

LEVERAGING TRANSLATION TO IMPROVE NATIONAL ECONOMY

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Abstract

Although, translation is seen as a powerful tool for the promotion of understanding at the local, regional and international levels, little has been said by translation scholars and practitioners on its viability to contribute to Nigeria's economic growth and sustainability. The prominent role translation plays in economic revitalization, promoting trade expansion and fostering industrial growth in Nigeria and across the continent cannot be gainsaid. This paper establishes the economic potential of translation not only for Nigeria, but also for the translators themselves. In spite of the debate on the creative nature of translation, the paper contends that translation, nonetheless, is a sub-sector of the creative industry. In this paper, translation services were discussed in the context of glocalization, revenue expansion and tax return as some of the major ways through which translation can contribute to the national economy. The paper concluded with implications of the foregoing for professional translators.

Keywords: Translation, Translation Services, Economy, Glocalization

Introduction

It is imperative to mention here from the onset that an earlier version of this paper was delivered as the Lead Paper presented at the 19th Annual Conference and Workshop of the Nigerian Institute of Translators & Interpreters (NITI), Abuja – Nigeria, on Thursday 26th October 2023. No

other time is more apt to have a discussion that focuses on translation and economy than now, given that economic impact is felt in all aspects of our national life. There are three probable justifications for the aforesaid assertion; the first justification addresses the continental need, the second is traceable to the economic agenda of the current administration led by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, while the third justification relates to professional and/or career translators.

On the continental need, the 2023 Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) Annual General Conference highlighted the opportunities in the African Union's Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement for Nigerian legal practitioners. One key issue that was emphasized is the role that language competence plays in this transformative economic development on the African soil. Stressing this point, the Executive Secretary, National Action Committee on AfCFTA, Mr. Segun Awolowo, said; "You need to have a skillset that sells you across the border." His remark, in the context of translation and economic development, is deep and profound as Nigeria's neighbours in the West African sub-region are nine Francophone countries, two Lusophone countries and five other Anglophone countries.

Back home in Nigeria, The current administration's Renewed Hope agenda has economy as a key element, ranking second after national security (Renewed Hope, 2023). The Agenda has economic sustainability as both ambitious and strategic objectives for a country that came out of recession in 2017, only to relapse into an era of dwindling revenue.

On the professional angle, there is scarce literature on the relationship between translation and economy generally speaking. In support of this, Aboh & Ezika (2018) opined that the relationship between translation and economy has received little or no attention. Perhaps, this may partly due to the fact that available literature on translation focus more on translation theories and principles. More so, majority of translation professionals are academic scholars who devote their scholarship into translation studies. Marais (2018) bemoaned translation studies scholars' reticence in linking translation studies to theories of economics and issues relating to materiality of production. Ajiboye (2017) adduced a possible reason for this: owing to the overwhelming popularity of translation as a pedagogical tool in foreign language learning,

there seems to be no place for a second look at the skill as a business enterprise, capable of yielding revenue.

Improving the National Economy through Sector-Driven Approach

One thing that is noticeable in the ministerial portfolios under the present Tinubu-led Federal Government is the recurrence of the word ‘economy’. Apart from traditional portfolios like finance; industry, trade and investments that bear direct relevance to the national economy, we now have new portfolios such as marine and blue **economy**; arts, culture and creative **economy**; communications, innovation and digital **economy** (introduced for the first time by the Buhari’s administration but tweaked this time around with the addition of ‘innovation’). Even the traditional budget and national planning ministry has been renamed as budget and **economic** planning. We equally have, just as it had been under the previous administrations, a finance and the coordinating minister of the **economy**.

One plausible reason for the recurrence of ‘economy’ in these portfolios is that economy no longer plays a traditional role as commonly confined to the fields of finance, budget, trade, industry and investment. Rather, economy is now cloaked in a new garb that covers all sectors, including the oft-neglected sectors like arts, culture and creative industries. If professional translators are interested in improving our national economy, the first question that naturally comes to mind is, which of these portfolios is the best fit. Put differently, under which type of economic portfolios can the translation industry be appropriately categorized? Although, the answer is simple on the surface, it may be problematic. For instance, aside the fact that translation is an art, it is also a creative skill, it can, therefore, appositely be classified as a creative endeavour in a creative industry, thus belonging to creative economy. Translation as a business enterprise involving group of persons who are certified to be professional translators qualifies as an industry; hence, it may, arguably, be placed under a coordinating ministry for industry, trade and investments, even though real trade and investment activities are envisaged here, as opposed to creative works.

Furthermore, the role translation plays in the creative industries had once received academic attention in 2016 at a conference entitled, “Translation and

the Creative Industries” at the University of Westminster in 2016, which charted the growing academic interest in this area and underlined its potential (Kapsaskis, 2018). The question on the creative nature of translation, much as it may interest us, may take us far into other domains like tracing the origin of creativity itself to psychology – one of the four professional disciplines known as foundations of education (the other three are history, philosophy and sociology). Kapsaskis (2018) equally noted that there is the debate about whether translation is to be understood in terms of imitation, reproduction, resemblance or of creation, originality and difference. While trying to do justice to this aspect, albeit briefly, it suffices to say that the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) enlarged the concept of ‘creativity’ from activities having a strong artistic component to “any economic activity producing symbolic products with a heavy reliance on intellectual property and for as wide a market as possible” (UNCTAD, 2004). It is remarkable to note that the UNCTAD further made a distinction between ‘upstream activities’ (traditional cultural activities such as the performing or visual arts) and ‘downstream activities’ (closer to the market, such as advertising or publishing). From these groupings, one sees clearly that translation industry as a subset of creative industries belongs to the downstream activities due to the significant role of language and translation in both the media space and publishing domain.

The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) defines ‘creative industries’ as industries involved directly or indirectly in the creation, manufacture, production, broadcast and distribution of copyrighted material (WIPO, 2003). The emphasis here is on intellectual property right that accrues as a result of the creativity invested in the making of the goods and services. Translation industry is captured in this definition as a translator’s work rendered from the source language is independent of the original work; hence, intellectual property rights automatically accrue to such work. Intellectual Property (IP) remains the common tie that binds the entire creative industry as it is the primary product of all activities across the different sectors (Masele, 2022). Despite the expansive and pragmatic definition of creative industries by these international bodies to include translation, the translators’ discipline is not included in the sub-sectors of Nigeria’s creative sector. In the wisdom

of the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), only media and entertainment, beauty and lifestyle, visual Arts, tourism and hospitality belong to this category (Leadership, 2023).

An attempt to consider how Nigeria's national economy can be improved will require a multidimensional approach, in order to properly situate translation in the context of economy. As an economic performance indicator, the Gross Domestic Products (GDP) is a monetary measure of the final market value of goods and services produced in a country at a specific period of time. It measures the total output of a national economy. In a 2013 survey conducted by the International Confederation of Societies of Authors and Composers, the cultural and creative industries generated a revenue of 2,250 billion USD or 3% of the world's GDP and 29.5 million jobs or 1% of the world's active population (World Creative 2015). Informed by this impressive revenue surge in the global creative industry, the Federal Government of Nigeria rebased the country's GDP in 2013 to include creative industries, which in turn has led to an increase in the GDP through substantial revenues generated from the industry. For instance in 2021, the Central Bank of Nigeria, announced that the creative industry is an important one in the country, with annual revenue of about 4.5 billion US dollars (Vanguard, 2021) and it is projected to contribute up to 5% of GDP at over \$50 billion by 2030 (Leadership, 2023). The forgoing underscores the economic potential of the creative industry in the Nigerian economy.

Furthermore, experts have suggested a number of strategies to achieve economic growth and development. At the macroeconomic level, market-oriented strategies include trade liberalization, export promotion, promotion of foreign direct investment (FDI), removal of government subsidies, floating exchange rate systems among others. Although, it remains a subject of debate among experts whether a fixed rather than floating exchange rate is more preferred especially for developing economies. Tight fiscal discipline with government spending under control, ensuring public expenditure is restructured to target priorities, reform of tax systems to reduce tax burdens, privatization of key industries and ensuring the full application of a system of property rights are some of the policy recommendations associated with these strategies (Turin, 2010). As shall be seen later, translation plays an

indispensable role at this macroeconomic level especially in export promotion, FDI attraction and guaranteeing efficient intellectual property rights regime.

Whereas, most discussions on economic growth and development tilt towards macroeconomics. While it is true that macroeconomics, political, legal and social circumstances contribute greatly to a successful economy, Porter et al (2007) contend that progress in these areas is necessary but not sufficient, in that they only improve the opportunity to create wealth but do not themselves create wealth. They argued, and rightly so, that wealth is actually created by the productivity with which a nation can utilize its human, capital and natural resources to produce goods and services. Productivity, therefore, depends on microeconomic capability of the economy, rooted in the sophistication of companies, the quality of national business environment and the externalities arising from the presence of clusters of related and supporting industries.

Factors engendering productive strategies for growth of companies, small firms and even nano-businesses are enumerated to include human resources, capital resources, physical infrastructure, administrative infrastructure, information infrastructure, scientific and technological infrastructure and natural resources (Porter et al 2007). Making a case for nano-businesses, the fastest growing start-up model in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), Alaro (2025) and Alao (2023) posited that MSMEs generally provide the largest employment opportunities for the unemployed population and also guarantee daily stable income for its operator(s). According to the United Nations, MSMEs account for **90% of businesses worldwide**, generate **60–70% of employment**, and contribute approximately **50% of global GDP** ([UN, 2023](#)). In **Nigeria**, MSMEs account for **96% of all businesses**, further underscoring their economic importance ([SMEDAN, 2023](#)). Nano-businesses in particular, have a huge capacity to reduce poverty and are also an alternative source of income for even the working population. The low initial capital outlay for their set-up and reduced number of operators which ranged from 1-3 persons, account for this huge success.

Translators create wealth at nano-entrepreneurial level. In some cases, they conveniently operate from home or assigned office space in their academic or research institutions, and may not even require a corporate office. Thus, in

alignment with the submission of Porter et al, unless microeconomic capabilities improve, sustainable improvements in prosperity will not occur.

Glocalization, Translation Services and Revenue Expansion

As a neologism of globalization and localisation, glocalisation has emerged as the new standard in reinforcing positive aspects of worldwide interaction, be it in textual translations, localized marketing communication, socio-political considerations, etc. (Shamsuddoha, 2008). Given the problems globalization created for many cultures around the world as reflected in the incompatibility between human relationships and the extreme exploitation of resources and the maximization of the concept of competitiveness on liberalized markets (Boyer et al., 1996), It was obvious that the world would desire for more. Localisation has its origin in economics and business; it is regarded as a process of making global products to fit a local market, or put differently creating new products tailored for local market. It can be defined as the linguistic and cultural adaptation, in particular of digital content, to the requirements of a certain market, and the provision of services and the management of multilingualism in the global flow of digital information (Chuang, Y. T & Lee, Y.T 2015).

Business experts speak about glocal, global and local strategies, each with its peculiarities. In global strategy, tailoring products to target local market is often neglected, as products or services in a standardized manner and decision-making are fully centralized with seemingly equal positioning at the global market levels where all countries participate in one language. The local strategy concentrates much on products and services for the local market, while the glocal strategy is the aggregate of the global and local strategies in what has been summed up in the phrase: *think globally, act locally*.

According to Yifeng (2009), translation activities are part of local realities in relation to the global world of transnational cultures. Even beyond cultures, translators generally need to think globally and act locally while rendering translation services. Translation bridges the gap between globalization and localization, which often is achieved through breaking language barriers, so that clients or citizens can take full advantage of information be it in the form of business opportunities, brand recognition and positioning, sales promotion,

market domination, better citizen engagement, linguistic and cultural adaptation, among others. Doing so will enlarge the scope of translation services to cover new areas, which in turn will stimulate economic growth for the nation.

Barring translators' socio-economic well-being at the microeconomic level, it is important to note that tax returns to government remain one major way through which translation can contribute to the national purse. Under the provisions of the Personal Income Tax (Amendment) Act 2011, translators carrying on business in Nigeria are required by the law to pay personal income tax. It is a tax imposed on incomes and profits in the nature of an income of individual, group or business. There are basically two ways to pay personal income tax; for people in paid employment as is the case with translators working in a translation company, the employer deducts the tax at source. This is otherwise known as pay as you earn (P-A-Y-E) (Section 80(1) PITA). For self-employed persons, like independent professional translators carrying on business as sole proprietors or in partnership, they are required by law to assess their taxes and pay the amount directly to relevant tax authorities (Section 9 PITA (Amendment), 2011). It should, however, be noted that where the employee works under the supervision or management of a person who is not his employer, that person (otherwise called the manager) shall furnish the particulars of the employees' emoluments as may be necessary to comply with the provisions of these PAYE regulations and the manager shall deduct the tax due from the employees' emolument and remit same to the relevant tax authority (No. 2(3) PAYE regulations). This is the case when organizers of conference deduct certain percentage of interpreters' professional charges as tax when they are engaged (Ajiboye 2017). Some multinational organizations like International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) that frequently engage translators also deduct tax from their professional charges. We shall now consider some areas in the translation industry that can generate direct taxable income for the government or aid an increase in the country's GDP.

Income opportunities in AfCFTA

It was earlier mentioned that opportunities abound in the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement introduced by the African Union

(AU). Part of the objectives of the AfCFTA Agreement is the creation of a single market for goods, services, facilitated by movement of persons in order to deepen the economic integration of the African continent and in accordance with the pan-African vision of “an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, enshrined in Agenda 2063” (Art. 3, AfCFTA Agreement). According to the World Bank, the AfCFTA Agreement will create the largest free trade area in the world measured by the number of countries participating. The pact connects 1.3 billion people across 55 countries with a combined GDP valued at US\$3.4 trillion. It has the potential to lift 30 million people out of extreme poverty, but achieving its full potential will depend on putting in place significant policy reforms and trade facilitation measures (World Bank, 2020). As at 1st October, 2025, 54 out the 55 countries on the continent have signed the agreement, while only 48 have ratified/acceded and deposited instrument of ratification (AfCFTA Status List, 2025). The only country that has yet to sign is Eritrea. Following the passage of thirty (30) days after the deposit of the twenty second (22nd) instrument of ratification (Art. 23, AfCFTA Agreement), the Agreement and the Protocols on Trade in Goods, Trade in Services, and Protocol on Rules and Procedures on the Settlement of Disputes came into force on 30th May, 2019.

The foregoing signals a pathway to massive economic potentials for Nigeria as the economic powerhouse of the West African sub-region, leading to an increase in the country’s GDP. Translation and interpreting have indispensable roles to play in communication services; financial services; transport services, and tourism and travel-related services – the five priority areas which focus on trade in services. It is instructive to note that the significant policy reforms and trade facilitation measures needed to give full effect to the AfCFTA Agreement must necessarily include translation and interpreting services, more so, that the primary working languages of the AU are Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, and more recently, Kiswahili.

Translation of Product Labels in Exports

Trade in goods is one of the key components in the scope of the AfCFTA Agreement. As the private sector is expected to swing into action by producing value-added goods that can be traded competitively within the

continent, translators must be on the stand-by to render translation of product labels in the language of consumer countries. Naturally, this would increase patronage and turnover. Ajiboye (2017) observed that exports when labeled in the language of the consumer country win consumers' confidence more readily than the language of the exporter country. This lays further credence to the emphasis on glocalization of translation services. The same idea may be domesticated in Nigeria as well, where products are labeled in local languages especially for semi-urban and rural communities where there is limited access to formal education – a problem identified by *The Encyclopedia of World Problems & Human Potential*. Save for the challenge of limited diffusion, as innovatively expressed by Ekundayo Simpson, Nigerian languages would have enjoyed wide spread in usage. But sadly, they have continuously been dominated by languages of erstwhile European colonizers (Simpson, 2007). So long as the indigenous languages continue to be limited in diffusion, in scope, spread or use, functionality of the languages for economic growth will only be a mirage.

Advertisements and Marketing

Through advertisement and marketing, products become more visible in both the local and global markets. Advertisement and marketing are used to promote sale of exports, increase brand recognition and strategically position products for market domination. Translation plays an incredible role in this regard, as reflected in the premium placed on advertisements by multinational organizations. For instance, Coca-cola company has different advertisements for its Coke brand in different languages of the world including Arabic, English and French. Adopting the glocal strategy for business would mean that advertisement of products meant for local and global markets should be rendered in the language of the targeted markets (i.e the consumer communities or countries). Of vital mention here, is the great impact of the print and electronic media in spreading the information and marketing products. Translators have been playing this role, along with broadcasting, current affairs programme, news reporting and production in almost all licensed radio and television stations in Nigeria. It is one major area that translators –and indeed translation– have recorded much success. Both the public and private sectors are great beneficiaries of translation services in the

media, in terms of the profits generated into government coffers and high return on investments, respectively.

Tourism and Hospitality

Nigeria is a country endowed with abundant human and natural resources, with numerous tourist attraction sites. Visitors who are willing to explore Nigeria's diverse cultural terrains and serene environments will require the services of tourist guides who are proficient in the language of the visitors. When visitors are received by persons who can speak in their language, it creates in them a sense of security. While some hotels offer services in a number of languages, thereby making them the preferred choice of some tourists, others simply make an arrangement with translators who can work as tourist guides or interpreters for a specified period, depending on the business or tourist schedule of the visitors. This unique service has, over time, increased the profit margin of hotel owners.

Translation of Audio-Visuals

Translating audio-visuals could come in a number of ways, including but not limited to transcribing audio-visual religious texts, promotional videos, awareness and sensitization contents especially those released by the National Orientation Agency (NOA) from time to time. This type of translation is different in that translators listen to audio-visual content and then render the translation in the target language thereafter. In the Islamic domain for instance, there are thousands of soul-inspiring lectures presented in some Nigerian languages notably in Hausa and Yoruba that are waiting for young and enterprising translators who can create economic fortunes for themselves through intra-lingual or inter-lingual transcription for onward publication of such to become printed materials. This is a common practice in the Arab world, where religious lectures are systematically represented in written form. Publishers who know the true worth of such intellectual works are quick to offer royalties to the translator. In some cases, the translator can earn a bounty through public presentations and book launch. In case of the latter, the translator is required to assess his tax accordingly and pay the amount directly to relevant tax authorities in line with Section 9 of Personal Income Tax (Amendment), Act, 2011.

Conference Interpreting

Everyone agrees that in international conferences, fora, dialogue or high level meetings between Heads of States or their representatives of bilateral or multilateral dimension, with two or more languages involved, communication can successfully be established through interpreting. Although beyond this traditional sphere of interpreting, there seems to be more awareness among the general public, particularly the elitist population about the important role of interpreting whether in its consecutive or simultaneous mode. Nations of the world have immensely benefitted from the patriotic gestures of many interpreters, as they facilitate through their services, economic growth for their countries on one hand and international organizations on the other hand. In this wise, our country continues to leverage her vast human resources in the translation industry to improve the nation's economy. It is common practice for conveners of conference to deduct certain amount from the professional fees of interpreters as tax, which in turn will be remitted to the government account through relevant tax authorities. With the serial engagements of the Nigerian government (as represented by the MDAs) in various bilateral and multilateral relations, one can only imagine the volume of tax remittances going into government coffers through conference interpreters!

Specialized Translation

With the emergence of "Language for Special Purposes" LSP theory, the broader term LSP translation also became popular and is still widely used today (Zubair, 2021). With the age of globalization that witnessed rapid growth in science and technology and unprecedented social transformation, there was much information in circulation bothering on diverse aspect of human endeavours. Thus, specialized translation arose from the need to have a greater specialization in the field of translation. Translators and interpreters need to pay attention to this notable area. To function well as a translator and/or interpreter, one needs to devote enough time to master specific registers relating to fields of one's choice such as medicine, agriculture, science, technology, engineering, journalism, law, economics, education, business etc. The enormous burden that comes with specialized translation is what makes translators who specialized in the above disciplines the toast of high-paying clients, specially embassies and international organizations.

Translation Consultancy and Retainership

Professional translators who know their onions are consulted regularly on translation services, translation studies and training. Translation retainer-ship is when an organization retains, through contract, the services of a translator for a specified period of time. Both are legitimate way to earn and also pay tax to government coffers after assessment. To attain the status of a translation consultant or secure translation retainer-ship, a translator would have to prove his mettle as a true professional translator with cognate experience in the industry.

Translation Research or Research in Translation

Research in translation is a forte for academic scholars, particularly those who are in the translation studies specialism. Translators who are not in academia may develop their capacity in this area, through short courses on translation or better still postgraduate programmes in Translation Art. Translation helps a great deal in advancing the frontiers of knowledge. Some classical and contemporary works require a translation or retranslation due to some latent errors. A quick example is *Ta'lif Akhbar al Qurun Min Umarai Bilad Ilorin*, one of the authentic historical sources detailing the history of Ilorin Emirate (from inception up until 1912) which was translated in 2022. Before its translation, historians had all along relied on partial translation in English of aspects of the work relevant to their research. Whereas, there are many translated cultural and historical works that require further research. Translations and research in translation can increase government revenue through effective regime of intellectual property rights, as authors may obtain International Standard Book Number (ISBN) at a fee from the National Library of Nigeria.

Conclusion

The present discussion on how to leverage translation to improve national economy has some implications for the Nigerian Institute of Translators and Interpreters (NITI), as the umbrella body for all certified translators and interpreters in Nigeria. With the continuous increase in membership of the Institute, it has become highly necessary to introduce professional translation training, as a form of continuing translator training programme. Translation

scholars have, on several occasions, harped on the quality of training for professional translators and interpreters. Also, there is the need to take more decisive action towards the passage of the NITI Bill into law. We understand the bill has been in the National Assembly for more than a decade. In countries like Germany, United States and Canada, translation and interpreting are well regulated. In some of these countries, a distinction is made between lay and certified translators. NITI may have to project the revenue potential of translation and interpreting services to members of the National Assembly or relevant MDAs whenever an opportunity to do present itself. Perhaps, members of the National Assembly may be motivated to do the needful if that would translate to achieving revenue growth for the nation.

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