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Translating COVID-19 Expressions from English to Yoruba: Lexical Expansion and its Communicative Competencies

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Abstract

The paper examined and interrogated the communicative competencies and appropriateness of translations of selected COVID-19 expressions from English to Yoruba in news broadcast and media usages in the Yoruba-speaking region in Nigeria. Thirty concepts were sampled from news bulletins presented by the news presenters across six major Yoruba-speaking states of Nigeria while only sixteen of the samples were extracted and analysed. This paper is motivated by linguistic analysis of the communicative capacity of the translated COVID-19 Expressions in Yoruba media and how they are able to bring forth the needed information and create necessary awareness in such an emergency situation. The analysis revealed translation strategies like copious translation, interpretation, creation of new words, borrowing, localizing and inventing new words. The paper established that through translation strategies, new concepts or registered COVID-19 Expressions in English can be captured by the lexis and structures of Yoruba language and also, increase words in the lexicon of the language. The communicative competencies of these translated expressions are capable of educating and enhancing easy and better understanding of what the virus entails as well as the danger and the preventive measures to contain the virus. The translated expressions are therefore used to inform and create awareness about the virus among the indigenous Yoruba people who cannot speak English.

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1. Introduction

The demand for adequate translation to disseminate information and knowledge in the ever expanding world dominated by science and technology is increasingly becoming challenging. Translation as a serious endeavour demands both bilingual ability and a bi-cultural vision from a would-be translator. The function of a good Translator is apt interpretation in order to adequately transfer meaning from source text to target text, Akio (1988:35). A translator from functional perspective is a mediator interpolating between two cultures, bringing together different moral systems and socio-political structures with the aim of overcoming the challenges that beset transfer of meaning in the practice of translation. Dare & Yede (2020:172) assert that the meaning and the significance attached to translation equivalence differ from one sociolinguistic community to another. The translator therefore is morally bound to discover the difference and also look for acceptable and agreeable solution. Translation as a serious task is otherwise an act of processing social data whose worth is dictated by socio-economic principles and convention where translators subtly guarantee cohesion and social security in the dissemination of information. Fedyuchenko, (2018:116).

Translation requires a high level of competence from the translator. The translator needs a good working knowledge of two languages to transfer meaning adequately from the source text to the target text. He is careful and mindful of the cultures of the source and the target languages to reduce digression in translation target, Bassnett & Lefevere (1998). Practically, many translators often encounter complexities in rendering technical messages precisely because technical terms are representation of very definite concepts, Clausen (2004:30).

Kelly (2000) holds the view that translation of technical terms can create various problems as a translator needs to consider linguistic equivalence and the cultural practices embedded within the language use in a particular linguistic community. Language is culture specific and therefore, culture index, since the inception of translation, has been advised to be incorporated in the principles and practice of translation. Nowadays, translation studies has centered on the interface between translation and culture and the way culture impacts translation. Translation along the lines above should be done across cultures along with intercultural

competence and awareness which have become more popular in the translation field, Bednarova&Gibova (2018:210).

Translations activities are purposeful and targeted to reach a particular audience within a specific time constraint, Aveling(2006:160). Translation offers an avenue to make an urgent message or pieces of useful information available from one language to another with a consciousness to preserve meaning, Clausen (2004:30). Chesterman (2018:18) notes that a text translation must ensure meaning through the use of apt linguistic constructions and agreeable culture signposts for easy comprehension for the target audience. Translations are developed as situation-in-culture activities. Gentzler (2001) notes:

Subjects of a given culture communicate in translated messages primarily determined by local culture constraints. Inescapable infidelity is presumed as a condition of the process; translators do not work in ideal and abstract situations or desire to be innocent, but have vested literary and cultural interests of their own, and want their work to be accepted within another culture. Thus they manipulate the source text to inform as well as conform to existing cultural constraints.

It should be noted from the above that approach to translation should be functional, descriptive, target-oriented, and systemic, Lefevere&Basnet(1990:10). The aim is to ensure significance in the norms and constraints that characterize the theory and practice of translation. Translation is built on the framework of culture, politics and power, Lefevere(1992). Translation is therefore preoccupied with the wide-ranging issues of serious general happenings narrated in the source text and translated in the target text .This gives a useful background to this study.

2. Statement of the Problem.

Journalists in the Yoruba- speaking part of Nigeria adopt different translation choices in the translation of foreign news items. The suitability and the communication capacity of the translation choices made by these journalists prompted the study of an intuitive feeling of the communicative capacity of the translated COVID-19 expressions in Yoruba media and how they are able to pass the needed information and create necessary awareness in such an emergency situation. The renderings of the concepts in Yoruba reveal translation strategies such as copious translation, interpretation, borrowing and localizing new words and inventing new words. Do the

expressions possess enough communicative competencies to educate and enhance easy and better understanding of the danger and preventive measures to contain the virus? There is the need, therefore, to study the communicative capacity of the translated COVID-19 Expressions adopted by news-writers in the South-Western Nigeria.

3. Language and Culture

Language and culture are like Siamese twins and are quite inseparable for both depend on each other for self-expression. Culture is the totality of the socially acquired knowledge about the way of life of a people and this is manifested through a particular language. Catford (1965) is of the view that:

The language of a society is an integral part of its culture, and the lexical distinctions drawn by each language will tend to reflect the culturally important features of objects, institutions and activities in the society in which the language operates.

Hursti (2001) pointed out that “culture draws parallel lines between the acquired qualities of man and his instinctive qualities.” Culture subsumes materials and non-material artifacts, social behaviors and values expressed through linguistic behavior of a people. In actual fact, the general behavioral pattern of man in his environment is dictated by culture.

Sapir (1934) defines language as ‘a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols.’ This definition denotes that language is totally a human possession. As noted earlier, language and culture are intertwined. Thus Sapir’s (1934) view of language has a central purpose; it is a carrier of culture. Language is essential to culture, and as Venuti (1995) puts it, ‘the importance of language to culture is undeniable everywhere’. Caimoto (2010:80) posits that man’s total ways of behavior constitute his culture and are reflected in his language.

Knowing and using a language go beyond interacting with mere structural patterns of the language. It has to do with the knowledge of the cultural patterns of life of the speakers of the language. Our culture influences the way we use language to express reality; our world view. Culture dictates our ways of life in a particular environment and our patterns of behavior, which in turn control our language use and the function we thrust on it, Bednarova (2017:208).

4. Translation in News Writing.

The theory and practice of translation demands that the process of translation be filtered to remove undesirable elements, as the production progresses. Schank and Abelson (1977) pointed out that ‘the conscious element that goes into beautifying language is not present in speech’. Gambier and Henrik (2001) hold that ‘the conversational style in radio and television news bears semblance to that of ordinary spoken dialogue’. Considering the fact that the broadcast copy is translated to be spoken, it becomes very important that the style be more relaxed and informal in order to sustain the interest of the listeners and at the same time maintaining the principle of accuracy Haji Mohammadi, (2005:219).

The source texts are usually modified into the target text; and this demands the total appraisal of the undercurrent of the situation and the context of the news production as well as editing and rewriting and also, schedule and principles in the newsroom. The goal and the expectation of the broadcast news translation is to write to speak to people, not to read to them and this constitute the basis for the assertion that ‘newspapers communicate with printed words, radio with spoken words and television with moving pictures, Bielsa and Bassnett, (2009).

According to Weda(2014:151), types of translations include:

word-for-word translation, literal, faithful, semantic, adaptation, free, idiomatic, communicative and cognitive translation, word-for-word translation, free translation, literal translation, pragmatic translation, esthetic poetic translation, ethnographic translation, linguistic translation and communicative and semantic translation.

5. Approaches to News Items Translation

There exist different approaches to translation of foreign news items in the media industry. Only two of these approaches shall be considered in relation to their suitability to this study. These are:

5.1. Framing

In an attempt to make the news event available to the public, the media provide frame of reference, otherwise, stereotype account of exact state of affairs. This process creates an offshoot of the main frames which are in turn used by the audience and the individuals in the course of deduction of information about events. The frame methods consist of stereotypical setting, habit, and values, and are based on expectations in a particular social situation. Frames permit news writers 'to locate, perceive, identify and label', Fillmore (1977), Duboi (1997), Goffman (1974), Schank & Abelson (1977). It is believed that news frames focus on what is discussed and the process followed in the discussion and, the inference drawn to aid deductive reasoning. News frames are enunciated in the concept like, metaphors, symbols and visual images used in news narrative Entman, (1991).

To successfully process news item translation, it should be noted that press translation is governed by the very essence of promptness. Speed of delivery of news items becomes the main preoccupation of translator and also, an essential characteristic. The question of speed in the development of translation is germane to the comprehension of translated foreign news items. Giving consideration to the target public: how quickly the listeners to radio and television newscast come to term with the news items become an issue of paramount importance. News items are to be cast in such a way that they present instantaneous comprehension. Van Dijk (1998) notes that "in the field of translations, readability, comprehension and speed often end up, disappointingly, simply as textual and cultural domestication".

5.2. Translation Loss

Hervey and Higgins (1992) submitted that the processing of meaning from ST (Source Text) to TT (Target Text) inevitably deals with some significant degree of translation loss. This happens due to the inability to reconcile culturally relevant features in ST with that of TT. Translation loss is an attempt to stem the tide of inability to reproduce an ST accurately: the possibility is a loss of features in the TT or gain. Hervey and Higgins [ibid] hinged this loss or gain on the fact that 'background shared knowledge, cultural assumptions and learnt responses of monolingual Target language (TL) speakers are inevitably culture-bound.' Considering the above, source language (SL) speakers' reactions to the ST are not to be replicated exactly or they are not going to have direct effects on members of a different culture. An insignificant cultural difference between the ST listeners and the TT listeners is expected to create a basic divergence

between the significance of the ST and those of the TT. Such significance is likely to be related on a large-scale and in a partial sense; there is no likelihood of uniformity here. Hervey and Higgins [ibid] therefore admit that “if there is equivalence in translation, it is not an objective equivalence because the translator remains the final arbiter of the imagined effects of both the ST and TT.” From this standpoint, it is not in doubt that a reasonably objective appraisal of ‘equivalent effect’ is difficult to predict.

Bangbose cited by Awobuluyi(1992:22) mentions six strategies for invention of new expressions from new development alien to our culture. These include (1) Translation in consonance with the rules of the target language. (2) Interpretation of the existing words of English vis-a-vis its function. In other word, new words are ascribed specific functions. (3) Creation of new words by deforming the source language. (4) Borrowing directly from the source language and localizing it to suit the internal rules of the target language. For instance, Coronavirus = Kòronáfairòsì. (5) Inventing new words using the repertoire of the native language. (6) Creating new words completely out of non-native words.

The claims above prompt the questions of how do the translators of Yoruba news item make certain choices during translation of foreign news items with due regard to the principle of equivalence and comprehension? What principle or aim influences their choice to concede or to lose for the purpose of achieving successful transfer of meaning? To answer these questions, due consideration should be given to the ST and TT cultures and world views as a whole.

6. Theoretical Framework

Neubert & Shreve (2003) maintains that there exist different approaches to the study of translation. Meanwhile, current notions of the nature of translation hold that the basic principles guiding translators are familiarity with the source and target language as well as the subject matter. Most translation theorists; Bassnett(1999), Neubert& Shreve (2003),Lefevere(1998), Baker (2006) etc., hold the view that a good translation must be transparent and faithful to the original text. It should be devoid of word for word translation, devoid of ambiguous sentences and should reflect adequacy of selection of words that will capture the style and worldview of the original. In this regard, this study adopts Awobuluyi(1992) strategies for invention of new expressions from new development alien to our culture. The reason for choosing this standpoint is that it suits the purpose and serves as a useful tool for this study.

7. Data Presentation and Analysis

This study examines translations of selected COVID-19 Expressions from English to Yoruba contained in news broadcast and media usages in the Western part of Nigeria. It analyses their communicative capacities and suitability. Thirty news items were collected and sampled from news bulletins presented by the news media across four major Yoruba-speaking states of Nigeria (107.5 FM, Lagos State; 603 KHZ AM–OGBC, Ogun State; 91.7–Rave FM, Osun State and 756 AM, Radio O. Y. O. Oyo State) out of which only sixteen were extracted and examined. For the purpose of reliability and balanced sampling, four news items were taken from each of the aforementioned Radio Stations for critical analysis. The study is necessitated by the need to critically analyze the communicative capacity of the translated COVID-19 Expressions in Yoruba media and how they are able to pass the needed information and create necessary awareness in such an emergency situation. Items identified and examined are those are critically tied to COVID-19 pandemic situations. The data are presented and analyzed as follows:

7.1. Category One

1. Quarantine (Ìsémólé) 2. Self-Isolation (Ìdánìkanwà) 3. Nose Mask (Ìbomú) 4. Mask (Ìbojú/Ìbonu/Ìbomú) 5. Gloves (Ìbowó) 6. Trachea/Wind Pipe (Kòmódokun)

The news items listed above were translated using translation strategy of copying. The word Quarantine in (item 1), is a noun word. It is rendered as an equivalent noun “Ìsémólé” in Yoruba news media. The word self-isolation (item 2) is translated as (Ìdánìkanwà). Nose Mask (items 3) is rendered as (Ìbomú). A glove is rendered as (Ìbowó). Copying which is one of the translation solutions is employed to achieve direct transfer of meaning from the source to target text. It is used to derive meaning from the already existing concept or word with popular usage.

Translation solutions sometimes may lack clarity in meaning because the direct translation strategy used is usually predicated on principle of deduction and assumption of language universal. The word ‘Ìdánìkanwà’ is translated in Yoruba to signify self-isolation. The problem here is that it lacks precision. The semantic implication of the word in Yoruba points to

a person deliberately isolating him/herself from other people due to pride, material achievement or through some self-imposed philosophy which is in sharp contrast with isolation meted out by the Yoruba society on those with contagious ailment like leprosy – *igbo ladete ngbe* ; the leprous-inflicted is condemned to be isolated in the bush. Pride or haughtiness is usually frowned upon in Yoruba culture and anybody displaying such ends up becoming a pariah: shut out and off the public gaze and recognition. It must be pointed out that Yoruba culture, like others in Africa, holds family relationship and phatic communion in high esteem. Thus *idánikanwà* connotes irresponsibility ranging from loneliness borne out of marital failure, parental irresponsibility resulting in break-up of the kith and kinship affinity among the family members and, social irresponsibility resulting in excommunication and non-recognition in the society. Hence the Yoruba proverb which says ‘*eni tó bá fẹ́ rí 'ni làárí*’– ‘social recognition is give and take’. The responsibility of the translator is to do a news item translation that will enable the Yoruba listeners reconcile the prevailing situation with the translation solution to forge desirable comprehension of the foreign news items from positive point of view?

It should be noted that the basic principles guiding translators are familiarity with the source and target language as well as the subject matter. Neubert & Shreve (2003) maintains “current notions of the nature of translation hold that the basic principles guiding translators are familiarity with the source and target language as well as the subject matter.” Also a good translation must be transparent and faithful to the original text. It should be devoid of word for word translation, devoid of ambiguous sentences and should reflect adequacy of selection of words that will capture the style and worldview of the original. Nevertheless, new expressions from new developments alien to our culture must be presented in such a way to capture the intention of the translation, the influence of the cultural environment and the prevailing situations in which translation takes place as well as the expectations of the listeners.

From the above, one can say that the prevailing social events and the hypes given to it from different quarters form a converging pressure upon which the listener is forced to form his opinion and the meaning of such translation, even without their precision. Meaning is enforced upon the consciousness of the recipient of the news to make comprehension take place. What matters mostly in this context is the communicative capacity of the news items enunciating prevailing social events and, in this situation, the translated COVID-19 Expressions. The Yoruba

media is however saddled with the responsibility to pass the needed information across to the local populace and create necessary awareness in such an emergency situation. The comments and reaction of the local population actually show their understanding, even if at the minimal level, of the danger and preventive measures required to contain the virus.

Other descriptive words employed for translation include Trachea/Wind Pipe (item 7) translated as (Kòmóòkun), Nose Mask (items 3) rendered as (Ìbomú) and Gloves (item 4) rendered as ìbòwó. The translated items are employed to represent a respiratory organ and paraphernalia used to shield some body parts from infection and injury in English culture. The main challenge here is that of referential perplexity. For the sake of clarity, the referential import of Trachea/Wind Pipe (item 7) is blurred by its translation as (Kòmóòkun) in Yoruba. This word can only have meaning among the academics whose area of discipline is Yoruba phonetics and phonology and by extension, professional butchers but it may not be understood easily by the majority of the Yoruba speakers to mean wind pipe or trachea.

Translation strategy of direct word copying is used to present nose mask (item 3) and gloves (item 4) as kit worn to shield the nose (imú) and the hands (owó) from the infection of COVID-19. Glove and mask among the Yorubas are used popularly among the egúngún or other masquerades cults groups and, it is used to ensure utmost secrecy and anonymity rather than protection. To resolve the issue of referential confusion and forge translation solution, the idea of protection (àbò or ibò-) translated from the foreign news items is directly utilized in Yoruba translation to create the basic concepts and instruments of awareness of protection against the ravaging COVID-19 pandemic. The translation strategy of copying was adopted to copy word directly from the source text (ST) to create awareness of ensuring protection in an emergency situation.

7.2. Category Two

1. Coronavirus (Kòkòrò-Àrùn- Àìfojúrí) 2 Physical Distancing (Ìtakété-síra-ẹ̀nikejì- tàbí - sí - Aláádúgbò) 3. Social Distancing (Ìtakété-síra-ẹ̀ni-láwùjò) 4. Hand Sanitizer (Ìpawó apakòkòròàrùn) 5. Mask (Ìbojú/ibonu/ibomú) 6. Pandemic (Àjàkálẹ̀ àrùnlágbàayé) 7. Ventilator (Èrọamèèémí-já-gaara) 8. Sore Throat (Egbò ọ̀nà ọ̀fun) 9. Intensive Care Unit (IbùdóÀkànṣeFúnÌtójú) 13. Underlined Medical Condition (Àìleraabénú) 14. Respiratory

Disease (Àìsàn a-je-mó mímí) 15. Test Kits (Ohunìṣàyèwò) 16. Infectious Disease Centre (IbùdóFúnÀrùnÀkóràn)

The news items highlighted above are translated using loaded noun phrases and direct translation strategies. News items like 1. Coronavirus (kòkòrò-àrùn-àìfojúrí) 2 Physical Distancing (Ìtakété-síra-ẹ̀nikẹ̀jì-tàbi-sí-aláàdúgbò) 3. Social Distancing (Ìtakété-síra-ẹ̀ni-láwùjọ) 4. Hand Sanitizer (Ìpawó apakòkòròarùn) 5. Pandemic (Àjàkálẹ̀ àrùnlágbáàyé) 6. Ventilator (Èrọamèèémí-já-gaara) 7. Sore Throat (Egbòònàòfun) 8. Intensive Care Unit (IbùdóÀkànṣeFúnÌtójú) 9. Underlined Medical Condition (Àìleraabénú) 10. Respiratory Disease (Àìsàn a-je-mó-mímí) 11. Test Kits (Ohunìṣàyèwò) 12. Infectious Disease Centre (IbùdóFúnÀrùnÀkóràn) were done using direct translation strategy to effect perspective change.

Perspective Change is built upon the notion based on looking and judging the same issue from divergent world views through the options given by our various languages. It is afforded by altering sentence focus to enable inter and intra sentential functions thereby bringing about fluidity and dynamism in expressions of concepts. Expression of different views on the same occurrence is also achieved through changing semantic focus which is enabled by the selection of diverse ideals as well as varying register to account for situation of occurrence as well as the point of view of narration and discourse.

Lexical Density Change deals with lexical convergence, the number of lexemes or conglomeration of texts utilized in sending a given set of information. The sub-category of this include: generalization versus specification which involves mobility of action in the direction dictated by situations. Explicit versus Implicit expressions are however used to indicate deeper and surface meaning processing mechanism which is allowed by intuitive and tacit knowledge of a language possessed by individual. Multiple translation and re-segmentation involves manipulation of sentence structures known as ‘recasting sentences’ which brings about compensation in the course of processing ST to TT. Compensation is therefore utilized in introducing translation solution at a new linguistic level.

Cases of direct borrowing and nativisation of foreign words by the local news-writer are noted in the processing of foreign news items translation. This is done by adopting Translation strategy of Rewriting of words or concepts by using loaded noun phrases to translate novel words or concepts that lack translation equivalence. For instance, Coronavirus (Kòkòrò-àrùn-

àìfojúrí), Physical Distancing (Ìtakété-síra/ẹnikẹjì- tàbi-si-aláàdúgbò), Social Distancing (Ìtakété-síra-ẹni-láwùjọ), Hand Sanitizer (Ìpawó apakòkòròàrùn), Pandemic (Àjàkálẹ̀ àrùnlágbáàyé), Ventilator (Èrọaméèémí-já-gaara), Sore Throat (EgbòỌ̀nàỌ̀fun), Intensive Care Unit (IbùdóÀkànşefúnÌtójú), Underlined Medical Condition (ÀìleraAbénú), Respiratory Disease (Àìsàn A-Jẹ-mó mímí), Test Kits (OhunÌşàyèwò) and Infectious Disease Centre (IbùdóFúnÀrùnÀkóràn) are all interesting translation solutions.

Cultural Correspondence translation solution is an approach that utilizes parallel idioms and equivalent culture-specific items to arrive at an agreeable translation of foreign news items including units of measurement, currency, forms of address, new ideas and novel occurrences. For example: the translation of the following items Coronavirus (Kòkòrò-àrùn-àìfojúrí), Physical Distancing (Ìtakété-síra/ẹnikẹjì-tàbi-sí-aláàdúgbò), Social Distancing (Ìtakété-síra-ẹni-láwùjọ), Hand Sanitizer (Ìpawó ApakòkòròÀrùn) into the Yoruba news media reflects utilization of cultural correspondence.

Text Tailoring is also a situation where translators deftly alter what is actually said in the text through the means of correction of misconception and deletion of major body of material that is not relevant to the idea of the target text. Addition of new information can also be done to boost the intention of translation. For instance, Pandemic (Àjàkálẹ̀ àrùnlágbáàyé) and Ventilator (Èrọaméèémí-já-gaara) are good examples of text tailoring.

8. Conclusion

The paper is an attempt to examine translations of COVID-19 news items by the news media in the South West of Nigeria with a consciousness to the fact that the language of the source text which is English is different from the language of target text which is Yoruba and, the two convey different cultural values. Translation activities are quite challenging and precision is often difficult to accomplish. Admittedly, most of the translated news items suffer non-conformity to the original versions but its aim of dissemination of information in an emergency situation and to the people of an alien culture is fairly achieved. It should be noted that most of the translated registered expressions in this paper are by means of adaptation invented by the Yoruba literates especially news writers whose literary exposure guided the translation and fabrication of some lexical expressions alien to their culture. Ideally, mass communicated messages should be crafted in such a way to display absolute clarity.

The paper, therefore, establishes that through translation strategies, new concepts or registered COVID-19 expressions in English can be captured by the lexis and structures of Yoruba. These translated expressions can also increase words in the lexicon of the language. The communicative competencies of these translated expressions are capable of communicating, educating and enhancing easy and better understanding of what the virus entails as well as the danger and preventive measure to contain the virus. The translated expressions are therefore used to inform and create awareness about the virus among the indigenous Yoruba people who cannot speak English.

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