

TRANSLATION SERVICES AND THE NIGERIAN REVENUE: THE MISSING NEXUS

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by

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Introduction

This short paper intends to throw up some critical issues relating to the socio-economic emancipation that translation is capable of generating in Nigeria if only the right attention is paid to its potentials. Not only that, we are of the considered opinion that owing to the overwhelming popularity of translation as a pedagogical tool in foreign language learning there seems to be no place for a second look at the skill as a business enterprise, capable of yielding profit. Whereas there is impressive literature on the uses of translation in classroom teaching of non-native languages, only a negligible few works are devoted to the 'marketability' of translation let alone to the revenue-yielding potentials of the skill. Whereas translation as a career is seen from the perspective of personal gains, the possibility of the career being exploited to give something back to the society is hardly explored. Yet, we believe that, just as oil or cocoa can be a veritable source of national income, translation, if appropriately addressed, can well contribute its own quota to 'enlarging the coast' of national economy. How this can be achieved is the focus of the remaining part of this paper.

Translation and National Economy

The first area of concern, though not the most important is the use to which pharmaceutical companies can put translation of their brochures. By ensuring that these brochures are put in the languages of the consumer community, the companies

not only enhance their but also improve on their tax returns to Government. Of course, it is important that the translation of such brochures is done by experts who possess demonstrable competence in the languages involved and also have a tolerable level of familiarity with the register of the business. As for all other businesses, a poor translation results in poor public reaction and is capable of producing negative effects on the reader. In the specific case of pharmaceuticals, the danger of misapplication of directives is high in the circumstance of untidily delivered translation.

The role played by media houses is not limited to promoting awareness of services, products and goods. Through the translation of texts carrying these social facilities, they are better known, better appreciated and more enthusiastically consumed. The link between consumption and profit margin on the one hand, and between profit margin and value added tax(VAT) on the other is obvious and all things being equal, the economy of Government will normally receive a boost. In other words, when goods and services experience a positive jolt, it is not just because the radio and the television have promoted them, they have done so in more languages than one. The indirect positive effect of translation should not be lost on us in this regard.

The Film Industry

Nigerians are lovers of film. The assertion is so true that there is hardly any home without film videos of all manner of interests: love, marriage, divorce, attacks, deceit, corruption, perseverance, cowardice, courage, faith, religion, ethnicity, etc. It is also most probable that, apart from football, film is about the most common pastime among Nigerians, young and old. As a matter of fact, the film industry has grown so widely in Nigeria that it attracted an estimated sum of \$ 11 billion (N1,72 trillion) in 2013, thanks perhaps to the revolutionary impact of Chimamanda Adiche's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. As at 2014, the industry was said to have earned itself the prestigious record of being the third most valuable film industry in the world, coming after the U.S and India, and the first in Africa. During the year under review, it contributed about 1.4% to Nigeria's economy. Given the popularity of home videos in particular, the general opinion is that the average film producer is in good money not to talk about individual actors. It is only natural that with the right taxation regime, the revenue accruable to Government from the much taunted

Nollywood industry will be substantial. Whether Nigeria is getting the right dividends from this venture is an open question.

Whatever may be the case, our opinion is that, with more interest in subtitling the films in languages other than the original, for example, in French or Arabic, the chances of the sales growing much higher are greater, the hypothesis being that the interested viewing public will be wider. It needs no gainsaying that the revenue to Government will consequently be higher.

Religion

Nigeria is a country that is characterized by contagious attachment to religion. There is hardly anybody without a profession of, or a confession to one form of religion or another. In Nigeria, you are either a Christian, a Moslem or a traditionalist. What is more interesting is that all faiths are now competing for attention in the social space. They therefore use all opportunities to raise their voices for attention and draw public attention to their spiritual superiority. The radio, the television, the newspapers, the social media are often replete with religious ideologies. More interesting perhaps is the fact that all religious move across languages mainly through translation. Not only is the translation of holy books into hitherto ‘unknown’ languages being vigorously pursued but also the tracts, brochures, pamphlets and other texts undergo translation into languages considered desirable for the expansion of the relevant faith. What are the implications of this trend for national revenue? The truth is that just as the translators and printers earn some money for their jobs, the Government indirectly increases since in one way or another, the yield of the enterprise eventually get to Government. Even then, it need be said that Government should endeavour to see to it that translations are done by accredited TSP’s (Translation Service Providers) so that revenue channel can be appropriately monitored.

The pressure of formal education

All over the country today, the craze for formal education far outstretches the indifference to it, even in spite of Boko Haram. This craze has two immediate implications. First is the fact that more advertisements are a daily experience. Now, these advertisements are not limited to the official language-English; the languages of the immediate community are often involved. In a way, translation creeps in, giving a pride of place to translators. When advertisements are recast in local

languages, it is rightly assumed that the clientele would increase, with the attendant consequence of more translation being done and [aid for.ain, the need for a central body such as NITI (Nigeria Institute of Translators and Interpreters) to oversee the exercise cannot be overemphasized. Otherwise, the whole effort at generating the required revenue from the exercise will be haphazard and unrewarding. The second implication of formal education being made a subject of honorable mention in all quarters is the growing understanding that education is best offered in the mother tongue of the consumer of that education, classically called the learner. But if we agree that the contents of that education are most often provided in English, the official language, the need for these contents to be translated into respective mother tongues cannot be gainsaid. A very arduous task but one that promises a bounty for translators. As the curricula are meant to be translated so also are mountains of texts across all subjects. The argument may go that the exercise may be a once-and-for-all thing or at best seasonal, the fact is translators are kept busy at one point of the scale or the other by publishers. A lot of money is of course involved; so also is the expected revenue meant to rise.

Exports

A cursory look at Nigeria's export drive shows increasing interest in the expansion of revenue base and therefore the annual GDP. This development is not without positive influence on translation potentials, If we take the export to West African countries alone, there is already a yawning demand for language pairing. Without doubt, the language interest of Francophone and lusophone countries must be served if the exports are to be promoted in those countries. Business transactions are better concluded when business partners understand one another's language, which, in most cases, is carried out through translation and interpretation. Exports when labeled in the language of the consumer country win consumers' confidence more readily than the language of such exports is limited to that of the exporter, in this case, English. Whereas the trade-mark can remain in the language of the exporter, the 'modes d'emploi' must carry along the consumer in the latter's language if the export truly wants to achieve expanded consumer base. It should be the case for francophone countries like Bénin, Sénégal, Côte d'Ivoire and the Portuguese-speaking Guinée Bissau.

It need be recalled also that, following the pronouncement of the Honourable Minister of Science and Technology, Chief Ogbonaiya Onu, it may not be long for Nigerian automobiles to find a market in Mali, a francophone neighbor. While the needs assessment in Mali may well justify a look in that direction by the Nigerian Government, it should be added that the automobile needs of that country become rapidly satisfied when crucial promos are carried out in the official language of that country or its major local languages. Here is the room for translators and perhaps interpreters.

Only a few months ago, there was the announcement by Government of yam being exported to USA. As a country whose Hispanic population has grown from 14.6 million to 52 million, USA would not be linguistically sensitive if it did not take the study of Spanish seriously. In the same way, it would amount to business naiveté not to integrate Spanish into the American export calculations and strategies. Hence the need to translate export leaflets into Spanish. Needless to say that our PSP's will gain in the process so also will Government revenue increase from at least two directions; the VAT from PSP'S and the larger market incentive provided by translated messages.

Works of art

The place of works of art in national life cannot be gainsaid. Among those features that define the cultural identity of a nation are works of art. Through art, we get to know the imaginative peculiarities and the creative abilities of a people. The paradox about works of art is that, when original, they attract universal appeal. However, these works rely on translation for them to retain that appeal. Whether by way of their introduction or presentation, or by way of wholesale rendition, these works get known or appreciated across borders. Literary works of art are particularly germane in this discussion. As we all know, great literatures have benefitted immensely from translation. Consider, for example, the number of languages into which the works of authors like Achebe and Soyinka have been translated. Now, how does that affect national income? One of the several ways in which the economy can be positively affected is the universal attention the works attract and the royalty paid to primary publishers most of whom are local and the subsequent dividends accruable to such publishers. In a normal order of things, Government is expected to have its returns by way of VAT and other tax regimes. Another source of revenue to Government is

the increased tourism that works of art generate especially when it is certain that there will be bilingual material or human guides to the rescue.

Tourism and Hospitality Industry

The preceding comments will naturally remind us of the place of tourism in translation or vice versa. It has been asserted that tourism in Nigeria can well become such an important source of revenue that it can favourably compare with places like Brazil and UAE. If a lot of money is being pumped into tourism development, it is largely because Nigeria has seen the link between tourism the GDP and the need to improve on the latter via the former. Now, one sure way of rekindling the fortunes of tourism is through translation and interpretation. There are hundreds of documents to put at the disposal of tourists; there are hundreds of visitors from around the world who would need interpreters to better appreciate their new social and cultural environment. This implies that the more the facilities are guaranteed the larger the population of tourists and, consequently, the larger the income generated from tourism. The point, therefore, is that, without the input of translators and interpreters the clientele from tourism would be severely limited. Conversely, the greater the level of availability of inter-language services, the greater the chances of tourism boom. Of course, the boom should translate into higher revenue for both the country and the translation service providers.

With regard to hospitality industry, there is a lot that translation can offer. From bookings through menu offers to hotel management instructions e.g on room usage and security, the place of translation cannot be over-emphasized. A hotel that offers services in more than one language is indeed better placed than the one that is monolingual. A tourist that is served in his own language especially when that language is not ordinarily spoken in the tourist's new environment feels more at home than when he has to grapple with gestures and mimes. The implications for revenue are perhaps best appreciated when we consider the larger public covered by the translations and the fact that larger public means greater patronage and hence greater income. With proper monitoring, Government should expect greater dividends than hitherto.

Research Outcomes

All over the world, there are ceaseless efforts to better the environment, to proffer solutions to problems, to raise awareness or to advance knowledge in one area or another. These efforts come in form of research. Whether it is in medicine, social sciences or in the arts, the research carried out are usually published for specialists in the appropriate field to assess or simply comment upon. For judgments to be global, it is important that research outcomes be available in as many world languages as possible. Here is a feat left not for the researchers but for the translators whose responsibility it is to convey the message of the research in the most natural way possible. Of course, the more significant a research work is the greater the demand for information on it. In a way, therefore, as the translations help in promoting the research outcomes the revenue of the owner country increases through patents, copyrights reproduction rights and the likes.

International Conferences

Linked to research outcomes are international conferences. Practically on a daily basis, the newspapers are awash with all manner of announcements about impending conferences and workshops that are of international character and which call for the intervention of multiple languages. When these conferences and workshops hold, conference conveners have to plan ahead to cater for as many languages as the protocol of these meetings will require. This necessarily brings in translators and interpreters. Services of these professionals are paid for, though organizers of the conferences or workshops are free to deduct a certain percentage of the fees as tax. In many parts of the world, particularly in Canada and in the US, the deductions reverberate up to Government. In fact, according to an American report released by Common Sense Advisory, (CSA), it is estimated that by 2020, translation services in the US are most likely to fetch about 45 billion dollars annually. If it is possible to envisage this against the next couple of years in America, it is thanks to the constant demand for translation.

Implications

The afore-mentioned sources of revenue attributable to translation services are however contingent upon certain factors that must be taken into account if the services are to be economically productive to the State. An attempt will be made to investigate these factors with a view to assessing their relative relevance to the Nigerian background and experience. In other words, we intend to see the conditions that are necessary for the missing link between translation services and revenue enhancement to be bridged in Nigeria. If the top 100 translation companies in USA are reported to have experienced 'significant increase in their revenue' (<https://www.smartling.com/blog/translation-services-increases-demand-market-fragmentation>), it may not be just due to globalization and upsurge in internet facilities as it has been claimed but also due, in our view, to a number of critical factors that may have been taken for granted but which, in Nigeria, are still a subject for concern.

One of the implications of the march towards exploiting translation for economic enhancement in Nigeria is that there should be a strong central translation body with unassailable authority to direct the activities of translators. The mandate of such a body will include certification and discipline of accredited translators. NITI (Nigeria Institute of Translators and Interpreters) is that kind of body. And it is gratifying to note that the relevant bill to give legal teeth to NITI is in the works. It is then that Nigerian translators can behave like those in Canada and USA where bodies like CTTIC (Canadian Translators, Terminologists and Interpreters Council) and ATA (American Translators Association) respectively provide the necessary platform for the engagement of translators and the ethics governing the profession in those countries. Similar bodies have been springing up in other countries since 2006 when the central coordination of professional translation and interpretation started in America.

Secondly, we need a fair and efficient national tax regime. This is important if cases of tax evasion must be minimized, if the returns from member organizations within the large central framework and from free-lance translators must be properly captured. A porous tax law will give birth to a porous purse. This is particularly true of cases of translation and interpretation which in Nigeria today are poorly assessed

because they are poorly monitored. The poor assessment is not limited to quality assurance alone; it affects how to track emoluments.

Thirdly, it means that service requesters are expected to draw their ‘nominees’ from the list of registered and certified translators or translation service providers (TSP) thanks to a Directory already prepared for that purpose. However, this procedure does not prevent Company-house translators from being appropriately remunerated as long as there is a synergy between the Companies and the central authority, in this case, NITI, just like the central body is expected to be affiliated to FIT (Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs), the umbrella international body.

All translations must be reliable whatever is the circumstance. They must be seen to capture the message of the original text, reading very much like a non-translation. Hence there is a need for post-service editors, sometimes referred to as revisors, meeting thereby the *4 eyes* principle. It is the latter who guarantee the correctness and reliability of the translations. It is also important, in this regard, that relevant source materials such as dictionaries, background concept notes, terminological resources and internet support are readily available. While individual translators may not be in personal possession of these resources given their cost and volume, it should be possible to have access to them via regional centres of the central body recommended.

Now, in view of the fact that a lot of premium is placed on expertise and experience, translators should have the opportunity of being trained and re-trained so that they can be well abreast of new trends and challenges in the field. For example, today, there is much talk about Computer Assisted Translation (CAT) and the relief it has supposedly brought to human translation. It is unlikely that many Nigerian translators have seen how it works, let alone worked with it. Google Translate is a product of machine translation. But it is no overstatement to estimate the number of Nigerian users of Google at more than 25%. Regular exposure to workshops and other training sessions will certainly be an advantage to both young and old professionals.

The foregoing then implies that an organization like NITI should consider it a priority to open up training centres capable of sensitizing members to the developments in the industry and the need for harmonization of working conditions.

Universities should not fold their arms in this regard. While it is not all universities that can shoulder the responsibility of training of translators and interpreters given the fact that specialists in the field are few and far between, a few of them can provide support in that direction. Better still, the Federal Ministry of Education could consider it worth the trouble to establish an inter-regional centre for professional translation and interpretation where, among other things, efforts will be concentrated upon training and re-training of translators and interpreters.

In sum, what we are saying is that unless the missing link between translation services and the national economy is discovered and carefully exploited it may not be always easy for translation providers to be seen beyond serving narrow self-interests. Unless and until Government starts to see the benefits of translation (and indeed interpretation) to the growth of national income, the need to support the industry to take a firm root and to grow will not be centrally and collectively felt. Today, if there is a yawning gap between translation resources in Nigeria and the national economy it is simply because it has not occurred to Government that translation is a hidden treasure that can be worked upon to contribute to baking the national cake and which many developed countries like the USA, Australia and Canada are already using to advance their economy. It is therefore high time that Government attention was directed to these resources so that a greater level of synergy can be forged between ‘fund raising’ and ‘tongue raising’.

Thank you.

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