

Grammatical Rift and Cultural Lacuna: Constraints on English-Hausa and Hausa-English Translation

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Abstract

The issue of translation is an important aspect of interaction and communication. Since societies, cultures and languages are not the same, there is the need for effective and efficient translation so as to successfully achieve the desired objective of communication. This is with the view to bridging the communication barrier through translation. But this translation is shrouded with multiple complexities across languages. Some of the challenges are associated with the grammar and its cultural manifestations. This paper attempts an in-depth analysis of Hausa-English and English-Hausa translation of some concepts and terminologies with the view to demonstrating the difficulties in direct translation. The paper centers on International Media dealing with Hausa-English, English-Hausa translations, specifically, BBC, VOA, and related international broadcasting corporations and National dailies. This is further corroborated with field work on special vocabularies of Hausa figures of speech, proverbs; praise-epithet was carried out, particularly across Hausa popular culture.

Key words: Culture, translation, figure of speech and cultural manifestation

Introduction

From the historical point of view, the enterprise of translation is as old as mankind, and from the perspective of religion, it dates back to the first prophet sent to mankind. In context of historical linguistics, it developed along with the evolution of human languages. Cultural critics

view it as cultural development through contact by a variety of cultural groups in the struggle to meet unavoidable demands of socialization and acculturation among the contact groups. In fact, the scientific beginning of the art of translation and its earliest fathers are certainly under the cloud. However, the business of translation in this era is turning into a global issue and a serious academic affair in the international communities. Translation is now a necessity in our scientific world; it is the most powerful instrument in handling most sensitive issues of our security and diplomatic ties. It is the opinion of the authors of this paper that grammar and cultural barriers surrounding the message to be translated are always the problems in the transaction of the business. In this view, Hausa-English and English-Hausa translation trajectory would be the specimen to exemplify our opinion critically.

Methodology

The paper is not biased to any theoretical framework concerning the subject under review. However, the sources were gathered from the International Media dealing with Hausa-English, English-Hausa translations, specifically, BBC, VOA, and related international broadcasting corporations and national dailies. A field work of special vocabularies of Hausa figures of speech, proverbs, and praise - epithet was carried out, particularly across Hausa popular culture. The identified problems were critically noted and possible solutions were tried in the discussion. The notable problems of the linguistic and cultural abuses were tabled under the categories of the research areas of concentration. A few journalists and translators were interviewed to demonstrate the problems assorted with translation and find out their strategies in confronting those translation challenges. Available secondary sources were consulted and critically studied. The data analysis is therefore slated thus:

What is Translation?

Translation is purely a linguistic affair between professional and academic experts. Therefore, besides its dictionary meaning and academic perception by professionals and amateurs, it might have jungle definitions. In the English dictionaries, translation is the art of translating or the state

of being translated (Bargery, 1993). It is turning foreign literary composition into the vernacular. It is a reproduction of a work in a language different from the original. Academic experts view it as a study of translating and interpreting one language into another, be it in writing or otherwise. It is academically classified into different categories and divided into levels. The Hausa scholar's perception of translation differs slightly from aforementioned (Catford, 1965). It is named *fassara* or *mai da gami* only when it is verbally conducted. In handling any written document in the art, it is called *fashin baqi* (elaborating the written text). In the context of sign language (deaf language) the art is named *kwatanci* or *nuni* (demonstration or pointing). This should be noted carefully at the beginning of Hausa-English and English-Hausa translation business in the translation scholarship, for the translators to know what is needed from them (Okebalama, 1996).

Who is a Translator?

In line with academic and professional definitions of translation, a translator must be a person with a high standard linguistic background of the languages in the business, that is, the source language and the target language (Okebalama, 1996). He is expected to be above average in the classical grammar of the source language. His knowledge of the cultural background of the source language is an added advantage in presenting a meaningful translation from the original text. Their grammatical skill in the target language (second language) should be sound enough to deliver the message fairly to the best of their ability. Traditionally, translators must have native languages of their own. If they belong to the source language, they have all the chances to handle the original message in its true form. Their knowledge of the target language would then determine the quality of the meaning to be conveyed. In a situation where the target language but not the source belongs to their native group, the quality of the translation would not be as good as in the first example cited above (Mida, 194). Lastly, if translators belong to none of the languages in the business at stake, the grammatical and cultural damages would be more severe. The status of the translators in relation to the linguistic background of the languages involved is the first

yardstick to measure the standard of their translation output. The Hausa-English and English-Hausa translation by Hausa native speakers and professionals in the international media belong to the first category/group of the three aforementioned levels to which this study is devoted to.

Semantic Battle in Translation

Translators are war-generals in the semantics battle of words, phrases, sentences and general content of the passage before them. Their linguistic background, experience and the acquired techniques are their artilleries to battle with confidence. Translation is a great battle which requires all the necessary logistics and machineries to lead a successful operation. In this respect, translators must be alerted to the challenges awaiting them at the battle front. The ultimate aim is a 'dust-free meaning' of the original text; anything short of this, is a failure (Emenanjo & Mdimiele (ed), 1995). The semantic battle does not insist on the transfer of meaning 100% same as it was in the source language (Oyeleye, 1995). The meaning must neither be exaggerated beyond what the source language holds, nor understand. The meaning must respect all the linguistic rules attached to the languages involved in the battle, with cultural values embodied in the message. They have all the rights to evaluate meaning to the best of their receiving audience as long as the correct message is not tampered with. It is expected of them not to be too elementary in the battle of individual vocabularies to avoid word to word translation(). In dealing with phrases and sentences, they are free to conjugate the meaning to their audiences within the accepted level of their linguistic and cultural background. Semantic battle permits translators to employ all their artilleries in the safe transfer of the meanings in its real value for the receivers to enjoy the linguistic and cultural message appropriately. This battle is the target of all serious translators and no good translation should run short of it (Onah,1987).

Grammatical Rift in Hausa-English, English-Hausa Translation

In all the affairs of translation, grammatical aspects are the most serious issues to be noted as creating a rift in the transaction if not properly noted and carefully apprehended. Some of the commonly observed

serious errors include problems associated with gender, nouns, pronouns, determiners, verbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and grammatical agreement or concord, and related grammatical features of the languages in the translation.

The most common opening and closing doxology of the BBC and VOA English programs reads as follows: “You can listen to our programs *on* radio and *on* television...”

The preposition ‘on’ in English is used before days, dates, certain modes of transport, some movements or situation as: on the radio, on the television, on the scene, etc. In an attempt to deal with this, the BBC and VOA translators use ‘*akan*’ habitual or ‘*a kan*’ locative which both have different grammatical functions from those of the English preposition ‘on’. Thus, the ungrammatical Hausa translation reads:

Za a saurari shirye-shiryenmu a kan talabijin ko a kan rediyo ko a kan wayoyinku na salula.

The Hausa preposition ‘*akan*’ means usually or as usual. If it is written ‘*a kan*’ it means on top of. None of it translates the English prepositions ‘on’. The translator must avoid the grammatical rift of the two different prepositions in the two languages by employing grammatically accepted Hausa prepositions ‘*ta*’ or ‘*a*’ as follows:

Za a saurari shirye-shiryenmu ta talibijin ko a rediyo ko a wayoyinku na salula.

Grammatical Functions of Individual Vocabulary Items

At whatever capacity, a translator must belong to one and only native language of his linguistic background. In the struggle to transfer meaning, he is bound to face difficulties in dealing with very essential vocabulary items found to be very vital in translating meaning from either Hausa-English or English-Hausa translation. Let us consider the word ‘*baqo*’ in Hausa and its nearest related lexical items in English: *guest*, *stranger*, *foreigner*, *visitor*, *alien*, *lodger*, *boarder*, and *visitor*. In the English language, these words are of different dictionary meaning as it entails.

Guest: A person received and entertained at the house of another; a visitor; 2. A lodger or boarder
Stranger: One who is not an acquaintance; 2. An unfamiliar visitor or guest; 3 foreigner.

Foreigner: Belonging to, situated in, or derived from another country; not native; alien; 2. Connected with other countries, bearing a relation to other countries.

Visitor: One who visits. Also visitor.

Visit: To go or come to see a person.

2. To go or come to a place for transacting business
3. To be a guest or stay with temporary
4. To go or come to make official inspection or inquiry.

Thus, the English words, *guest, stranger, foreigner, visitor, lodger, boarder, alien* have only one equivalent meaning in Hausa language which is 'baqo' singular, 'baqi-plural' 'baquwa' feminine, 'baqunci' the state of being baqo. The words 'baqunci' and 'baqo, have some meanings with the aforementioned English words. An English-Hausa translator must pay heed to such essential grammatical rift between the two languages for the meaning to capture the original message.

Idiomatic Expression as a Source of Rift

Standard languages must possess all the linguistic qualities to meet global academic standard as per grammar and idioms. In the English language and idiomatic expressions posed serious technical grammatical rift in English-Hausa translation business. Word-to-word translation and free translation of these grammatical components often end up giving a contrary meaning to the original message. An English-Hausa translator is likely to be challenged in dealing with issues such as:

Idiom	Meaning
Hang in the balance:	Be undecided
Hard nut to crack:	Difficult person or situation
Till the cows come home:	For an indefinite period, for ever
Draw the long bow:	Exaggerate
Out of frying pan (into the fire)	Out of the difficulty into another equally or more serious one
Make the fur fly:	Create a disturbance
Where the shoe pinches:	Where the difficulty lies

In such instances as noted, a Hausa translator has no room to apply word-to-word translation. In any attempt to give free translation, the original value of the meaning will be missing along the line. To avoid such grammatical rift in translating idiomatic expressions, it is much advisable to try same idiomatic expressions of the nearest meaning (if available). In addition, related figures of speech of same function may be employed to balance the rift at least to some level of satisfaction. The seven English idiomatic expressions above would match the following Hausa meaning:

1. Kasa ta cewa
2. Kayehi ko mai taurin kai
3. Sai raqumi ya shiga akurki
4. Qarin gishiri
5. An yi gudun gara an faxa zago
6. Ta da qura
7. Wurin da gizo ke saqa

Though, the real vocabularies used in the English idioms are never replaced in the translated versions, yet the original meaning remains undisputed. The translation offered here is not word-to-word translation hence the vocabularies are not addressed individually. It is neither a free translation, as the meanings of some idiomatic expressions which approximate those of the source language are employed in the translation.

Proverbs, King Words and Wise Saying as Constraints

The difficulties witnessed in idiomatic expressions are very close to that of proverbs and wise sayings. The only exception is that, the Hausa language does not have king words expressions. Grammatical meanings

of proverbs and wise sayings would be abused in word-to- word translation in Hausa-English and English-Hausa translations. In an attempt to give free translation, the grammatical values would be tampered with. Consider the following Hausa proverbs as examples:

Hausa

1. Ruwa kamar da baƙin qwarya
2. Dole uwar na qi
3. A bar kaza cikin gashinta
4. Kuwwa baya ga yaqi
5. Kamar da gaske, karuwa ta ga noman xan koli

English

- it rains cats and dogs
Necessity is the mother of invention
Let the sleeping dog lie
Aftermath (a belated effort)
Deceit (short-lived), fanciful and in
consisted action or enterprise)

In the battle of meaning, a single word can efficiently translate a paragraph, a phrase or a sentence. Proverbs and wise sayings are the ancient philosophy and worldview of our ancestors. Translators must never force themselves to provide a new meaning to such ancient linguistic materials. A transfer of an equivalent expression is most preferable, or a single word capable of capturing capture the general meaning in the context of the given message is what is called 'a well balanced translation'.

Handling Hausa Idiomatic Expression

Hausa idiomatic expressions have similar features with English idioms. Indeed, they are all translatable, but with very serious care to protect the original meaning to reach the receiver with its full grammatical and cultural values. Any important issues in human life may have as many as hundreds of idiomatic expressions in a given language or dialect. In addition, some of the expressions need technical approach to satisfy the requirements of the target language.

Examples of such expressions include:

Hausa

1. Ya kwanta dama/hauri gabas
2. Ba hammata iska
3. Cin moriyar dugadugai
4. Cin karensa ba babbaka
5. Gyaran maqera
6. Sanin gari

English

- Die
Fight
Run
Un-challenged
Beating
Too-know

7. Hankalin tuwo	Common sense
8. Jerin gwano	Queue
9. Dama ga maxinki	Sick
10. Gumi ta gamu da anka	Confrontation/combat

Idioms of same family deal with single subject matter as in:

Hausa	English
1. Davensa ya ji makuba	Rich (expressive of affluence)
2. Kakarsa ta yanke saqa	Rich (great opportunity; possibility of abundance).
3. Gonansa ka rogo	Rich
4. Hannunsa da shuni	Rich
5. Hannu mai miya aka lasa	Rich
6. Ya hau kaya	Rich
7. Ya hau tudun mun tsira	Rich
8. Ya samu qarfen nasara	Rich
9. Ya damqi taman kahiri	Rich

Cultural Lacuna as a Source of Constraints

The first credential of a qualified translator is to have advanced working knowledge of the languages of the business. Advanced working knowledge means to master the grammatical aspects as well as in-depth cultural knowledge of the native speakers of the language. Grammatical know-how alone cannot satisfactorily equip one to be a good translator of the language involved in the affairs of the business of translation. Cultural aspects of languages are deeply rooted in their grammar and literary aspects (Okafor, 1988)), as such, no translator can do without it. The anticipated lacuna are mostly in dealing with serious aspects of anthropology and sociology of community such as medicine, professionalism, orator (specifically oral and written songs), religion, fetish, agricultural and economic issues as well as crafts and industries. In the present century of technological advancement, scientific terminologies are part of the constraints in modern Hausa-English and English-Hausa translation. Let us consider few of the examples practically.

Hausa poetic expressions and statements

Translators cannot avoid poetic statements and expressions in the course of Hausa-English translation business. The said expressions and

statements are parts of the linguistic usages in Hausa and English languages respectively. Thus, translators must always be ready to confront such expressions in their assignment. The hidden meanings of poetic messages are mostly cultural in their sublime form. Consider the following poetic expressions of Gambo mai waqar Varayi:

Jagora: Yay yi saqwanqan
 : Yay yi jangwam
 : Sannan inwa yay yi zonai

Translation:

Leader: He became reluctant, silent and glum
 : And looked helpless
 : And think deeply on the issue

In Xan'anace's expressions on the defeat of Na'ila by Shago, he narrates:

Jagora: Kashe Na'ila bai yi wuya ba
 : Kamar a tunkuxe turmi
 : Kamar mutum ya mari budurwa

Amshi: Don ka mari mace ba garari ba

Translation:

Leader: Defeat of Na'ila was not a difficult task:
 : It is just like pushing down a mortar (turmi)
 : Much like slapping a lady

Chorus: What is there to be proud of!

The cultural lacuna here lies in the meanings of words *Saqwanqwan*, *jangwam*, and *zonai* in their cultural values. There is no English equivalent to these words especially 'zonai' which in Hausa idiomatic expression is referred to: *Kalihun Shaixan* 'Unmeaningful looking for nothing' hardly be rendered into English. These cultural gaps must be handled with utmost care to protect the original meaning. Certainly, absence of 'turmi' in English material culture and a cultural conservative gender bias in Hausa ancient culture as against English culture is a great obstacle in translating Xan'anace's expressions of the successful defeat of Na'ila by Shago. I think, no amount of effort of an English translator can translate

the real cultural values attached to these statements in Hausa language. An English translator would end up giving example and explaining the happening rather than translating the meaning of the poetic pronouncement.

In a more serious issue, some poetic expressions are far above the boundaries of English popular culture which makes the original meaning to remain under the cloud in the translated version. A popular song of Aliyu Xandawo, the Kabawa Court Musician carries a good example of the great cultural lacuna between Hausa and English cultures. Consider the following statements:

Yara: Mutum guda ya hi gaban mutum dubu
 : Magabata abin da sun ka hwaxi
 : Ai mai da hwaxi vanna na

Amshi: Shugaban tahiya sarkin Kabi mai Sudani
 : Ila marin rugga xan Yakubu sa gurfani

Translation:

One man above thousand able men
Prophecy of elders is a notable pronouncement
Pronouncing it again is making fur fly

In whatever style an English translator tries to convey the meaning of the two stanzas of the songs, the cultural values and grammatical deviation attached to the original Hausa meaning would not be clearly as in poetic expression in the original language. Examples of these types of expressions in Hausa oral songs are countless.

Cultural Varieties and Registered Words

Central meaning of any message depends on the individual meanings of the lexical items therein. In Hausa-English translation, special vocabularies of ancient cultures and practices are very common among the elders. In Hausa medicinal culture, magic, tricks and illusion have different names in relation to the supernatural forces behind them. In contrast, the English culture may have only a common name to describe the varieties as in: 1. Baduhu: A charm which makes the possessor invisible

2. Zana: A charm which makes the possessor invisible in a particular moment.
3. Shashatau: A charm put in the mouth to assist in getting off scot-free from being struck by anyone.
4. Sagau/Qaho: A charm that causes an arm to stiffen as it is lifted for striking
5. Ragwangwan: A magic applied to the head to make it fatal for anyone else to touch that head in struggle.
6. Gaba: a magic which makes its possessor escape from an accident by flying mysteriously.

These varieties are not singularly identified in the dictionary of English culture by individual names. It is all referred to as 'Magic' or 'supernatural'. A native speaker may not feel satisfied to translate all as 'magic', hence the technical functions of the said medicinal varieties differ, knowing fully they are all 'magic' in English grammar. For instance, in dealing with human behavior, some of the Hausa vocabularies used to describe certain unwanted behaviors have similar problems to English translator. The following words may shed more light on my claims:

1. Kauxi: Verbosity
2. Karambani: Officiousness
3. Kakkavi: karambani or trembling
4. Kankajeli: trembling
5. Kankamba: (n.f) karambani q.v

A common meaning to all these behaviors in English may be trembling of the body from any cause but in Hausa, the meaning differs very slightly. Our international media, specifically BBC, VOA, RFI and DW (Hausa sections) have a common Hausa translation of a 'group of people' or any 'gathering' as *tawaga*. Alas! In Hausa cultural perspective 'tawaga' refers to a group consumed by natural calamity. Thus, to avoid this lacuna, a translator must be able to differentiate the following:

1. Tawaga: A group of consumed by calamity
2. Ayari: Caravan
3. Kungiya: Association

4. Taro: Coming together
5. Gungu: A collection; group, section, company

In an attempt to translate actions or voices bound to disturb peaceful atmosphere of a conducive environment, Hausa words of the following varieties are employed:

1. Hayagaga: Hubbub
2. Hayaniya: Hubbub
3. Rigima: Uproar, loud wrangling and quarrelling
4. Hatsaniya: hubbub
5. Wabaiwabai: confused? confusion
6. Ciri: fleeing/rushing to assist
7. Cincirido: a confused group looking for exists
8. Zangabur: confused indeed

The argument here is not the strategies to be used or the practical realities challenging the expert; but the semantic battle in the transfer or capturing the real cultural values as in the original message. Cultural lacuna is a serious constraint that no style can easily and successfully overcome.

Against All Odds

Translation strategies are the procedures followed in handling any anticipated problem pertaining to the art. In the area of the current study, Hausa-English and English-Hausa translation, the strategies are short in addressing linguistic issues in the stylistic study of alliteration. Hausa and English homophones centered on the sound production, phonetics and phonology of certain sounds in one word repeatedly in a given sentence or phrase. Whatever strategies an expert may wish to apply in Hausa-English and English-Hausa translation, the target message must remain unveiled. Consider the following examples:

English: First friday, february fifteen fifty-five, father Francis Fride four festival fish for four fathers from France.

Hausa: Da Kalla da abokin Kalla sun tafi kallon kalangu, sai aka qalle Kalla mari wajen kallon Kalangu, aka gaya wa abokin kalla; maza qalla gida da gudu ka gaya wa matar Kalla, ga Kalla can an qalle da mari wajen

kallon kalangu. Ya kalla da gudu, ya qalla wa matar Kalla kira, “ga Kalla can an qalle da mari wajen kallon kalangu”. Ta qallo kara, ta qallo da gudu, domin ta qalla wa wanda ya qalla wa kalla mari wajen kallon kalangu. Da ya qalla wa matar Kalla ido da qallallen kare ta qallo da gudu, ya qalla da gudu, kallo ya koma ga Kalla da matar Kalla da qallallen kare da qaton da ya qalla wa Kalla mari wajen kallon kalangu.

The message is well expressed and the meaning is very clear, but the intention is world-play of same sound in given words to demonstrate the language expertise of the speaker. This is what is expected to be transported into the target language against all odds. It is very unlikely for the translated homophone to accommodate the phonological gravity of the manipulated sounds in its original tonal melody.

Lacuna and Rift in Praise Epithet and Figure of Speech

With due respect to all the efforts of experts in addressing cultural issues in translation; there is still a very fundamental problem in the subject under review.

The vocabulary items employed in Hausa praise epithet and figures of speech are cultural and must be treated as such. Thus, the cultural variations of the two languages would not give room for an equivalent meaning to emerge. The following Hausa examples are part of the study experience:

1. Kafur-kafur zakaran tsafi wanda ya fi kafiri kafurci
2. Talalaviyar kashi ba a faxi ba rai ya vaci
3. Hankalinsa haukan yaro
4. Tsululu mugun zawo ana karta kana biyan ban hannu
5. Dudduqe Maguzawan Allah, Azumi babbar gayya komai
girman mutum guda yaka xauka
6. Jarqaniya!

Results

My paper is particular to Hausa-English and English-Hausa translation with special reference to its notable grammatical rift and cultural lacuna. In demonstrating the evidences, attention is paid very much to English-Hausa translation, to show the extent of damage that an amateur

translator is bound to make in confronting Hausa and English grammatical and cultural challenges. In this attempt, the paper is of the opinion that:

1. A translator is a photographer, his camera captures only what is visible through its lenses to the best of his ability. No matter how well trained and experienced a translator may be, a complete and accurate meaning of the original message can never be reproduced.
2. Standard of translation depends upon the linguistic background of the translator to the message to be translated. If he is a native of either of the languages, we expect a fair and satisfactory output. If he belongs to none, the damage would be well-pronounced.
3. The meaning expected in a far translation must agree with cultural and grammatical values of the two languages. If any of the two variables differs, the translation's strategies and its practical realities should be applied.
4. Hausa is the most prominent language in Nigeria and in West Africa particularly among the local National and International media. Alas! Qualified, skilled, experienced and professional Hausa translators are every insignificant in number in the business of 21st century translation.
5. Translation, as an academic discipline, is lagging behind in the Nigerian academia. It is reflected only as a selected course in advanced level and terminated at one level in academic session. Specialization in translation is yet to be honored in Nigerian academic cycle. To the best of my knowledge, there is no a single professor in translation in any of our Universities. In the absence of experts, an amateur must be given a chance to try.

Conclusion

A translator is a strong middleman in translation business carrying three unavoidable tasks of (i) reducing meaning into writing and vice-versa (ii) conveying the meaning of orally delivered message to his audience appropriately; and (iii) demonstrating ideas into sign language for those who cannot speak or make the speech. Thus, it is expected of translators to be well-grounded in the technicalities of interpretation. In whatever context, their knowledge of one of the language is expected to be very

high, capable of reducing grammatical and cultural abuses to the barest minimum. Translated meaning must never be short of the original message and not an overstatement of the true meaning of the original message. In Hausa and English languages, fundamental grammatical and cultural gaps contribute to the persisting constraints in the business. A translator must know that, translation is translation, and can only transmit a near meaning of the original message. It is my belief that no expert can translate a culturally biased Hausa message into English to the satisfaction of Hausa native speakers, let us try this as our conclusion.

: Kun san layun tsari gare ni
 : Dunqullan dawo gami da nono
 : Kowas sha su ba shi jin kasala
 : In ko an yi gardama a dama!

Gindi: Rabbana Allah ka taimake mu
 Mu samu fitak kai cikin tukunya!
 (Makada Sani Danbaldo Warama)

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