

Between the Teacher-Translator (TT) and the Officer-Translator (OT): The Useful but Elusive Handshake?

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Abstract

This essay is out to draw attention to a simple but often overlooked subject: the need to recognize two broad streams of translators and, more importantly, to draw together not only for the mutual benefit of both streams but for the ultimate growth and sustenance of the enterprise as a social cum international service. The essay admits the classic definition of translation and puts its major plank of argument on the assumption that translation and interpretation are Siamese twins. It purports that so much is going on in classroom translation that without it, office translation may well be a mirage. Put more sharply, classroom translation often called pedagogical translation is the father of office translation. Yet there is little, except for conferences, which brings the two into cross-fertilizing synergy. This is against the backdrop that office translation is an activity carried out for a fee or in return for a specified honorarium or salary. The central argument is that, whereas the teacher-translator is the indispensable light to the officer-translator, he is not open to being readily outsourced and that, unless regular occasions are provided for the teacher-translator to pull his weight in the field, the assumed parity between both streams might be a nullity.

Keywords: Teacher-translator, Officer-translator, handshake, synergy, pedagogical translator, interpretation.

Introduction

It is no longer a matter of profound scholarship to draw a dividing line between translation and interpretation as practically every study agrees that both represent the two sides of the same coin, the latter being the oral version of the former. The functional dichotomy is glossed between pedagogical translation and straight office translation, and hence between the teacher-translator and the official translator who, for lexicological synchrony will, in this essay, be referred to as officer-translator. The truth is that all translators pass through one form of pedagogical training or another in the classroom. However, whereas the teacher-translator tends to remain tied to the curriculum imposed by the classroom, the officer-translator is accountable to the pressures and demands of the office. Below, in brief, are what constitutes, in our view, the key characteristics of the teacher-translator and the officer-translator.

The Teacher-translator

The Teacher-translator is Primarily guided by the desire to improve awareness of the basic structures of the two languages in use. The teacher-translator is concerned about making the learners see how two languages differ not just in terms of the basic patterns of arrangement discernible in each but assuming an unequal level of competence in the two languages for the learner. Perhaps more importantly, he/she is concerned about the contextual implications of the choice of given patterns.

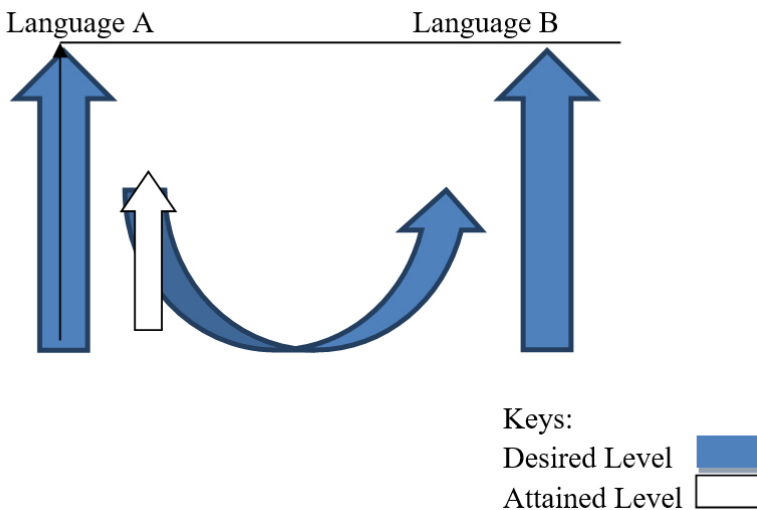


Figure 1: Language levels

The teacher-translator considers the class as made up of learners and not professionals. This informs the kind of relationship between him/her and the learners whom he/she sees as not yet ripe to handle from start to finish the task of translating a given text without assistance or supervision. To the teacher-translator, the learners are expected to make mistakes of conception or rendition as they are still learning. Unlike the professional translator, the teacher-translator sees his/her business daily guided by the type of experience he/she undergoes with the learners. In other words, the teacher-translator has a rather dynamic disposition towards his/her business in terms of what to offer to learners and what he/she expects from them.

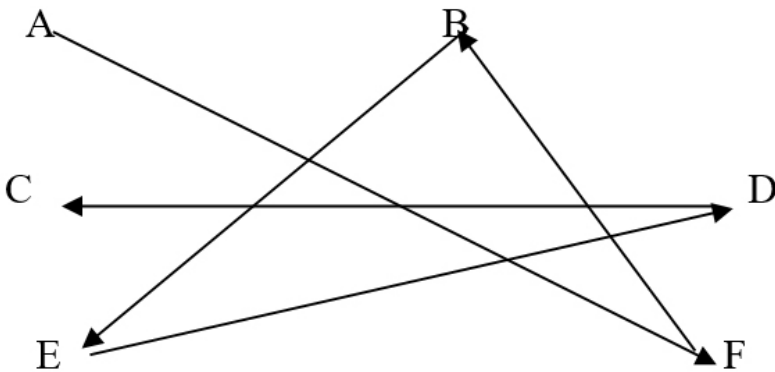


Figure 2: Dynamic Pedagogical Approach

The translator-teacher assigns a priori to the learner the status of weaker competence in one of the languages, especially the target language. Sometimes, the assignment of weak competence can be to both languages. Given that assumption, the main pre-occupation of the teacher-translator is to present to the class tasks that will match their ‘weakness’ level and will reveal areas requiring special attention or those to be glossed over. The primary status assignment may also reveal pleasant surprises.

The translator-teacher sees the goal of translation as empowering the learner linguistically. This is the main reason why the teacher-translator’s interest is in gathering as many different materials as possible; this is why varied proposed texts are not just in terms of themes but also in terms of structural patterns. The aim is to cover as many domains of social interest as possible so that registers associated with such domains come up for translation and practical review. Of course, the ultimate aim is to equip the learner in advance for life after class.

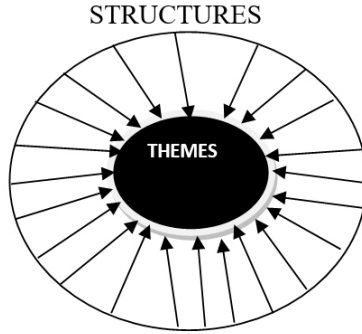


Figure 3: Structures dominating Themes

The teacher-translator promotes sequential exposure to the structural and lexical constituents of the target language. Given the artificial conditions governing learning, the teacher-translator cannot but build his/her teaching around a scheme. This scheme implies a certain level of planning that puts thematic graduation and syntactic pre-occupation or ordering into account. This approach demands from the learner readiness to see translation as, though ultimately a free and unpredictable market enterprise, but one that calls for progressive mastery of the correspondence between one language and another on the one hand and the methodical ‘recherché à equivalence’ on the other, as demonstrated in Figure4 below:

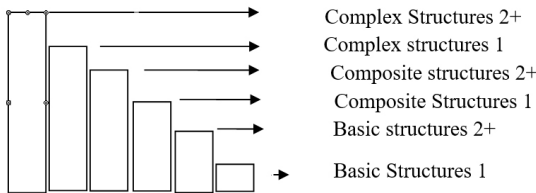


Figure 4: Sequential Exploitation of Structures

The translator-teacher tends to allow the learner’s progress to determine the pedagogical tempo. Despite the sequential approach adopted by the teacher-translator, the fact that he needs to follow the progress chart of the learner makes it pedagogically compelling to move according to the wind of achievement recorded by him in his teaching. In other words, there is no absolute rigidity in the format and contents of teaching neither is there an absolute

means of knowing in advance what areas of teaching concentration will be, even though he knows in advance his proposed texts for translation as the next point seeks to illustrate.

The teacher-translator carves out texts for translation in a relatively predictable fashion. What sets the teacher-translator apart from the officer-translator is the use of class experience to strategize the choice of what becomes the text to translate. The class may not know in advance the text being proposed (here there is a link with the portrait of the professional translator), the fact that there is a curriculum suggests the possibility of a scheme of work and a predictable outline. The situation holds, in principle, some advantage for both learner and teacher as they can count on the advanced knowledge of a part of a whole of the work to be done to get prepared in a way different from how the professional translator and his client react to the work.

The teacher-translator aims at seeing the product via the process and not vice versa. By this, we mean that the methods of achieving the targeted result are far more important to the teacher-translator than the result. He/She prefers to advertise the procedure for arriving at the product to calling attention independently to the product itself, even though the said product is of ultimate interest. The translator-teacher believes in breaking down the architecture of the translated text and examining the possible options before arriving at a final decision. In a significant way, the professional translator also does the same breakdown but he or she differs in two important respects: (a): the target is more the product than the process and (b) the breakdown is not for public consumption or attention. Figure 5 attempts to illustrate the relationship between product and process in this regard.

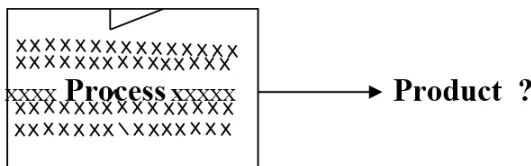


Figure 5: Process Dominating Product

The teacher-translator relies more on academic drive than practical experience. This characteristic is, in the fact, the main index of the teacher status of the classroom translator. Because translation in this context is an academic and learner-centered activity, abstraction, theorization, conceptualization, and

justification are the hallmark of the translation activity in the class. There is a desire to prove and disprove hypotheses, explain losses and gains of procedures, and link translation results to given aims and objectives. Practicals, in the form of exposure to live translation experiences are rare, except in specialist institutions, which again, are rare in West Africa. The ‘practical’ offered by the teacher-translator are usually limited to on-the-spot tests and advertised exams, while the teacher-translator personally undergoes the enriching splendor of practical experience only either at his own cost or at the behest of officer-translator colleagues in the field. Thus, he has practically no outsourcing experience.

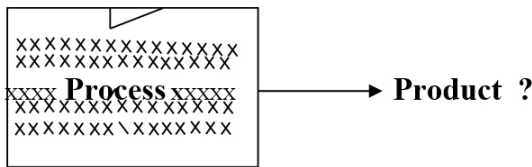


Figure 6: Reciprocal Exchange of Experience

The teacher-translator pays little or no attention to marketing and the cost of translation as an enterprise. On the strength of the foregoing, entrepreneurial skills built into what the teacher-translator holds as an integral part of the learning experience in the classroom. Thus, the learner may well end up being just a translation student rather than a translator-in-training. How else will we describe a translation student who is equipped with all except the tools for negotiation and bargaining?

The Officer-Translator

The officer-translator has ostensibly acquired the minimum training required as a translator. An obvious assumption in the profile of the officer-translator is the primary training. The training may have taken the form of classroom academic courses such as in a university or a certified center of professional translation. It may be partial like in the case of graduates of language courses with sprinkles of translation exposure provided in units or wholesale as in Translation Institutes. Officer-translators belonging to the latter category are extremely few in Anglophone West Africa. Most officer-translators in Nigeria depend on the general knowledge acquired in translation at the first-degree level to perform their duties. Of course, they build on this knowledge as

their experience increases. Whatever is the case, the primary responsibility of the translator when engaged in an office is to offer his services to that office as and when due.

The officer-translator is assumed to have near-equal competence in the use of the two languages in use. Based on the preceding remarks, the officer-translator is to have acquired tuition by natural exposure or by a combination of both what it requires to move from one language to another without much inhibition. An allowance is made often for the possibility of preference one language over the other as the language in which one is stronger and therefore capable of carrying the burden of thought. Often referred to as 'A' language, the stronger language is the one in which the translator prefers to render a given text. In any way, this does not suppose that the other language is any less likely to bring about the desired result if translated. A desk translator is open to moving in and out of languages. In addition, because of access to the dictionary and other helping resources, he or she is found to be just as good in A language as in B language.

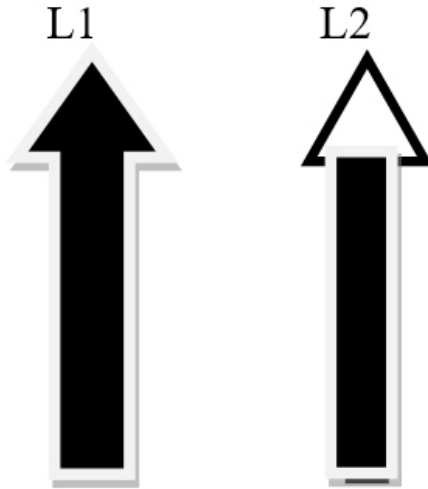
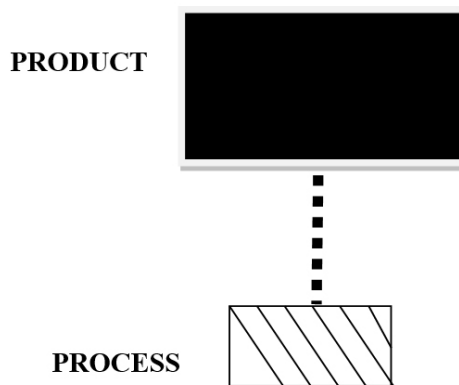


Figure 7: Near- equal competence in both languages

The officer-translator offers services as the occasion in the office demands. Unlike the teacher-translator, the officer-translator does not have to keep translating simply because the work so demands. The 'free' time allows the officer-translator to do other things, including reading to improve his/her knowledge base. However, the free time is contingent upon what translation assignment drops from the top. The teacher-translator, by contrast, chooses the time and task.

The officer-translator lives on translation services, employed primarily as a translator; expected to earn daily living through the work and must be to the satisfaction of the employer. The situation covers even certified outsourced or contract translators with satisfactory work through all manner of validation processes. By contrast, the conventional teacher-translator lives only in part on such services because the professional calling goes beyond translation (he/she teaches other courses) and the quality of the translation efforts is not open to direct sanctions.

The officer-translator presents the product rather than the process of the translation work to the consumer of the translation services. As far as the client is concerned, only the product matters; how the translator comes about the product is not the business of the client. It is only rarely that the client is



interested in the principles or processes that have led to a given translation result. On such occasions, the client either is an amateur translator or reacts to incidental queries.

Figure 8 Product Dominating Process

The officer- translator has, in principle, a rich and varied corpus of materials for translation to deal with. One consequence of this observation is that the translator has no choice as to what comes to the table for action. The translator, therefore, needs to have at his disposal such glossaries as are necessary for the type of translation assignment put before him. Secondly, if need be, the translator may consult even non-translators for guidance regarding specialist meanings of certain words and the cultural or contextual connotations of some others. Thirdly, the officer-translator may find himself under pressure, which may not be the case with the teacher-translator.

The officer-translator cannot always predict the nature and content of the materials for translation, especially if the translator is a freelance translator. Intimately tied to the foregoing, this feature sees the officer-translator reduced to punching in the dark or leaving the office at the end of the day with no idea of what translation services are waiting for him in the office the following day. The officer-translator has no control over what fresh documents are calling for translation and the scope of 'research' he will need to do to be in tune with the demands of the documents. The officer-translator will have to develop methodology for dealing with the translation of this text *de novo*. As the officer-translator is coming across the text for the first time and would only need to fall back on a similar text, using similar tools.

Unlike the teacher translator, the officer-translator has limited time to turn in the work. Time constraint is one of the hurdles that the officer-translator has to grapple with, usually, his time remains his client's or boss' time. Therefore, the officer-translator cannot afford the luxury of time enjoyed by the teacher-translator who is largely an independent service provider. The effect of time-constraint is seen either in the diligence that attends to service delivery or the not-too-satisfactory quality of the service. Under the impression of having little time, either he or she shows extraordinary diligence and commitment to ensure timely delivery or sacrifices quality to beat time.

The officer-translator is the servant whereas the teacher-translator is the boss. As a translator providing service under certain contractual conditions that put him forward as the 'weaker one'. The officer-translator is expected to satisfy the client before the reward, and he/she knows that the client is a customer and given the indulgence of being right at all times. Besides, the fact that the officer-translator is responsible to the consumer of the product, they are kept within a certain protocol of negotiation until fresh opportunities arise.

The officer-translator is, in the same connection as the above, often prone to recommend or propose charges that form the basis of negotiation between him or her and the client who may agree or disagree with the charges. In the case of public advertisements, the office requesting the services of a translator may propose a fixed pay which may not be open to negotiation or open to

review only at the interview. This situation would ordinarily appear to contrast with that of the teacher-translator who, once engaged on certain terms, is not likely to be able to initiate a review on his own. In one significant way, therefore, the officer-translator seems to have a stronger bargaining power than the teacher-translator whose work is often within a lax professional setting.

The officer-translator considers in-service training and sessions optional, unless in response to a professional challenge, such as review of charges, membership of the association, criteria for membership. Committed to the daily practice of the job, the officer-translator hardly sees the need for additional formal training, which workshops and conferences stand to offer. He/She instead believes that the daily experience of the job is sufficient. Sometimes, some translators of this category may feel the need for in-service training but may lack the time. However, questions of professional welfare may bring the group together under one umbrella body or another.

The Gaps as Points of Missing Exchange

A swift comparison of the two translation service providers brings into focus five main areas which can be a good source of collaboration but which collaboration is, in a general sense, still lacking or untidily exploited. I have referred to these areas as representing points of a useful but elusive handshake, a handshake that is desirable and considered interesting or relevant for the common growth of the enterprise called translation. We will look at them one after the other and examine how and why it is desirable to achieve a handshake from them and the consequences of not achieving it surely and steadily.

Training

The teacher-translator, being in an academic setting, relies on training via workshops and conferences for professional advancement. Such translators see these workshops and conferences as avenues for presenting their views in a formal way to a congregation of similar minds. It is also an opportunity for listening to ideas (old and fresh) on the principles and practices of their job. Meeting colleagues, old and new, assists in the sharing of observations and concepts related to their dreams, difficulties, and peculiarities. The ultimate result is self-improvement and professional advancement. One gets to know more about oneself and about the activity called 'translation' both in its pedagogical sense and in its wider theoretical sense. A quick and rough survey of the attendance lists of most workshops and conferences on translation in Nigeria and other countries of West Africa would often reveal a glaring absence of officer-translators; the stage favors the so-called 'academic' translators, the teacher-translators. It is our opinion that this includes conference, workshops,

and seminars offer to the officer-translators. Not only will the latter be in a position to evaluate the activities aimed at promoting translation in the classroom but they will also be able to improve or refresh their theoretical knowledge base. This does not exclude the rich source of data that their participation at such meetings represents.

Field of experience and Field experience

There is no doubt that the two brands of translation preoccupation underscored by the duo of teacher-translator and officer-translator are, as we have shown, significantly different but the good thing is that they are somehow in complementary distribution. What Translator A can do Translator B may not be able to do. For example, the classroom teacher dubbed the teacher-translator is essentially an exploratory translator, checking for areas with predicted errors of diction and structure. The officer-translator's efforts may be weakened by the fact that data are largely self-imposed and at best artificial and the results from the exploration are relatively restricted. However, the officer-translator has before him a large corpus from which to extract data but which he or she does not care to analyze, as he owes nobody any explanation about the 'how' of the final product. This is where a mutual peep into the window of experience of each category of translators is extremely beneficial.

On another note, we can consider the lack of exposure of the teacher-translator to what happens in the open field of translation as constituting a hindrance to the extent to which the translator can vary the classroom hypotheses. Without an invitation to the field, the translator may forever be an 'arm-chair' translation expert without the core raw data to assess the validity of his classroom claims.

Empowerment

Empowerment is key to sustainable output in translation. Attendance at conferences, payment of dues, response to emergency meetings of professional associations, etc., all these calls for money, and without comparable sources of empowerment, the two categories may not be able to discharge their responsibilities equally as expected. The specific case of teacher-translators who depend largely on monthly income makes it important to appreciate their relatively low level of response to collective challenges within the framework of professional associations. However, when the aim is to enhance personal status within a given setting, like promotion, the response is usually demonstrably high. By contrast, the officer-translator cadre may ordinarily prove more readily able, though not readily willing, to provide the necessary financial backing to support professional activities. Unless there is a formula

to grade financial responsibilities according to the true income and savings potentials of teacher-translators, it might always seem that they will need further empowerment to be able to march along with their colleagues in the office. This is where a handshake of fellowship between the two groups is again desirable.

Mobility via Outsourcing

The essence of human happiness is social mobility. An average human being is not satisfied with social fixity, which is termed in many circles as a sign of being moribund. Social scales consider social mobility as an upward movement and lateral mobility is a new type of mobility. This outlines that in some cases teacher-translators are open to offering outsourced services to officer-translators. The advantage of a platform such as this is much-desired cross-fertilization and synergy between the two streams will be easy to achieve. By the time the classroom teacher of translation gets contracted to work for a fee on a given mandate, they do not only have the opportunity to adapt their teacher-to-learner experience to new calls but also gets to acquire new tools for dealing with vice versa. The fear however, is that unless the structure of the relationship between the two is publicized and reviewed, the terms of one structure may continue to be used to determine the fortunes of another. To correct that fear and move steadily in the direction of the desired handshake, translation associations such as the Nigerian Institute of Translators and Interpreters (NITI) and the West African Institute of Translators and Interpreters (WAITI), through occasional workshops and initiation programs, are now at the vanguard of a scheme geared toward ensuring a worthy partnership between the two classes. A peep into the balance sheet of the activities of NITI and WAITI in this regard shows the attendance of more teacher-translators than officer-translators, not because they do not know the value of workshops and other training programs but because, from the grapevine account, they lack the funds.

Networking for Better Research Output

Research on translation by various institutions of higher learning in West Africa is impressive. From Simpson (Nigeria) and Sampson (Ghana) through Ihenacho (Nigeria) and Abioye (Nigeria) to Nkansah (Ghana), Asobele (Nigeria), and Yakassai (Nigeria), among many others, there has been of a compelling interest in the review of the history, principles and procedures of translation either in absolute terms or about local circumstances. The output of the research, useful as it is, suffers in two main respects. First, the consumers have tended to be limited to fellow academics most of whom need the output

for their promotion. Second, the raw material for the research has tended to exclude what translation practices in the field have to offer. It is based on those two observations that we acknowledge the need for networking that involves collaboration between the town and the gown, between what the officer-translator has to offer and what researchers (basically teacher-translators) stand to gain from the former. The latter should also show interest in the activities of officer-translators, which activities can complement or even enrich their general knowledge base in translation.

Conclusion

The main thrust of the essay is a collaboration between the two classes of translators identified so that the gains of one can be the benefit of another and vice versa. The fear, however, is that unless the structure of the relationship between the two is reviewed and publicized, the terms of one structure may continue to determine the fortunes of the other. As if to mitigate that fear and move steadily in the direction of the desired handshake, NITI and lately, WAITI, through occasional workshops and initiation programs, are now at the vanguard of a scheme that is geared toward ensuring enduring partnership between the two groups. Yet, a peep into the balance sheet of the activities of NITI and WAITI in this regard shows the involvement of more teacher-translators than officer-translators, not because the former is richer but because they see in these sessions what the officer-translators seem to take for granted. Index of an elusive handshake!

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