

ELEVENTH CONGRESS AND WORKSHOP OF
NIGERIAN INSTITUTE OF TRANSLATORS & INTERPRETERS (NITI)
ON **TRANSLATION/INTERPRETATION IN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE**
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KEYNOTE ADDRESS DELIVERED BY PROFESSOR AMOS AMECHI IHENACHO

Your Excellencies
Your Royal Highnesses
Chairman
Present and past Presidents of NITI
Fellows of NITI
Members of NITI
Ladies and Gentlemen

The Organising Committee of the 11th Congress & Workshop of NITI has asked me to supply a few words as keynote to our discussion of the Congress and Workshop theme, **Translation/Interpretation in Democratic Governance**. In attempting to do this, I would, with your permission, like to cast a quick look at the results of a survey carried out by the International Federation of Translators (FIT) 30 years ago, in 1983.

The results of that survey, published in 1984, clearly show the great importance that human societies all over the world attach to the sister professions of Translation and Interpretation, as eloquently as shown by the pronouncements of some of our colleagues here in Nigeria who are, or were, eminent professionals, and as eloquently as shown, too, in the many journal articles and book chapters, and few books written over many years by our colleagues here in Nigeria who are specialists in Translation Studies. They show clearly the status of, and attitude to, practitioners of those professions in many countries, ranging from those in which good governance and democratic practice have attained near-perfection to those where either good governance or democratic practice, or both are piteously lagging behind.

As you can see in the document attached here as appendix, 27 professional associations from 22 countries took part in the survey. They provided answers ('yes' or 'no') to questions regarding the availability or not of certain services or facilities thought to be crucial in the exercise of their professions. Tanzania was the only African country that took part in the survey. Two countries (India and Tanzania), answered only one question in the affirmative (out of a total of 18 questions).

Now, let us look at just one of the questions, regarding the existence of:

(m) state or public institutions for the training of *professional* interpreters and/or translators.

19 countries/associations (including India) answered this question in the affirmative. And that was the highest number of affirmative answers in the survey (together with question (f) regarding **Statutory regulations concerning copyright for translators**, which had 19 'yes' answers as well). If Ghana were present, she would have answered 'yes' to that question (a 'yes' that dates back to a long time ago, possibly even to the time of Kwame Nkrumah!) If Nigeria were there, she would have answered 'no' to that question; today, 30 years on, in 2013, Nigeria will still answer 'no' to that crucial question!

However, Nigerian practitioners have achieved a lot through their own personal efforts – except that that first generation of practitioners cannot live and work for ever, as many colleagues (including Ekundayo Simpson and Tundonu Amosu) have repeatedly warned, and lamented, and rightly raised the alarm.

May we here, Ladies and Gentlemen, remember that we of NITI mourn the untimely disappearance of yet another of our few ace interpreters, Muyiwa Phillips. May his soul rest in perfect peace!

On a positive note, our eminent colleagues who presented the NITI bill in the House of Representatives, to the House Committee on Education, have told us that the bill was well received by that Committee; that members of that Committee posed probing questions and made very helpful comments, including the recognition that NITI, more than most other Nigerian professional associations, has international status or presence and, therefore, deserves proper regulation and official recognition. We wish to thank the Honourable Members of the House Committee on Education for their thoughtfulness and forthrightness; and we urge the Houses to expedite their action to turn that bill into law.

TRANSLATION/INTERPRETATION AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

An organization that promotes democratic governance (National Democratic Institute, NDI) defines that notion as follows: “effective public-sector institutions and processes that operate in a manner consistent with democratic values of transparency, representation, pluralism and accountability”

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for its part, has this to say about democratic governance:

“More countries than ever before are working to build democratic governance. Their challenge is to develop institutions and processes that are more responsive to the needs of ordinary citizens, including the poor, and that promote development. UNDP helps countries strengthen electoral and legislative systems, improve access to justice and public administration and develop a greater capacity to deliver basic services to those most in need (...)
Through its programmes, UNDP brings people together within nations and around the world, fostering partnerships and sharing ways to promote participation, accountability and effectiveness at all levels. We aim to build effective and capable states that are accountable and transparent, inclusive and responsive — from elections to participation of women and the poor.”

In our discussions, we may need to ask ourselves how far Nigeria has gone in actualising genuine democratic governance. Is genuine progress taking place in the most crucial areas of our needs; or are we fossilized, so to speak, in a situation in which, year in year out, leadership shows us empty hands, having achieved no real progress with all the petronairas at its disposal and sanctimoniously prays that, “by the grace of God”, “by the special grace of God”, “by the very special grace of God” (sic), our lot, our lives, will improve?

Then we may need to determine how the professions of Translation and Interpreting impact on democratic governance in Nigeria; and, conversely, how democratic governance (or its lack) affects the work of translators and interpreters. The practice of Translation and Interpreting ramifies most aspects of the activities carried out by any and every government; more so with regard to democratic governance; more so in a country like Nigeria with her insularity among many non

English-speaking countries, with her over 160 million inhabitants among whom over 400 languages are spoken.

Would we need to enumerate the services that Translation and Interpreting must render to democratic governance in these circumstances? Do we need to discuss the tasks that those professions must carry out in Nigeria? Here are some:

- To ensure mass communication, as well as other forms of communication in the country
- To facilitate the government's dealings with the outside world
- To help preserve the cultural heritage of the country
- To help enrich the country's culture(s)
- To enable Nigerian culture(s) to contribute to the universal cultural market
- To assist the process of civilization and scientific and technological advancement in the country
- To help export the country's technology abroad
- To help provide more diversified sources of entertainment.

But, what is Translation? What is Interpretation? I know that in the following section I might be preaching to the converted. Please forgive me for that.

TRANSLATION

The word **translation** is derived from the Latin past participle **translatus** which itself comes from the Latin verb **transferre** (**trans** = **across**; **ferre** = **to carry**) the main forms of which are: **transferro, transferre, transtuli, translatum.**

First, in its widest sense, **translation** means the verbal or non-verbal re-expression of the message inherent in given communication signs. In this sense **translation** includes the sister profession known as **interpretation** or **Interpreting**.

The person who carries out the re-expression is known as a **translator** and the action is defined by the verb **to translate**.

Secondly, the word **translation** is also used to describe the transfer of, say, a Bishop from one see or district to another, or of a saint's relics from one location to another.

Thirdly, the word **translation** is also used, in the Holy Bible, to describe the conveyance of a living person to heaven without the person having to pass through death.

Fourthly, the word **translation** is also used in mathematics to denote, according to Collins English Dictionary, "a transformation in which the origin of a coordinate system is moved to another position so that each axis retains the same direction".

In that first acceptance of the word, which is the one that is relevant to our professions, it may stand for:

- The very concept of translating
- The practice of re-expressing a message in other, alternative signs
- The activity carried out by a translator
- The operation or process involved
- The end product of the operation
- The growing academic discipline now known as **Translation Studies**, or, in a restricted usage, **Translatology**.

This discussion of the English word **translation** will enable us to inquire, if need be, into the motivation of its equivalent in other languages:

- French **traduction** from the Latin verb **transducere** (to *lead across*)
- German **übersetzen** (to *set over*)
- Russian **непобогмв (pere vodit)** (to *lead* or *conduct across*)
- Hausa **fassara**
- Igbo **itughari**
- Yoruba **tunmo**
- Etc.

Might there be something in the form and content of these words that could point to something significant in the world view of the speakers of the various languages?

DEFINITION OF TRANSLATION

In terms of what we do when we translate, we may wish to adopt Peter Newmark's definition, which says: "Translation is an exercise which consists in the attempt to replace a written message in one language by the same message in another language".

This definition brings out the following points:

- It is an **attempt**, and may be more or less successful
- It is **written**, which brings in the specialized differentiation between the two sister professions: **Translation** (written communication) and **Interpretation** (oral communication)

- The textual material considered and replaced is a **message**; therefore human communication takes place
- There is **language contact**; two languages are involved, source language (SL) and target language (TL).

We may also wish to borrow Jacques Flamand's definition, viz:

Traduire, c'est rendre le message d'un texte de départ avec exactitude (fidélité à l'auteur), en une langue d'arrivée correcte, authentique et adaptée au sujet et à la destination (fidélité au destinataire),

We would thus bring in the capital notions of quality and faithfulness.

FRENCH INTERPRETE

In his scholarly introduction to Danica Seleskovitch's book *L'interprète dans les conférences internationales*, C. Andronikof traces how the Turkish word **turdjuman** evolved through **dragoman** or **drogman** to **drugement**, and became **truchement** in the hands of Molière (author of *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*) who used both **truchement** and **interprète** to designate the **interpreter**.

Interprète obviously got the upper hand. And Andronikof goes on to deprecate the use of **interprétariat**, preferring **interprétation** which functions rather like the English **translation**, as described above, as well as the French **traduction**.

TRAINING OF PROFESSIONAL TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS

The issue of training is a very crucial one, and I have no doubt that presentations and discussions in this area will take account of the many studies on the subject as well as proposals by our colleagues.

Among other studies, one of the chapters of Ekundayo Simpson's book *TRANSLATION: PRINCIPLES AND APPLICATIONS* addresses the problem of training. And in his keynote address at a NITI Congress and Workshop several years ago, Tundonu Amosu considered the problem of training and proposed "a complete overhaul of our curriculum".

We know that a number of universities run PG programmes in the training of translators but, of course, none in the training of interpreters. Where do these programmes lay emphases? Striving to improve the competence of the trainees in English, in French, in any other language they might have? Inflicting hours of the history and 'theory' of translation on them? Would it be possible to single out a few really talented students and drill them constantly in **practical** translation courses?

Would it be possible to go cap in hand to the Nigerian Government, as supplicants, and request at least **ONE STATE SCHOOL OF TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS**? (Nigeria is worth more!) Is importing necessary help from experts abroad too much problem, or so costly an exercise that the Government cannot handle it?

Finally, I have no doubt that colleagues who would be discussing the equally crucial subject of Translation/Interpretation and the Mass Media, and other sub-themes of the workshop must have come across several studies by some of our

colleagues in these areas; for example, Ekundayo Simpson, as well as Evaristus Anyaehie, on Translation and the Mass Media.

A look at the themes and sub-themes of past NITI Workshops shows that certain themes, like training, the mass media, always come back. That is a very healthy situation; for these are areas in which we need constant update. I hope that we can all continue, in the same vein, to update our ICT skills, as NITI President has continued to insist.

I look forward to fruitful discussions in this workshop, and a useful outcome.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you for listening.

Amos Amechi Ihenacho