

Language of Languages: Translation, Interpretation and Preservation of African Heritage in the New Frontier of Development

Stephen J. Oluoch

Department of Languages Linguistics and Literature, Kisii University (yahuma173@yahoo.com)

Abstract

The rapid challenges in ideological as well as linguistic situations throughout the world increases the level of difficulty in defining global heritages and languages. Hence; the need to bridge the gap between cultures and languages of the world. This is because each cultural component defines its relative unity in terms of the cultural and linguistic parameters which have enabled the world to move into the 21st century; call for evolution of both multi-linguistic and multi-cultural entities from ethnic and national viewpoints into global family. Conversely; western leadership in science and technology and cultural advancement is likely to last well into next century. Africans will continue to need important stimuli from western as well as other foreign sources. But, technological, cultural and scientific interdependence requires Africans in turn to begin making a contribution to the new world of future. For this to be achieved African indigenous languages to be involved in the process of cultural exchange and preservation. African indigenous languages can contribute towards this endeavor through translation, interpretation and digitization. This article seeks to propose and argue for translation and interpretation to be a tool for preservation of African heritage and bridge of communication between languages of limited diffusion and those of wider communication. The article tries to address the following issues: What is the position of African languages in the preservation of African heritage in the new frontier of development? Can translation and interpretation be a tool of communication between languages? What should be done to revitalize African languages to compete favorably with major languages of the world? How can African indigenous languages be preserved?

Keywords: Heritage, Interpretation, Indigenous Languages, Preservation, Translation, Orthography

1 Introduction

The study of Nexus between language, communication and development as a phenomenon has attracted much attention from social scientists and communication experts. Much emphasis has been put on modern languages as means to wider communication as opposed to the role of African indigenous languages and other world languages of limited diffusion in the field of communication. Most of the studies on languages of limited diffusion including African indigenous languages more often than not, focus on anthropological issues at the expense of issues related to communication and development.

However, the role of indigenous African languages and other languages of limited diffusion, in diffusion of development agenda in less developed parts of the world should not be under estimated. This is because the rapid changes in ideological, scientific and economic as well as linguistic situation throughout the world increase the difficulty in defining global cultures and languages. This is because each cultural component defines its relative unity in terms of cultural and linguistic parameters which have enabled the world to move into the 21st century, call for the evolution of both multilingualistic and multi-cultural entities from ethnic and national viewpoints into a global family. Conversely, western leadership in science, technology and cultural development is likely to last well into the next century. Africans and citizens of the less developed parts of the world in reference to the above parameters (Science, technology and culture) will continue to require important stimuli from western as well as other foreign sources. But, scientific, technological and cultural interdependence requires that the less endowed nations in turn begin to make a contribution to the new world culture of future.

It is from this background that this article seeks to propose and argue for translation/interpretation to be considered as a bridge to global cultural communication. The article tries to address the following issues: What are the position of African indigenous languages and other languages of limited diffusion in the global cultural communication? Can translation/interpretation be a bridge to global cultural communication? How can the indigenous African languages and heritage be preserved?

2 The concept of Translation and Interpretation

Translation is the transfer of source texts (ST) into target text (TT) in a written form while maintaining the original form and meaning in the target text (Gile, 2004). The oral form of the process as postulated by Oluoch (2014) is interpretation. The overlaps make a clear distinction impossible, Munday (2008:5) observes that the term 'translation' is very multidimensional in that it could refer to the general subject of study, the outcome of the work (the text that has been translated) or the process itself (the act of producing the translation also referred to as ('translating'). The process of translation is generally observed by semanticists to involve two languages. In this case, two different written languages are taken to be working together to convey a meaning in a communication.

Munday (2008:5) underscores that the process of translation between two different languages involves the translator changing an original written text (the source text ST) in the original verbal language (the source language – SL) into a written text (the target text – TT) in a different verbal language (the target language – TL). This is the process which is referred to as 'interlingual translation' by Jakobson (1959/2004:139).

Indeed, it is the traditional focus of translation studies.

The purpose of translation as averred by Koksai & Yuruk (2020:329) is to serve as a substitute for the original. Translation makes it intelligible for people who cannot read/speak the language in which the source text is found.

Interpretation is explained as oral transfer of meaning of source text into target text (Catford, 1965). The difference between translation and interpretation is based on type of texts involved in the transfer of meaning. This distinction has been fixed by two international consortium of professionals: International Federation of Translators (IFT) and International Association of Conference Interpreters-dealing with oral transfer of meaning. Interpretation is further divided into subcategories namely; consecutive interpreting, liaison interpreting and community interpreting. Consecutive interpreting is an oral transfer of meaning which is delivered after listening to a speaker (source language text) so there is some time lapse between the source text and the target text. Liaison interpreting is a transfer which takes place in spontaneous conversational settings. Community interpreting is an oral transfer which is sentence- by-sentence. Munday (2008) observes that currently all over the world, consecutive interpreting is used mostly in bilateral contacts in which only two working languages are involved. Interpreting could be in two ways: when an interpreter works for both participants in the source language and target language, this is a two-way or bidirectional interpretation which requires advanced skills in both the working languages. A one way interpreting, which means transfer from one language only, this is usually employed in summit meetings.

Interpretation came in handy after World War 1 at the Conference on the Preliminaries of Peace in 1919, before then, all international meetings

were being held in French which was the language of diplomacy in the 19th century (Oluoch, 2014:20). Later, interpretation was used in Nuremberg trials (1945-1946) and Tokyo trials (1946-1948) of war criminals.

The boundary between translation and interpretation is very fluid. Translator and interpreter as professionals are closely related, and quite similar to each other, yet they are also very different. Fundamentally, both translate from one language into another, however, there are remarkable differences between the two. This distinction is stated clearly by Koksai and Yuruk (2020:30) that an interpreter works with spoken communication, while a translator deals with writing websites, scripts, legal, technical documents, manuals. An interpreter is often required to translate back and forth; that is from and into a particular language. Translator do not have to translate from target language back into the original source language. Munday (2008) observes that interpreters are required to translate on the spot; at conferences, meetings, television coverage signing for hearing impaired audience, diplomatic mediations between nations etc.

Translation and interpretation are both very sensitive processes, so, there is serious need to choose the right words and convey them in an appropriate language to avoid translation errors.

3 Position of African indigenous languages and other minority languages in global cultural communication

Culture consists of the material object as well as the patterns for thinking, feeling, and behaving that are passed from one generation to the other among members of a society [Shepard, 1996:86], society is composed of people living within defined territorial borders who share a common culture. Culture becomes the carrier of these peoples moral, aesthetic and ethical values.

Simala (2000:160) observes that all over the world, culture has come to be viewed as an important resource and a mediating agent in development. This is the binding element that ties individuals together through their integrated patterns of behaviour, thought and communication. Language is part and parcel of culture. The cultures of Africa, Asia and South America, as much as those of Europe, are integral part of the modern world, hence, the need for the whole world to move from the dominance of European languages such as English, French, Spanish to all the other languages over Africa and the world. Ngugi (1993:10) contends that this move towards pluralism of languages will act as legitimate vehicle of the human imagination and communication. The involvement of African languages of wider communication such as Kiswahili, Hausa, Lingala, Luganda, Wolof and those of limited diffusion such as Suba, ElMolo, Dorobo, just to mention but a few in international communication network will encompass the movement to resurrect aspects of the cultural heritage of black people in different parts of the world and forge a new status of dignity in global cultural arrangement. This move will call for cultural dialogues and exchange of ideas among the African and minority languages and major European languages. Dialogue between cultures are genuine source for cultural dynamo. For a long period of time African and minority languages of Asia and Latin America have never found their place in global political and scientific sites. This argument leads us to ask: Do African and minority languages of Asia and Latin America have the ability to express the global culture? Or, put it this way: can the global culture be viewed through the prism of African and minority languages of Asia and Latin America?

In this report, *Our Creative Diversity*, the World Commission on Cultural Development (1995) calls for a strategy of world development based on a new global ethics, a strategy which

positively promotes and enhances the diversity of cultures and one which takes into cognizance the potential of local cultures, as well as the role of culture at individual, societal, national and international levels, thus making culture the centering for sustainable and equitable development. In reconciling culture and national or international development, a priority area should be language, as a means of communication and general public.

Language is a fundamental force and institution in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and, must be incorporated into any strategy of development that is adopted. Language is crucial in education, and both are important elements in development of culture. The realization that the center for holistic development for example, in Africa is in peoples themselves, their values, environments, motivations and resources is underscored by the Organization of African Unity (O.A.U) Language Plan of Action of 1987, which argues that the cultural advancement of the African peoples and the acceleration of their economic and social development will not be possible without harnessing in a practical sense indigenous African languages. Empowering these African languages will bring knowledge and information to the masses in languages they know and are close to.

How can these minority languages of Africa, Asia and Latin America be empowered? The empowerment of these languages can only be achieved through the art of translation and interpretation. Translation/ interpretation study as an aspect of linguistics has enormous contribution to national development. Foreign ideas, concepts and technology will always be imported from developed nations in foreign languages, and for these ideas, concepts and technology to be domesticated in developing nations, there will be need for translation/interpretation services. Conversely, inter-cultural communication can only be

achieved through translation services. Ngugi (1986:8) has maintained that indigenous languages are best fitted in generating and recreating the best of African culture. Moreover, major intellectual paradigms of the west are likely to remain unavailable even in single African language unless there is genuine translation/interpretation activities involving wide spread adoption of African languages and the minority languages of Asia and Latin America as media of communication in education and cultural sites.

Translation of for example literary works from African and minority languages of Asia and Latin America to dominant European languages such as English, French, Spanish and vice versa will enable the government and societies of Africa, Asia and Latin America to share their cultural riches with the rest of the world. Classic works such as *Al-Inkishafi* in Kiswahili has been translated in several European languages. This move has enabled speakers of these language to share with Africans of the East African Coast the treasures of Swahili culture. Other illustrious examples of translated texts are the translation of Finnish classic *Kalavela* Written by Elias Lonnrot into Kiswahili, more should be done on the legends and myths of the minority languages and cultures. More Kiswahili literary works which have so far been translated into several European languages are: *Sauti ya Dhiki*- Abdilatif Abdalla as *Voice of Agony*, *Mashairi ya Muyaka* as *Poems of Muyaka* among other works.

These moves have shown that languages and literatures of the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America are not peripheral to the twenty first century. These languages are central to what has made the world what it is today. This is why Ngugi (1993:22) says that African and minority languages of Asia and Latin America must not be afraid of borrowing from the best in world culture. All the developed and developing cultures of the world have borrowed from other

cultures in a process of mutual cultural development.

On the other hand, on the world political sites, the external relations between Africa, parts of Asia and Latin America has never been encouraging with reference to the use of African and minority languages of Asia and Latin America. These languages hardly occupy any place of honour. Their place has been taken by major European languages: English, French and German.

Among the official languages at the United Nations there is not as at now a single language of African, Asian or Latin American origin. Of the five continents, the only one not represented linguistically at the UN is Africa. It is in the opinion of this article that Kiswahili, or Hausa, Wolof, Shona, Ahmaric be made one of the official languages of the UN and all its organs. Of these languages, Kiswahili's candidacy will carry the day. This is because Kiswahili at the moment has a global representation in all the continents. In this context, Kiswahili would certainly be good for each country in the world as a medium in which all nationalities inhabiting its boundaries could participate. Kiswahili will be a common language of communication within a country and for the world. This inter-language communication can only be achieved through the medium of translation and interpretation.

This can only be realized through the establishment of centers for writing, translations and interpretation in the capitals and universities of African, Asian and Latin American countries. These centers will facilitate cultural and technological communication among the languages of limited diffusion and popular languages of European origin. Through translation and interpretation services continents of Africa and Asia will open up themselves to the other continents. At the moment translation and interpretation services among African languages and other major languages in the world are least

developed in African countries. The reasons to explain this paucity are many. Among these reasons are: lack of translation/interpretation experts in these countries and scarcity of fund to hire the very few available experts to undertake the translation and interpretation services.

The problem of lack of experts in this field has been addressed constantly by the International Federation of Translators (IFT) in its members' annual conferences every year. The IFT has organized workshops and seminars for its members on the emerging issues in translation and interpretation in languages of limited diffusion since 1992. However, very little success if any has been realized in this endeavor in African languages. This is because very few African countries send their representative to these annual conferences. In Eastern Africa, Tanzania has been the only country with active participation in this federation. Tanzania's participation has always been facilitated by The Institute of Kiswahili Research; University of Dar-es-Salaam and other national associations like the National Council of Kiswahili (BAKITA) and The Association of Tanzania Poets (UKUTA). However, these associations have failed to link the many languages of Tanzania with the major European languages. They have translated little if any classic works from for example Zaramo, Haya, Nyamwezi among other languages into English, French, German and vice-versa. This has made these societies to be unable to exchange their world views.

In Kenya, the role of translation and translators/interpreter in national development as has observed by Oluoch (2006:13) has been neglected. There is no any Association in Kenya which brings together translators/interpreters from the media, publishing industry, government and private sectors. Furthermore, the universities in Kenya have not yet established centers for writing, translation and interpretation, and, very few of them offer expertise courses in translation

and interpretation. There is need for The National Association of Kiswahili (CHAKITA) to spearhead the move for establishment of a writing, translation and interpretation center to facilitate training of translation experts and also translate/interpret works from Kiswahili to other African languages and other major European languages and vice-versa.

4 Translation and interpretation as a bridge to global cultural communication

Translation and interpretation are very central to intercultural communication (Koksal & Yuruk 2020:327). Deficiency of knowledge of another culture can cause confusion, misunderstanding and even offense in communication process. The importance of translation as a bridge in intercultural communication in variety of fields cannot be underestimated. The world is currently interlinked and translation/interpretation fulfils a role by breaking down language barriers. Professionally, translators play a role as intercultural communication experts, mediators, and the bridge between people, cultures and opinions (Oluoch,2014). Translation/interpretation actually represents that place where cultures, previously separated, converge and establish ongoing relations. Translation/interpretation in this sense is one of the media through which intercultural communication is possible. To achieve this, a translator must consider the cultural background of the text as a matter of critical importance. Umberto Eco (2003:162) puts it clearly into perspective by asserting that: a transition/interpretation between two languages, but also concerns an exchange between two cultures, or two encyclopedias. A translator/interpreter not only has to keep in mind rules which are strictly linguistic but also cultural features, in the broad sense of the term. From Umberto Eco's assertion, it is very clear that the nexus between culture and communication is

inseparable. Smith (1966:7) observes the importance of this nexus by reasoning that knowledge of culture is needed in the process of translation, since translation/interpretation as intercultural communication needs to be seen as a dynamic process in which the cultural variable is of crucial importance. The translator/interpreter has to possess and develop knowledge of the relationship among language, culture and communication before tackling a translation/interpretation work.

In intercultural communication, the translator/interpreter is seen as an intercultural mediator which travels across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Liddicoat (2016:349) underscores this view by asserting that: mediation is thus to be understood as an interpersonal activity focused on the interpretation and representation of meanings that takes place in the communicative space between writers and readers.

Intercultural crisis communication translation and interpretation in the recent past have manifested in areas of science and technology all over the world. Translators and interpreters are very useful in mediation in terrorist conflicts. While elucidating on the role of the translator and interpreter in terrorist conflicts, Diaz (2021:63) asserts that translators and interpreters work could be very meaningful in the prevention of international terrorism. Diaz observes that it is important to avail linguistic analysts who can collaborate with the intelligence services, and to avail mediating experts who can communicate with immigrants' civilian populations.

Terrorist attacks such as the United States (New York, 11 September, 2001), Spain (Madrid, 11 March, 2004 and the United Kingdom (London, 7 July, 2005) culminated into the development of common strategies to counter terrorism in the world. The strategies to be used must involve multiplicity of several languages in play. The only link among these languages is translation

and interpretation. This is underscored by Navarro (2004) by considering that to attain remarkable success in such cases is by involving information and knowledge management experts.

Another phenomenon which is tied to terrorist conflicts is the influx of number of refugees around the world. This scenario would require the need for trained translators and interpreters who would work alongside humanitarian personnel in the refugee camps. Todora (2021:153) argues that in these particular situations, interpreters are not just enablers of communication by transferring content from the language into another but active partners, alongside the humanitarian personnel.

5 Strategies translators and interpreters use to mediate between languages and cultures

In an arena where there are multiple languages and cultures which are in contact, there is need for a communicative text which will carry the cultural features while mediating from one language to another. In this case, Kuzenko (2017:3) emphasized the need of a translator and interpreter to be familiar with source language and target language cultures. They should also be aware of the purpose of the communication and the audience to enable the translation and interpretation process be an effective cross-cultural communication. For this to be realized, Hervey and Higgins (2002:20) believed that cultural translation is the most appropriate strategy to be used. They referred to this strategy as cultural transposition. According to Harvey and Higgins the strategy works towards naturalizing foreign features by choosing and replacing them with features which are indigenous to target language and culture.

Hervey and Higgins established a scale of five strategies which could be used to mediate between source culture and target culture.

These are:

- i. Exoticism: - In this strategy the level of transposition is very low. The translation and interpretation still carries the cultural and linguistic features of source language to target language.
- ii. Calque: - which include target language words but in source language structure therefore making it familiar to a large extent.
- iii. Cultural borrowing: - the source texts expressions verbatim into target text. After a period of time the usually become a standard in a target language terms. This kind of borrowing is very frequent in history, legal, social and political texts.
- iv. Communicative translation which is mostly used for culture specific expressions. In this strategy the translator/interpreter substitutes source language word with an existing concept in target culture. The propositional meaning in this case is not the same but has similar impact on the target audience. The last strategy is (v) culture transplantation. In this strategy, the whole text is rewritten in target culture.

6 Preservation of African heritage

It is estimated by language scholars (Ogechi, 2003; Oluoch, 2014; Ogone, 2008) that between 700 to 3000 languages are spoken in African continent. Of these, the same scholars aver that hundreds are considered endangered while many have disappeared. The languages which have disappeared have also necessitated the loss of people's cultural and intellectual heritage. How then can this gloomy scenario be remedied? There have been attempts to preserve the

indigenous languages of Africa in the recent past. Several world and continental organizations such as UNESCO, African Academy of Languages (ACALAN), SAS Hackathon, national governments, Media and Publishing houses have come up with strategies to preserve African languages and heritage.

Innovative initiatives have been put in place in Africa to promote the use of languages of limited diffusion throughout Africa. In South Africa, for example, the Pan African Language Board has compiled siSwati language dictionary which has contributed to preservation of siSwati. The dictionary is a major contribution to pedagogy as teachers could now get the much needed assistance. This project was supported by MacMillan Publishers. The creation of, and translation of business software into many of South African indigenous languages is a greater milestone in preserving indigenous languages of South Africa. One of the organizations which has been in the fore front in digitizing the indigenous languages of South Africa is the Zuza Software Foundation. The foundation through experts has translated and digitized Linux into Zulu, Xhosa, Venda and many other languages of limited diffusion in South Africa. In Ethiopia, Shabo and Ongota –indigenous languages of Ethiopia were studied and documented in 1999 through funding from Endangered Languages Fund. Similar study and documentation was also done in South Africa in NIU to document and preserve the structures of this language.

African Academy of Languages through its Vehicular Cross-border Language Commissions and Focal Points has ensured that much effort is put on preservation of African indigenous languages. This is achieved through proper implementation of ACALAN's developmental program at the grass root level. One of the major achievement towards the preservation of African indigenous languages by ACALAN is the successful attempt to harmonize the writing

systems of cross-border language to enable it be used in education system, in the media, meetings and other fora. The academy established the Pan African School for Interpretation and Translation. The school's major objective is to train translators and interpreters on African indigenous languages so that they can be used as technical languages of development in Africa. The 'African languages and cyberspace' which is a program of ACALAN is geared towards making African languages have visibility in the internet.

Similar efforts on making African indigenous languages have visibility in digital platforms have been done in Cameroon. Dixon (2022) reports that data scientists in Cameroon through digital team *LangTech* have sort away to preserve indigenous African languages of Cameroon. Cameroon is home to at least 250 languages; with many considered living others deemed lost or extinct. Dixon contends that local speakers of native languages in Cameroon are very few because younger generations are not encouraged to learn the languages. This situation is further compounded by lack of or little documentation and structuration of these languages. This makes digitization of these languages be a big problem to resolve. The comments of Swi Innocent Che, Team LangTech co-leader as quoted by Dixon summarizes the situation:

Some languages have little documentation and this makes those languages unstructured-and when those languages aren't structured or documented, it's challenging to digitalize the language.

Despite the challenges encountered by team LangTech in Cameroon, a digital platform for some of the indigenous languages in Cameroon was successfully created.

Language is preserved through language in education policy of a government. The importance of language in education is captured in the policy on education which gives priority to indigenous language as a medium of instruction in education system. Williams (2004) contends that African languages could be the most critical element for Africa's survival, and cultural, educational and economic development.

Prah (2003:26) underscores the role of harmonization of orthography of mutually intelligible languages into one base language as a mean of preservation of indigenous languages. The Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society (CASAS) has been in the forefront in linking linguists and other experts in an endeavor towards the harmonization of orthography between mutually intelligible clusters of languages in Africa. CASAS has developed a tool to guide on this work of harmonization of orthography. Some of the language clusters which have been harmonized through CASAS program are depicted in the table below:

Table 1: Casas work on harmonization of orthography

Harmonized core language	Cluster of languages
Gbe	Aja in Nigeria, Aja, Mina, Fon and Gun in Benin; Mina and Ewe in Togo; and Ewe in Ghana.
Languages of Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique	ciNyanja/ciCewa, ciNsenga/ciNgoni; eLomwe, eMakhuwa,ciYao, ciTumbuka/ciSenga, ciBemba, kiKonde, Lunda, ciLuvale isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele, isiShangaan, Seswati, Ngoni.
Nguni	Sesotho, Setswana, Sepedi, SiLozi.
Sotho/Tswana	Mande, Malinke, Dyula, Mandingo, Bambara.
Mandenkan	Gurunshi, Frafra, Senufo, Moree, Kulanga. Twi, Fanti, Brong, Baule, Agni.
Gur	Ati, Meke, Dzaman, Mtumu, Mvenyi and Okak.

Prah (2003) observes that not all languages which are mutually intelligible could be collapsed into one orthography. In the CASAS documentation and harmonization of orthography it is noted that some clusters such Luo (Anyuak, Shilluk Jur, Lafon, Acholi, Lang'o, Alur, Dholuo, Dhopadhola) do not easily collapse into one orthography. Others which do not collapse into one orthography are Somali, Rendille, Borana and Oromo clusters. The harmonized orthography should be used to produce materials to be used in formal and informal education and mass media. Through this approach many indigenous African languages could be preserved.

Language in education policy is a major avenue for preservation of languages. Language is a fundamental input of a society into the school system. Instruction in school is given out in a shared language. In this sense language facilitates learning. Abari et.al (2013: 9) observe that stripping a society of its native language is like stripping it of its culture and heritage.

7 Conclusion

The role of translation and interpretation in global cultural communication cannot be over emphasized. Translation and interpretation facilitate cultural dialogue among minority and major languages of different societies. Languages of limited diffusion will open up to the developed nations only through translation and interpretation services. It is very important that Africans should preserve their languages, globalization notwithstanding. African nations must provide the means by which their languages and cultures could be saved from complete extinction. As, has been discussed in this article, this could be done by promoting the native languages through the language in education policies. Through this policy indigenous languages should be made mandatory subjects at all levels of education in African countries. The harmonization of orthographies of mutually intelligible languages in Africa should be encourage and funds for the same should be provided by national governments and donor partners. The harmonized orthography should be used as a medium of wider communication.

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