

Translating For The Radio:

A Case Study of Voice of Nigeria (VON),

the International Radio Broadcasting Station of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. A Keynote Address delivered by Mr. Ezekiel Ndukwe, Director Strategic Planning and Corporate Development, Voice of Nigeria, at the 11th Nigerian Institute of Translators and Interpreters (NITI) Congress held at the Conference Hall Ray Field Hotels Asokoro, Abuja ,On November 28 and 29,2013.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the world has witnessed a steadily increasing demand for translations. This has been made possible by scientific and technological progress, the growth of scientific, technical, commercial, cultural and other relations as well as the desire by nations and governments to develop cooperation and coordinate their efforts in promoting civilization. In fact, there has been a growing awareness on the part of nations of the need to improve their image and promote their culture, their political and economic programmes among their peoples and other nations of the world. This is important in a world that is economically, politically and culturally interdependent considering the fact that no nation can develop in isolation. This situation has led to an extensive and active use of the services of translators since nations of the world do not speak one language and even within individual nations, the people speak different languages.

The need to ensure that translated cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological information is propagated to the benefit of an audience as large and as wide as possible has been one of the preoccupations of peoples and governments. And they have resorted to various means to achieve this goal. One of such means is the Mass Media which are being extensively used because of the advantage of the extensive audience participation they command. There is no doubt that this situation and progress in modern technology have given rise to an enormous growth of the radio, the television and the newspaper markets, with nations and governments establishing more and more of them, calling for more translators than ever before. This development has not only revolutionized the usual translation methods but also, in many respects, broadened the functions of the translator. In fact, the present standard of information dissemination services has produced a class of translators who are called upon to perform many functions at the same time. They have to translate texts, adapt them to the target audience and get on air to deliver them.

This paper is therefore an attempt at highlighting what is involved in translating for the radio with particular reference to the Voice of Nigeria which is an organ of the Federal Government of Nigeria established in 1961, immediately after our country's independence, for the purpose of promoting government policies and programmes as well as the nation's culture. The main focus of this paper is translating for the radio with particular reference to translators at the Voice of Nigeria, their duties and challenges as well as special demands of the radio which they have to consider without prejudice to the normal translation problems in the course of their duty and the prospects of translation at the Voice of Nigeria.

The paper is based on the writer's study in the fields of translation and radio journalism, his activities as a French producer/translator with the Voice of Nigeria. The paper will briefly examine translation as a discipline, text categorization, types of translation, translation techniques, category and nature of texts for radio translation to enable us appreciate the requirements of translation. It will then, as earlier mentioned, dwell extensively on translation and translators at Voice of Nigeria, problems, challenges, and prospects in the organization to serve as practical examples of translation in a media organization especially the radio. It will be pertinent to take a look first at translation as a discipline. The question then is what is translation?

2. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF TRANSLATION

Translation is the act of moving from one language into another by reproducing information contained in one language (the source language, SL) into another (the target language, TL), while ensuring that TL items have more or less the same meaning as the SL items replaced. It involves preserving and transposing of meanings, ideas, beauty and the entire value of a textual material written in one language into a second one.

According to Jean Darbelnet, quoted by Ekundayo Simpson, Translating in the Nigerian Mass Media: a sociolinguistic study, Quebec, CRB, 1979, p.3 “translation is the operation which consists in transferring from one language to another all the elements of meaning of a passage, and only these elements, while ensuring that they retain in the target language their relative importance, as well as their tonality; - and also taking into account the relative difference presented by the cultures to which the source language and the target language correspond respectively”,¹

Any translator worth the name must be highly proficient in both the source and the target languages and he is expected to comprehend their nuances.

In addition to linguistic competence, the notion of translation presupposes a knowledge of the cultures of the languages involved. This is important given the fact that the vocabulary of any language derives its meaning to a large extent from its culture. Meaning is the basic link between culture and language and it is the central field of translation.

The translator, as a reader or listener must first understand the ideas as expressed in one language and then as an author or speaker, he reproduces the ideas in the target language.”². Translation involves the intellect, intuition, emotion, imagination, will and memory. Experience, research, knowledge among other factors come into play in translation. The process has many aspects to it linguistic, informative, literary, aesthetic, historical, cultural and communicative. It is not just a simple but a complex process of substitution.

What therefore could be regarded as adequate translation of a source text is a function of a combination of factors such as “the nature of translation process, its linguistic and extra-linguistic layers, the nature of the source and the receptor of the message, the differences in linguistic structure, and culture and world view of the two languages in contact situations”³ . Texts are categorized in translation. This brings us to our next line of discussion.

3.TEXT CATEGORIZATION

A further basic question of interest to translators in the search for translation equivalence is text categorization. The category to which a text belongs is determined through the categorization of the source language text taking into account the problems involved in translating the text. There are three major categories of translation: technical or scientific translation; general translations and literary translation. Although items belonging to these broad categories may overlap at various points and levels, the distinction still stands.

Naturally, technical translation is essentially different from the two other categories by the fact that its subject matter is relatively hermetic in nature and contains mainly technical terms. Therefore, the problem of translating in this case requires that, apart from linguistic competence, the translator should be knowledgeable in his field and master the terminologies involved.

On its own part, literary translation calls for the poetic and imaginative use of language within a non-empirical framework. It requires literary and creative competence. The translator in this case is a co-author.

As for general translation, it is made up of general texts of varying subject-matters. These are mainly socio-political texts. Although the subject-matters may involve the use of technical terms where appropriate, such subject-matters are never so remote from the general experience nor the technical terms used so many as to constitute a serious barrier to easy understanding. There are however types of translation.

4. TYPES OF TRANSLATION

There are three types of translation: **intersemiotic, intralingual and interligual.** ⁴

Intersemiotic or intermedial translation could be referred to as sign translation. This involves explaining or illustrating the contents of a text by the use of non-verbal means and symbols such as diagrams and pictures. In this case linguistic signs are interpreted by the use of non-linguistic signs. An example is the practice in audio-visual language courses where a word or a phrase is represented by an appropriate sketch or photograph. Other examples are road signs and the drawing of a crossed stick of cigarette to indicate that smoking is not allowed.

Intralingual translation is translation or movement within one language. This involves a situation where a complicated text written in a language is explained by the use of a more comprehensive paraphrase or near synonyms in the same language. Here the linguistic sign of the same language is replaced without changing the meaning of the message.

Interlingual translation is the type that involves translating the linguistic signs of a particular language by the use of those of another language. It calls for movement from one language into another. For example: This type of translation is the most generally used and important to the linguist and the human community. There exist different translation techniques.

5. TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES

This is another issue that is of great interest to translators in the search for translation equivalence. There are about seven of these techniques which almost all translators use consciously or unconsciously. They are **borrowing, calque or loan transaction, literal or word-for-word translation, transposition, modulation, adaptation and equivalence.**⁷

Borrowing is the easier of the methods. It is a frequently used device. As the name suggests, it occurs when the target language borrows a word from the source language leaving it untranslated. It is used when the need arises to fill a gap in the lexis of the target language or in the case of an unknown concept. The translator can also adopt the method for stylistic effect, to create a sense of atmosphere and to give local colour to a text. Examples are: management, weekend, dollar, football, marketing in French and doyen, courier, salon, bon voyage in English. These include geographical and proper names.

Calque is a special and more sophisticated type of borrowing which involves the transfer of a source language phrase or group of words into a target language and the components parts of the phrase or group of words are translated literally. Examples are “complements of the season” for “compliment de la saison” “to give the green light” “donner le feu vert” “science fiction” for “science fiction” “the man in the street” for “l’homme de la rue”.

One may also use the **literal method of translation.** **The word-for-word translation** applies normally in the case of two fairly closely related languages having similar grammar and lexis as well as related cultures and families:

“Ou allez-vous?” _____ “Where are you going?”
“Il part pour Paris demain” _____ “He leaves for
Paris tomorrow”.

Transposition is the method used where a part of speech is replaced by another without changing the meaning of the message:

“Des son retour” _____ “as soon as he gets back”

Here a noun is used in French whereas a verb has been used in English.

In the case of **modulation**, what happens is that the emphasis or view point is changed when a correct but readily acceptable translation would otherwise result. Examples are:

“the time when” _____ “le moment ou”
“jusqu’a une heure avancée de la nuit” _____ “till the late
hours of the morning”

“it is not difficult to show” _____ “Il est facile a démontrer”

Equivalence is the technique which involves repeating or describing the same situation or idea as in the original text by means of different structural and stylistic elements. This applies to proverbs, saying and fixed expressions:

“as simple as ABC” _____ “simple Comme bonjour”.

“from coast to coast” _____ ”d’une mer a l’autre”

“within earshot” _____ “a portee de voix”

“when in Rome do as the Romans” _____ “il faut hurler avec les loups”.

In the case of **adaptation**, the translator observes that a situation described in the source language does not exist in the target language and he has to illustrate it by a different one. References to a “test match” becomes references to the “tour de France” as a similar and reasonably appropriate sporting activity.

We have examined some questions and issues of interest to the translator in the search for translation equivalence. Before we move on to the section which will be devoted to people involved in the transfer of meaning from one language into another at the Voice of Nigeria, it would not be out of order to discuss the nature of texts involved in radio translation and what distinguishess the latter from any other type of translation.

CATEGORY AND NATURE OF TEXTS FOR RADIO TRANSLATION:

As has been pointed out earlier, text particularization is absolutely necessary in the search for transaction equivalence. A knowledge of the category to which a particular text belongs would help in identifying the problems involved in translating such a text and therefore what methods should be adopted in the search for equivalence. In this context, certain questions readily come to mind in the specific case of radio translation: To what category do texts involved in radio translation belong? Are they general, literary or technical texts? In what ways does radio translation differ from any other type?

Generally speaking, radio translation involves mainly general texts. The reason is not far-fetched. The primary aim of radio broadcasting is to inform, educate and to entertain. The information given in radio is of the general type. This is far from saying that radio broadcasting has no place for literary and technical translations. Such translations would occasionally take place depending on the type, subject and contents of programmes meant for broadcast. But priority is given to general

information texts and therefore general translation. Yet, the fact remains that the general text meant for radio translation as opposed to the ordinary general text such as a newspaper story has characteristic features that distinguish it from the latter.

According to Richard Aspinall, “all radio writing is writing for the spoken word and everyday speech should be the guide to the words we use and the manner we use them. In talking with one another we use familiar words. We assemble what we have to say in short phrases and seldom put ideas together in the kind of lengthy paragraphs which we may write”.⁵

It is necessary at this point to look more closely at the nature of the radio text. Is what is involved written or oral text? The radio translator and the translator of a general text receive texts in the form of written material but they do not process the message for the same target audience. Whereas the radio translator produces texts for the ear (the listener), the translator handling an ordinary general text does the same thing for the eye (the reader). It then follows that in translating for the radio, oral mode of expression is paramount.

But it has to be stated at this point that if oral performance is central in translating for the radio, this does not imply that radio translation is interpretation which, in its technical sense, involves “the oral processing of an oral message”.⁶

What is involved in interpretation, such as conference interpreting, is the oral transposition or transfer of oral or non-visual message from one language into another. The interpreter does not see the original text. With the aid of the earphones and the microphone, which are in most cases his tools, he listens to the text the speaker is reading out in one language and renders the message he has heard into a second language. But in the case of radio translation, what we have as the original material is a visual or written text. This is given to the translator to be processed into a message meant for oral delivery. Although there may be exceptional situations where the interpreter is provided with a text to be processed, in which case what is involved is, to a greater extent, similar to translation than to interpretation, the distinction between the two operations still stands. Radio translation is, therefore, “the case of processing of written material meant for oral delivery into another language where delivery would also be oral”⁷ this is exactly what takes place daily at Voice of Nigeria. We will therefore examine the translators/translations at the Voice of Nigeria.

VOICE OF NIGERIA

Before we proceed with translations/translators at VON it is pertinent to look at the organization and its mandate

Voice of Nigeria (VON) is the sole International Broadcasting Radio Station of the Federal Republic of Nigeria authorised by law to broadcast to the outside world "to the exclusion of any other broadcasting authority or any other body in Nigeria." VON which became autonomous in January 1990, was established in 1961, following Nigeria's growing role in the affairs of the African continent and the need to have an external radio channel through which authoritative information about the African situation could be disseminated to the entire world.

It has as its Mission "Reflecting Nigerian and African perspective in our broadcasts. Winning and sustaining the attention, respect and goodwill of listeners worldwide, particularly Nigerians and Africans in the Diaspora. Making Nigeria's voice to be heard more positively in the shaping of our world".

And its Vision is "To become the International Radio Broadcasting Station of first choice for anyone interested in Nigeria and Africa".

It broadcasts on the following frequencies:

7255 KHz on 41m band – West Africa.

15120 KHz on 19m band – North Africa and Overseas.

11770 KHz on 25m band – East and Central Africa.

9690 KHz on 31m band – West and Central Africa.

Voice of Nigeria broadcasts in eight (8) languages namely English, French, Hausa, Arabic, Kiswahili, Fulfulde, Yoruba and Igbo. Translations are therefore done in all these languages . The authorities of VON are working towards the reintroduction of German language which was stopped due to paucity of funds. There are also plans to introduce Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese and some other indigenous languages on VON.

The practice of translation in Voice of Nigeria dates back to 1961 when it was established as the External Service of the then Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC). It is one of the oldest institutions in Nigeria that has consistently, extensively and intensively used the services of translators for its operations and has therefore directly or indirectly encouraged translation in the West African sub-region and beyond.

Apart from the translation of broadcast materials, Voice of Nigeria is engaged in the translation of government policy documents especially those that emanate from the Federal Ministry of Information and Communications.

It is believed that in Nigeria VON employs the largest number of people who practice the art of translation. Currently, more than fifty (50) members of staff of VON carry out translation work on a daily basis and about 1000 pages of translation are done in VON in the languages of broadcast daily. This amounts to 30,000 pages in a month and 360,000 pages in a year or 45 pages per hour and $\frac{3}{4}$ page per minute.

It is on record that many good translators were introduced to translation at Voice of Nigeria. Some of them are very well known and work in International Organizations, the Foreign Affairs Service, Tertiary Institutions etc. They are Akin Demeideros of the ECOWAS Secretariat, Mr. N. Nwobasi of the Foreign Service, Late Mark Ekundayo Dada, Late Akin Kolade, Professor Jacob Ukoyen, of the University of Ibadan, Karl Mann of the University of Ilorin, Lena Okon of UNDP, among others.

In fact, one of the translators, Late Bose Atewologun, formerly of the ECOWAS Secretariat, in whose memory NITI instituted an award, was a product of Voice of Nigeria.

It is therefore obvious that VON has made important strides in the promotion of translation thereby contributing immensely to development, peace and harmony at national and international levels.

TRANSLATORS/TRANSLATIONS AT V.O.N.

Translation services in Voice of Nigeria are provided by the Language Services: Hausa, Ki-Swahili, Arabic, French, Fulfude, Yoruba and Igbo. Each of the Services is headed by a Supervisor and attached to the Programmes Directorate.

There are more than 50 members of staff translating for the Voice of Nigeria in the 7 existing language Services. All the people who apply to work in the services are mainly equipped with a first degree in their expected languages of operation. These people are recruited as programme producers but translating forms the major part of their work. Many of them have worked as translators/producers in international radio stations across Europe and Africa within the framework of VON's MOUs with these international broadcasters. They are expected to translate a variety of materials from English into their working languages. Materials translated include news reports, newspaper articles, news bulletins, press reviews, commentaries, advertising copies, speeches, features, official documents and agency materials.

Applicants who come to the language services of the Corporation are subjected to a Voice and a 3-hour translation tests. The test normally consists of translation into the applicants expected working language of English language tests of approximately 500 words, using material related to the type of work done at the Voice of Nigeria.

The use of dictionaries and other reference material is permitted during the test the purpose of which is to select candidates who have broad background and linguistic ability and may find satisfaction in using and developing them.

New comers to the Services are mainly fresh graduates who are not taught how to translate properly at the undergraduate level or who, in some cases, have no experience of translation work, let alone radio work with its specific requirements. As such they are expected to undergo a complete re-orientation to translation under the informal training programme provided by the Services. These new arrivals are attached to experienced translators/producers in the field who guide them systematically, making sure that they are briefed and exposed to the operations of the Services, methods of work and background reading materials. As a matter of fact, they must read widely in their languages of operation and listen to radio stations that broadcast in these languages to keep abreast of developments of the news and current affairs register in the languages.

Translations done by a new member of staff are revised by experienced translators, who then discuss with the staff member any corrections or changes made and offer advice and suggestions on ways to improve the quality of work. In most cases, revised drafts of translations are returned to the new member to enable him learn from the corrections made. This process is repeated until the supervisor is satisfied that the new member of staff understands what is required of him and can now operate without supervision while facing the problems and challenges arising from translating for the Voice of Nigeria.

4. **PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES**

The translator working for the Voice of Nigeria is confronted with all the difficulties encountered during conferences, such as highly technical subjects, working under pressure, unavailability of texts, lack of lexical equivalents for objects and events not known in the target language among others and he has to meet the usual requirements of translating. But it is important to note that translating for the Voice of Nigeria requires more than the qualities of a conference translator. In fact, a translator at the Voice of Nigeria is expected to be a new

breed of worker who should have the qualities of a translator, a journalist, an editor, a producer and a presenter to be able to face squarely the challenges and constraints which are the result of the demands of radio broadcasting and the peculiar nature of the organisation he is working for.

One of the challenges which the Voice of Nigeria translator faces emanates from the nature of radio broadcasting which lays emphasis on oral performance. In radio broadcasting oral communication is paramount. The presenter of a text meant for the radio is involved in what amounts to a one-sided conversation with the audience. In this case, any texts for translation are meant to be processed into a message to be delivered orally. But in most cases, these texts are badly written or are not originally meant for the radio as they are prepared by writers and journalists who are not experts in radio broadcasting. While rendering such texts, it is therefore important for the Voice of Nigeria translator to be conscious of the need to reflect the oral performance objective of the radio by adapting the text to the radio style which is conversational in tone.

Such a style has to be smooth, clear and to the point. Sentences are kept short and simple. Not every sentence needs to be complete. For complete sentences, the basic structure for conciseness and punch is simply subject, verb and object. Easily understood words are required. Pretentious adjectives, adverbs and verbs are out of place. This is necessary for the sake of the listener who cannot go back and look up or check for words in his dictionary when he gets confused.

At ordinary conferences, translators have to consider the correct spelling of words only. But for the translator at Voice of Nigeria who has to translate, adapt and present a text, the spelling of words is important, although not as much as the pronunciation of words which must be established before the text can be presented. This is one of the headaches of translating at the Voice of Nigeria.

Flair for journalism and editorial duties – this is a quality translating for Voice of Nigeria increasingly calls for. The task of the Voice of Nigeria translator does not end with rendering the text accurately. It extends to the search for the right linguistic approach to a potential audience. Linguistic perfection and the listener's psychology are very important. Apart from the well-known differences among human beings, their psychology is linked with the national character and racial peculiarities of the nation to which the listener belongs. Therefore the effectiveness of a radio broadcast largely depends on the consideration given to this factor. A translator working for Voice of Nigeria is expected by all means to

avoid the impression of a translated text. He would go to any length in order to copy the style and diction of the language into which he is translating.

In most cases, the translator is confronted with the need to re-write a text or at least insert something to make the material more attractive and palatable to the target audience.

The restricted nature of broadcasting time which has made the range of material for broadcast to be restricted is another source of worry for the translator at the Voice of Nigeria. Each text meant for broadcast must not last below or beyond a specific duration.

It is not always that both the source and target languages are at par when it comes to the resources available to them for expression. One of them may be more expressive in character than the other. Besides, the air time allocated to the source language text may not be of the same duration as that of the target language text. Therefore, the translator in this case does not have an easy task. Working against time, he has to produce scripts that are exactly clocked in the face of pieces of information competing for attention. Confronted with the need to ensure that his programme does not under run or overrun, he must add and weed out facts as may be called for in a given situation. Needless then to say that texts translated for broadcast at the Voice of Nigeria are marvels of compression and expansion. Translating in this establishment calls for ability to do these things efficiently if one must avoid being penalized and regarded as an inefficient producer.

Perhaps one of the most difficult problems which the Voice of Nigeria translator has to face is in the area of language. It is common knowledge that most translators work into their native tongue or into their language of habitual use. This is always so except in the case of people who at a tender age has the opportunity to learn more than one language well and who acquired their education in both cultures, thus enabling them to move freely in both directions.

This view is supported by such authors on the problems of bilingualism as W. F. Mackay, G. Steiner, U. Weinreich among others. But how many of such people are working for the Voice of Nigeria?

5. PROSPECTS

It is not inconceivable that the nature of work involved in translating for the Voice of Nigeria as described above will require that serious thought be given to the development of training programmes for people who handle translation work. It is to be noted that, generally, the Voice of Nigeria attaches great importance to manpower development. In the past there was no official training system for Voice of Nigeria translators. But recently management has realized the need to assist those who handle translations in voice of Nigeria, For example; voice of Nigeria has signed MOU's with foreign broadcasters where staff of language services are sent to update their knowledge in the area of language development and broadcast operations in their languages; staff are also encouraged to pursue studies and attend seminars on acquisition of translation skills. Training programmes have been designed for translators, but their full execution is hindered by paucity of funds.

It is to be noted that people involved in translation in Voice of Nigeria are not recognized as such. This is in spite of the extensive translation they have to handle under pressure. Writing on this issue in his monograph on this category of workers at Radio Nigeria under which the Voice of Nigeria operated before becoming autonomous in 1990, Simpson observed that "all those involved in translation are designated "Assistant Producers", "Producers", and "Senior Producers"⁷. The situation still remains the same thing at the Voice of Nigeria. It is important to note that the Voice of Nigeria translators do not receive remuneration commensurate with the specialized nature of the work they do, that is, special emoluments and so on outside the normal Civil Service salary structure. Some time ago, there were plans to introduce a system whereby programmes in languages other than English are not the direct result of translation but these plans are yet to materialize.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that for now, the prospects of translating at the Voice of Nigeria are far from being bright and promising. As long as the above situation persists, most people who come to work in the language Services end up discovering sooner or later that there are no career prospects for them as translators in the establishment and so decide to leave at the earliest opportunity. And the Corporation continues to be the worse for it as low staff retention has produced a low dividend in terms of institutional memory and familiarity with procedures and specialized terminology. And, of course, this situation affects translation quality in the organization as well as the growth of translation in this sector.ss

6. CONCLUSION

Translation is a multidimensional discipline. Over the years, its practice has been revolutionized as a result of modern technology and civilization and translation is now applied effectively in several areas such as the radio with special requirements and demands. Translation as it is practiced at the Voice of Nigeria, calls for more than the qualities of a translator; it equally requires the flair for journalism, editorial duties, programme production and presentation. In spite of the numerous challenges the Voice of Nigeria translator has to face, he is not recognized as a translator. At the moment career prospects for the translator in the organisation are not bright. But it is very difficult to state whether the practice of translation will be sustained in future at Voice of Nigeria. An alternative system, other than the building of programmes by translation, could be evolved. But until that is done, translation will continue to be practiced by people who have no intention of making a career as translators in the organisation. And yet the danger here is that translation may not attain the professional standard required. Translating -- to be or not to be in Voice of Nigeria? Only time will tell.

I thank you all for listening.

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