

Language translation in communication as a strategy in cross-border governance and cooperation: Some preliminary observations in the Nigeria – Cameroon border relations

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Abstract

The paper examined the role of language translation as a major tool in cross-border governance and cooperation within the context of official linguistic differences along and astride the Nigeria-Cameroon border by highlighting border conflicts as an obstacle to cross-border cooperation in post-colonial Africa. Data for the study was sourced through two methods of data gathering strategies of field investigation and supplemented with a desk review of the literature. Findings indicate that towards the end of the nineteenth century, European imperialist powers partitioned Africa among themselves by drawing lines of demarcation and foreign languages that split several homogenous culture areas without any regard to the facts of the familiar pattern of ethnic and cultural interlinks and penetration associated with millennial of intergroup relations in the continent and its sub-regions. Despite the Organization of African Unity (OAU) resolution of 'boundary maintenance' at independence, it also, created the language problems currently experienced in Africa, thus creating a clog in the wheels of progressive efforts at regional cooperation and integration. The paper, therefore, concludes that while it may not be realistic to recommend that the superimposed official languages be dropped almost immediately, both countries must explore the language behaviour and preferences of the people of the border region to engender the possibility of the use of indigenous lingua franca for cross-border interaction and cooperation.

Keywords: Language, Communication, Translation, Cross-border conflict, Integration.

Introduction

Practical changes are occurring which are rapidly transforming political and anthropogenic boundaries throughout the world, resulting in shifts of meaning and practice, not always on parallel tracks. This poses a challenge to our understanding of what boundaries are for and what they mean in terms of boundary governance and cross-border cooperation. While political boundaries have formed the foci of the study of experts in Political Geography, Diplomatic History, International Law and International Relations to the extent that they have been actively engaged in attempting to fathom ways of diminishing some of the negativities and consequences of international boundaries, scholars in Historical Linguistics cannot be said to have done much less in proposing solutions based on finding from the field to some of the language problems of



African boundaries, which are negating good boundary management and cross-border cooperation.¹ These problems derive largely from the arrival of European languages on African soil, which resulted in the creation of the international boundaries as well as the inability of the post-colonial African state to adopt policies that would accommodate the interests of the larger society.²

For instance, in 1981, an unfortunate incident occurred at the Nigeria – Cameroon border near Ikingi which almost escalated into a full-scale war between the two nation-states. In a swift attempt to abridge the tension, a senior official of the government of Cameroon was dispatched from Yaounde to Lagos, Nigeria. There was a communication problem because of linguistic and cultural differences between the two nation-states, at least at the official diplomatic level. The understanding of “Minister of State”, the senior official of the government sent from Cameroon was not properly interpreted in Nigeria where a “Minister of State” is a junior official of the cabinet.³ It thus appears according to some diplomatic sources that the then Nigeria’s Minister of External Affairs, Professor Ishaya Audu felt slighted that the government of Cameroon was very contemptuous of the matter and had dispatched only a junior minister not knowing that the envoy was his Cameroonian counterpart. The issue was seized upon by the media in Nigeria and the controversy that ensued as a result of this imperfect paraphrase may have had far-reaching implications even though it is long forgotten

Another example in Diplomatic History where there was an imperfection in translation which was only misleading but produced disastrous consequences was recorded by T. Savory where he recounted thus:

There is some reason to believe that the fate of Hiroshima was influenced by the fact of translation in communication. After the Potsdam Conference. An ultimatum was sent to the Japanese Government, demanding their surrender. Their reply contained the vital word *Mokusatsu*, the closest translation of which is to the effect that the answer would be delayed until discussion had taken place. But the translation received in Washington used the word ‘ignore’, the whole implication of which was very different. It must have strengthened the American resolve to drop the bomb....⁴

The two examples above, are in a nutshell, only an illustration of the seminal role of translation in international diplomatic cooperation especially between nation-states with different linguistic expressions, the established political will to cooperate and in all efforts at cooperation notwithstanding. Therefore, it is

¹Anthony I. Asiwaju, *Artificial Boundaries* (New York: Civilitis International, 1990), 31.

²Wale Adeniran, “Preliminary Observations on Language Use and Needs in Border Regions: The Nigeria-Benin Experience,” in *Academic Disciplines and Border Studies*, ed. R. T. Akinyele, (Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 2007), 123-124.

³M. A. Fonkem, “Translation as a Tool in Cameroon-Nigeria Transborder Cooperation” (1992), 1. Unpublished paper presented at the First Nigeria-Cameroon Transborder Workshop, Yola.

⁴T. Savory, *The Art of Translation*, (Boston: The Writer Inc., 1968), 183 – 184.

very necessary and imperative to start our discussion with a clarification of the semantic underpinnings of some keywords in the title of this presentation.

Epistemic Contextualization

Metaphorically, language can be posited that thought, a unit or component of ideas is the sending rod or tuning fork; the lodestone or touchstone for the expression of deductive or reductive reasoning. It is a malleable agent, a tool for analysis, synthesis and the possible contradictions or paradigms thereof. In this regard, Edde M. Iji postulates that "language is a sifter of all the above ingredients of expression. It can also be regarded as a filtrate medium or vehicle for the expression of communication of meanings, feelings or experiences."⁵ Similarly, communication is a phenomenon that activates or facilitates the sharing of meanings, ideas, messages, experiences or feelings, etc. through the instrumentality of organic signs and symbols; with perception, encoding, and decoding as another phenomenon of human interactions.⁶ When ready to be expressed, ideas or thoughts become the stream of consciousness to which language is the channel and communication, the medium of projection to the target audience. In this sense, language and communication whether verbal or non-verbal can be regarded as Siamese twins, the separation of which cannot be achieved without corporeal damage to one or both of them. Thus, in essence, the paradigm of human communication in all its dynamism is a meditation on the co-existential necessities among humans.⁷

In other words, language and communication can be manipulated to control events in human interactions. They can be used to soothe cries, with the view to neutralizing or resolving conflict status quo or otherwise. This twin function can also be manipulated to escalate a crisis or conflict situation, to cause dissension, discontent, disorientation, agitation or even destabilization of an otherwise calm atmosphere and disposition typical of peace and harmony. This double-edged sword paradox of language and communication is that they can be skewed to strengthen good neighbourliness as well as cut to destroy harmonious relationships between communities or states.

In the same vein, translation is considered simply an expression in one language that is expressed in another language.⁸ This consideration is not wrong, granted that the Biblical story of the Tower of Babel relates in the form of a legend, the origins of linguistic constraints imposed upon mankind from the early period of the human evolutionary era. However, the consideration has some inherent limitations in that it seems not to bother whether what is involved is expressed in the verbal or non-verbal form. But, to the more informed, the concept of translation denotes the rendering in writing of a message expressed in one language into another. Hence, what emerges from the preceding discussion is that the practice of translation perhaps, began when man was able to replicate

⁵Edde M. Iji. "Language and Communication in Peace and Conflict Resolution," in *Conflict Resolution, Identity Crises and Development in Africa*, ed. C. O. Bassey and Oshita Oshita (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 2007), 47.

⁶Iji, "Language and Communication in Peace and Conflict Resolution," 47.

⁷Iji, "Language and Communication in Peace and Conflict Resolution," 48.

⁸Fonkem, "Translation as a Tool in Cameroon-Nigeria Transborder Cooperation" 5.

in written form what was thought mentally or expressed verbally or in a non-verbal form.

While it is imperative to note that translation in an oral mode is referred to as 'interpretation', it is also very important to state herein that our emphasis is on interlingual translation as opposed to the other two types of translations, namely: intralingual and intersemiotic.⁹ Even though E. Nida¹⁰ defines interlingual translation as "producing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalence with the message of the source language first in meaning, and secondly, in style"; Vinay and Darbelnet perceive it as "le passage d'une langue A à une langue B, pour exprimer une même réalité X" ("shifting from one language A to one language B to express the same reality X").¹¹

From the above definitions, it follows that translation exists hypothetically and practically because people speak languages and cannot communicate with one another. More so, it is obvious that translation is, in the first instance, the solution for overcoming the obstacles that exist whenever people attempt to communicate with one another across cultural boundaries. Translation, therefore, serves as the vehicle for communication by providing an equivalence of thought that lies behind the different verbal expressions. On this score, C. A. Nama makes the following pertinent observation concerning the role of translation in cross-cultural communication, that:

... given the linguistic diversity of mankind globally, the translator assumes extraordinary significance as one who bridges gaps and disseminates knowledge. In this era of information and technological breakthrough, there is no question about the primordial role that translation plays in international diplomacy.¹²

From the foregoing, it is not just enough to have a translation, but the said translation must serve the desired purpose for which it is sought. Therefore, the quality of the translation must be guaranteed. In other words, for there to be cross-cultural communication, the translator would have to produce a rendering of the source text (ST) which will fit, Nida's prerequisite of "the receptor language and culture as a whole."¹³ According to G. Toury, once produced "every translation goes to serve as an ordinary message. In a regular intra-systemic act of communication, without, however, necessarily losing its distinct identity and meaning as a special kind of message...."¹⁴ It, therefore, means that every translation is a creative work which goes to fit into the

⁹R. Jacobson, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation" in *On Translation*, ed. Rueben A. Brower. (Massachusetts: Howard University Press, 1959), 109.

¹⁰E. Nida, "Principles of Translation," in *On Translation*, ed. Rueben A. Brower. (Massachusetts: Howard University Press, 1959), 19.

¹¹J. Vinay et J. Darbelnet, *Stylistique Comparée du Français et de L'Anglais*, Nouvelle Edition. (Paris: Didier, 1977), 20.

¹²C. A. Nama, "The African Translation and the Language Question: Theoretical, Practical and Nationalistic Considerations," *EPASA MOTO*, 1 (1989): 17.

¹³E. Nida, *Towards a Science of Translation*. (Leiden. 1964), 167.

¹⁴G. Toury, *In Search of a Theory of Translation*. (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1980), 16.

system of the second (target) language and as such, must meet the norms of that second language and, not just a mere change of codes and signs.

Interestingly, since translation is an act of communication, there is, therefore, the need for it not to be a mere transposition of words or phrases in abstraction but rather a rendering of real texts intended for a given audience. For translation to serve this desired objective within the framework of Nigeria and Cameroon's cross-border governance and cooperation, both parties must strive to get a better understanding of the concept and how it functions; as well as seek the services of qualified personnel whom Nama describes as "an intermediary... a mediator between two different linguistic systems, two cultures and two philosophical systems."¹⁵ Indeed, Fonkem corroborates this viewpoint when he asserts that "no two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The words in which different societies live are distinct worlds..."¹⁶ S. Ojo succinctly summed the role of the translator in cross-cultural communication:

... the translator must be a proficient bilingual, (...) show evidence of some natural and acquired skills and above all, be an artist with words. These are qualities that will enable him to measure the communicative value as well as the deep sense of the source text (ST) and replace it with a target text (TT) in a receptor language which approximates as closely as possible the same communicative value.¹⁷

As government officials and authorities in both Nigeria and Cameroon get a better and more thoughtful insight into the functioning of translation in communication, cross-border governance and cooperation will begin to discard the notions that the translator is omniscient, knows and can work into all human languages and even beyond, or that the translator is a kind of automatic xerox machine. This cannot be overemphasized because the art of recreation is known as the translation process and which entails an enormous exercise of analysis, exegesis, elaboration and lucidity in expression. It is by so doing that translation can arrive within the realm of inter-cultural exchange and understanding of the dynamic counterpart in cross-border governance and cooperation in border regions.

Divisive Role of European Languages and post-Colonial Efforts at African Integration

As a result of the balkanization of the African continent by European imperialist powers, the colonizers imposed their languages as official languages in their respective African territories. Since the Europeans were interested primarily in sourcing raw materials for their metropolitan industries, as well as establishing markets for manufactured goods from their factories, they were eager to train a corps of people who could communicate with them in their languages and serve

¹⁵Nama, "The African Translation and the Language Question...", 7.

¹⁶Fonkem, "Translation as a Tool Cameroon – Nigeria Transborder Cooperation", 6.

¹⁷ S. A. Ojo. "The Role of the Translator of African Written Literature in Inter-Cultural Consciousness and Relationships", *META* 3. 3, (1986), 292.

as interpreters between them and the local African population. Thus, English was introduced to territories occupied by Britain, French to those administered by the French, and Portuguese, Belgians and Spaniards to their respective colonies as well as Germans up to the First World War.

By the time the various African territories gained political independence after the Second World War, European languages had become firmly established as the official languages of the respective colonized African territories. One of the indisputable consequences of the European languages in Africa is the barrier they created to communication and cooperation among the various African peoples and their successor states. As rightly expressed by Professor Anthony Asiwaju:

One terrible effect of colonial partition on Africans has been the establishment of different colonial educational systems and the introduction of different language barriers and a general cultural alienation of the Western-educated Africans from one another even in areas along state boundaries where the educated elite on both sides have the same shared background of a common culture.¹⁸

As a result of the indoctrination the educated elites were subjected to by the European and the neglect of African languages in the various educational systems, those on different divides of the borders became suspicious of one another and developed contempt for indigenous African languages.¹⁹ Along with territorial colonization, there was effective colonization of the mind of the educated Africans as they were made to believe that the indigenous languages were inferior to imposed European languages and that there were too many African languages anyway. The idea was laundered that since there were too many of the local African languages, none of them could be officially assigned a role without the possibility of generating conflict in the society.²⁰

However, contrary to the popularly held view, it is not the multiplicity of indigenous African languages that impedes socio-economic cooperation and integration at the regional or sub-regional level in Africa. Rather it is, as has been pointed out by a leading African sociolinguist, Ayo Bamgbose, that:

The lack of political will by those in authority... the elite... who stand to benefit from the status quo... the dominance of European languages (and consequently neglect of African languages)²¹

Arising from above, and in a swift move to address the challenges inherent in the colonially imposed languages barriers, the Assembly of Heads of States and

¹⁸Anthony I. Asiwaju, *Partitioned Africans: Ethnic Relations across Africa's International Boundaries, 1884-1984*. (London: C. Hurst and Coy, 1984), 10-11

¹⁹Akeem Lasisi, "Towards Re-Inventing African Languages", in *The Comet*, (June 26, 2001), 3.

²⁰Adeniran, "Preliminary Observations on Language Use...", 125.

²¹Ayo Bamgbose, *Language and the Nation: The Language Question in Sub-Saharan Africa*. (Edinburgh: University Press, 1991). 1-2.

Government of Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in one of its early resolution AH/DEC.8 in 1966, established the OAU Inter-African Bureau of Languages (BIL) and charges with the responsibility of:

- (a) To break the linguistic domination, alienation and division of the continent in the wake of independence.
- (b) Actively assist in the realization of the linguistic independence and unity of the continent through active support and encouragement of the use of indigenous African languages for educational, commercial and communication purposes at national, regional and continental levels, and through the support of inter-African indigenous languages to be used for wider communicational purposes.²²

As a follow-up to the above resolution, the OAU again in July 1986 adopted the Language Plan of Action for Africa in Resolution CM1352 (XLIV) stating inter alia some basic objectives as:

- i. To encourage the increased use of African languages as vehicles for instruction at all educational levels; and
- ii. To foster and promote national, regional and continental linguistic unity of Africa in the framework of the multilingualism prevailing in most African states.²³

It also enjoined every member state of the OAU to have a clearly defined language policy.

Despite the persistent admonition of the OAU, however, virtually all African states have struggled reticently with the adoption and implementation of a clearly defined language policy. They have all instead been caught up in the trap of adopting the foreign languages with which they were colonized, that is, English, French and Lusophone as their official national languages. For instance, the closest that Nigeria has ever gone to have a language policy is the proviso inserted in the 1977, 1981 and 1998 National Policy on Education, the Cultural Policy of Nigeria (1988) and the Constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1979 and 1998)²⁴ and 1999 (as amended). Accordingly, Wale Adeniran in his critique of Nigeria's language policy laments as follows:

... there has been little or no attempt at the implementation of these provisions. While the National Policy on Education of 1977 and 1981 could be said to have a nationalistic outlook in terms of the linguistic empowerment of the people; the the1979, 1998 and 1999 policies further set out to ensure the linguistic marginalisation of the vast majority of the Nigerian population to the extent that it has replaced the provision calling for the learning of a second Nigerian language by the Nigeria child with the adoption of French as the second official language of the country.²⁵

²²Adeniran, "Preliminary Observations on Language Use...", 125-126.

²³Adeniran, "Preliminary Observations on Language Use...", 126.

²⁴Adeniran, "Preliminary Observations on Language Use...", 126.

²⁵Adeniran, "Preliminary Observations on Language Use...", 126.

Indeed, it is important to note that language policy and planning in the foreign policy of states is of prime standing, first because of the loyalties to different languages, and second, because of the implications for other multilingual contexts in international relations. Language policy is needed, also, not only for multilingual contexts, but for official, national, educational, inter-ethnic, and international functions. Regrettably, Bamgbose observes that:

... as it is in most other African countries, language policy in Nigeria is rarely documented, but its effects can be seen in action in various domains, such as use as an official language, medium of instruction in schools, language use in the media, and the legislature.²⁶

Consequently, the National Policy on Education (2004) stipulates the following terms:

- (a) In addition to appreciating the importance of language in the educational process, and as a means of preserving the people's culture, the government considers it to be in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his mother tongue. In this connection, the government considers the three major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.
- (b) The medium of instruction in pre-primary schools should be the language of the immediate community in a multinational, school, English may be used as the medium of instruction but the language of the immediate community should be taught in the spoken form.
- (c) Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community and at a later stage English.
- (d) Apart from functional literacy and effective communication, numeracy should be included as an aspect of the curricula on which emphasis should be placed. Where Arabic is the medium of instruction in religion and moral instructions, it will continue to be used.²⁷

Unfortunately, the implementation strategies and all resources needed to make these policy statements realisable were not provided for, by the government. Therefore, all we have in Nigeria, just like the case of Cameroon are mere language policy statements that are not well-defined and to date, there are no educational and language resources as to its implementation. In both Nigeria and Cameroon, the interweaving of the politics of language and ideology relates to the very existence of the state and raises the issue of the people as 'a nation.' If nations were to be defined by the languages spoken by their respective peoples, as is advocated by the protagonists of the 'one nation, one language' philosophy, it might be said that both nation-states are not nations or that there are many nations in one state, granted that, in addition to English and French, both Nigeria and Cameroon have a plethora of national indigenous languages.

²⁶Bamgbose, A. "Language in Contact: Yoruba and English in Nigeria", *Education and Development Journal*, 2. 91, (2001): 329-341.

²⁷Federal Republic of Nigeria: National Policy on Education, (4th Edition, 2004), (Lagos: NERDC press, 2004), 23.

In Cameroon, for instance, the grandiloquence of English and French as international languages and as the only languages appropriate for education as championed by Fonlon²⁸ prevailed when Cameroon became independent and had to consider the language issue for the sake of nation-building. Fonlon viewed no other option for Cameroon in the planning of the country's language policy and propounded official bilingualism as the best language model for education. He presumed that this would guarantee the country's economic stability, foster integration and national unity and create a linkage between Cameroon and the global community. Reasons accounting for this choice of thought appeared to be similar to those justifying the enactment of the 1920 colonial law regarding the use of local languages in schools. French was thought of as a 'no man's language', its adoption was less likely to spark language conflict and its perceived 'utilitarian' value as a global language and as a language of opportunities was decisive in its choice. Similar opinions were also held in West Cameroon regarding the adoption of English.²⁹

English and French are thus the official languages of Cameroon since 1961 and are recognised as such in the country's constitution of 1st September 1961 and amended constitutions of 1972 and 1996. An official bilingualism policy has been implemented since the early 1960s and the education system is made up of two subsystems: Anglophone and Francophone.³⁰ The over 250 Cameroonian languages were sidelined in the planning of the country's language policy, even though some linguists working to codify Cameroonian languages for schooling suggested different models.³¹ For instance, a trilingual model was proposed whereupon an additional language was chosen from among the over 250 local languages, in addition to English and French. Whereas during the colonial era, ideologies about language applied differently in the territories under British and French rules. They appear to be at loggerheads with the creation of the Cameroonian state and the adoption of English and French as official languages.

Furthermore, studies on language ideological divides are grounded in historical and cultural claims related to the British and French colonial legacies in Cameroon.³² Beyond linguistic and cultural claims associated with the use of English and French; the seeming divide between Anglophones and Francophones in Cameroon could be traced back to the colonial territories administered by the British and the French. Hence, the linguistic nature of the divide indicates that it is rather geographical and sociopolitical in nature. Indeed, Anglophone identity established in linguistic and territorial legacy is still very endemic today to the extent of fueling separatist ideologies in the 'Ambazonian' struggle for independence in Southwest Cameroon. Nevertheless,

²⁸ B. Fonlon, "The Language Problem in Cameroon: A Historical Perspective." *Comparative Education*, 5, 1, (1969), 36. 25-49.

²⁹ G. Echu, Colonialism and Linguistic Dilemmas in Africa: Cameroon as a Paradigm (Revisited). *Quest XIII*, 1-2, (1999), 22. 19-26.

³⁰ Genevoix Nana, "Language Ideology and the Colonial Legacy in Cameroon Schools: A Historical Perspective." *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 4, 4; (April 2016), 182.

³¹ Nana, "Language Ideology and the Colonial Legacy in Cameroon Schools: A Historical Perspective." 182

³² Ruth Adebile, "Language Policy in Planning for Education in Cameroon and Nigeria." *Academic Leadership: The Online Journal*, 9, 2; (2011), 12.
<https://scholars.fhsu.edu/alj/vol9/iss2/22>.

Anglophone speakers in Southwest Cameroon remain realistic about the inexorable resolve of being fluent in French to effortlessly relate to fellow Francophone countrymen in an environment where French is used in eight out of the ten regions of Cameroon. Despite advances in legislation in terms of acknowledging the existence of indigenous Cameroonian languages and using them in communication, English and French still hold sway in Cameroon's official diplomacy.

At the level of autochthonic ethnolinguistic and lingua franca for inter-ethnic communication, the following languages are spoken on both sides of the international boundary between Nigeria and Cameroon. They are Ejagham, Boki, (south) Tiv, Hausa, Fulfulde (Benue-Adamawa), Kanuri, Arabic (Borno - Chad), etc. these languages would therefore qualify to be referred to as trans-national languages and not merely based on their existence on both sides of the border divide. But, because they are the ones used by the local peoples for all of their transactions, except at the border post, nobody uses the European imposed languages. In the light of the tremendous volume of economic activities and the socio-cultural interactions across the Nigeria – Cameroon border, the region is of great importance not only to the two states but to most members states of two economic communities in West and Central Africa (the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and East and Central African States (ECCAS)).

Since the aboriginal African languages, particularly the transborder languages, impact the lives of many more borderlands inhabitant than the superimposed foreign languages, one cannot but wonder why it is that the various African countries, especially Nigeria and Cameroon, have not deemed it necessary to accord these languages the attention they deserve in terms of enhancing the status at the bilateral and multilateral relationships. Two of the languages in the Nigeria – Cameroon border region languages are among the dominant Central Chadic languages, and to a large extent, the largest ethnolinguistic fragmentation found in the Nigeria – Cameroon border: the Ejagham and Bokiias Bantoid language groups on both sides of the border.³³ The Ejagham, for instance, occupy a contiguous area Southern and Central Cross River and Southwest Cameroon astride the Nigeria – Cameroon borderlands.

By contrast, the minority status of the superimposed foreign languages in the region is not in doubt. For example, Southwestern Cameroon speaks of the minority who have the mastery of the French language and the majority of the population who know and speak the local languages of Cameroon. In Nigeria, however, despite the status of English as the official language, Bonchuk affirms that "there are domains in the corporate lives of the inhabitants of the borderlands to which the language is irrelevant."³⁴ More importantly, the foreign or European languages tend to promote division between 'the educated elites and the illiterate masses in the countries that have adopted them. It,

³³ C. B. M. Brann, "A Socio-Linguistic Profile of Nigeria's Northern and Eastern Borders," in *Borderlands in Africa: A Multidisciplinary and Comparative Perspective on Nigeria and West Africa*, eds. A. I. Asiwaju and P. O. Adeniyi. (Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 1989), 213.

³⁴ M. O. Bonchuk, "International Boundaries of Nigeria and Peaceful Management: Search for Policy Relevance." *Calabar Journal of Liberal Studies*, VIII (8) 2005, pp. 80-81.

therefore, becomes obvious that these superimposed languages cannot be said to be suitable for mobilization for socio-economic development and socio-cultural integration at the international diplomatic level as indicated earlier. This is evident in the political relations between the two countries as both countries have had to more tilts in the balance. They have shifted from periods of pretentious friendship and cooperation, to the cold war and even near open military confrontation.

Cross-border Governance and Cooperation in the Niger-Cameroon Border Region

It is perhaps pertinent to point out here that although Nigeria and Cameroon share political, economic and cultural affinities, these variables have not helped much in sustaining cooperative relations since independence. Perhaps the fluctuations in cross-border governance and cooperation are largely the ramifications of colonialism: fragmentation of the ethnic groups across borders, unstable boundary regime governance, suspicious and competitive economic and political institutions as well as superimposed foreign languages inherited from independence. In other words, while Cameroon has maintained a more aggressive policy toward Nigeria, Nigeria has maintained a non-aggressive policy toward Cameroon.³⁵ However, the major factor that has affected the Nigeria - Cameroon inter-state relations in the post-independence era has been the border conflicts.

Regional cooperation has been defined by Ernest Haas as “any inter-state arrangement with less than universal participation designed to address some common challenges affecting nation-states in a region or sub-region.”³⁶ In the case of Nigeria and Cameroon, these challenges have been identified and include numerous complex variables. Such variables, according to the National Boundary Commission of Nigeria (NBC) are sheer adjacency of some 1050 miles of shared boundary straddled by identical ethnic groups and cultures, parallel religious adherence by the citizenry on both sides of the boundary divide, the presence of rich natural resources at certain sections of the boundary and a degree of common historical experiences both in the pre-colonial and post-colonial periods.³⁷

Despite the above-shared variables between Nigeria and Cameroon, the two countries have only recently begun to make resolute efforts at cooperation. Situating this kind of potentially conflictual posture resulting from mutual suspicion and distrust at the continental level, A. I. Asiwaju explains that:

The history of Africa since the evolution of modern states, modelled after the European nation-state structure, has

³⁵O.A.Otora, “Where Internationality Meets Locality: Analysis of Conflict of Laws in Cross Border Relations in Nigeria’s Eastern Borderlands.” *Icheke: A Multidisciplinary Journal of Faculty of Humanities*, 16, 2, (2018):101-123.

³⁶E. B. Hass, “The Study of Regional Integration: Reflections on the Joy and Anguish of Pre-Theorizing.” ed. *Regional Integration: Theory and Research*. 24, 4 (1970): 607 - 606.

³⁷Oscar O. B. Ede, “The Relations between Nigeria and Cameroon: Fluctuating Cooperation and Tensions.” *Nigeria and Cameroon: An Annotated Bibliography*. ed. Modupe Irele (Lagos: NIIA, 2002), 7.

been replete with gory incidents of conflicts, mutual distrust and antagonism rather than mutual understanding, deliberations and cooperative determination... the problem has been truly endemic and carries with it the adverse implications, not only for international peace and security; it has also militated against the realization of regional integration across the continent.³⁸

For obvious reasons, Nigeria and Cameroon's bilateral cooperation between 1963 and 1983 culminated in the signing of about eight bilateral agreements covering such areas as Free Movement of Persons and Goods (1963); Social, Cultural and Technical Relations (1972); Security and Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation (1983). Before then, both countries had set up modalities in 1971 to institute a Nigeria - Cameroon Joint Commission (NCJC) for mutual interest and cooperation. The commission was later expanded to aggregate contacts at different levels between the two states, to enhance good neighbourliness and cooperation.³⁹ Indeed, the first meeting of the joint commission was held in Abuja, Nigeria in December 1991. The meeting laid the foundation for transborder cooperation workshops as a demonstration of the political will by both states to enhance cooperation as a strategy of moving from confrontation to cooperation in crisis management diplomacy.

Nevertheless, and despite the expended efforts, recurrent skirmishes and conflicts along and astride the Nigeria – Cameroon border have been a cause for concern. Professor A. I. Asiwaju has convincingly submitted that:

The Nigeria – Cameroon boundary is the most volatile of all Nigeria's shared international boundaries... and some of the boundary conflicts result in fatal accidents which in one or two cases almost led the two countries into open war.

The above should not, however, be interpreted to mean that international boundary conflicts are unexpected phenomena in global politics. They are instead a natural occurrence of what could be described as the border paradox which Lord Curzon argued that "borders are a razor's edge on which hands suspended the contemporary issues of war and peace, life and death to nation-states in international relations."⁴⁰ In other words, after the International Court of Justice's judgement in 2002 which ceded the Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon, there's increased awareness and recognition by both Nigeria and Cameroon of the dangers of border conflicts in their binational relations. Hence, the identification of flash points or early warning signals to such conflicts that have over the years militated against the development of cooperation between both countries accounts for the pride of place now given to border issues in the joints meeting experts of both countries.

³⁸A. I. Asiwaju. Introductory Remarks at the Joint Meeting of Nigerian and Cameroonian Experts on the Nigeria-Cameroon Border, Abuja, 17th December 1991, p. 2.

³⁹M. A. Fonkem, "Translation as a Tool in Cameroon-Nigeria Transborder Cooperation" p. 3.

⁴⁰ Lord Curzon, *Roman Lectures at Oxford*. February 2nd 1907.

Furthermore, the need for increased cross-border cooperation and governance arises from the fact that both Nigeria and Cameroon are now more than ever before making greater efforts to reduce border tensions. The implication is that the two states are exploring ways and means of enhancing their cooperation to steer the fortunes of the shared boundary from the path of conflict to that of peace, progress and prosperity for the respective peoples. This is very important as both countries are being challenged by irridentist pro-self-government agitation from both regions abutting the international boundary (Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) in Southeastern Nigeria and Ambazonia Separatist Movement in Southwest Cameroon). These developments to a large extent, have created a favourable atmosphere for greater understanding between both nation-states and linguistics and communication should be seen as being very crucial for a successful realization of this noble objective, grated that either of the two nation-states uses a different official language, the bilingual nature of the Republic of Cameroon notwithstanding.

It is interesting to note that geo-politically, Nigeria and Cameroon occupy very strategic and central positions in Africa. These two contiguous neighbouring nation-states have from time past, been some of the major crossroads of Africa's cultural and economic development. U. I. Ukwu illustrates this point clearly and submits thus:

... the boundaries of seven of the major language sub-families of Africa meet within the (Nigeria-Cameroon border) region, and ancient political and economic relationships link it with its surrounding areas and across the continent to the wider world.⁴¹

Unfortunately, however, between the two neighbouring nation-states, their cross-border relationships have been one which is replete with gory incidents of conflicts, mutual distrust and antagonism. It is imperative to note that mistrust destroys relationships even when it is unfounded. On this score, Professor A. I. Asiwaju further notes:

... a flash-back to the sordid past conjures a sad memory of legions of border clashes, resulting in avoidable losses of human life, erosion of mutual trust and confidence and erratic destruction of socio-cultural affinities between the vivisected populations on both sides of the border.⁴²

The question which often arises is, why is it that these two neighbouring nation-states with a great deal of shared historical past turn their back on each other instead of being engaged as partners in search of solutions to their inherently common problem? The reasons of course include mutual distrust and suspicion, which could be adduced by different hypotheses, including cross-cultural

⁴¹ U. I. Ukwu, "Transport and Communication as Factors in the Modernization and Development of Nigeria." *Readings in Social Sciences: Issues in National Development*, ed. E. C. Amucheazi. (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1985), p. 117.

⁴² A. I. Asiwaju, Introductory Remarks at the Joint Meeting of Nigerian and Cameroonians Experts...p. 2.

communication problems. Thus, there is always a tendency for conflict to arise between people, especially when they cannot understand each other.

It is pertinent to note at this juncture that the cross-cultural communication problem in the Nigeria – Cameroon border region is a consequence of an accident of European influence on African history. For instance, Nigeria being an erstwhile British colonial territory is predominantly Anglophone. Cameroon too, like Nigeria, is Francophone as a result of its colonization by the French, even though it adopted a bilingual posture as a result of the Southwest region which was hitherto independent and was under British control. At independence, therefore, and especially after the plebiscites, ethnolinguistic and socio-cultural groups were split and placed into two inter-colonial jurisdictions thereby seeing themselves far apart as strangers.

The problem of language translation in communication in the Nigeria – Cameroon transborder governance and cooperation can be expressed at two levels, namely, the official level and the grassroots or unofficial level. At the unofficial or grassroots level, there is absolutely no serious problem along and astride the Nigeria – Cameroon borderlands from the Atlantic Ocean in the south to the tripoint of Lake Chad. This is so because the border populations inhabiting the borderlands are of the same ethnocultural groups that were balkanized by the fiat of European political surgery.⁴³ In the southern sector, for example, there is pidgin English, Efik, Ejagham, Boki, etc, which are common on both sides of the boundary or Fulani (Fulfulde) and Hausa or some other local languages in the north. These cross-border languages are often tools for cross-border interaction and trade. The spin-off from these has often guaranteed peace, cooperation, stability, etc which are necessary for cross-border governance and development. In other words, it is at the official level that the major contestation exists where the languages of administration and international communication remain because of the foreign languages bequeathed by the respective former colonizers. Fonkem is of the view that “these same languages, among other things enormously facilitated communication with the former colonial power, and this has many political, diplomatic as well as cultural implications.”⁴⁴

Thus, it is only at the official level of contact and communication that these superimposed European languages that both Nigeria and Cameroon have carried out their cooperation such as bilateral and multilateral diplomatic initiatives since attaining political independence. It is only rational to submit that language translation has remained imperative to bridge the communication gap created by linguistic barriers created by colonialism; hence the need to turn to the grassroots level of relationships across boundaries, whereby the micro-historical integrating percolating realities could be harnessed by both governments for border governance and cross-border cooperation at the macro of official level.

⁴³ M. O. Bonchuk, “International Boundaries of Nigeria and Peaceful Management...” p. 93.

⁴⁴ Fonkem, “Translation as a Tool in Cameroon-Nigeria Transborder Cooperation”, p. 5.

Conclusion

The paper examined the use of different official languages in Nigeria and Cameroon and observed that it is difficult if not impossible for the two nation-states to effectively enhance their border governance and cross-border cooperation without resorting to translation. It was indicated that resorting to translation as it is the only means of communication could not guarantee effective communication for cooperation. Therefore, for translation to play an effective role and produce the desired result, its quality has to be ensured. This argued against the background that translation has the power to generate positive impact as well as create situations that would lead to negative consequences if done with greater care and efficiency.

To foster and enhance border governance and cross-border cooperation between Nigeria and Cameroon, both nation-states should aspire for excellence in language translation quality, especially in keeping with their recent resolve to jointly demonstrate a model of transborder cooperation and boundary conflict management in Africa. Since the basis for human communication is interaction as conflict is defined as the breakdown in communication, transborder communication in the border region must be made a conscious deliberate process from which infinite interaction could be derived.

For effective border governance and cross-border cooperation, the grassroots perspective as evidenced by the pre-colonial linkages of ethnolinguistic and cultural relations across the border region should be encouraged to increase the possibility of realizing effective communication at the more official conflictual level as the intensity of informal interaction or micro-diplomatic relations is raised. More so, to strengthen the already existing cordial relations at the grassroots level, radio and television programmes that utilize the local border languages should be encouraged as well as the use of unity institutions, and joint cross-border ventures in the use of local languages to disseminate information should be established.

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