

## RELEVANCE OF THE TRAINING RECEIVED BY TRANSLATORS IN NIGERIA: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Dr Chimmuanya Pearl Ngele

[pearlonuoha@yahoo.com](mailto:pearlonuoha@yahoo.com)

+2347032590259

Department of Foreign Languages & Literary Studies

University of Nigeria, Nsukka

&

Marinus S. Yong (PhD)

Department of Languages and Linguistics

Alex Ekwueme Federal University

Ndufu, Alaike-Ikwo

Ebonyi State

### Abstract

The importance of translation can hardly be overemphasized. It is a sociocultural phenomenon that has been with man since people from one linguistic community began mixing with those of other speech communities. The desire to understand and communicate with each other therefore formed the basis for translation. In this study, our aim is to ascertain the degree of relevance of the training received by translators in Nigeria. To achieve this aim, the researchers form hypothesis that border on the fact that training of translators in Nigeria is more theoretical than practical. The hypothesis states that trained translators in Nigeria rarely practice professional translation. In addition, most Nigerian translators cannot use specialized translation software, because most teachers of translation are specialist in other areas of languages not translation specialists. Investigation is done using a semi structured questionnaire. This instrument was distributed to 150 linguists; specialists in Nigerian and foreign languages. Questionnaires were distributed electronically using the snowball method. The data were processed with the descriptive method. Data presentation is in the tabular format. Our findings show that translation training in Nigeria is concentrated at the postgraduate levels of education; most Nigerian institutions do not include electronic translation in their curriculum. It concludes that translation training in Nigerian institutions is more theoretical than practical.

**Key Words:** translation training; translators; language specialist; theoretical; practical

### Introduction

Translation, the transfer of a message from one language to another for communication, is of vital importance in introducing people to cultures, civilizations, and societies that are different from their own, as well as to modern ideas and technical/ scientific developments (Aksoy, 201). Hence, training translators and teachers of translation is becoming a necessity because translation is playing an increasingly more important role in today's world. The art of translating has become very necessary in several international and intercultural activities. Actually, one may describe translation as a sociocultural phenomenon that has been with man since people from one linguistic community began mixing with those of other speech communities. The desire to understand and communicate with each other therefore formed the basis for translation.

People who can express themselves in two or more languages have always played the role of translators before it became an academic discipline. Such bilinguals often give the impression that translation is a mere rephrasing of a message expressed in a language. The present study is therefore an examination of the training given to translators for professional practice. The training received by students in translation should equip them not only with practical bilingual abilities, but also to encourage attitudes that will allow them to do the best possible translation work after graduation. This article focuses on the training of translators in Nigeria. Its aim is to investigate the major challenges facing training translators in Nigeria. Bassnett and Lefevere (11) remark that since languages express cultures, translators should be bicultural, not bilingual. As Ngele and Iyala-Amadiargue, translators being bilingual means they are also bicultural. They drew their position from Cumming's definition of culture as "the totality of transmitted behavioural patterns" (43). Tar has a completely different opinion. She centres the art of translating on linguistic competence arguing that "the aim of translation teaching is for translation trainees to acquire comprehensive abilities in a foreign language and the mother tongue/first language" (103).

Harmonizing the four positions, this research investigates the different competences acquired by translators in Nigeria and the usefulness of these competences to the Nigerian job market. The study examines the practice of translation in Nigeria and the expertise acquired by the practitioners. It also examines the use of computer assisted translation tools by orifessuibal translators in Nigeria, as Nzuanke and Chinaka note:

In a country like Nigeria that has witnessed significant changes brought about by technology and globalisation, translators exercising their profession in the country would be expected to follow the global trend and change with the times. Thus, instead of such Nigerian translators sitting at their desks for endless hours and days, poring over voluminous books and dictionaries, struggling to find the right word, expression and/or co-text to complete a given translation job, they should rather be churning out thousands of words per day to produce timely translations that may fetch them huge sums of money and generate much bigger sums for their clients.

Examination is done by forming four hypotheses and three research questions. Investigation is done using a semi-structured questionnaire. This instrument was distributed to 150 linguists; experts in Nigerian and foreign languages. The questionnaires were distributed electronically using the snowball method. The data were processed using the descriptive method; by calculating percentages. Data presentation is in the tabular format.

The results show that translation training in Nigeria was concentrated at the postgraduate levels of education. They also show that most Nigerian institutions do not include electronic translation in their curriculum. Finally, this research discovered that translation training in Nigerian institutions is more theoretical than practical and this constitutes a stumbling block in professional practice.

### **Relevance of the study**

The training of translators in Africa may be traced to the establishment of Translation as a postgraduate discipline to a project initiated in 1989 with the support of the European Commission's Directorate General for Translation and Interpreting (Afolabi

and Oyetoyen 328). The project birthed the Pan-African Masters Consortium in Interpreting and Translation (PAMCIT). This consortium is currently run by five African universities, namely, the University of Buea in Cameroun, the University of Ghana, the University of Nairobi in Kenya, the Université Gaston Berger in Senegal, and the Universidade Pedagógica de Moçambique in Mozambique. In the last twenty-five years, a number of universities across the continent now offer postgraduate programmes in T&I (Translation and Interpreting). It is, therefore, necessary to study the sustainability of T&I curricula and the increasing need to align training with market requirements.

The present research therefore investigates the capacity of the training received by translation trainees in Nigeria to equip them for professional practice. Another objective of this study is to examine the extent to which these translation trainees can employ the relevant technology to their profession. Given the growth of the translation industry in Nigeria and the influence of technology on education, it is expected that most Nigerian translators should be conversant with recent computer-assisted translation tools. Our research is therefore necessary in order to review the extent to which Nigerian translators are equipped to face the demands of the global translation industry.

### **Research Questions**

The study desires to get responses to three questions:

- I. What are the methods employed in equipping translators in Nigeria for professional practice?
- II. How useful are these methods in professional practice?
- III. Who is/are charged with the task of training translators in Nigeria?

### **Hypothesis**

1. The training of translators in Nigeria is more theoretical than practical.
2. Trained translators in Nigeria rarely practice professional translation.
3. Most teachers of translation in Nigeria are specialists in other fields of languages, not translation specialists.
4. Most Nigerian translators cannot use specialized translation software but can only use GOOGLE TRANSLATE.

### **Materials and Methods**

The instrument adopted for this research is a semi structured questionnaire. The questionnaire is designed in English and has sixteen questions. It was distributed with a target of having 150 respondents. The questionnaire is a GOOGLE form, its distribution was done electronically. It was placed on the WHATSAPP platforms of several language associations, such as: Linguistic Association of Nigeria, African Pragmatics Association, University French Teachers' Association of Nigeria and the language departments of many Nigerian universities.

The instrument was distributed using the snowball method. The snowball method entails that one respondent leads the researcher to another – like brings like. This method is apt for this research because we need experts of different languages. In this section, we present our instrument and discuss the factors surrounding its creation.

*Presentation of questionnaire*

1. Do you have a degree in languages? Yes ☐ No ☐
2. If YES is your response to QUESTION 1, which language(s) did you study?  
(A) English ☐ (B) French ☐ (C) Igbo ☐ (D) German ☐ (E) Others \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the highest you did in school?  
(A) NCE/OND ☐ (B) Bachelor's degree ☐ (C) PGD ☐ (D) Master's degree ☐ (E) PhD ☐
4. Do you teach translation? Yes ☐ No ☐
5. If YES is your response to QUESTION 4, at what level do you teach translation?  
(A) Nursery/Primary ☐ (B) Secondary ☐ (C) Tertiary other than university ☐ (D) university ☐
6. Please tick what pertains to you  
(A) I'm a trained translator teaching translation ☐ (B) I'm only a language teacher, teaching translation as a part of the curriculum ☐
7. Are you a trained translator? Yes ☐ No ☐
8. If YES is your response to QUESTION 7, which training did you receive?  
(A) PGD in Translation ☐ (B) Certificate course in Translation ☐ (C) Bachelor's degree in Translation ☐ (D) Bachelor's degree in languages ☐ (E) Masters in Translation ☐ (F) PhD in Translation ☐
9. Did your translation training include the use of electronic devices? YES ☐ NO ☐
10. How best can you describe your translation training?  
(A) Purely theoretical ☐ (B) Purely practical ☐ (C) Mixed but more theoretical than practical ☐ (D) Mixed but more practical than theoretical ☐
11. Have you ever had to do electronic or internet translation? YES ☐ NO ☐
12. If YES is your response to QUESTION 11, which app or software did you use?  
(A) GOOGLE TRANSLATE ☐ (B) TRADIOS ☐ (C) LINGUINE ☐ (D) Others \_\_\_\_\_ ☐
13. If YES is your response to QUESTION 11, why did you choose to go for electronic translation? (A) It is more accurate ☐ (B) It is cheaper ☐ (C) I wanted some technical terms ☐ (D) It is faster ☐ (E) Other reasons (please state) ☐
14. If YES is your response to QUESTION 11, what was the type of the document you translated? (A) Personal letter/mail ☐ (B) Scientific ☐ (C) Literary ☐ (D) Others ☐
15. If YES is your response to QUESTION 11, did you edit the work done by the machine? Yes ☐ No ☐
16. Have you ever had to do professional translation? Yes ☐ No ☐

In any case where a YES/NO question is present, the question that follows would give an insight to what is being investigated. The result was presented in tables using the simple percentage method.

The first question – *Do you have a degree in languages?* - was targeted at ascertaining if the respondent was a language expert. Secondly, it was necessary to know the language studied. This is in line with our second hypothesis. Hence, the second question seeks to know the language(s) that was studied by the respondent. Thirdly, our research wished to know the depth of training received by a person before calling

him/her a language expert. It is necessary to know that the second and third questions have options from which the respondent had to choose. These options were produced by the Nigerian educational system.

In examining our third hypothesis, the study investigated the percentage of these language experts who are teachers of translation by asking; *Do you teach translation?* The fifth question goes further to investigate the levels at which translation is taught in Nigerian schools. This question has options, giving all the levels in the Nigerian educational system.

As a direct response to the third hypothesis, the sixth question probes directly to know if this teacher of translation responding is a trained translator. The seventh and eighth questions were designed to ascertain if the translator teacher is an expert and his/her level of expertise or not.

Our first hypothesis was geared towards the manner of training received by Nigerian translators; theoretical or practical. In view of this, a description of the training is demanded by the ninth and tenth questions.

The eleventh to fifteenth questions searched for responses to affirm or negate our fourth hypothesis. The questions were based on electronic translation; type of software used, reason for choosing electronic translation, nature of text and post edition. In line with our second hypotheses, the research wished to know the percentage of Nigerian translators who had been involved in this practice professionally. This informed the design of the sixteenth question.

### Data Presentation

In this section, we present the data harvested by our questionnaires. A total of 121 persons completed the questionnaires. Given that we had a target of 150, this figure implies that there were 29 shortages.

Our first question was “Do you have a degree in languages?”. The responses were: Yes 90.1% and No 9.9%. This means that the majority of the respondents were language experts so we had the right set of respondents. Secondly, the research wishes to ascertain the language studied by these experts. The responses were as follows:

**TABLE 1: Languages studied by respondents**

LANGUAGE	PERCENTAGE
English	29.4%
French	78%
Igbo	13.8%
German	25.7%
Others	10.9%

Under the column “Others,” we had; Spanish (1.8), Russian (3.7), Chinese (2.7), Yoruba (0.9), Fulfulde/Hausa (0.9), Arabic (0.9). TABLE 1 shows that the majority of the respondents were experts in French. However, it is necessary to note that our respondents spread across a wide range of language fields. This factor is important because translation is not restricted to a particular language.

Thirdly, we asked; “What is the highest you did in school?”. The responses are as follows:

**TABLE 2: Presentation of respondents' educational levels**

DEGREE	PERCENTAGE
PhD	18.2%
Masters	28.9%
Bachelor's	48.8%
NCE/OND	0%
PGD	0%

It was necessary to ascertain the level of education of the respondents before terming him/her a language specialist. According to the data, the respondents were all specialists in different languages. The larger percentage of the respondents (48%) were Bachelor's degree holders while 52% was spread across different levels.

In fourth place, we had to investigate the percentage of these language specialists who are teachers of translation. Only 28.9% responded in the affirmative while 71.1% said "no". Nonetheless, this population was still useful in examining the training received by translators in Nigeria. This is because the respondents were all first and foremost language specialists; despite not all being specialist in the field of translation. Fifthly, the levels at which they taught translation was investigated. Our responses were:

**TABLE 3: Presentation of levels at which translation is taught**

LEVEL	PERCENTAGE
Nursery/Primary	12.5%
Secondary	25%
Tertiary other than university	17.5%
University	45%

The data show three pertinent pieces of information:

- Most of the respondents teach translation at the university level.
- Translation is taught at all levels of education in Nigeria.
- Translation teaching is concentrated at Higher education level

Examining the competences of persons teaching the translation courses in schools was also necessary. This is in response to our third research question and also the third hypothesis. Hence, in sixth place, our findings showed that 51.4% of translation teachers were trained translators. However, 48.6% were language teachers, probably experts in other specialties but teaching translation. Our research considers this figure as significant, though the majority were trained translators. The response to our sixth question negates the third hypothesis: *Most teachers of translation in Nigeria are language teachers not translation specialists.*

Our seventh question reads: "Are you a trained translator?". 57.1% responded in the affirmative and 42.9% in the negative. This implies that the majority of the respondents had some training in translation. For this reason, it is necessary to ascertain the type and level of translation training. Hence, the eighth question reads: "which training did you receive?". We had only 24 (out of the 121) responding to this question. Their responses were as follows:



**TABLE 4: Presentation of the levels at which Nigerians receive translation training**

LEVEL	NUMBER OF PERSONS
PGD in translation	1
Certificate course in translation	1
Bachelor's degree in translation	0
Bachelor's degree in languages	2
Masters degree in translation	10
PhD in Translation	10

TABLE 4 presents three factors worthy of note:

- None had a B.A in Translation. This may be because no Nigerian university offers bachelor's degree in translation.
- People with B.A in languages did not consider themselves translation experts. It is instructive that most of the 121 respondents had degrees in languages, implying that they had received some translation training. However, only 24 responded and only two thought that a B.A in languages was enough to consider one's self a translator.
- Translation training is often done at the Master's degree and PhD levels. The translators were asked to describe their translation training. This description is connected to the ninth and tenth questions. The ninth question was: "Did your translation training include the use of electronic devices?". Sadly, only 26.2% responded in the affirmative, 73.8% in the negative.

Responses to the tenth question are shown below:

**TABLE 5: Description of translation training**

EXPERIENCE	P
Purely theoretical	5%
Purely practical	5%
Mixed but more theoretical than practical	55%
Mixed but more practical than theoretical	

Our data (question 9 and TABLE 5) affirm our first hypothesis: the training of Nigerian translators is more theoretical than practical. In the view of this research, this "theory-based training" creates problems in professional practice. However, it is advantageous for those who wish to embark solely on translation research in order to join the academia (become academic).

The eleventh question reads: "Have you ever had to do electronic or internet translation?". The response to this was: 66.9% responded positively and 33.1% in the negative". This result is remarkable for most of these respondents had indicated in our ninth question that they were not taught electronic translation in school.

As a follow-up to our research on the ability to do electronic translation, the twelfth question desired to know the software being used. The responses were:

**TABLE 6: Presentation of software used by Nigerian translators**

SOFTWARE	PERCENTAGE
Google Translate	77.8%
Tradios	2.5%
Linguin	2.5%
Others	17.2%

Under the column “Others: the responses were: Cistran, Deep-L, Fox Machine. TABLE 6 affirms our fourth hypothesis; “Most Nigerian translators do not use specialized translation software (Tradios, Cistran Linguine etc) but can only use GOOGLE TRANSLATE”. GOOGLE had the highest patronage, according to our findings.

Next, the research wished to know the reason a trained linguist/translator would embark on electronic translation. Again, not everyone gave a response to this question; only 94 persons responded. Our findings are as follows:

**TABLE 7: Reasons for which Nigerian experts translate electronically**

REASON	NUMBER OF PERSONS
It is more accurate than manual translation	7
It is cheap	8
I wanted some technical terms	22
It is fast	57
Other reasons	0

TABLE 7 showed that rapidity and the search for technical terms are the reasons behind the use of translation software.

The fourteenth question desired to discover the type of texts translated electronically. The data revealed:

**TABLE 8: Presentation of documents translated electronically**

NATURE OF DOCUMENT	PERCENTAGE
Personal letter/mail	38.8%
Scientific	11.1%
Literary	38.3%
Other reasons	27.8%

TABLE 8 reveals that most of the texts translated electronically were not highly classified texts but only letters/emails. This table showed that scientific texts were seldom translated electronically. Unfortunately, there was little explanation under column “others”.



Still investigating electronic translation, the fifteenth question was: "Did you edit the work done by the machine? While 87.7% of our respondents said YES, 12.3% said NO. The implication of this piece of information was that language experts had adequate knowledge on the need and process of "post editing". According to our findings, only 39.7% of the language experts had ever done professional translation. A significant population – 60.3% - had never practised professionally. The data generated by the sixteenth question affirm our second hypothesis: *Trained translators in Nigeria rarely practice professional translation*

## Conclusion

In this study, our aim was to ascertain the degree of relevance of the training received by translators in Nigeria. To achieve this aim, hypotheses that border on fact that training of translators in Nigeria is more theoretical than practical, trained translators in Nigeria rarely practice professional translation, most teachers of translation in Nigeria are specialists in other language fields not translation specialists and most Nigerian translators do not use specialized translation software, were used.

Questionnaires administered were developed in line with these hypotheses. The 16 questions were distributed electronically using the snowball method to 150 respondents deemed to be experts in Nigerian and foreign languages. The data received were analysed using the descriptive method that depends on percentages.

From the analysis we can make the following conclusions: in Nigeria, specialization in the field of Translation is limited to the Postgraduate level, most Nigerian institutions do not include electronic translation in their curriculum and translation teaching in Nigeria lays more emphasis on theory than practice.

It is certain that our findings represent a call for improvement in the training of translators in Nigerian universities and institutes. Though the course is introduced at a much lower level in the undergraduate programme, there is the need to place emphasis on its practical aspect. At the postgraduate level students need to do more of practice than theory for them to excel in the field of translation. They may take advantage of the booming film industry with a huge francophone public that surround Nigeria. This can be more effectively done if they are properly trained on how to use the appropriate translation tools.

## References

- Afolabi, Segun. and Oyetoyan, Oludamilola. "Charting a new course for translator and interpreter training in Africa: Lessons from the COVID-19 experience in selected countries". *The Journal of Specialised Translation*. 36: (2), 327-341, 2021.
- Aksoy, B. "Translation As a Rewriting, The Concept And Its Implications On The Emergence of a National Literature". *Translation Journal*. (5):3, 200-205. 2001.
- Bassnett, Susan and Lefevere, Andre *Translation, History and Culture*. London: Cassell, 1995.
- Cumming, Brett. *The Relationship between Language, Culture and Identity and the Implication for Language Teaching and Language Policy*. <https://aichi-pu.repo.nii.ac.jp/> (Accessed 01/02/2018), 2006.



- Gibova, K. *The dark side of literary translation: An analysis of translation trainees' performance*. Publication of Institute of British and American studies, Presov. [www.pulib.sk/web/kniznica/elpub/dokument/kacmarova/subor/Gibova/pdf](http://www.pulib.sk/web/kniznica/elpub/dokument/kacmarova/subor/Gibova/pdf). (Accessed 2/5/ 2018), 207.
- Ngele, C.P.O. and Iyalla-Amadi, P. "Saussure's Concept of Meaning Applied to the translation of Literary texts". *Language Discuss and Society Journal* (LDS), Polland. (35):1. [www.language-and-society.org/volume/-number-1-june-2019](http://www.language-and-society.org/volume/-number-1-june-2019) (Accessed 3/1/2022), 2019.
- Nzuanke, Samson. and Chinaka, Uchechi. *Technology and Translation: The Impact of Recent Technology Tools on Professional Translation*. Publication of the University of Calabar
- Tar, Maryam. "A Comprehensive analysis of perception of teachers on the challenges of teaching translation in Nigerian universities". *Current Issues in Translation Studies in Nigeria*. Soyoye, Festus. and Mayanja, Shahan. (Eds) Berlin: Wehrhahn Verlag. 103-111, 2012.