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EDITORIAL

COMMUNITY INTERPRETING AND TRANSLATION IN AFRICA: BRIDGING THE LANGUAGE DIVIDE

1. BACKGROUND

In an increasingly interconnected world, the relevance of effective communication cannot be overemphasized. Nowhere is this more evident than in the diverse and linguistically rich continent of Africa. With over 2,000 indigenous languages spoken across its vast expanse, Africa presents unique challenges and opportunities for community interpreting and translation. As a matter of fact, community translation and interpretation is a daily occurrence in many African communities, from the newsreader who takes an article from Reuters or BBC and renders it in the local language, adding their own cultural twist, to the master of ceremonies at a traditional marriage ceremony between a couple from different ethnic/language groups, to the agricultural extension officer who needs to translate his message of seedling management to a group of farmers who speaks a different language. In this editorial, we present selected papers from the ATSA conference on Community Interpreting and Translation in the African Context, exploring the significance of language empowerment and the bridging of linguistic divides.

The 2nd Biennial conference of the Association for Translation Studies in Africa (ATSA) was hosted by the University of Ghana in June 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the event was hosted online with hundred participants from 23 countries and 33 institutions, mainly from the African continent, including participants from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, and Uganda. Participants from Europe (Belgium, France, Germany, Spain) and the Americas (Brazil, Canada, and the United States of America) also attended and participated. There was a good blend of translators, interpreters, trainers/instructors, researchers, and students – evidence that there is growing interest in research on translation issues, not just for researchers but also for professionals on the ground. The participation was very encouraging not only in terms of the 18 papers that were presented on a wide

range of topics but also because of the number of non-presenting participants who engaged actively during the conference. The variety of the conference presentations indicated that community translation has been practiced in Africa long before the term was coined. From the act of carrying out traditional marriage ceremonies to local language journalism, there is ample evidence to show that Africans have always relied on community translation to bridge gaps that might arise due to its highly multilingual nature. What has been lacking and was made clear through the presentations at this conference, was the need for more research from and on Africa concerning community translation to be made visible and disseminated widely. More importantly, there is the need to theorize Africa as far as the nature and practice of community translation in African contexts is concerned as a look at Western literature seems to focus on community translation in the domains of health, justice, and migration. The Journal of Translation Studies in Africa is still young and barely three years old. However, within this short period, it has proven to be carving a niche for itself in terms of setting the agenda and creating a space for translation studies research on the African continent. We therefore count it a privilege to contribute to this special issue.

2. CONTRIBUTIONS IN THIS VOLUME

The articles that make up this special issue delve into the realm of Community Translation in the African Context, focusing on five distinct studies that shed light on different aspects of this theme. Peter Flynn's article provides a general conceptual background for the issue as he discusses concepts used in translation studies. While tracing the development and shifting interpretations of key concepts in translation studies and ethnography, the article draws on ethnographic data to shed new light on intralingual translation. In spite of the setting of his examples not being African, the main argument of his paper is relevant and applicable – that it is important to ground these concepts in lived experiences and cultural contexts.

Jacobus A. Naudé and Cynthia L. Miller-Naudé uncover the historical significance of the Rosetta Stele (generally referred to as the Rosetta Stone), a multilingual artifact that contributed greatly to deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphics. It explores how this has unlocked new knowledge and insights, particularly in the realm of African orthographies. Through an examination of the connections between multilingualism, translation, and interpreting during the Ptolemaic era in Egypt, this article highlights the relevance of this historical artifact to the African context.

The concept of Indirect Translation (ITr) is discussed in detail by Damola. E. Adeyefa. Basing his study on D. O. Fagunwa's novel 'Ògbójú Ọḍẹ Nínú Igbó Irúnmalẹ' and its translations, Adeyefa critically analyzes ITr possibilities in 'Ògbójú' and its translations, particularly the Ultimate Target Text (UTT) 'La forêt aux mille démons' by Louis Camara. A reevaluation of the assumed indirectness in Fagunwa's original work, analyzed in conjunction with a study of the degree of indirectness in Camara's French retranslation reveals an interplay of ITr between Fagunwa's original work in Yoruba, the English translation by Wole Soyinka and the French retranslation by Camara.

Translation into languages that do not have a large body of literature in certain domains requires a level of lexical creativity. This is explored by Clara Asare Nyarko as she provides a description of lexical creativity in health translation in Ghana, using examples from the Akan language. Focusing on the use of a bi-directional English-Akan parallel corpus, the author analyzes lexical creativity as a strategy employed by translators working with Akan, a language often considered a minority language in the African context and explores how the corpus can empower community translation in Ghana.

Kanja van der Merwe's article provides insight into the often-neglected area of prisoner interpreting in Nigeria and South Africa, by exploring the necessary communicative competence of interpreters in this setting, the dynamics of power and conflicting goals that need to be navigated by the interpreters.

Collectively, the articles in this special issue provide further insights into the vibrant world of community interpreting and translation in Africa and demonstrate the richness and complexity of the practice on the continent from past eras to contemporary times. It is hoped that these papers will challenge scholars of translation studies in Africa or on Africa to reexamine and embrace the peculiarities and uniqueness of the practice of community translation in Africa and that these articles will spawn further research into the domain.

Happy reading.