

TRANSLATING ECONOMIC TERMINOLOGY ACROSS LANGUAGES: CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES, AND MULTILINGUAL APPLICATIONS

By

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Abstract

Translating economic terminology across languages presents a critical challenge in today's interconnected world, where financial discourse shapes policy, trade, and academic exchange. This study investigates the complexities of rendering economic terms across English, French, and Igbo, focusing on technical precision, cultural sensitivity, and contextual adaptation. The objective is to highlight how translation can function not merely as linguistic conversion but as a bridge between diverse economic systems and cultural frameworks. The problem addressed lies in the technical density of economic jargon, policy-specific variations, and metaphorical language that often lack direct equivalents in target languages, leading to potential misinterpretation or distortion. Methodologically, the paper employs comparative analysis of multilingual glossaries, case studies of policy documents, and interdisciplinary consultation with economists and linguists. Findings reveal that standardized glossaries from international organizations enhance accuracy, but contextual adaptation and explanatory notes are indispensable for culturally specific terms. Moreover, collaboration with subject experts and audience testing significantly improve clarity and resonance among target users. The study recommends a hybrid translation strategy that combines technical fidelity with cultural adaptation, supported by explanatory footnotes and iterative feedback from native speakers. Such an approach ensures that economic discourse remains accessible, accurate, and culturally relevant across linguistic boundaries. Ultimately, the research underscores the role of translation as a vital tool for fostering inclusive global economic dialogue.

Keywords: Cultural Adaptation, Economic Translation, English–French–Igbo, Globalization, Multilingual Glossaries.

Highlights

Complexity of Economic Translation: Translating economic terminology across English, French, and Igbo involves challenges of technical jargon, policy-specific variations, cultural sensitivity, and metaphorical language.

Hybrid Translation Strategy: Effective translation requires balancing standardized glossaries with contextual adaptation, explanatory notes, and collaboration with subject experts.

Case Applications: Examples from Nigeria (English–Igbo) and Francophone Africa (English–French) show how translation must align with local socio-economic realities and institutional frameworks.

Multilingual Glossary Contribution: A comparative glossary (English–French–Igbo) demonstrates how technical precision can be combined with culturally resonant equivalents to enhance accessibility.

Global Impact: Translation of economic terms is not just linguistic but socio-cultural, serving as a tool of empowerment that democratizes access to economic knowledge and fosters inclusive global dialogue.

Introduction

In the era of globalization, economic discourse transcends borders, requiring precise and culturally sensitive translation of financial and economic terminology. Scholars note that economic translation is a highly specialized field, shaped by the multidisciplinary origins of economic concepts and the constant evolution of financial practices (Akpaka, 2023). Whether in policy documents, academic literature, or international trade agreements, economic terms carry technical specificity and cultural nuance. Translating these terms across languages—such as English, French, and Igbo—poses unique challenges that go beyond linguistic equivalence. As Lyutviyeva (2021) argues, the rapid emergence of new financial terms, abbreviations, and institutional frameworks complicates equivalence and demands adaptive strategies from translators.

Moreover, translation is not simply a matter of linguistic conversion but of transferring specialized knowledge across cultural and ideological contexts. Abdukarimova (2019) emphasizes that economic terminology often reflects institutional realities and socio-political frameworks, making direct translation insufficient without contextual adaptation. This paper therefore explores the complexities of translating economic terminology, outlines effective strategies, and presents multilingual case studies to illustrate how translation can serve as a bridge between diverse economic systems and cultures.

Literature Review

Previous studies highlight the tension between technical fidelity and cultural resonance in economic translation. Hamidova and Shakirova (2025) stress that economic terms often lack one-to-one semantic correspondence, requiring interpretive strategies (p. 176). Mukhtar Imam et al. (2019) further note that metaphorical language complicates translation, as figurative expressions must be adapted to local idioms (p. 4). Akpaca's (2023) case study underscores the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, while Lyutviyeva (2021) identifies the growing challenge of translating newly coined financial terms in a rapidly globalizing economy. Together, these works establish the foundation for examining translation as both a linguistic and socio-economic act.

Methodology

This study employs a comparative and qualitative approach:

Glossary Analysis: Reviewing multilingual glossaries from international organizations such as the IMF and OECD.

Case Studies: Examining policy documents in Nigeria and Francophone Africa to identify translation practices.

Expert Consultation: Engaging economists and linguists to validate technical and cultural accuracy.

Audience Testing: Assessing clarity and resonance among native speakers in Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire.

Challenges in Translating Economic Terms

Technical Complexity and Jargon

Economic language is dense with specialized terms like *quantitative easing*, *liquidity trap*, or *fiscal deficit*. These terms often lack direct equivalents, requiring interpretation rather than conversion (Hamidova & Shakirova, 2020, p. 176; Lyutviyeva, 2021, p. 2).

Policy-Specific Variations

Terms such as *Social Security* or *Value Added Tax (VAT)* differ across countries. A literal translation risks misrepresentation if the target culture lacks an analogous system (Mukhtar Imam et al., 2019, p. 2; Abdulkarimova, 2019, p. 5).

Cultural and Ideological Sensitivity

Words like *capitalism* or *privatization* evoke different connotations depending on historical context. Translators must navigate these associations carefully to avoid ideological distortion (Akpaca, 2023, p. 3).

Metaphorical Language and Figurative Usage

Economic texts often use metaphors—e.g., *economic meltdown*, *financial cushion*, or *market bubble*—which may not translate directly. Creative adaptation is required to preserve meaning (Mukhtar Imam et al., 2019, p. 4; Lyutviyeva, 2021, p. 3).

Abbreviations and Acronyms

Terms like *GDP*, *IMF*, or *OECD* are globally recognized but may require expansion or explanation for audiences unfamiliar with international institutions (Hamidova & Shakirova, 2020, p. 177).

Strategies for Effective Translation

Use of Standardized Glossaries

International organizations such as the IMF and OECD provide multilingual glossaries that ensure consistency and technical accuracy (Hamidova & Shakirova, 2020; Lyutviyeva, 2021).

Contextual Adaptation

Translators must consider socio-economic realities of the target audience. For example, translating *budget deficit* into Igbo may require explanation of government spending practices unfamiliar to the local context (Abdukarimova, 2019, p. 6).

Explanatory Notes and Footnotes

In academic or policy documents, footnotes can clarify unfamiliar terms without disrupting the flow of the main text. This is especially useful for metaphorical or culturally specific expressions (Mukhtar Imam et al., 2019, p. 4).

Collaboration with Subject Experts

Working with economists or financial professionals ensures that translations reflect both linguistic and technical accuracy. This interdisciplinary approach is essential for high-stakes documents (Akpaca, 2023, p. 5).

Audience Testing and Feedback

Sharing translated terms with native speakers or target users helps assess clarity and resonance. Adjustments based on feedback improve accessibility and comprehension (Lyutviyeva, 2021, p. 5).

Besides, explanatory footnotes are valuable in educational and official documents, particularly when dealing with acronyms or system-specific expressions. Testing translated content with target audiences, such as Nigerian civil servants or students in Francophone universities, ensures the translation is both accessible and authoritative.

Case Applications

Nigeria: English–Igbo Translation

English Term	Igbo Translation
Subsidy	ego enyemaka n’azụ ahia
Budget deficit	mme fu ego gafee ntinye ego
Exchange rate	ọnuego mgbanwe ego
Tax reform	mgbanwe n’usoro ịtụ ụtụ

These terms reflect Nigeria's current economic discourse—e.g., *fuel subsidy removal* is a major policy issue whose translation into Igbo requires not just linguistic conversion but contextual explanation.

Côte d'Ivoire / Francophone Africa: English–French Translation

English Term	French Translation
Economic integration	intégration économique
Customs union	union douanière
Foreign direct investment	investissement direct étranger
Microfinance	Microfinance

Such terms are central to regional policies under UEMOA and ECOWAS and often appear in development reports, necessitating precise French equivalents that align with institutional language.

Multilingual Glossary: English – French – Igbo

English Term	French Translation	Igbo Translation	Definition
Economy	l'économie	akụnụba	System of production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services
Inflation	l'inflation	mgbasawanye ego	General rise in prices and fall in purchasing power
Unemployment	le chômage	enweghi ọru	State of being without a job despite actively seeking work
Gross Domestic Product (GDP)	le Produit Intérieur Brut (PIB)	Ngükota ngwaahịa ime obodo	Total value of goods and services produced within a country
Budget	le budget	mmefu ego	Financial plan for income and expenditure
Taxation	l'imposition	ịtu ụtu	System of levying taxes
Interest Rate	le taux d'intérêt	ọnuego mmeri ego	Percentage charged on borrowed money or earned on savings
Market Economy	l'économie de marché	akụnụba ahịa	Economic system based on supply

			and demand with minimal government control
Public Spending	les dépenses publiques	ego a na-eji n'orù góomenti	Government expenditure on public services
Monetary Policy	la politique monétaire	iwu ego	Central bank actions to control money supply and interest rates
Investment	l'investissement	itinye ego	Allocating money with the expectation of future profit
Recession	la récession	mmebi akunuba	Period of economic decline across markets

This glossary reflects both institutional definitions (IMF, OECD) and culturally adapted equivalents Igbo, aligning with recommendations from Adukaimova (2019).

Findings

Glossaries provide technical accuracy but cannot fully capture cultural nuance.

Contextual adaptation is essential, especially for policy-specific terms like subsidy removal in Nigeria.

Metaphorical language requires creative translation, with Igbo equivalents often relying on culturally resonant idioms.

Collaboration with experts improves accuracy, ensuring translations align with both linguistic and economic realities.

Audience testing confirms accessibility, highlighting the need for explanatory notes and iterative refinement.

Conclusion

The translation of economic terminology across languages is more than a linguistic exercise; it is a critical component of global economic integration. Economic discourse is embedded in technical precision, cultural nuance, and policy-specific contexts that demand careful navigation. While standardized glossaries provide a foundation for accuracy, contextual adaptation, explanatory notes, and collaboration with subject experts are indispensable for ensuring clarity and resonance. Translation plays a pivotal role in shaping inclusive economic dialogue, particularly for underrepresented languages like Igbo. A hybrid approach that balances fidelity to technical definitions with sensitivity to cultural contexts democratizes access to economic knowledge, ensuring globalization does not marginalize non-dominant languages. Ultimately, translation serves as a tool of empowerment, enabling diverse societies to contribute to and benefit from global economic exchange.

This study makes several key contributions to the field of economic translation and multilingual communication:

Bridging Linguistic and Economic Systems: By analyzing English, French, and Igbo translations of economic terminology, the paper demonstrates how translation functions as a bridge between diverse economic systems and cultural frameworks, rather than a mere linguistic exercise.

Hybrid Translation Model: The research proposes a practical strategy that combines standardized glossaries, contextual adaptation, explanatory notes, and expert collaboration, offering a replicable model for translators working in specialized domains.

Multilingual Glossary Development: The inclusion of a comparative glossary across three languages provides a valuable resource for scholars, policymakers, and translators, enriching both academic literature and practical translation practice.

Case-Based Insights: Through examples from Nigeria and Francophone Africa, the paper highlights how translation must respond to local socio-economic realities, thereby contributing to applied translation studies in underrepresented languages.

Advancing Inclusive Global Dialogue: By emphasizing the importance of culturally sensitive translation, especially for languages like Igbo, the study

underscores translation's role in democratizing access to economic knowledge and fostering inclusive participation in globalization.

Practical Implications

This study offers practical guidance for translators, policymakers, educators, and institutions engaged in economic communication across languages:

For Translators: The hybrid strategy outlined provides a clear framework for balancing technical accuracy with cultural adaptation. Translators can rely on standardized glossaries while supplementing them with explanatory notes and audience feedback to ensure clarity.

For Policymakers: Accurate translation of economic terminology into local languages (e.g., Igbo, French) enhances policy accessibility, enabling citizens to better understand reforms such as subsidy removal or tax restructuring. This fosters transparency and public trust.

For Educators and Students: The multilingual glossary serves as a teaching resource, helping learners grasp complex economic concepts in their native languages. It supports inclusive education by bridging technical knowledge and cultural context.

For International Organizations: Institutions like the IMF, OECD, ECOWAS, and UEMOA can adopt these strategies to improve communication in multilingual environments, ensuring that economic discourse resonates across diverse cultural and linguistic communities.

For Local Communities: By democratizing access to economic knowledge, translation empowers underrepresented languages and communities to participate meaningfully in global economic dialogue, reducing marginalization in policy and academic discourse.

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