

Teaching of Translation Studies in Kenyan Universities

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Abstract

The paper critically examines the translation studies situation in Kenyan universities. Further it seeks to outline the interdisciplinary nature of translation studies, and hence its importance to other closely related disciplines, especially language and communication. It also explores the current state of translator training in Kenya and seeks to create an understanding on the scope, opportunities and challenges of translation in the Kenyan context.

Key Words: *Translation, Translator Training, Language, Communication*

Introduction

Diachronically, translation practice can be traced way back to the 1st Century BC. Documentary and historical evidence point to the prominence of translation practice, particularly in the west, to have been during the Roman Empire (Bassnet, 2002). Cicero and Horace have been cited as some of the earliest scholars to talk about translation practice (Munday 2008). As Bassnett points out, majority of the translations revolved around Greek poetry and philosophical thoughts. In the Arab world, the practice of translation can be traced back to the 1st Century A.D. with the “House of Wisdom” (*Bait Al-Hikma*) in Baghdad functioning as an academy, library and translation bureau (As-Safi, 2008). Despite the argument that translation was a Roman innovation necessitated by the need to maintain, retain and preserve the intellectual civilization of the Greeks, translation as a form of cross-cultural communication is as old as human communication.

Translation as a discipline however is not as old as the practice. Whereas documents were translated since ancient times, studies into translation as a phenomenon did not exist until the 20th Century. However, scholarly thoughts on translation were ever present in translation with the debate over whether to translate word for word or sense for sense taking center stage and laying the ground for latter theoretical arguments. The concept of translation studies, as a discipline, was not in existence before the 1970s. Shitemi (2011) argues that, this subject (translation) has tremendously developed and is most robust in the 21st century. Perhaps this can be alluded to the fact that there is an increasing need of documents to be translated from one language to another all over the world. A very good example is the fact that The Constitution of Kenya (2010) recognizes Kiswahili and English as official languages. Before 2010, Kiswahili was only a national language while English was

the only official language. This means that there are many documents required to be translated from English to Kiswahili.

It is imperative to note that during the ancient times, there were no deliberate attempts to clearly outline the scope and boundaries of this field. It was largely viewed as a craft, practiced by the linguistically and creatively gifted individuals within the society. Despite attempts by Middle Ages scholars such as Dolet and Tytler to come up with clearly defined criteria for carrying out translations (Bassnet, 2002), there were no distinctive definitions that could suffice to explain the nature and scope of translation.

It is during the second half of the 20th Century, that significant changes have been experienced which have been marked by increased interest in the field. Despite the complexity and confusion surrounding the name of this discipline with various scholars proposing various terms e.g. German scholars prefer *translatology*. Holmes proposition for *translation studies* seemed more appealing and has become universally accepted as the name for the discipline. An array of translation scholars have emerged since the 1950s despite majority of them being majorly linguists: Benjamin (1930), Jakobson (1959), Catford (1965), Nida (1964) and Taber (1969) among other classical translation scholars. These scholars have had a significant contribution in shaping translation studies as a discipline.

The scope of translation studies today is much more complex than it was fifty years ago. A multi and interdisciplinary approaches have proven important as well as posing a challenge to the growth of this discipline. For instance, as Cronin (2004) points out that the nature of translation practice and scope has changed significantly and so has the texts targeted for translation. In a globalized world, business, politics and even cultures are no longer boundary based or defined. The need for communication in a multilingual world has contributed significantly to present gains in this field. This is despite English emerging as a global *lingua franca*.

In East Africa, the practice of translation largely involves Kiswahili as either the Source or the target language. University of Dar-es-Salaam (UDSM) has had major contributions in transforming translation and interpretation studies. For instance, the projects to provide Kiswahili versions of various computer software such as MS Word and Linux are major contributions not only to the development of Kiswahili but also to the advancement of translation in a digital age.

In Kenya, translation practice on the one hand can be said to be a relatively old concept dating to over a century. Among the first documents to be translated were literary works such as the *Hamziyya*, and religious texts such as the Bible. For example, Rev. Dr. Ludwig Krapf, a religious scholar and Christian missionary who after preaching The Gospel for some time in The East Coast of Africa, began translating the *New Testament of The Bible*, *Order of Morning and Evening Prayer*, and Dr. Barth's *Bible Stories* to Kiswahili. Further, it is worth mentioning that Rev Johannes Rebmann was also very instrumental in compiling Dictionaries of the *Kinika* and *Kiniassa* languages, and translated a *Swahili* version of The Gospel

according to St. Luke, which was later published by the Bible Society of Kenya (Kandagor, 2016; Chiraghdin and Mnyampalla, 1977).

At the beginning of the 20th Century, various literary works were translated from English and Arabic to Kiswahili (Muigai, 2005). In addition, the Inter-territorial Language Committee (ILC)¹ carried out various translations largely from English to Kiswahili. On the other hand, translation studies as an academic discipline is barely twenty years old in Kenya.

In this paper, we delve into the nature of translation studies in Kenya by exploring the state of translator training in institutions of higher learning. In this regard, we have cited examples from selected public universities in Kenya. Purposive sampling method was used to select seven major public universities in Kenya used in the study. This is informed by the fact that the seven universities have been in existence for relatively longer time and as such have strong academic structures. In addition majority of the "new universities", that is, those chartered after 2010, heavily borrow curricular from their parent institutions. The focus of this paper dwelled on the various academic programs that touch on translation studies at various levels, that is from Diploma to Doctoral studies.

Survey of Translation Studies in Kenya

Universities, as institutions of higher learning, are tasked with among other responsibilities, to train students to be professionals who can meet the human resource needs of a particular country. To this end, these institutions are mandated to develop academic programs and curricular that meets these objectives. One of the approaches used by various institutions is to provide grounding in a particular discipline and also some basic concepts from other related disciplines in the spirit of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary scholarship in order to produce an all-round scholar.

In the developing translation studies curricular, there are two approaches: Language based approach and professional oriented approach (Tennent, 2005). Whereas the former approach envisages translation as a language exercise, the latter seeks to prepare the student for a real-life translation in a vocational or professional context.

In discussing programs, curricular and practices in training translators, Ulrych in Tennent (2005) highlights the fact that majority of language and linguistics departments offer translation courses as a way of improving students' linguistic proficiency.

¹ The ILC was a body charged with among other tasks, standardization of Kiswahili and promoting its use. Translation was one of the strategies relied on as a means of growing Kiswahili Literature.

Looking at translation studies in Kenya, the two approaches have been employed by various institutions with some integrating the two to emerge with a ‘hybrid’ translation program. Kenya is a multilingual country with over 42 languages (Ethnologue, 2013). In this case, one cannot afford to overlook the need to enhance and facilitate communication within this context. Majority of Kenyans are bilingual with the knowledge of a mother tongue and albeit modest proficiency in Kiswahili and or English (Ogechi, 2009). Further, the country has a bilingual official language policy which as Magugu (2014) notes implies more functions for translation in its implementation.

A critical look at these linguistic scenarios with the global world in 21st Century, make it very vital for any language agency to consider translation as a means of enhancing effective communication. This forms the rationale behind the establishment of a postgraduate diploma in translation Studies at Kenyatta University (KU) which states:

The changing trends in the world today that have made the world a global village have presented a challenge to the universities to train personnel to bridge the gap between cultures and languages. Any time there has been an intersection of two cultures and languages, the need for translation and interpretation arises. Any time one culture produces a written text, translators serve as the bridge that allows literate members of one culture to be exposed to the written material of the other. (Online KU Postgraduate Diploma in Translation studies Course description).

Translation Studies in Sampled Universities

In this section we look into universities that have language related courses ranging from linguistics and literature to media, public relations and business studies (advertising and marketing) and relate them to translation studies. We argue for the need to integrate these programs with translation studies units.

Table 1: Universities with Structured Translation Studies Programs

Program	University						
	UoN	KU	MU	MMUST	Maseno	Egerton	JKUAT
PhD							
Masters							
Post Graduate Diploma							
Bachelors							
Diploma							

KEY: No Structured Translation Studies Program

Structured Translation Studies Program

Only three of the seven sampled institutions had a structured translation program at various levels of study. For example, The University of Nairobi (UoN) has a *Center for Translation and Interpretation Studies*. This is the only institution

in the country that has such a specific centre with regard to this discipline. The centre offers postgraduate studies at Masters and Doctoral levels only. Eligibility to join this centre is subject to competence in at least two languages.

Based on the course details for the Masters program, it is evident that the curricular follows a professional-oriented approach:

This is a postgraduate degree program offered at the University of Nairobi that is designed to equip students with the theoretical and practical skills necessary for them to become professional translators. Apart from equipping them with the knowledge and understanding of the discipline of translation, the program also has a strong practical element in which students will translate texts from various fields and cultural contexts. The course is designed for practicing translators, linguists, professionals from various fields and all those keen on improving their translation skills or starting a career in translation (Online UoN college guide).

The centre for translation and interpretation studies at The University of Nairobi was established in 2010 and is funded by the United Nations (UN). It is majorly in place to train linguists and translators to meet the demand for these personnel in African languages. Hence it cultivates a global market, i.e translator training approach. Based on the UN findings on the state of language professionals in the world, that international organizations will lose 40% of their language staff through retirement with Africa being hardest hit, such a program is key to mitigating this disaster in waiting.

Considering some of the African languages such as Kiswahili and their development at the international scene (For example it is one of the working languages of the UN in Africa and an official language at the African parliament) it is a challenge to the institutions of higher learning within the East African countries to constantly ensure the availability of fully trained Kiswahili language professionals. It further necessitates translator training in Kenyan Universities. This forms part of the justification for the Masters and Doctor of Philosophy programs at the *Centre for Translation and Interpretation Studies* at UoN. Looking at the course outlines, there are efforts to take an interdisciplinary approach to translation studies with the inclusion of units such as the electives proposed: Language description, Precise writing and editing, Information technology for translation, Discourse analysis in translation, Comparative stylistics in translation, and Intercultural communication.

Based on the units mentioned above, it is clear that there is a close relationship between translation, linguistics, editing, information technology, discourse analysis, stylistics and anthropology. Whereas the university has a structured courses for translation and interpretation studies at Masters and Doctoral levels, their choice of programs level may raise a question like this: What about those who do not qualify for Masters and Doctoral studies?

Looking at Kenyatta University (KU), there is a structured postgraduate diploma in Translation studies offered in the Department of Linguistics. It is evident that their program targets to produce professional translators in various areas of specialization. The programme is split into four tracks: Legal Translation, Media Translation, Translation of Literary texts and Religious texts translation. This can be hailed as a move in the right direction in professional translator training. However, there is need to critically examine the corpora available in these fields and weigh it against the job markets.

The areas of specialization structured overlook the more robust Science and Technology field. The implications of this weakness is that though the translation trainee will have an overview of translation processes involved in other tracks of translation, they won't get enough grounding in the said field. Further, citing Science and Technology field in today's world, it accounts for a majority of translation projects globally. For example, looking at listed projects in *Translators base* website, most of the listed projects fall under this category. In addition, the relatively new field of interest in translation studies, localization, sprouts from this field. One can deduce that this is a field that offers more job opportunities for translators from all over the world as opposed to the legal field and the religious one. In translation studies, the developments of this field in a digital age requires that students have a proper understanding of the shifts and changes involved be it on the text types, tools or theoretical approaches (Cronin, 2013). Therefore, incorporating units that explore the complex nature of translation studies and practice in a global and digital age would help in improving the curricular.

Moi University (MU) on the other hand, has programs which depicts an integrated approach to translation studies. Currently, there isn't an existing structured programme in translation studies though a diploma in this field is being introduced soon. Translation studies units are offered as part of the Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Kiswahili program in the Department of Kiswahili and Other African languages. In the third year of study, students can choose to specialize in Linguistics, Translation or Literature. This approach is replicated at the postgraduate level whereby Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy students can have range of specialization just like at bachelors level of study.

However, the approach being used at MU has a challenge. That is, after training, students are not awarded degrees in translation studies but rather in Kiswahili. In addition, students pursuing B.A in Linguistics, Media and Communication, B.A in German and B.A in French in the School of Arts and Social Sciences as well as Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Media Science from the School of Information Science are usually required to take two units in translation studies from the Department of Kiswahili and Other African Languages. This is aimed at giving them grounding in linguistics but isn't enough for them to be professional translators.

Table 2: Universities with units in Translation

Program	University						
	UoN	KU	MU	MMUST	Maseno	Egerton	JKUAT
PhD							
Masters							
Post Graduate Diploma							
Bachelors							
Diploma							

KEY: No Translation units at all
 Some Translation units provided

From the table 2 above, there are some universities among the sampled ones that do not have any structured course in translation studies but have units offered on translation. For example, Egerton University has a translation unit offered at the third year of study to Bachelor of Education students who specialize in Kiswahili. However, it is offered as an elective and one may conclude that it’s more of a language-based unit. It is not meant to train professional translators. A similar situation is also witnessed at Maseno University where units in translation studies are offered at bachelors and masters level in the Department of Kiswahili and Other African Languages. In addition, there are some sampled institutions that do not offer any translation studies related unit. This is despite there being courses that are language based, for example Media studies, Mass Communication and Journalism.

To Train or not to Train Translators

Drawing from the state of translation studies at institutions of higher learning in Kenya, one may wonder: Must one be trained as a translator? Cronin (2003) points out that the 21st Century is a communication age. Therefore people, institutions, governments and businesses have no option but to embrace cross-boundary and cross-cultural communication so as to remain relevant. In this regard, translation stands as a bridge to actualization of this form of communication.

When we explore translation practice, despite there being debates on what constitutes translation competence, there is a general concern from majority of translation scholars that bilingualism alone is not enough. One needs to undergo formal translator training in order to be equipped with the necessary translation skills. Bell (1991) says that translation competence must comprise the following; bilingualism, textual competence, encoding and decoding skills which together create communication competence. This approach is supported by Werner (1992), Neubert (2000), Kelly (2002, 2005) and PACTE (2003).

Further, by analyzing various researches conducted in the field of translation Shitemi (1997) argues that it has become necessary that there are intricate details in translation practice which require one to be trained in order to be equipped with requisite skills.

From the study conducted, it is clear that Kenyan universities have made tremendous effort in the teaching of translation studies. The few universities that are teaching translation either as a program of study or as a unit (s) should be encouraged to continue improving their curricular so as to meet the job market both locally, regionally and internationally. On the other hand, institutions which do not have translation courses at all should be encouraged to start offering them. This will ensure that we have competent translators who can meet the translation needs of a given speech community, country and the global communication market.

Conclusion

The research analyzed the state of translation studies in selected public universities in Kenya. Based on the study conducted, it is evident that all the seven universities teach translation and interpretation studies in one way or the other, with The University of Nairobi leading because of its Center for Translation and Interpretation Studies. The other institutions only offers translation as either an integrated program as is the case at Moi University, while the others offer it as an additional unit just like any other elective. The study suggests that there is need to have serious departments of Translation and Interpretation Studies in Kenyan Universities. This will ensure that the country has enough translators who are able to meet the translation demands not only in Kenya but also the global market. Further, we suggest that there is need to have more translation bodies in the country. Currently there is one that deals with Bible translation, that is, Bible Translation and Literacy (BTL), which indeed is doing a great job.

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