

Translation and the National Language Policy: A strategic framework for enhancing literacy in Nigeria

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.60787/jolan.vol5no1.413>

Halima Umar Sani
Department of Linguistics and Foreign Languages
Bayero University Kano
sanihalimaumar@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper explores the contributions of translation to the national language policy framework, highlighting its importance in enhancing accessibility to information on Government policies and education, as well as the factors that lead to challenges in translating educational materials. Translation plays a critical role in the effective implementation of national language policy in Nigeria, a nation characterized by its rich linguistic diversity with over 500 languages spoken across its various ethnic groups. The paper uses the ethnographic method of data collection, which involves interviews, observation as well as written texts and online materials. Newmark (1988) was adopted as model of the analysis. The findings revealed that translation ensures that government documents, educational materials, and public announcements are available in multiple languages, thereby bridging communication gaps and fostering a sense of belonging among all citizens. The findings also revealed that translation aids in improving literacy rates and learning outcomes, allowing students to engage with content in their mother tongues, by promoting the use of local languages in educational contexts. This alignment not only supports cultural preservation but also enriches the educational experience. The findings further revealed challenges of translating the educational materials, and the strategies of overcoming them. Finally, the role of translation in Nigeria's national language policy implementation underscores its significance as a tool for promoting cultural understanding, and enhancing equitable access to educational resources. The study recommends that government should put more efforts in developing orthographies of all the indigenous languages to meet the demands of its multilingual society.

Keywords: Translation, national language policy, cultural issues, cultural equivalent and proposed pedagogy

Introduction

Nigeria, a multilingual country with over 500 ethnic groups, faces significant challenges in promoting literacy among its citizens. Despite efforts to improve literacy rates, Nigeria still lags

behind other countries in terms of literacy levels. One effective tool for promoting literacy in Nigeria is translation, which can be leveraged through the National Language Policy. Then, the government of Nigeria enacted the National Language Policy in 2022 to ensure that children from primary 1-4 are taught lessons in their mother tongue or in the most widely used language of their region. This follows several researches conducted which show that teaching in English has contributed to the growing rate of school dropout and the pupil's failure to understand lessons in Nigeria. Indeed, most children are enrolled into formal schooling with some form of knowledge of their mother tongue languages. However, they do not often find correlation between their knowledge and the school subjects which are taught in English. Scholars have unanimously agreed that teaching in the mother tongue gives children a strong foundation to learn how to read in their first language. This is because when a child is taught in the mother tongue, he/she easily understands and expresses what is taught, asks questions on what he/she does not understand and interacts with teachers and fellow students. However, in spite of the success being recorded so far in this attempt, its full implementation is trailed by a lot of challenges, including provision of teaching and materials for children in Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE- Primary 4), such as books of reading, stories and dictionaries, which were previously in the English language. To ensure that children acquire knowledge in their mother tongues, these teaching and learning materials need to be translated into different Nigerian indigenous languages. There is no doubt that translation is going to be central to the attainment of the goals of the National Language Policy. Language is the foundation for translation, because it is through language that a human being expresses his/her inner feelings. As Yakasai (2012: 46-47) argues, "Language is the means through which a human being expresses his/her feelings and thoughts". This means that language is the means of communication between people. This method of communication is not visual but audio, which implies that language is made up of meaningful sounds that are produced by the speaker and listened to by the listener, who then interprets their meanings. The question here is 'what are the appropriate methods to follow in translating teaching and learning materials, so that they go in line with our culture and the actual message to be sent to children in schools'? This article explores the potential of translation in promoting literacy in Nigeria, with a focus on the National Language Policy, the challenges to be encountered during the translation process and the

translation strategies that will assist in the accomplishment of those goals, for the betterment of education in Nigeria.

The concept of translation

Translation is an age-old phenomenon that has played a key role in knowledge production and development of human societies. It assists in the spread of knowledge of science and technology, commerce, healthcare and religion between different societies. Several scholars have made attempts to define translation. For example, Catford (1965) submits that “Translation is substituting or replacement of message of one text into another. In translation, the form of the source language is replaced by the form of the target language”. Nida & Taber (1974:12) contends that “Translation consists of reproducing in the the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style.” On his part, Brislin (1976: 1) sees translation as “a general term referring to the transfer of thoughts and ideas from one language to another, whether the language is in written or oral form, whether the languages have established orthographies or not; or whether one or both languages is based on signs.” For Wilss (1982: 3), “Translation is a transfer process which aims at the transformation of a written source language text (SLT) into an optimally equivalent target language text (TLT), and which requires the syntactic, the semantic, and the pragmatic understanding and analytical processing of the source text. Syntactic understanding is related to style and meaning. Understanding of semantics is meaning related to activity. Finally, pragmatic understanding is related to the message based on context or implication of a sentence.” Newmark (1991: 27) defines it as “the act of transferring meaning of a stretch or a unit of language, the whole or a part, from one language to another.” All these scholarly definitions show that translation is an exchange between different languages, by way of being mindful of meaning and cultural nuances between the languages involved. We can also deduce from these definitions that the most important concern of translation is to bring the equivalent expression in target language that conveys the same meaning, nuance and intent as the original message in the source language, thereby ensuring that the intended communication is accurately conveyed and comprehended by the recipient.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed - methods approach, combining desk research and in-depth interviews. A comprehensive review of existing literature was conducted, drawing on books, articles, journals, and online sources. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were held with renowned scholars in translation studies and expert translators, providing invaluable insights and expert perspectives that informed this paper. However, a sessional interview was conducted with scholars, in order to fully understand the contents of the National Language Policy. All the exemplars presented in this paper are drawn from Hausa, one of Nigeria's three main languages and prominent lingua franca in the Northern region. This choice reflects the language's significance in the country's linguistic landscape and facilitates the illustration of key concepts and ideas.

The role of translation in promoting literacy

Translation plays a crucial role in promoting literacy, particularly in multilingual contexts like Nigeria. By translating educational materials, literary works, and other texts into Nigerian languages, translation can help to:

- i. Increase access to education: Translation can make educational materials more accessible to learners who may not be proficient in English or other foreign languages.
- ii. Promote cultural preservation: Translation can help to preserve Nigerian languages and cultures by making literary works and other texts available in these languages.
- iii. Enhance literacy levels: Translation can contribute to improved literacy levels by providing learners with materials that are relevant to their linguistic and cultural contexts.

The contribution of translation in educational development

There is no doubt that translation has played a vital role in most aspects of human life. History has shown that translation has for long contributed in societal development, in terms of education and language. The English language has been profoundly influenced by translations from other languages throughout its history, resulting in a significant expansion of its vocabulary, grammatical structures and literary styles. During those times, the English people's effort to translate most of the Greeks' works is what elevated their language above other languages of the world. For example, if

we look at most of the works conducted by the Greeks on science and philosophy, it is difficult to find those works in their source language. Translation as argued in Abioye (1999), Simpson (2007), Timothy-Asobele (2007), among many others promotes international understanding, encourages dialogue between cultures, and promotes interaction and cooperation in all spheres of nation building and development. Thus, translation educates people to know new concepts and ideas as well as what is happening around the world. Therefore, this study claims that translating teaching and learning materials into the mother tongue languages will improve the standards of education in Nigeria in the following ways:

Easy and quick understanding of lessons

Translation helps in quick and easy understanding of information in the teaching and learning process. Studies have shown that most of lessons which are taught in classrooms would have their contents better understood and easily internalised by students, if the lessons are translated into the mother tongue languages, much more than how they are taught in the English language. There are instances during lessons when a teacher often translates some concepts in the native language before the students fully understand the topic being discussed in the class. There are topics which necessitate teacher to drop English and use the native language as long as he/she wants students to understand the lesson. What do you expect if the whole lesson is given in the local language? Here, we have come to understand that translation has an important role to play in teaching and learning. This has further shown that translating children's books in various subjects would aid their understanding of lessons, instead of cramming which most of them resort to in order to pass examinations. For example, if we attempt to teach Mathematics in Hausa, we would realise that initially, the Hausa have had their own method of counting from one to ten. Traditionally, this method teaches children how to count items via use the following song:

Table 1

Number	Hausa version	English version
1	Daya mafarin kirga	One, the beginning of counting
2	Biyu idanun dabba	Two, the eyes of an animal
3	Uku kafafun murhu	Three, the stones of a cooking spot

4	Huɗu kafaffun tebur	Four, the legs of a table
5	Biyar na yatsun hannu	Five, the fingers of a hand
6	Shida ranakun aiki	Six, the working days
7	Bakwai ranakun mako	Seven, the days of the week
8	Takwas goma ba biyu kenan	Eight, that's 10 minus 2
9	Tara daga ita sai goma	Nine, you are next to 10
10	Goma biyar biyu kenan	Ten, that's 5 times 2

If we look at the counting method in the table above carefully, this method teaches Hausa children to count using everyday objects and some parts of their body, making numeracy skills more accessible and engaging. Similarly, it teaches them how to express number eight by subtraction and addition to arrive at number ten in counting process. Therefore, translating Mathematics into local languages will ease children's understanding from the beginning. It also encourages the development of educational materials in local languages, which can make education more accessible.

Communication and inclusivity

A well-translated learning materials would help in facilitating better understanding and collaboration among learners in Nigeria. This is especially important in a country with multiple languages and dialects, as it aids education and community relations. This is because when a child is taught in the mother tongue, he/she can easily understand, and have confidence to express what he/she learned, be able to asks questions on what he/she does not understands and interacts with teachers and fellow students without fear. Therefore, translation into various languages would have a positive impact on the education system by promoting the use of indigenous languages in schools, leading to improved literacy rates and better learning outcomes for students.

Knowledge of places around the world

Translation also allows students to know the names of places, countries, seas and continents around the world. Some examples

Table 2

Name of Countries	Translated Hausa version
America	Amurka
Great Britain	Burtaniya
China	Sin
Russia	Rasha
Cameroun	Kamaru
Chad	Chadi
Somalia	Somaliya

Similarly, translation will also make students to learn names of continents, like:

Table 3

Name of Continents	Translated Hausa version/Hausa version translation
North America	Amurka ta Arewa
South America	Amurka ta Kudu
Europe	Turai
Asia	Asiya
Africa	Afirka
Antarctica	Antatika
Oceania	Osheniya

Likewise, students have also learned to know large water bodies across the world, such as

Table 4

Name of large water body	Translated Hausa version/Hausa version translation
Pacific	Fasifik
Red Sea	Maliya
River Rome	Bahar Rum
Indian Ocean	Tekun Indiya

Atlantic Ocean	Tekun Atlantika
----------------	-----------------

Finally, it includes knowledge of world's deserts, such as the Sahara Desert, Kalahari Desert, the Syrian and Arabian Deserts as well as cultural identity and unity. Nigeria is a linguistically diverse country with over 500 languages, therefore, translation will help promote a sense of national identity while preserving local languages and cultures. It encourages unity in diversity by fostering respect and appreciation for different linguistic groups.

Understanding the major challenges of translating early grades learning materials

Despite the potentials of translation in promoting literacy, several challenges need to be addressed. Due to this account, this study identified some challenges of translating early grades learning materials.

Cultural issues

Translators must be sensitive to cultural nuances and differences to ensure that translations are accurate and relevant. The biggest problem being faced in translation is the coming of words and phrases that carry some cultural nuances, which may be difficult to translate directly in a way that children will understand the message being passed to them. In the past, there were arguments among scholars on how to tackle the issue of cultural variation in translation. Nida (1964), who discusses the problem of correspondence in translation and the need for equivalence in grammar and culture between the source and the receptor languages, believes that at times, cultural variation is often more problematic in translation than syntactic variation.

Similarly, Nida also identifies two central issues in relation to translation: formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. In formal equivalence, there is a complete correspondence between the source and the recipient languages in terms of structure and content. In other words, the translator tries to preserve the vocabulary and the structure of the source text as much as possible. In dynamic equivalence, on the other hand, there is an attempt to translate the source text using words and structures that make more sense in the receptor language. This means that the aim of this translation process is to maintain the intended meaning and elicit the intended emotional response by utilising

the grammar and vocabulary that are more natural to the receptor language speakers. In short, Nida concludes that most of the problems of translation can be attributed to differences in the contents and the cultural nuances between the languages involved.

Baker (1992) notes that the vocabulary of the source language can portray a specific thought and worldview that is alien to the speakers of the target language. This can be overt or covert. They can also be related to cultural or religious injunctions of the two different groups. Baker also notes that a translator may come across linguistic items that have no equivalence in the target language at all, which is possible due to cultural differences. Thus, she identifies the following items whose equivalents cannot be found in other languages:

- Worldviews that are peculiar to a particular culture
- Worldviews or thought patterns in the source language, which do not have similar expressions in the target language
- Source language vocabulary that has a difficult or obscure meaning
- Differences in meanings between source and target languages
- When the target language lacks vocabulary that are polysemous
- When the target language lacks vocabulary that can be used
- Differences which are obvious or relative
- Differences in sending meaning
- Differences in structure and style
- The use of loanwords on the part of the source language

This indicates that it is imperative for a translator to be conversant in semantics and grammar, because that is what allows him/her to know weight of vocabulary and identify the differences in styles between the source and the target languages. It is this that also allows him to know the way on how to find a middle ground in the event of lack of equivalence in the semantics of the languages involved. These ways are arranged in a series. It is an undeniable fact that cultures are

gradually becoming more universal and the translator must take note of this. Therefore, by approximating the culture of the source language in the target language translation, it allows the translated text to be read with little difficulties. Again, the text becomes more interesting to read when it contains some level of unfamiliar vocabulary. This also brings the translator closer to the culture of the source language. It also allows the reader of the translated text to come into contact with the culture of the source language.

Translator

As we all know that translation is a bilingual activity, language is just the first prerequisite which is not enough if not accompanied by extra linguistic knowledge, general knowledge – versatile education, experience, technical skills, and motivation. These and many more are the qualities needed from a professional translator who is expected to play a positive role in the implementation of national language policy.

Target beneficiaries

The beneficiaries are the audience who are going to read the translated text and understand the message being conveyed. Knowing the target audience is very important for the translator. That is what enables him/her to choose the appropriate vocabulary, style and sentence structure that can be easily understood by children, for whom the translation is done.

Coulthard (1992) remarks that by first identifying the reader of the source language text, it allows the translator to determine the kind of translation needed. He says that the first problem the translator encounters relates to how he/she must think of the new readers in the receptor language which, even if he/she possesses the knowledge and thought process of the source language reader, there may be differences in the two cultures. Therefore, it is important that translator should pay attention to the age group of the target readers, their level of education, sex, etc.

From this discussion, it can be understood that culture is a fundamental aspect of the translation process, so much so that it is hard to translate items from one language to another without giving due consideration to cultural variations between the two languages, especially the receptor

language. However, it is also possible to have cultural differences from one speech community to another, even if they communicate in the same language. That is why it is pertinent to consider the culture of the people who speak the receptor language, especially due to its influence in shaping the attitudes and behaviors of the people in this society.

However, these challenges also present opportunities for innovation and collaboration. For example, technology can be leveraged to facilitate translation, while partnerships between governments, NGOs, and private sector organizations can help to mobilize resources and expertise.

The proposed pedagogy

In order to mitigate potential translation challenges and facilitate the translation process for educational materials, thereby supporting the attainment of the National Language Policy's objectives. This paper proposes the following translation strategies:

- i. The first step which is the most important one is to find the cultural equivalence. This is where the translator should consider the nature of the vocabulary in the source language and then finds its equivalent in the culture of the target language. For example:

Table 5

Source text	Cultural equivalence
Book	Littafi
Wristwatch	Agogo
Tree	Bishiya
Wooden Slate	Allo
Chalk	Alli
Broom	Tsintsiya
Mat	Tabarma
Mathematics	Lissafi
Class	Aji
Addition	Tarawa
Subtraction	Debewa
Division	Rabawa
Multiplication	Ninkawa/sau

All the above listed items that exist in the Hausa language can assist in translation and discussion in the mother tongue and make it easy for Hausa children to pick up fast.

ii. Then, the second strategy is lack of cultural equivalence for text. In this kinds of translation, one has an option to describe the word as it appears in the text. This is commonly known as descriptive equivalence. Example as follows:

Table 6

Source text	Descriptive equivalence
Airplane	Jirgin Sama
Drone	Jirgi Mara Matuƙi/Jirgin Leƙen Asiri (it depends on the context)
Computer	Na'ura mai kwakwalwa
Stadium	Filin Wasan Kwallon kafa
Basketball	Wasan Kwallon Kwando
Addition of Numbers	Tara Lambobi
Total Numbers	Jimillar Lambobi
Difference in Numbers	Bambancin Lambobi
Multiplication and Division of Numbers	Ninka Lambobi da Raba Su
Expansion	Kawar da Baka Biyu daga Cikin Jumla
Prime Numbers	Gwaurayen Lambobi

iii. The next strategy is a situation where the text of the word describe by its function. It is more appropriate to apply a functional equivalence procedure in this kinds of translation. This is the process where the translator uses vocabulary for items that are absent in the culture of the target language but their functions are represented in the translation. This must also be in line with the culture of the source language. This strategy solves the problem of cultural differences in the text, by depicting words on the basis of the actions they performed. For example:

Table 7

Source text	Functional equivalence
Air Conditioner	Na'urar Sanyaya Daki
Camera	Na'urar Daukar Hoto
Black box	Na'urar Nadar Bayanai

HIV	Cuta mai Karya Garkuwar Jiki
Drone	Jirgin Leken Asiri/ Jirgi Mara Matuki

iv. Another strategy is transference procedure which can also be used in translation. This is the way in which cultural words from the source language are borrowed into the target language. This makes them loanwords in the target language. Most of cultural words that are used in the target language include names of living things, historical and geographical records, names and addresses of places. Example of words are:

Table 8

Source text	Tranference/ Loanwords
Zainab	Zainab
Ali	Ali
Nijeriya	Nijeriya
Kano	Kano
Borno	Borno
Abia	Abia
Dutsen Dala	Dutsen Dala
Gwauron Dutse	Gwauron Dutse
New Nigeria	New Nigeria
Daily Trust	Daily Trust

v. However, the final strategy used in this paper is via adaptation of word as it is in the source and also make some phonetic and phonological modifications, like insertion of a vowel within the cluster consonants of source language text as well as added a vowel in the final syllable boundary of the word. See the examples:

Source text	Naturalization
Fan	Fanka
Bread	Burodi
Bucket	Bokiti
Pencil	Fensir
Numbers	Lambobi
Cup	Kofi

Conclusion

Translation has the potential to play a significant role in promoting literacy in Nigeria, particularly when leveraged through the National Language Policy, which ensures teaching in the mother tongue, as the language plays roles in the learning process of children in the early stages of the primary education. Undoubtedly, children learn lessons faster, widen their horizon of thinking and ask questions when they are taught in their mother tongue languages. This paper has brought into the light for the contribution of translation in the teaching and learning in Nigerian schools. The paper has shown that translation brings about simplicity in children's understanding of lessons. It also helps to preserve language and culture of the people. It allows children to know places and events around the world. Similarly, this paper has also discussed some major challenges that are associated with translation as well as the strategies that can be followed to translate teaching and learning materials. While the existing challenges, can be addressed through innovation, collaboration, and commitment to promoting linguistic and cultural diversity. By harnessing the power of translation, Nigeria can make significant strides in promoting literacy and developing its human capital.

Recommendations

To promote literacy through translation in Nigeria, the following recommendations are made:

1. Develop a national translation policy: A national translation policy can help to coordinate translation efforts, mobilize resources, and ensure that translations are of high quality.
2. Establish a national translation institute: A national translation institute can provide training and capacity-building programs for translators, as well as facilitate translation projects.
3. Promote partnerships and collaborations: Partnerships between governments, NGOs, and private sector organizations can help to mobilize resources and expertise for translation projects.

4. Leverage technology: Technology can be leveraged to facilitate translation, including the use of translation machines, softwares, online platforms and applications.

References

- Abioye, J. O. (1999). *Bridge Across Cultures*. Lagos: University of Lagos Press
- Baker, M. (1992). *In Other Words*. London: Routledge.
- Bargery, G. P. (1983). *A Hausa-English Dictionary and English-Hausa Vocabulary*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Brislin, R. W. (1976). *Translation: Application and Research*. New York: Gardner Press Inc.
- Catford, J. C. (1965). *A Linguistic Theory of Translation: An Essay in Applied Linguistics*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Coulthard, M. (1992). *Studies in Translation*. No. 28, pp 37-49.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2022). *National Language Policy*. Federal Ministry of Education
- Newmark, P. (1988). *A Textbook of Translation*. Hertfordshire: Prentice Hall International Ltd. University Press.
- Newmark, P. (1991). *About Translation*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Nida, E. (1964). *Towards A Science of Translation*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- Nida, E. & Taber C. (1974). *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Leidan: E. J. Brill.
- Ofulue, C. (2009). Translation and Language Maintenance (Or Is It Preservation?) In Nigerian Languages. *Journal of Linguistics Association of Nigeria*. No 12, Port Harcourt: M&J Communication Ltd.
- Shastri, P. (2012). *Fundamental Aspect of Translation*. New Delhi: PHI Learning Private Ltd.
- Simpson, E. (2007). *Translation: Principles and Applications*. Lagos/Abuja: Interlingual Limited.

- Timothy-Asobele, S. J. (2007). *Conflict Resolution and Peace-Making: The Role of Translators and Interpreters*. Lagos: Upper Standard Publications.
- Wilss, W. (1982). *The Science of Translation*. Stuttgart: Gunter Narr Verlag Tubingen.
- Yakasai, H. M. & Azare, Y. M. (2012). The Role Of Culture In English-Hausa Translation www.nitinigeria.net.
- Yakasai, S.A. (2012). *Jagoran Ilimin Walwalar Harshe*. Sokoto: Garkuwa Media Services Ltd.