

Translating technical texts: The Igbo language example

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ABSTRACT

Translating a text from one language to another poses problems to the translator. The task becomes more enormous when translating from a well developed language to a developing one. It even becomes more complex when dealing with a technical text. While the English language belongs to the Anglo-Saxon group, Igbo language belongs to the Congo Basin. Every domain of translation presents its own difficulties and the technical domain too. Technical translation belongs to a specialized area. This implies that it involves specialized terminology. Igbo language is lagging behind in the development of technical terms. There is a wide gap between the two languages both linguistically and culturally. This paper tries to identify some challenges in translating a technical text into Igbo and suggest the way forward.

Keywords: Translation, technical terms, specialized translation.

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INTRODUCTION

Translation generally involves a range of difficulties and this can be a very challenging activity. The problem is even more accentuated when dealing with technical translation. Technical translation belongs to a specialized field. It implies that it requires specialized terminology. Specialized translation has its peculiar problems no matter the language. The situation becomes more critical and complex when translating from a widely accepted and developed language. English language is far more advanced than Igbo language in all ramifications. The two languages do not belong to the same family and as such do not share much in common. There is a wide gap between the two. While English language is well advanced in scientific and technical terminologies, Igbo language is in the process of developing terms to bridge the gap. Buttressing this point, Eke and Ugorji (1999:26) note that:

Many factors account for this variance: levels of scientific development, levels of cultural evolution etc. it is true that Igbo man has come in contact with the computer, yet, since it is not in our culture, it is difficult for the translator to find on the spot equivalents to suit the English terms for parts of the computer.

Every language has a particular way of expressing

things. And this is often influenced by the environment and culture, which in turn determine their choice of words. In other words, the lexical resources of a language reflect the environment in which its native speakers live. Bellos (2011:160) opines that, "*languages tend to have words their users need, and not to have words for things never used or encountered*". In this era of globalization, there is need to disseminate information concerning scientific researches and knowledge to the public through the media and different reading materials. The Igbo race should not be left out in the fast changing world. This will no doubt go a long way in the development of Igbo language. We have chosen a technical text that is multidisciplinary culled from Osita Eze's book, *Nigeria and the World Trade Organization*. We shall look at the concept of translation, technical translation. We have done a brief comparison of the two languages. Finally, a commentary will be done based on the translated text before we draw a conclusion.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The idea of this paper was informed by the fact that Igbo language is lagging behind in the creation of technical terms. There is need to create technical terms in Igbo to meet up with the fast changing world instead of resorting to direct borrowing from other languages. The major method of data collection was discussion with experts in

Table 1. Example.

English	Igbo	Literal meaning
A virgin	Nwanyi n'amaghi nwoke	A woman who does not know a man
Idiot	Onye nzuzu	A person of foolishness
Herbalist	Dibia mgborogwu na nkpa akwukwo	Doctor of roots and leaves collector
Arrivals	Ndi nabata abata	Those who are coming back

the legal profession, especially in international law. We equally consulted other research works done in the field of technical translation.

Data presentation

There are seven tables in our work. Tables 1 to 5 show the differences between the English and Igbo languages. Table 6 shows the English text and the Igbo translation. In Table 7, we have the specialized terms, the Igbo translation and the technique used in term creation.

TECHNIQUES IN TERM CREATION

There are different techniques of term creation proposed by different Igbo scholars. The methods include naturalization, compounding, acronym, adaptation, sigla, coining, hybridization, creative equivalence etc. According to Sager (1990:65), terms can equally be created by analogy. We will present the techniques and examples encountered in our work.

Borrowing

This involves lifting a word from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL) when the equivalent does not exist in TL. All languages borrow from one another, Igbo language is no exception, e.g. HIV.

Naturalization

In naturalization, words are borrowed but modified either phonologically or orthographically to reflect the lexicon of the receptor language, e.g. Treaty = tiriti.

Composition

This is the combination of two words to create a new one, for example: AIDS = *Qria* + *mminwu* (noun + adjective).

Description

This technique is used when there is no equivalent of the term in the target language. The example taken from our

Table 2. Example.

An egg	Ákwá
A bed	Ákwà
Cloth	Ákwà
Cry	Ákwá
Head	Ísí
Blindness	Ìsí
Cassava foofoo	Ákpú
Cyst	Ákpú
To dig	Ìgwú
Lice	Ìgwú

Table 3. Example.

A <u>big</u> house	ulo <u>ukwu</u>
<u>That tall</u> man	nwoke <u>ukwu ahu</u>
<u>Some</u> people	Ndi <u>ufodu</u>
<u>That</u> place	Ebe <u>ahu</u>
<u>Kind</u> man	Nwoke <u>obiqma</u>

The underlined words are the qualifiers and determiners in both languages.

Table 4. Example.

Law	Iwu
Decree	Iwu
Act	Iwu
Ordinance	Iwu
Order	Iwu

Table 5. Example.

It is <u>watery</u>	Ọ di <u>mmiri mmiri</u>
She wears a <u>red</u> dress	Ọ yi afe <u>uhie uhie</u>
She speaks <u>fast</u>	Ọ na-ekwu <u>oso oso</u>
Read it <u>slowly</u>	Gua ya <u>nwayo nwayo</u>

The underlined words in Igbo are equivalents of the ones underlined in English.

work is TRIPS = *Otu ahia mba uwa maka ihe gbasara*

Table 6. English and translated Igbo text.

English text	Igbo text
<p>Members of the WTO recognize the gravity of the public health problems affecting many developing countries especially those resulting from HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other epidemics. Somehow, they see WTO agreement on TRIPS to be part of the wider national and international action to address these problems.</p> <p>In what appears to be an affirmation of a high margin of appreciation which a state has, even in matters of treaty law, to protect its vital national interest which is not necessarily limited to matters of health, it stated:</p> <p><i>“We agree that TRIPS Agreement does not and should not prevent members from taking measures to protect public health. Accordingly, while reiterating our commitment to the TRIPS Agreement, we affirm that the Agreement can and should be interpreted and implemented in a manner supportive of WTO member’s rights to protect public and, in particular, to promote access to medicines for all”.</i> (Eze, 2014)</p>	<p>Ndi otu ahia mba uwa (WTO) kwenyere n’oke nsogbu nke ahụ ike ọha n’eze n’emetuta obodo ndi n’emepe emepe, karịsịa ọria ndi ana enweta site na ọria nje mminwụ (HIV) n’ọria mminwụ, (AIDS), ụkwaranta, ịba n’ọria ndi n’efefe. N’otu ụzọ, ha n’ahụkwa nkwekọrita otu ahia mba uwa maka ihe gbasara n’inwe ọny okwu n’ahia (TRIPS) ka ụzọ aga eji weta nsogbu ndia na njedebe n’obodo anyi na mba uwa nile.</p> <p>N’ihe gbasara nkwado n’oke mmasi ndi obodo nwere n’ihe gbasara iwu tiriti ichekwaba ọdimma obodo n’ihe ndi ọzọ, ‘abughị sọsọ n’ihe gbasara ahụ ike kwugidere ike si: <i>“Anyi kwere na nkwekọrita ihe gbasara n’inwe ọny okwu n’ahia (TRIPS) agahi egbochi m’ọbụ gbochie ndi otu a ime ihe ha nwere ike ime jji chekwaba ahụ ike ọha n’eze. N’otu aka ahụ k’anyi n’akwusike n’akwado nkwekọrita nke ihe gbasara n’inwe ọny okwu n’ahia. Anyi n’akwusike n’akwado nkwekọrita ahụ kwesiri ma nwere ike k’akọwa ya, meputakwaazi ihe n’uzọ g’akwadosike atumatụ otu ahia mba uwa n’ihe gbasara ichekwaba ahụ ike ọha n’eze, ya na ikwanite ọny ọny nke g’eme ka mmadu nile wee ike n’enweta ogwu”.</i></p>
(Our translation)	

Table 7. Translation of some abbreviations and acronyms.

S/N	Technical terms	Igbo translation	Technique used
1.	AIDS	Ọria mmịnwụ/OMI	Composition and coinage
2.	HIV	Ọria nje HIV	Composition and borrowing
3.	Treaty	Iwu tiriti	Borrowing and Naturalization
4.	TRIPS	Otu ahia mba uwa maka ihe gbasara inwe ọny okwu n’ahia.	Descriptive
5.	WTO	Otu mba ahia uwa	Descriptive

inwe okwu n’ahia.

Coinage

This involves using some letters to form a new word. It is mostly used in the creation of abbreviation and acronyms, e.g Ọria mminwụ = OMI.

State of technical terms in Igbo language

Few researches have been made for promoting the level of technical terms in Igbo. Okeke (2006) published a trilingual study of expanded national programme on immunization terminology in English, French and Igbo. Obasi and Ohaiké (2011) carried out a bilingual study of HIV/AIDS terms in English and Igbo. Uhuegbu and Ijioma provided culture-bound legal terms in Igbo. The work done so far is not enough and research is still on going.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Since the paper is on translation of technical texts, we are faced with the task of looking at translation and technical translation with its characteristics and problems.

Translation

Many linguists have defined translation in various ways depending on their school of thought. Simply put, translation is the transfer of message from one language to another. When we talk of language, it cannot be isolated from the social context in which it is embedded. Hence Vermeer (1989:222) observes that, “language is part of culture”. Translation goes beyond the transfer of message from one language to another which is purely a linguistic affair. Translation should be seen as both linguistic and cultural activity. According to House (2009:11):

Translation is not only a linguistic act; it is also a cultural one, an act of communication across culture. Translating always involves both language and culture simply because the two cannot be really separated.

Based on the above definition, a translator should not only have sufficient knowledge of the source and target languages, but should also be conversant with both cultures. The target culture norms are crucial because it is the cultural environment that the translator will have to achieve its purpose. Hence translation is a form of intercultural communication. There are two major types of translation, the literary and technical translation. In this work, we are concerned with the technical translation.

Technical translation

Technical translation is one part of specialized translation (Newmark, 1988:151). The specialized areas include politics, commerce, law, technology, medicine finance, etc. According to www.technicaltranslation.com.info:

Technical translation covers everything from automotive translations like car manual and instructions for machine maintenance, to scientific documentaries for the chemical and medical industries.

It is generally distinguished from other forms of translation by its terminology. Every language has language for general purposes (LGP) and language for special purposes (LSP). And specialized vocabulary is an important feature of an LSP. In other words, LSP is the language of specialized subject field (Bowker and Pearson, 2002:27). This implies that technical translation is so varied in topic and often diverse in register. Each domain has its own particular terms and jargons.

Problems of technical translation

Like any other domain of translation, technical text has its own challenges. The number of technical fields is indefinitely large and terminology is expanding and changing daily. This result in some difficulties a translator may encounter in the course of his job.

Problem of false friends (*faux amis*)

These are words in one language that look like words in another but have different meanings. Some examples are cited below:

English	French
Density	la masse spécifique
Specific gravity	la densité

Petrol	l'essence
Kerosene	petrole etc.

A translator should not assume that he already knows a word. The use of reference books is imperative if in doubt.

Neologisms

Lack of knowledge of technical terms and neologisms constitute a great problem for the translator. New coinages evolve daily especially in this era of information technology and scientific discoveries. Some abbreviations mean different things in different domains and languages. Baker (1996:25) observes that:

Once a word or an expression is borrowed into a language, we cannot predict or control its development or the additional meanings it might or might not take.

Abbreviations

Technical fields abound in abbreviations and acronyms. An abbreviation is not often translated by another. Most abbreviations mean different things in different languages, and even in the same language. Technical translation usually involves a lot of abbreviations and acronyms which are different in every language and these cannot be translated literally. For example, the abbreviation *LOC* in sports could mean *Local Organizing Committee* and *Loss of Consciousness* in medical domain (Ijioma, 2014). Also, the abbreviation *SR* could mean *Stimulus Response*, *Sinus Rhythm*, *Sedimentation Rate* or *Slow Release* (Ijioma, 2009:105).

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ENGLISH AND IGBO LANGUAGES

A translator needs to have a good command of his working languages. That is why we are giving a brief comparison of English and Igbo languages. As already mentioned, the two belong to different language families and do not share much in common. Stressing the importance of knowing differences between languages, Baker (1996:296) opines that:

Translators should find it useful to investigate and compare the expression of such categories and meanings associated with various structures in their source and target languages.

Below are some differences between the two languages.

Alphabet

While English language has twenty four in number, Igbo

on the other hand has thirty six.

English	Igbo
A B C D E F G H I J K L	a b c h d e f g gb gh gw h i j j k
M N O P Q R S T U V	kp kw l m n n nw ny o o p r s
W X Y Z	sh t u u v w y z

Sentential and descriptive language

English language is specific in her choice of words; Igbo language on the other hand is sentential. In most cases, a sentence is used to describe a concept. Some examples are given in Table 1.

Articles

English language has definite and indefinite articles, where as such articles do not exist in the Igbo language. Example:

A man	Nwoke
A goat	Ewu
The house	Ulo
The pot	Ite

Tones

Igbo is a tonal language, while English lays emphasis on stress. The tones determine the meaning of a word. Some examples are given in Table 2.

Centrifugal system

Igbo language operates a centrifugal syntax while English language operates a centripetal. This means that the qualifiers and determiners come quite often after the noun (Table 3).

Generic language

Igbo is a generic language, most times, it has one word for related concepts but with different nuances. English on the other hand has specific terms for each concept (Table 4).

Uhuegbu and Ijioma (2010:67) observe that, *“the Igbo linguistic community makes little or no distinction between the different forms of legislation as found in the English language”*. This in itself poses its own translation problems.

Verbs and adverbs

In English, verbs and adverbs stand apart in sentences,

while in Igbo language, the verb at times is an amalgam of various morphemes. Here is a typical example culled from Eke and Ugorji (1999:70)

English	=	S/he has already finished eating.
Igbo	=	O richaalarii
O	=	S/he (subject of the structure)
ri	=	eat (verb root)
cha	=	all (finish....adverbial morpheme)
a	=	imperative marker
rii	=	already, since (adverb of time).

It can be seen that “has already eaten” four words, has been rendered in Igbo by using a single orthographic word. From this, we can deduce that a language has generally established traditional combinations which do not occur with corresponding ones in another language. This comparison is very important for a translator to enable him know the nitty gritty of the language which in effect will help him do a good translation.

Repetition

Igbo language, at times has a way of repeating words for emphasis. Bellos (2011:7) notes that, *“there are significant differences between cultures and languages and how people do things with words”* (Table 5).

The English and translated Igbo texts

The English and translated Igbo texts are given in Table 6.

COMMENTARY AND PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

There are remarked differences in both the English and translated Igbo texts. This is due to their structural and lexical differences. The lexical resources of a language reflect the environment in which its native speakers live.

Length

The translated text in Igbo is longer than the English version. This could be explained since we earlier noted the sentential, descriptive and repetitive conceptualization and representation of Igbo concepts.

Multidisciplinary text

Translating a technical text in one domain poses a great challenge in the area of terminology documentation. The problem becomes worse when two or more domains are involved in one technical text. The translator is faced with

the problem of terminology documentation. The selected text deals with commerce, health and legal terminologies. Each domain has its own peculiar terms and jargons. A word in one domain may mean different thing in another domain.

Abbreviations and acronyms

Abbreviations and acronyms abound in technical texts. We encountered some in our translation from the text (Table 7).

From the examples in Table 7, we can see that none of the words are translated with a word; TRIPS for example has as much as twelve words. This buttresses the point that Igbo is a sentential language. English language, being a global and developed language has standard translations for these abbreviations. Translation of abbreviations and acronyms consists of reformulation from one language to another. In reformulation, the order of words can be changed after translation and new ones made to form a new name. Some may be completely different and have nothing in common in different languages. In one language, there are combinations of words that form abbreviations, while in another, the words are translated like several separate words. Igbo language, on the other hand, is not developed in this area. The language is in the process of developing to meet up with the fast growing trend. We have translated the abbreviations and acronyms retaining the English versions in some cases, since Igbo language has no equivalents for them. In the case of AIDS, we have tried to form an acronym: *Ọria mminwu* (OMI). While retaining the English abbreviations, we should try to create our own. Language evolves and is not static. This will lead to the development of our own language.

Borrowing

Borrowing is one of the techniques of translation. This happens as a result of contact between languages, or where a language lacks words to fill the gap, it also resorts to borrowing. There are many reasons for borrowing. Borrowing may be direct borrowing or there may be phonological or orthographical modification to suit the lexicon of the receptor language. Bellos (2011:179) on borrowing observes that,

They might import the word as it stands, making whatever modifications in form that are needed to allow it to function in a sentence.

An example from the translated text is shown below.

Treaty iwu tiriti

Igbo language has no word for treaty. We have therefore

borrowed the English word and modified it phonologically and orthographically to suit the Igbo language lexicon.

CONCLUSION

Translation of a technical text into Igbo is a herculean task. Igbo language because of the low level of its technological and scientific development lacks terms for some concepts. As a result, most terms are not lexicalized. Baker (1996:21) puts it thus, that:

The source language word may express a concept which is known in the target culture but simply not lexicalized, that is not 'allocated' a target language word to express it.

Igbo language, most often, uses longish, paraphrasing, excessive dilution and description to express foreign concepts. That explains why some terms in English are translated into Igbo by description. It has equally been observed that the syntactic structure of a language imposes restrictions on the way messages may be organized in that language. That is why the product of a translation will be a disaster if the translator does not have sufficient knowledge of both the source and target languages. It is also imperative for a translator to be abreast of the trend, by keeping in touch with the modern sources of information. Any language that is not ready to generate terms and new coinages will die. The Igbo linguists in collaboration with translators and terminologists should work together to do more on the development of technical terms to meet up with the fast changing world.

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