

AUTHOR:
Mwamba Chibamba¹

AFFILIATION:
¹University of Ottawa

EMAIL:
mchibamba@yahoo.co.uk

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.38140/jtsa.1.4387>

*Journal for Translation
Studies in Africa*
2020 (1): 63-66

PUBLISHED:
22 May 2020

TRANSLATION PRACTICES IN A DEVELOPMENTAL CONTEXT: AN EXPLORATION OF PUBLIC HEALTH COMMUNICATION IN ZAMBIA

Translation studies in Africa has often been studied through the lens of postcolonial and literary studies (Tyulenev & Van Rooyen 2013). In more recent times, there has been a call for scholars to look beyond the postcolony and to enlarge the boundaries within which translation is studied (e.g. Marais 2017, Marais & Feinauer 2017, Susam-Saraeva 2002, Tymoczko 2007, Tyulenev & Van Rooyen 2013). Some scholars have argued that the concept of translation has for too long been studied from a narrow, Eurocentric viewpoint, based on literate societies. Inspired by this criticism, this study explores how translation is practiced in a very specific context, namely that of a developing country. It highlights the importance of socio-economic and cultural context in translation and how the different issues such as illiteracy, poverty, disease burden, geographical spread, and religious and cultural beliefs interact with each other in the area of public-health communication.

The study takes a two-pronged approach. A preliminary bibliometric survey to gauge the place of Africa in translation studies as a discipline was conducted before a review of the literature and analysis of selected health messages. The results of the bibliometric survey support the hypothesis that Eurocentric theories of translation studies tend to restrict broader views of translation, especially in non-Western societies. In spite of its limited scope, the survey gives a glimpse of what areas in translation are studied the most on the African continent. Taking a leaf from Tymoczko's (2007) work, the study advances the idea of broadening conceptualizations of translation to better suit specific contexts such as Africa.

Recognizing the importance of all translation scholarship on the continent, the author points out that society is constantly evolving and as such there are many aspects of translation in Africa that are worth studying in present-day Africa. For example, whereas translation and writing were used as resistance in colonial times, the majority of



Published by the UFS
<http://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/jtsa>

© Creative Commons
With Attribution (CC-BY)



Africa's current population who were born after independence (1950/60s) have embraced and appropriated the European languages that were imposed on their forefathers. The status of European languages in Africa has therefore evolved over the years.

Drawing from Tymoczko's (2007) concept of translation as a cluster concept, Jakobson's ([1959] 1966) three types of translation, Marais' (2014) complexity theory approach, Vermeer ([1989] 2002) and Reiss and Vermeer's ([1984] 2014) functionalist theories, the thesis conceptualizes translation as a communicative act that involves more than just the transposition of text from one language to another. Accordingly, the study views translation as a complex process that involves many elements. In the case of public-health communication, for example, the author posits that there is no one source text but rather a body of scientific source information that has to be packaged and translated and made palatable for a specific audience. The translation may be interlingual, intralingual or intersemiotic. The most important criterion in translation in public health is transmitting scientifically factual and correct information and not necessarily accuracy or equivalency of a specific text.

Taking Zambia and the southern African region as a case study, the author discusses what constitutes a developing country and some of the socio-economic, religious and cultural factors that affect the communication of health messages to the public. From a cultural perspective, health in communal societies such as those in Africa is considered to be a communal issue while the opposite is true in societies that favour individualism. This is significant in terms of how messages are packaged. In many cases, messages are constructed to target the community rather than the individual. This affects how these messages are translated and what media is used. Multimodality comes into play here as media such as video or drama performances that can reach a group of people at the same time are favoured ahead of the more individualistic media like brochures. In addition, other factors also have to be taken into account like the literacy and education levels of the target audience as well as access to resources and equipment. Therefore, decisions on what media and what language to use for a specific message are often influenced by the dynamics of the target audience. The very fact that a message seeks to reach a whole community determines the approach taken by the designers and transmitters of the message. In relation to culture, the author relies on some health-communication theories such as the health belief model to support the idea that a target audience's worldview and societal belief systems also matter in communicating health messages (Schiavo 2014).

The thesis furthermore highlights the crucial role that orality plays in African society. For instance, even in countries where literacy rates are quite high, such as South Africa and Zimbabwe, it was quickly discovered, due in large part to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, that the more conventional media such as written literature were not sufficient to successfully educate people about the disease and to influence behaviour change to avoid infection. In terms of educating the population, the edutainment model (Singhal & Rogers 2004; Singhal et al. 2004) appeared to be one of the most effective ways of communicating about the complex realities of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Pioneered in Mexico by Miguel Sabido, the edutainment model combines education and entertainment while at the same time delivering an important health message. Factual information about a specific issue such as HIV/AIDS is woven into a soap opera. Lessons are imparted about a health situation through the protagonists. The message usually involves a character demonstrating desired good behaviour and a character exhibiting undesired behaviour. The consequences of making the right choices and the wrong choices are therefore demonstrated through the characters of the drama serial. The study includes the

analysis of a few health messages in relation to their context. It demonstrates the importance of intersemiotic translation and multimodality in orality-based societies.

The study reveals that, although translation is perceived differently across the region under study, it is usually only identified as translation, or explicitly mentioned as such in health campaigns, when interlingual translation takes place. However, actual practice is more consistent with a much broader conceptualization of translation. It is worth noting, however, that the rationale behind the criticism against the top-down, one-size-fits-all models in health promotion underpins the whole idea of intralingual and intersemiotic translation. In short, health promotion has increasingly privileged the construction of target-oriented messages attuned to local contexts and cultures. To this effect, the study reveals that intralingual and intersemiotic translation (and their underlying multimodality) are the types of translation that are mostly used in this specific context.

Numerous examples of health messages demonstrate diverse techniques of using intralingual and intersemiotic translation. For example, an audio-visual message in English can be localized for the target audience by using a local accent, local slang or code-switching to deliver the message. To reach literate or semi-literate audiences, often only a few catchwords or phrases in a particular message are translated into the local language. Media such as radio, film and sketches are also often used where available and accessible.

The study also reveals the disparities in terms of translation training and translation as a profession in the various countries of the Southern African region. Some countries have well-established translation training programs while others do not. This, however, does not appear to be a factor in terms of translation practice. Translation still occurs regardless of the presence of trained translators. In Zambia, for example, translation is often performed by people of different training backgrounds, often related to language. For instance, journalists working in local-language transmission and teachers of local languages often play translator roles in various projects requiring translation. One of the implications of this is of course the low status and invisibility of the translator. Very rarely were translators acknowledged or even named in the products analysed. On a more positive note, this situation also presents the opportunity for new tailor-made translation programs that can respond to the local needs to be developed in institutions of higher learning. For example, translation can very well form a part of the training in professions related to health communication, public health or agriculture outreach.

In terms of how translation is practiced in public-health communication, O'Halloran, Tan and Wignell's (2016) notion of resemiotisation comes to mind. Messages are reconstructed and reformulated from the source literature by local professionals to fit the culture and worldview of the target audience. The local professionals therefore play the role of linguistic and cultural translators. Although the study did not focus on measuring the occurrence of the three types of translation inspired by Jakobson, it demonstrates a clear preference for intersemiotic (and multimodal) translation, given the socioeconomic and cultural dynamics of the target audience. The compatibility of intersemiotic translation with a non-literate, oral society is evident.

REFERENCES

- Jakobson, R [1959] 1966. 'On linguistic aspects of translation'. In RA Brower (ed.), *On translation*, OUP, New York. pp. 232–239.
- Marais, K 2014. *Translation theory and development studies: A complexity theory approach*. Routledge, New York. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203768280>
- Marais, K 2017. 'We have never been un(der)developed: Translation and the biosemiotic foundation of being in the global south'. In K Marais & I Feinauer (eds.), *Translation studies beyond the postcolony*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne. pp. 8–32.
- Marais, K & I Feinauer 2017. 'Introduction'. In K Marais & I Feinauer (eds.), *Translation Studies Beyond the Postcolony*. Cambridge Scholars, Newcastle Upon Tyne.
- O'Halloran, KL, S Tan & P Wignell 2016. 'Intersemiotic translation as resemiotisation: A multimodal perspective', *Signata*, vol. 7, pp. 199–229. <https://doi.org/10.4000/signata.1223>
- Reiss, K & HJ Vermeer [1984] 2014. *Towards a general theory of translational action: Skopos theory explained*. Transl. by C Nord. Routledge, London. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315759715>
- Schiavo, R 2014. *Health communication: From theory to practice*, 2nd edn. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Singhal, A & EM Rogers 2004. 'The status of entertainment education worldwide'. In A Singhal, MJ Cody, EM Rogers & M Sabido (eds.), *Entertainment education and social change: History, research and practice*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, London. pp. 3–20. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410609595>
- Singhal, A, S Usdin, E Scheepers, S Goldstein & G Japhet 2004. 'Entertainment-education strategy in development communication'. In CC Okigbo & F Eribo (eds.), *Development and communication in Africa*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham. pp. 141–153.
- Susam-Saraeva, Ş 2002. 'A multilingual and international translation studies?'. In T Hermans (ed.), *Cross-cultural transgressions. Research models in translation studies*. St. Jerome, Manchester. pp. 193–207.
- Tymoczko, M 2007. *Enlarging translation, empowering translators*. St. Jerome, Manchester.
- Tyulenev, S & M van Rooyen 2013. 'Preface'. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, vol. 31, no. 4, pp. iii–v. <https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2013.864446>
- Vermeer, HJ [1989] 2002. 'Skopos and commission in translation theory'. In L Venuti (ed.), *The translation studies reader*, transl. by A Chesterman. Routledge, London. pp. 227–238.