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Cross-Cultural Communications – The Challenges of Translation and Interpretation of the Local Language Policy in Education in Kenya

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Abstract

Language is a key pillar that drives a nation to achieve success in varied fronts. It is fundamental to communication and through it different real life situations are examined and interpreted. The use of local languages especially in pedagogy is instrumental to holistic development of individuals in multilingual settings where different cultures commune as a result of diverse linguistic habitats. Of concern are local languages which are the principal tools used in creation, dissemination and interpretation of knowledge as well as cultural beliefs and practices that govern the way of life of a particular community. Local languages are pre-eminent contributors to social, political and economic development of any country. Without them, individuals are confronted with sub standard ways of living coupled with stagnation in different spheres of life. Because of the impact of local languages, their use is entrenched in the Kenyan constitution of 2010 as stipulated in chapter 2, section 7(3) which notes the commitment of the state to: promote and protect the diversity of languages of the people of Kenya and to promote the development and use of indigenous languages, Kenya Sign language, Braille and other communication formats and technologies accessible to persons with disabilities. It is deemed a basic human right in the constitution therefore when individuals are denied the opportunities of using them their human rights are violated. Despite the benefits that accrue from the use of local languages, they have not been given the attention they deserve in the Kenyan context in particular and the African continent generally. This continent has relegated them to the periphery especially in the realm of education a fact that has contributed significantly to the alienation of the continent. Most education systems in this continent give precedence to international languages despite the fact that the number of those fluent in these languages is minimal. The use of such languages in the education system poses far reaching consequences because there is a disconnect between what is formally taught and its applicability in its social domain. It is on this premise that this paper sought to investigate the challenges that Dholuo translators encounter when translating the English language policy document to native speakers of Dholuo and to establish how such challenges can be overcome. The researchers argued from the premise that enhancement of local languages promote career development and open up avenues which can be used to achieve social integration, a concept that has been elusive in the Kenyan context. Interviews were carried out with the Quality Assurance and Standards Officers. Secondary data in the form of books , reports and journals were also utilized.

Key words: Language, Multilingualism, Pedagogy, Constitution

Introduction

Language is an important tool in the society and this is best captured in Malinowski's assertion that 'language is the necessary means of communion: it is one indispensable instrument for creating the ties of the moment without which unified social action is impossible' (Diamond, 1959).

Language serves a myriad of functions the basic of which is communication. It is a social product springing up with the first community, developing with the increasing needs of culture and sophistication and vanishing when society vanishes. Thus language happens to be the index of the progress of society and the longer a society exists the richer the language becomes' (Manindranath, 2000). The use of mother tongue as a channel through which knowledge is imparted cannot be trivialized. Fagerberg-Diallo (2006) demonstrates that learning to read and write in the language (s) used at community level triggers learners. They enable individuals participate and take leading roles in local institutions and organisations. Such persons encounter an important growth in credence for they establish businesses, manage local associations and community-based groups and take part in local political institutions. As parents, they give better parental support to the school going children.

There is a strong correlation between language and ethnicity. Language defines a community and through it members of the community conduct their businesses and interact with one another and the outside world. Fought (2006) notes that language and ethnicity are deeply interlaced. Language contributes to the social and psychological processes involved in the formation of ethnic identity. Ethnicity is seen as a social construction that indicates association with a particular group that is usually a minority within a country. Members of ethnic groups share common cultural attributes such as their language. Hence the bond between language and ethnicity puts the language that defines the community in this case the native one at the core of discussion.

Background information on the Language Policy

According to Association for the Development of Education in Africa (2005), the first mien of language policies in Africa dates back to the subdivision of Africa among the European powers in the 19thc. Besides the negative political and economic effects, these policies have had a major influence on education. Although history has made the European languages an irrefutable attribute of our linguistic terrain, it would be a blunder to believe that we can ever achieve practical development if we remain absolutely reliant on them. Rather we should encourage the co-existence of both African and European languages in our educational system, with priority given to the former. To achieve this, rigorous emendation needs to be done to the existing policies followed by their implementation.

A historical account of the Language policy in Kenya is crucial for the comprehension of pertinent issues that are language oriented. Nabea (2009) observes that the language policy in Kenya has its basis in the colonial language policy following the invasion and annexation of the African continent by European powers, which took place towards the end of the 19th century. After independence English was declared the official language a decision which Ngugi (1986) notes helped prolong neo-colonialism rather than help bring change. Several commissions (Ominde commission 1964; Gachathi 1976; Mackay 1980 ; Koech commission among others) were initiated in order to inform the language policy but only a few recommendations made by such commissions were put to practice. English was thus considered as the language of official communication and was seen as illustrious as compared to the native languages. English was a status symbol for anyone who learnt it began abominating the peasant majority thereby becoming alienated from the values of his/her native language. Promoting English at the expense of local languages is therefore detrimental to the future of the Kenyan children.

Objectives of the study

This paper sought to address the following objectives:

1. To investigate the challenges that Dholuo translators encounter when translating the English language policy document to native speakers of Dholuo.
2. To establish the strategies that Dholuo translators can use to overcome the problems encountered when translating the English language policy document to native speakers of Dholuo.

Literature review

Kadenge and Nkomo (2011) note that translation has been principal in Africa since the continent's earliest connections with the rest of the world, particularly for the motive of commerce and proselytization. Translation, they argue, is a product of language policy and it correlatively carries the inferences for the implementation of language policy and for language development. According to Zheng (2017), translation, a social practice, is inexorably bound up within social contexts because on the one hand, the act of translating is indisputably carried out by individuals in a social system and on the other hand, the translation phenomenon is inevitably implicated in social institutions which greatly ascertain the specification, creation and dissemination of translation. At the centre of translation is the notion of culture.

Ndhlovu(2012) notes that terms and phrases find meaning through frequent use by particular people. For translation to be effective, a translator must have in his/her possession two most crucial skills: knowledge of the source language and culture and that of the target language and culture. The role of a translator therefore is to transfer the message linguistically as well as culturally to make it real to the target readers. The obligation of translators is to connect two languages and cultures. Apart from the two skills mentioned, communication, technical and social skills also come in handy in the translation process.

Translation is a vital process that should be given the significance it deserves. According to Kadenge and Nkomo (2011) translation between indigenous languages may catalyse bilingual lexicography involving them. Mheta and Muhwati (as cited in Kadenge & Nzomo, 2011) demonstrate that loan translation is a productive term-creation strategy in chiShona lexicography. Translation may ease the preferment of the status of functional growth of the indigenous languages including the minority languages which need more consideration in translation and language policy to curb the marginalisation of the minority communities. Translation, Aguado- Gimènez and Pèrez-Paredes (2005) note is thus a decision-making process and a problem solving- task. It is decision making because of the options that the translator faces. Hatim and Mason (as cited in Aguado- Gimènez and Pèrez-Paredes 2005) observe that translation is a matter of choice: omissions, additions and alterations may indeed be rationalized but only in relation to the intended meaning. It is problem-solving because Newmark (1988: 8) notes that a translator is always 'trying to solve a thousand small problems in the context of a large one.' Translations have a central function in inaugurating new entities and viewpoints into spheres which can never be seen in segregation from a wider international setting. Also by virtue of the changes that they go through in different settings, translations move to places that are beyond the reach of originals.

Samant (2015) observes that the major problem that translators experience is finding a linguistic and stylistic equivalence in the process of translation. For linguistic equivalence for example, the problem is compounded since the translator has to take into account the grammar, sound system and structure of both the source and target languages. There are terms that cannot be translated from the source to the target language and this poses the untranslatability issue. According to Cui (2012:826), 'untranslatability is a property of a text or of any utterance in one language for which no equivalent text or utterance can be found in another language.' Jakovac (2015) posits that there are two types of untranslatability: linguistic and cultural. Linguistic untranslatability occurs when there are contrasts between the source and target language whereas cultural untranslatability is when there is lack of pertinent situational constituent in the target language. Translation may not be successful since the target language may not show the meanings of some concepts correctly. Conley and O'Bart (as cited in Fadanelli, 2012) observe that a lot information risks getting lost in translation. In addition, language attributes like politeness, register and style as well as language structures such as questions, answers, verbs, syntax and morphology in general present enormous challenges for interpreters.

In the study of translation as problem-solving, Hadebe (2004) notes that translation in Zimbabwe is largely prompted by the need to communicate with majority Zimbabweans who are not proficient in English. This is deduced from the fact that English is the main source language of translation while native languages are involved as target languages. Therefore translation becomes an interposition contraption that serves to harbour the majority of citizens who would otherwise be eliminated because of their lack of English proficiency. Hadebe further notes that the flow of translation is one way, from English to Ndebele and seldom backwards. This is contrary to what happens in the developed countries where translation is usually a twofold operation. The situation in Zimbabwe is replicated in Kenya. Being a multilingual society, English is in most cases the source language while the native languages act as target languages. Therefore to fulfil the need of communication, it is crucial that information be translated to the native languages since a majority of Kenyans are not competent in the English language which is one of the official languages in Kenya (Roy- Campbell, 2014).

Jakovac (2015) provides some solutions to the problems of translation. He argues that for concepts that are untranslatable, it is the duty of the translator to use the method of compensation in order to arrive at a term that is equivalent to the one in question. The methods that can be employed to sort untranslatability are as follows: borrowing, adaptation, calque and paraphrasing. According to Cui (2012) adaptation, also known as free translation is a mechanism where the translator recompenses social or cultural situation in the source language with a correspondent one in the target language so that the new situation would be more habitual to the target audience. In this way, the translator can maintain the intelligibility from the source language without confusing the audience.

Borrowing is an action in which the translator borrows a word or an expression from the source language because there are no equivalents in the target language. Calque is a method where an expression is translated verbatim from the source to the target language. Its purpose is to maintain the cultural message that is relayed. This is usually done at the expense of the formal element of the target language and at times the intelligibility of the target text. Paraphrasing is a recasting of the content of the text which results in an elaboration of the original text. Baker (1992) also presents different methods that can be used to address the challenges posed by translation. This study adopted the strategies that are outlined by Baker.

Theoretical framework

The study adopted the Descriptive Translation Studies (Holmes, 1972) and Luhmann's Social Systems (1982) theories. According to Ndhlovu (2012), this theory emerged in the 1970s to counter prescriptive theories of the past which primarily prescribed translations by judging them as 'good' or 'bad' depending on their level of faithfulness to the source text. One of the major proponents of Descriptive Translation theory theory is Holmes (1972) who Ndhlovu (2012) notes established translation as an empirical study. Holmes (as cited in Ndhlovu, 2012) states that a translation study has two main branches that is descriptive translation and translation theory. The former is concerned with describing translation(s) and the activity itself while the latter is charged with explanation and prediction. Ndhlovu (2012) further states that by positioning the target text as the first point of call in the analysis of translations, Holmes firmly grounded Descriptive Translation Studies in the descriptive arena thereby making the approach target-oriented. Moreover, by acknowledging the socio-cultural environment under which translations are produced, Holmes helped to bring the much needed new insight into translation studies.

According to Luhmann (1982), social systems are systems of communication and the society is the most encompassing social system. Being the social system that comprises all communication, today's society is a world society. A system is defined by a boundary between itself and its environment, dividing it from an indefinitely complex or chaotic exterior. Furthermore each system has a distinct identity that is constantly reproduced in its communication and depends on what is considered meaningful and what is not. Zheng (2017) notes that even though Luhmann's theory is one of communication, it is introduced to translation studies to discuss the nature of translation and the systematic study of translation. Luhmann's theory is crucial because the main aim of translation is communication. The intention of the translator is to disseminate information to the target audience. In this way, knowledge is not only created but also circulated to those in need of it. Also through communication, two distinct languages as well as cultures commune with each other thereby leading to the expansion of vocabulary in both languages in some cases or in the target language only.

Methodology

The study adopted the methodology employed by Ndhlovu (2012). In this method, the product (English and Dholuo texts) is used as a means by which to investigate the translation process (norms and strategies). Ten Quality Assurance and Standards Officers within Migori County were purposively sampled. The selection of the respondents was done on the basis that they were native speakers of Dholuo and they are Quality Assurance and Standards Officers. Face to face interviews were used to collect primary data from the respondents. Secondary data in the form of reports written by commissions that were vested with the responsibility of reviewing the language policy (Ominde, 1964; Gachathi, 1976; Mackay, 1981 and Koech, 1999) were also used.

Discussion

The respondents noted that they encountered several challenges during a sensitization programme that had been organized by the County government in conjunction with the Ministry of Education to create awareness among the members of the Board of Management of primary schools within Migori County. It had come to the attention of the County Executive in charge of Education that some parents were against the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction in lower grades a fact that was partly attributed to lack of knowledge with regard to what the language policy in education as stipulated by the Ministry of Education says. During the interviews, the officers expressed the challenges that they faced in disseminating the information contained in the policy document in Dholuo, the language of the catchment area. This is what one of them had to say:

When we met the Board of Management members we were so elated that finally our children would benefit from instruction carried out in their native language since our audience were representatives of parents in their schools and this information would reach the parents. We had divided the sections that we were to talk to them about. When my turn to speak came, I realised that there were terminologies in English that did not have their equivalents in Dholuo. When I consulted my colleagues none of them was able to get an equivalent term and so our team leader told us to use them just the way they were in the source language (English). Some of the terms that posed challenges to us were as follows: policy, scientifically conceived, foster nationhood among others.

During another interview session with another officer, the problem of lack of training in translation emerged. This is what he had to say:

When we met the stakeholders (members of Board of Management) I realised that I had to read the document once more in their presence, internalise the content and then try to translate it as best as I could. I struggled to go through the process it was hectic. At times my colleagues and even some members of the board had to step in to assist. I learnt that translation is an activity that requires professionalism. This can mainly be achieved through training.

In an interview with another officer that participated in the exercise, the issue of improperly translated terms came to perspective and this is what she had to say:

During the sensitization process, there were terms that were improperly translated and this created debate among the members on the specific terms. A lot of time was wasted in the process of trying to reach a consensus on the best terms in the target language. During such times, the participants lost concentration on the content and instead focused on the controversial terms. Some of the words that brought about heated debate were unification, devolution and reforms among others.

In another interview the interviewee mentioned that constraints of multiple translations that are likely to bring about confusions cropped up. The interviewee noted that some members of the audience did not understand Dholuo so while one person translated the contents of the policy into Dholuo, another did so in Kiswahili in order to cater for the participants that did not understand the language of the catchment area. The problem of lack of terminology for some words and concepts also unfolded in the Kiwsahili language. Not all participants were catered for since some were not competent in Kiswahili and they did not understand Dholuo and so the other language that should have been used to deliver the content was Lulogooli. The problems associated with cross-cultural communications emerged as a result.

From the examples above the challenges of lack of terminology, inexperience in translation, cross-cultural communications and improperly translated terms came to note. These problems can be sorted out by employing effective strategies. According to Aguado- Gimènez and Pèrez- Paredes (2005), translation strategies such as those outlined by Baker (1992) are useful in different ways: they help solve equivalence problems, they favour translation-as-a-process awareness and they present students with opportunities to discuss and reflect on contextualized theoretical issues. Translation strategies by Baker (1992: 26-42) are as follows:

(i) Translation by a more general word (superordinate)

According to Baker this is one of the commonest strategies for dealing with many types of non-equivalence, particularly in the area of propositional meaning. It works equally well in most languages since the hierarchical structure of semantic fields is not language specific. In this strategy, a more general term is used to overcome a relative lack of specificity in the target language. For example, the English term *policy* lacks a one to one equivalent in Dholuo language thus a more general term such as ' *chik*' is used to refer to it. Another term is *colonialists* which is translated in a more general term such as *jowagunda*.

(ii) Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word

This strategy is applicable in instances where there is a difference in the expressive meaning of a word in the source language to its nearest equivalent in the target language. Therefore to avoid conveying the wrong expressive meaning, a translator opts for a more general word. For example the word *ministry* in the source language is translated to the word *migawo*. Another term, *stakeholders*, is translated as *jokanyo mag migepe ma opogore opogore kaka migawo mar somo, ohala, thieth gi mamoko*.

(iii) Translation by cultural substitution

This strategy involves replacing a culture specific item or expression with a target language item which does not have the same propositional meaning but is likely to have a similar impact on the target reader. The main merit of using this strategy Baker asserts is that it gives the reader a concept with which s/he can identify something familiar and appealing. On an individual level, the translator's decision to use this strategy will depend first on how much licence is given to him/her by those who commission the translation and second the purpose of the translation. On a more general level, the decision will also reflect, to some extent, the norms of translation prevailing in a given community. In translating the expression *different levels of education* such *as lower, upper, secondary and university (Okenge ma opogore opogore mag somo kaka lowa, apa, sekondari kod mbalariany)* the translator could do the translation by comparing the levels mentioned to those that were used to disseminate informal education in the traditional Luo setting for effective comprehension to take place.

This can be done as follows:

Ndalo machon kane nyithindo tindo nene ipuonjogi kod minegi. Puonj abilani inyalo pim kod puonj ma ichiwo e lowa praimari. Ka ne gibedo madito nyiri nene yudo puonj kuom minegi. Puonj ni ne ichiwo ka luwore kod tije mane ipuonjogi kaka luoko, moto , pidi, tedo kod tije mamoko. Yawuoyi bende nene ipuonjo kod wuonegi kane gidhi pur gi dhok, kwath, dwar kod tije mamoko. Tijegi ne ipuonjo gi mondo oik gi ne ngimagi kaka jok madongo.Puonj abilani inyalo pim kod puonj ma ichiwo e apa praimari. Kane koro gi chopo e okang' ma nyiri kod yawuoyi mapon, chuo nene yudo puonj kuom kweregi kod neregi kaachiel gi owetegi madongo mane osenyombo. Nyiri bende nene yudo puonj kuom deyegi kod weyegi kaachiel gi nyiminegi mane osenyuom.Puonj gi nene itimo mondo obed kaka ranyisi mar ngimagi mar dak gi mondegi kod chuogi. Puonj abilani inyalo pim kod puonj ma ichiwo e sekondari. Tok keny jii imiyo lemo ma opogore opogore e kanyakla ma gidake jomoko bedo gi telo e kanisa moko e anyuola to moko bedo gi ting' e gweng' kaka jaduong' gweng' chif, jodong abila, mine ma puonjo jii weche dak kod tije momoko. Kuom mano jogi oluor kendo kapok gik moko otimore e gweng' to nyaka gi go kombe piny ka gi nyiso jii kaka weche ma omakogi go inyalo lo. Puonj abilani inyalo pim kod puonj ma ichiwo e mbalariany. (In the traditional Luo set up, when children were young, they were informally taught by their mothers who played a central role in socializing them. This kind of teaching can be compared to the one that takes place at the lower primary level. When children had grown, the girls would receive education from their mothers who taught them duties stereotypically regarded as feminine such as washing clothes and utensils, fetching firewood, taking care of their younger sisters and brothers and cooking among other duties. The boys on the other hand would be taught by their fathers as they were being trained on duties stereotypically regarded as masculine such as ploughing with the help of cattle, herding and hunting among other duties. The teenagers were taught these roles as a way of preparing them for adult life. This kind of teaching can be compared to that which is offered at the upper primary level. As young adults, the men would be taught by their grandfathers, uncles and elder brothers who were married. The ladies would be taught by their grandmothers, aunts as well as elder sisters who were married. This type of education was offered to prepare them for marriage life. This kind of education can be compared to that provided at the secondary school level. After marriage, the men and women were accorded different responsibilities and positions in society. Some could be leaders in church, in their clans, at the village or location levels. Some became village elders, chiefs and members of the council of elders. Some women taught younger women the principles of marriage life among other duties. People who hold such positions are held in high regard in the society and their opinions are sought before important decisions are made or solutions to problems are arrived at. This kind of education can be compared to the one offered at the university level).

(iv) Translation using a loan word or loan word plus explanation

This strategy is particularly common in dealing with culture-specific items, modern concepts and buzz words. Following the loan word with an explanation is very useful when the word in question is repeated several times in the text. Once explained, the loan word can then be used on its own. For instance, the English words *devolution, science, professional, lower primary, schools* among others are borrowed as they are from English with slight modifications in the way they are spelt in the target language. In translating *devolution* for example, explanations are given on how it works and this is compared to what used to happen in the central government before decentralization of resources and services took place. The words borrowed from the source language are also spelt according to the orthography of the language which is borrowing them.

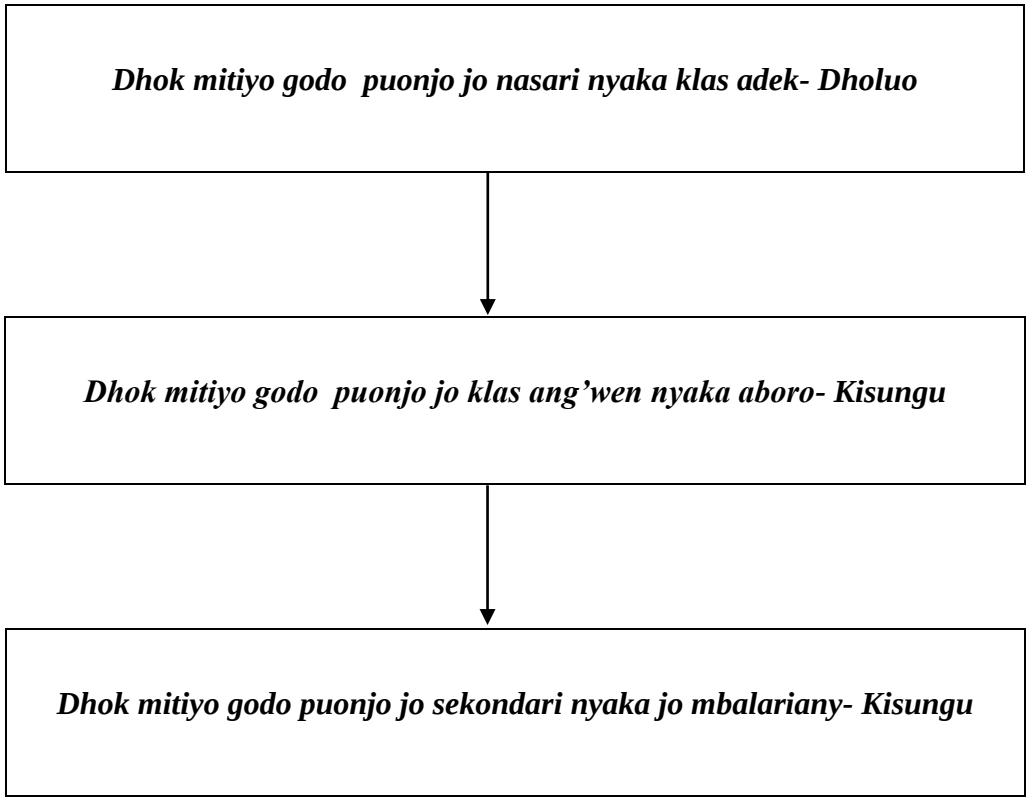
The words above are spelt in this manner: *devolushon/ devoluson, sayans, profeshonal/profesonal, nasari, lowa praimari, skunde.*

(iv) Translation by paraphrase using a related word

This strategy tends to be used when the concept expressed by the source item is lexicalized in the target language but in a different form and when the frequency with which a certain form is used in the source text is significantly higher than would be natural in the target language. For example, *Early childhood education centres* could be translated as *skunde ma itere nyithindo matindo matinde koreka chako skul, kod manie lowa praimari chakre klas achiel nyaka adek.*

(v) Translation by paraphrase using unrelated word

If the concept expressed by the source item is not lexicalised at all in the target language, the paraphrase strategy can still be used in some contexts. Instead of a related word, the paraphrase may be based on modifying a superordinate or simply unpacking the meaning of the source item particularly if the item in question is complex. The *language of instruction recommended by the government to be used at different levels of education* can be translated as *dhok moyiedhi gi sirikal mondo otigodo e puonjo e okengo ma opogore opogore.* To further help the audience remember and unpack the meaning of the concept translated, a diagram can be used. This is referred to as translation by illustration. For example, the different languages used as the media of instruction according to the language policy in education can be illustrated as follows:



Conclusion

Translation is an important exercise that should be conducted among different languages to aid in effective communication of information to those to whom it is intended. It is also a good way of building the vocabulary of the languages concerned. Those involved in the exercise should have the right skills to engage in it successfully. For example, the translator must be adept in both the target and source languages. There is need to have a good knowledge of the cultural background of the two languages since culture plays a principal role in the translation process. Moreover some entities are embodied in the culture of a given community and their meanings can only be comprehended in the context of the culture of the community in question.

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