerian Research and Development Council (NERDC), "Indonesia has, over the years, one national language for spoken strategy, for

doing government business, communication in the National Assembly, for diplomacy, for University teaching. They adopted one national language out of 750 languages.

That is their national language policy. South Africa, for example, has various language nationalities but they have adopted 12 for transaction of business, for teaching in Universities, for conducting business and government activities. That is their national language policy. In Nigeria, we have 500 language nationalities based on the last language delineation we did in the council".¹⁶

Furthermore, there are various institutions working on language issues in the country, namely, the Nigeria French Language Village which champions the cause of French to equip Nigerians from all walks of life, e.g. legislators, public servants as well as individual Nigerians. There is Arabic Language Village which nurtures the language for the Muslims who use to convey their thoughts and conduct their religious affairs. Then the country has the Institute of Nigeria Language in Aba to equip Nigerian teachers to teach endoglossic national languages in Nigerian schools. Additionally, there are Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council and Language Development Centre both designed to promote the Nigerian languages.¹⁷ The lack of proper adoption and probably a straight-forward implementation of national language(s) paves way for her heavy dependence on translation among her various ethno-linguistic nationalities. Both national and international news is relayed by the media to her citizens through the use of translation into various national languages. The crucial significance role of translation is well manifested in present linguistic situation of bi-lingual Cameroon.

In Cameroon, according to Joseph,¹⁸ citizens' linguistic and cultural rights are protected. He further asserts that: In some Cameroonian courts, assessors when interpreting (i.e. doing oral translation) for national language speakers summoned for litigations, can be considered to address sociolinguistic problems.

For example, in this context translation bridges the gap between the powerful magistrates and the powerless illiterate litigators. In a multilingual polity like Cameroon, it is translation that ensures that citizens' linguistic rights are respected as provided for by international conventions such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic,

Religious and Linguistic Minorities, adopted in 1992, and the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights adopted in Barcelona in 1996.

We do not live in a static world of unidirectional causes and static structures. Rather, the world is dynamic, and various forms of human action are interconnected in multiple ways. This also applies to translation, which is not just subjected to changing patterns, but which can also contribute to these changes. Moreover, the role of translation is also evident in the modernization of languages. National languages of any given countries may lack adequate lexico-semantic terminologies, by the instrumentality of translation the gap will be filled by creating cross-cultural and inter-linguistic equivalents. Joseph further asserts that "once an equivalent has emerged, other lexical forms can naturally be derived from the translated model. Subsequently, language modernization takes place thanks to translation"¹⁹ In the same vein, further corroborating this assertion, Joseph²⁰ quotes Ndonga as stating thus: In a globalized world, boundaries are no longer effective because ideas cross cultural and linguistic barriers in real time. Thus, languages should undergo modernization through terminological development. To bridge the communication gap between world views expressed by different languages, translation resorts to some techniques like lexical calque and borrowing. In this regard, Cameroonian languages have witnessed the introduction of new terms which are oreign or coined and which have enriched their lexicon.

Through the use of translation, language graphization is achievable. A living example is the translation of the Holy Bible into some Cameroonian local and national languages like Ewondo, Mungaka, Isubu, Duala, Bulu, Ffulde, etc. these languages by virtue of translation have gained their orthographies registered in the scripture. Logically speaking, the graphization of languages has been achieved through the exploitation of translation.²¹ Besides, one of the prominent roles of translation in language development is the dictionary industry. According to Joseph,²² Cameroon, as a bilingual nation (English and French) has various dictionaries written in either English and a national language or in French and a national language. He further comments that "some of the bilingual dictionaries include the French-Gbaya, French-Basa'a, French-Ewondo, and French-Tunen, among others." From this, one can easily observe that translation fosters the development of languages in general and the Cameroonian national languages in particular on a well entrenched laid down principles which render their standard varieties rule governed.

The role of translation is multifaceted in nature. Echoing the idea of the significance of translation, Anna²³ articulates that "translation can also have a critical influence in politics and can act as an agent for reconciliation or social integration. Translation can therefore have a distinct effect on how global and human rights issue can be conveyed and communicated".

Looking at the unifying aspects of translation, Anna²⁴ cited the case of South Africa as a crystal instance where the current linguistic situation in the country is interesting. Out of various linguistic nationalities, eleven languages are officially recognized and enshrined in the constitutions, but English dominates them. In other words, in politics, business, social and education, English language has become the most dominant.

In Nigeria, we ask ourselves that out of the oft-said 500 language nationalities, what should be the focus of this country in terms of national language policy? Can we evolve one? Which one can we say we want to treat nationally, the one to promote, to use to do government business in order to strengthen the coherence and understanding of ourselves as we see in other developed nations? Echoing the similar concern, Professor Godswill Obioma, the executive secretary of NERDC²⁵ cited the linguistic situation in Rwanda as a living instance as thus:

Rwanda has passed through various colonial governments. Germany, French and so on and they have gone through these in terms of language development but as soon as Rwanda became a Republic, they now said we want bi-lingual, they said we want to speak two languages French and English. And they made every effort to ensure that everybody is bi-lingual. Regarding the contribution of translation towards the international understanding, Anna²⁶ expatiates on the case of Koro language discovered lately during an extensive research on two minority languages Aka and Miji native to India. During the course of research, Koro was discovered by linguists during the "expedition" in 2008 that was a part of National Geographic's Enduring Voices' project. The report is as thus: The linguists reported that the newly found language distinguished itself from the widely known ones in terms of words, sounds and structure. What is even more interesting is that it would appear that the territorial proximity of the Aka tribe has not influenced Koro to a significant extent and that the differences in sounds between the two languages can be compared to the difference between English and Japanese. Linguists have expressed concerns over this endangered language spoken only by an estimated one thousand people, especially because of the fact that Koro does not have a

written form...Therefore, from a linguistic point of view, Koro could be a great example of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that language is strongly influenced by the reality we live in. Koro words reflect the unique perception of the surrounding world by this north eastern Indian tribe. Thus, the translation of this indigenous language can be seen to be an invaluable source of knowledge about this fascinating culture and their existence. The language could provide an invaluable insight into their world view, their values system and their perception of the environment in which they live.... The role of translation in development education becomes self-evident as K. David Harrison, who introduced Koro to the rest of the world, suggests: "Language revitalization will prove to become of the most consequential social trends of the coming decades...." Translation and Literature Development It is no longer tenable to posit that the significance of translation in the reproduction of foreign literatures for the consumption of all and sundry has solved the problems of unequal access to universal knowledge. Translation of literary works (novels, short stories, plays, poems, etc.) is considered a literary pursuit in its own right. In the Arab world, with the rise of Islam and Islamic empire, the translation activities of the Arab began with the translation of the Persian, Greek, Chinese and Indic politics and diplomatic material into Arabic language. Later on, translations of classical Greek and Persian works as well as parts of the Chinese and Indian texts were carried out into Arabic with the intention of studying them scholarly at major Islamic learning institutes like the Al-Karaouine, Al-Azhar and Al-Nizamiyya of Bagdad. Theoretically speaking, priority was given to Near Eastern traditions and more contemporary Greek and Persian traditions.²⁶

Exhibiting the crucial role and impacts of the Arab translation activities, it is reported that: Arabic translation efforts and techniques are important to Western translation traditions due to centuries of close contacts and exchanges. Especially after the Renaissance, Europeans began more intensive study of Arabic and Persian translations of classical works as well as scientific and philosophical works of Arab and oriental origins. Arabic and, to a lesser degree, Persian became important sources of material and perhaps of techniques for revitalized Western traditions, which in time would overtake the Islamic and oriental traditions.²⁷ In the same vein, Cohen²⁸ notes that the Arabs made concerted efforts towards the translation activities, particularly in the aftermath of their victory over the Greek world. All the Greek's philosophical as well as scientific works were translated into Arabic, which in turn were also translated in the Middle Age, into Latin while the Arabs were in Cordoba in Spain. From Latin, translations "of Greek and

original Arab works of scholarship and science helped advance the development of European Scholasticism”.²⁹

An important role in history has been played by translation of religious texts. Instances of this can be observed in the first translation of the Old Testament into Greek in the 3rd century BCE named “Septuagint” in reference to the seventy translators charged to conduct the translation at Alexandria, Egypt. This translation was subsequently rendered into many languages of the world such as Latin, Coptic, Armenian and Georgian.³⁰ In the reformation carried out by the Protestant Reformation, the Bible was translated into several local European languages. This culminated in the polarization of Western Christianity splitting them into Roman Catholicism and Protestantism over certain differences in the meaning of crucial words and passages.³¹ Interestingly, it is my strong conviction that translating narratives from the global South is an invaluable source of knowledge about unfamiliar languages, indigenous cultures and experiences, and is immensely useful for gaining and understanding of non-European societies for development education purposes in particular. As stated before, the Republic of South Africa has adopted eleven languages out of various language nationalities as its national languages. In such a situation, the need of translation for social and political interconnections among this people will be immense.³² At this juncture, Bernacka reports the on-going scholastic debates at the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society at Columbia University since 2009 on the bid to translate indigenous books and other forms of literature in South Africa in which they agreed that: In such a multilingual country, the translation of African literature and culture should be treated as a matter of primary national importance in that it would contribute to spreading the knowledge lesser known social and linguistic groups such as Zulu or Xhosa. Furthermore, such a project would not only make other voices heard but also... broaden the cultural base of English, the other cultures and people of South Africa in a multilingual discourse.

Translation can be seen in this context as an act of mediation and a form of reconciliation between the periphery and centre, the dominant and aspiring culture.³³

It is worth noting here that, according to Joseph,³⁴ as translation works in favor of national languages it also does damages to them. That is the rationale behind what Joseph tagged “a double-edged sword”. In other words, translation of official languages into national languages promotes and enriches national languages. On the contrary, translation of national languages into official

languages engenders "cultural assimilation" which eventually endangers the existence and longevity of national languages.

Who are the qualified Translators? In a qualified translator certain characteristics are expected. A competent translator should be bi-lingual and bi-cultural. This is because a language is not merely a conglomeration of strings of words and of grammatical rules and syntax to form sentences. It is also an array of "interconnecting system of connotations and cultural references whose mastery, writes linguist Mario Pei, "comes close to being a lifetime job".³⁵ According Kasperek,³⁶ competent and qualified translator must be of the following attributes:

- a) a very good knowledge of the language, written and spoken, from which he is translating (the source language);
- b) an excellent command of the language into which he is translating (the target language);
- c) familiarity with the subject matter of the text being translated;
- d) a profound understanding of the etymological and idiomatic correlate between the two languages;
- e) a finely tuned sense of when to paraphrase (translate literally) and when to paraphrase, so as assure true rather than spurious equivalents between the source- and target-language texts.

Conclusion

So far, we have alluded to the meanings of translation and its impacts on every aspect of our life. We pointed out that translation studies can be regarded as science. However, if we take the product of translation into proper accounts, it seems rational to think of it as a craft or art. Whether translation is regarded as a science, art, or craft, it seems significant to note that a good translation should play the same role in the target language as the original did in the source language. In translation, parts of the original text being translated must be rendered properly. A translator is not allowed whatsoever to assume the role of censor and surreptitiously delete or bowdlerize passages merely to please a political or moral interest. Finally, we pointed out the attributes of a good, qualified and competent translator in as much as becoming an accomplished translator after having already

acquired a good basic knowledge of both languages and cultures may require a minimum of ten years' experience. Viewed in this light, it is a serious misconception to assume that a person who has fair fluency in two languages will, by virtue of that fact alone, be consistently competent to translate between them.

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