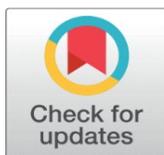


TRANSLATION AND THE TEACHING OF LINGUISTICS IN KISWAHILI IN KENYAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

A number of universities in Kenya courses in Kiswahili. This being a language, a number of those courses rely on research that has been done all over the world in various languages. In order for this body of language to be shared and used during instructions in Kiswahili classes by the instructors, translation plays a very important part. A basic course in translation is necessary as a facility to help share that knowledge. This study examined the place given to translation studies as a tool to the study of linguistics in Kiswahili. Common reference texts used in Kiswahili linguistics were analyzed to determine the extent to which they relied on translation as a discipline. Curriculums of universities were also looked at. Results indicated that some universities did not teach translation studies to some of the students whose courses of study included linguistics in Kiswahili. Others included translation studies at much higher levels and therefore not useful to beginners. It is recommended that all students studying linguistics in Kiswahili be taught translation studies at the point of the start of their studies to enable them to use it as a facility for further linguistics research.

Keywords: Kiswahili, Translation, Linguistics, Curriculum, Research, Universities

1. INTRODUCTION

The teaching of linguistics in whichever language depends largely on research that has been carried out in different parts of the world in diverse languages. This is because linguistic phenomena are found in the worlds more than seven thousand languages. [Baker and González \(2011\)](#) underscores this by pointing out how globalization, mobility of people have established translation and interpreting more firmly in the public consciousness. In order to understand the concepts found in the various branches of linguistics i.e., phonetics, phonology, morphology semantics, syntax and others, there is need for scholars of linguistics and especially those teaching courses in linguistics at university level to study the results of research that

have been conducted in different languages. While analysing of texts in terms of morphology, syntax and discourse guarantees better understanding of source texts [Tofail \(2014\)](#), it impossible to think of that without the ability to translate in the first place. She further argues that translators should be equipped with the required tools to analyse, understand, and evaluate source and target texts in the translation process. The results of those research are usually presented in different languages or rather the languages in which those studies were done. In order to use them, translation has to be done for them to be useful for those who speak different languages.

This situation underscores the need to recognize the importance of translation as a key factor in making the results of these research intelligible especially to those who do not speak the languages in which the research was conducted or reported. Knowledge generated by translation studies forms an important part of the intellectual capital in the knowledge society [Risku et al. \(2010\)](#). The ability to translate the results is therefore helpful to the instructors. It enables them to present those concepts in a language that their students can understand and with simplicity required of the level they are handling. Translation then must be seen as a cognitive activity that assists students in learning new phrases and expressions in the target language and using them to communicate meaning to others [Al-Musawi \(2014\)](#) Kiswahili instructors for instance need to have the ability to translate from as many languages as possible to enhance their ability to teach linguistics effectively. A quick view of curricula indicate that a number of reference texts used by Kiswahili instructors are written in English and other languages.

This paper examines the current situation in the teaching of linguistics in Kiswahili in Kenyan universities, the available texts in use and other resources and the importance of the ability to translate as a tool for successful teaching of linguistics. Finally, it gives suggestions on how this situation can be improved by putting a case for translation courses to be taught in the early stages of undergraduate classes to enable them to apply it as a means in understanding linguistic concepts.

2. THE TEACHING OF TRANSLATION STUDIES IN KENYAN UNIVERSITIES

While there are a number of universities in Kenya where translation studies are taught, the course is considered more or less a stand-alone course and is not taught as an enabling facility with an intention of making the learning of other courses easier. However, instructors who teach linguistics and specifically those who teach linguistics in Kiswahili recognize the importance of translation. This is evident especially considering that most of them use texts that are written in other languages apart from Kiswahili. The current situation in Kenya is that there are very few texts written in Kiswahili and therefore teaching Linguistics in Kiswahili without the ability to translate can pose very serious challenges.

While it is good to give credit to these instructors for the great effort, it would make their work easier if they take a different approach. Currently they use translation to transfer knowledge from other languages which they impart to their classes but without empowering the classes they teach to use the same facility to be able to look for this knowledge themselves.

If a course in translation was offered to students studying Kiswahili linguistics at the initial stages of their studies at the university, then it would be easier for them to use it as a facility to search for knowledge. This should especially be so because

at the pre- university stages (secondary schools) in Kenya, there is no part of the syllabus that prepares a student to be able to do the kind of translation required of them to be able to get knowledge from books not written in Kiswahili. Although they studied English and Kiswahili in secondary school as a compulsory subject, translation requires specific skills that they need to deliberately acquire to enable them to use it to translate the concepts at the university level. This means that students joining university are not equipped with the ability to do meaningful translation of the kinds of texts they are required to interact with.

A study of Kiswahili course outlines in a number of universities in Kenya show that the instructors who prepare those outlines include a number of books published in other languages. Most of them are written in English. It is not clear how Kiswahili instructors expect these learners to benefit from these texts, yet they are not armed with the right skills to be able to translate them especially during the early stages before they interact with any translation course at the university. Translation courses in most of the curricula are taught in second, third and fourth years of study at the university.

In the universities that were studied, the course on translation appeared only in the curriculum of universities offering a Bachelor of Arts course in Kiswahili. In universities without the B.A course in Kiswahili, translation as a course was completely left out. Despite that, the expectation of the instructors is that their Kiswahili students use books written in other languages as reference texts. There is no evidence of deliberate effort by these instructors to give their students specific translation skills for purposes of using these references. This is obviously a serious omission since it is clear that for them to use those texts, they need to have a functional knowledge of translation of texts.

3. METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

3.1. KISWAHILI LINGUISTICS TEXTS USED IN LINGUISTICS CLASSES

Texts on Kiswahili linguistics appear to have relied heavily on translation as a tool to be able to explain a number of linguistics concepts. A study was done on books published in Kiswahili by different authors. Specific attention was given to the reference material that the authors of those books relied upon. This was done by looking at the total number of reference material that the author used. The purpose of this was to determine how many references material they referred to are published in Kiswahili and those published in other languages.

Below are texts commonly used by Kiswahili linguistics instructors in a number of universities in Kenya. The texts mentioned are published in Kiswahili (Swahili language). Reference has been made to the reference pages of the texts to enable the reader to see the reliance of these authors on books written in other languages.

[Mgullu \(2002\)](#) Mtalaa wa Isimu has a total of 99 references. Out of those 90 are in English while only 9 are written in Kiswahili.

[Njogu et al. \(2006\)](#) Sarufi ya Kiswahili; Uchanganuzi na matumizi with a total of 57 references, 44 are written in English while only 13 are in Kiswahili.

[Massamba \(2004\)](#) Fonolojia ya Kiswahili Sanifu. Out of 12 references only 6 are written in Kiswahili while the rest are in English.

[Massamba \(2003\)](#) Sarufi Maumbo ya Kiswahili Sanifu. Out of 16 references, 8 are written in Kiswahili while the remaining 8 are in English.

[Mukhwana and Mwangi \(2011\)](#) Isimu Jamii. Out of a total of 39 references relied upon, only 9 are written in Kiswahili while 30 are written in English.

The examples given above are a clear indicator that the experts who have written the texts used in linguistics courses in Kiswahili at the university level recognize the importance of translation as tool for teaching linguistics in universities. From the data presented above of selected texts, it can be seen that there were a total of 201 reference materials that were referred to by the authors. Out of these only 41 were written in Kiswahili. It means that the authors appear to be using a lot of texts from other languages other than Kiswahili.

4. DISCUSSIONS

4.1. THE GAP

While it is true that translation is taught in a number of Kenyan universities, the objectives of teaching translation courses therein require re-examination. If the main objective of the course is to enable the learners acquire translation skills, then there is need to include the aspect of timing so that translation is not only a course but rather an enabling research tool. Timing here meaning that the course is taught early enough during the student's university studies to enable them to use the skills taught.

There is evidence that some students in universities in Kenya study Kiswahili including literature in Kiswahili and finally complete their studies without taking any course in translation at all. Some of those students are enrolled in Education courses and the assumption is that once they graduate, they will be teachers in secondary schools where they will teach Kiswahili and perhaps another subject. It is thought that maybe a course like translation studies may not be of much use to them. However, some of these students later go back to university to study Kiswahili at postgraduate level. Such students meet serious challenges because they lack such an important enabling tool for conducting research.

Apart from undergraduate studies, there is also evidence that translation is not taught at master's level in some universities for students who are studying Kiswahili. Any student of linguistics understands that inability to translate can be a serious impediment to research in linguistics. This skill is required to enable a scholar to understand various theories, analyse various texts and to understand the methodologies used by researchers in the various areas of specialization.

4.2. JUSTIFICATION FOR THE TEACHING OF TRANSLATION TO LINGUISTICS STUDENTS

Linguistic researchers analyse sound patterns in diverse languages. Although Kiswahili has its own phonology like other languages, the teaching of that phonology requires that experts use examples from other languages to show similarities and differences as is common practice in studies in linguistics. Since the studies in those languages are done and reported in languages, anyone who wants a clear understanding of the results of that research should have the ability to translate in order to benefit from them. As said earlier, instructors of Kiswahili in universities rely on this research underscoring the importance of translation ability.

Sociolinguistics for example analyses language as used in society all over the world. There are very few texts written in Kiswahili especially at the university level that cover this area. The ones that are available have references from books written in other languages mostly English. This further buttress the fact that the ability to

translate is important for students to explain linguistic phenomena arising from such studies.

Inability to translate therefore stifles the ability to conduct a serious linguistic study. It is worth noting that a researcher may have knowledge of the language in which a text is presented but the inability to translate due to lack of translation skill can still be a barrier to understanding and presenting those concepts clearly in the target language. A course in translation arms the researcher with the required skill to be able to do that.

Translation skill is therefore important not only for the instructors but also for the students. As already mentioned earlier some students studying Kiswahili at postgraduate level face serious challenges when confronted with texts written in English during research. A number fail to make use of those texts effectively because of lack of proper translation skills.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Students studying linguistics courses at the university should be taught a course in translation. This should be done irrespective of whether they will earn bachelor's in education or Arts.
- A basic course in translation should be taught in the first year of study with the intention of using it as a facility to enhance linguistic studies not for purposes of training professional translators and interpreters.
- Students studying linguistics in both Kiswahili, English and any other language should be taught a compulsory course in translation both at undergraduate and postgraduate level.

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