

Impact of Migration on Translation Practices: A Study of Language Mediation in Multilingual Communities

Christopher Chinedu Nwike¹, Ihechinyere Ebulu Ndubuisi¹,
& Kosisochukwu Emmanuella Nnaka²

National Open University of Nigeria¹

Department of Linguistics, Foreign and Nigerian Languages

Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University²

Department of Linguistics

&

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria³

Department of Linguistics

Corresponding Author's Email: cnwike@noun.edu.ng

Abstract

This study examines the impact of migration on translation practices in Nigeria's multilingual urban centres - Abuja, Lagos, and Port Harcourt. It examines the frequency and effectiveness of translation methods, as well as user satisfaction with the accessibility of translations. Using a descriptive mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 300 Igbo participants (100 per city) through surveys, ethnographic fieldwork, and case studies. These individuals live in areas where Pidgin English and other indigenous languages such as Yoruba and Hausa are commonly spoken. The study focuses on how these languages facilitate communication among speakers in these urban contexts. Descriptive statistics reveal that migrants frequently use translation tools, with machine translators like Google Translate and DeepL being the most common, followed by informal human interpreters such as family members. These choices are influenced by cost and limited access to professional translation services. Participants expressed significant dissatisfaction with the availability of translation services in public sectors, citing inadequate multilingual support in critical areas such as healthcare, education, and the legal system. While machine translation offers convenience, human translation is perceived as more effective, especially in culturally nuanced or high-stakes situations. An emerging preference for hybrid translation models, which combine AI efficiency with human accuracy, reflects changing user expectations. Theoretically, the study reframes translation as a fundamental right rather than a service. Practically, it advocates for multilingual policy reform, investment in hybrid translation infrastructure, and community-based language mediation. These measures are crucial for inclusive communication and social integration in Nigeria's linguistically diverse urban settings.

Keywords: Language Mediation, Machine Translation Practices, Migration, Multilingual Communities, Professional Interpreters

Impact de la Migration sur les Pratiques de Traduction : Une Étude de la Médiation Linguistique dans les Communautés Multilingues

Résumé

Cette étude examine l'impact des migrations sur les pratiques de traduction dans les centres urbains multilingues du Nigéria : Abuja, Lagos et Port Harcourt. Elle analyse la fréquence et l'efficacité des méthodes de traduction, ainsi que la satisfaction des utilisateurs quant à l'accessibilité des traductions. Une approche descriptive mixte a été utilisée pour recueillir des données auprès de 300 participants Igbo (100 par ville) au moyen d'enquêtes, d'un travail de terrain ethnographique et d'études de cas. Ces personnes vivent dans des zones où le pidgin anglais et d'autres langues autochtones, comme le yoruba et le haoussa, sont couramment parlés. L'étude s'intéresse à la manière dont ces langues facilitent la communication entre les locuteurs dans ces contextes urbains. Les statistiques descriptives révèlent que les migrants utilisent fréquemment des outils de traduction, les traducteurs automatiques tels que Google Traduction et DeepL étant les plus courants, suivis par des interprètes humains informels, comme les membres de la famille. Ces choix sont influencés par le coût et l'accès limité aux services de traduction professionnels. Les participants ont exprimé une profonde insatisfaction quant à la disponibilité des services de traduction dans le secteur public, déplorant un soutien multilingue insuffisant dans des domaines essentiels tels que la santé, l'éducation et le système judiciaire. Si la traduction automatique offre un certain confort, la traduction humaine est perçue comme plus efficace, notamment dans les situations complexes sur le plan culturel ou à forts enjeux. L'émergence d'une préférence pour les modèles de traduction hybrides, qui allient l'efficacité de l'IA à la précision humaine, témoigne de l'évolution des attentes des utilisateurs. Sur le plan théorique, l'étude envisage la traduction comme un droit fondamental plutôt que comme un simple service. Sur le plan pratique, elle préconise une réforme des politiques multilingues, des investissements dans les infrastructures de traduction hybrides et une médiation linguistique communautaire. Ces mesures sont cruciales pour une communication inclusive et une intégration sociale optimale dans les milieux urbains nigériens, caractérisés par leur diversité linguistique.

Mots-clés : Médiation linguistique, Pratiques de traduction automatique, Migration, Communautés multilingues, Interprètes professionnels

INTRODUCTION

Language diversity and communication patterns among societies are influenced by migration, which is a basic part of human history. Due to linguistic enrichment and communication difficulties, people and groups connecting their languages with new linguistic contexts often traverse national and regional borders as a result of economic opportunities, wars, education, or climate change. The dynamic linguistic landscape of Nigerian cities like Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt, where speakers of Hausa, Igbo, and¹ Yoruba cohabit and interact daily as a result of internal migration. Similarly, cities like New York, London, and Dubai have become cosmopolitan hotspots with hundreds of languages spoken, thanks to worldwide migration. This growing linguistic diversity calls for efficient language mediation through translation and interpretation to promote communication and integration within multilingual societies.¹

This is to ensure that migrants and host communities can communicate effectively and obtain necessary services, including healthcare, education, legal aid, and social integration; hence, translation is vital.^{2,3} To improve accessibility for various linguistic groups, official documents, court cases, and educational materials are frequently translated into important indigenous languages in Nigeria, such as Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba.⁴ For instance, to facilitate wider political participation, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) translates voting materials into indigenous languages. Similarly, qualified interpreters and translators support multilingual communication in the UN and EU to guarantee inclusive policymaking and humanitarian initiatives⁶.

Community interpreters are essential in helping migrant populations navigate legal systems, medical consultations, and employment opportunities in global migration hotspots like Johannesburg and Berlin. The translation in migrant settings presents many challenges, such as cultural differences, ethical dilemmas, and the need to balance linguistic accuracy with accessibility. For example, Hausa-speaking migrants from Nigeria who relocate to countries with a majority of English or French speakers

¹ Bamgbose, Ayo. *Language and Exclusion: The Consequences of Language Policies in Africa*. Hamburg: LIT Verlag, 2000.

² Nwike, Christopher Chinedu. *Procedures and Challenges in Translating a Prose: A Study of Chike and the River*. B.A. project, Department of Linguistics, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2015.

³ Nwike, Christopher Chinedu. "An Intersemiotic Translation of *Nkape Anya Ukwu*." *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 12, no. 2 (2021): 245–251. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1202.04>.

⁴ Nwike, Christopher Chinedu. *Issues and Challenges in Translating Legal Text from English to the Igbo Language*. M.A. dissertation, Department of Linguistics, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2019.

frequently struggle with linguistic adaptation and require translation services for essential information, and Hausa-speaking migrants moving to Igbo or Yoruba-dominated regions within Nigeria may need language mediation in legal, medical, and commercial interactions. Although concerns about impartiality and accuracy frequently surface, the role of unofficial interpreters such as multilingual family members and community volunteers becomes especially important in bridging these gaps.⁷

Code-switching, hybrid languages, and changes in translation techniques to meet changing linguistic demands are examples of linguistic innovations brought about by migration.⁸ Despite their disparate linguistic histories, Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba speakers can communicate with each other thanks to Nigerian Pidgin, which acts as a lingua franca among various ethnic groups in Nigeria. Globally, hybrid languages like Sheng (a combination of Swahili and English in Kenya) and Spanglish (a combination of Spanish and English in the United States) show how migrants incorporate aspects of their adopted and native languages into everyday conversations. For translators, who must navigate evolving language forms while maintaining meaning and clarity in communication, these linguistic processes pose difficulties.⁹

With an emphasis on language mediation in multilingual communities, this study examines how migration affects translation processes. It looks at the frequency of translation method usage and satisfaction with translation accessibility. The study will also evaluate how effective translation techniques are thought to be. To improve language accessibility and communication in various societies, this research is designed to provide insightful information to linguists, politicians, and translation professionals by examining actual translation procedures in migrant communities in Nigeria and, by extension, around the world.

⁵ Olayemi, Ayodele. "Election Materials and Language Accessibility in Nigeria." *African Journal of Political Science* 14, no. 1 (2019): 45–63.

⁶ Baker, Mona, and Gabriela Saldanha, eds. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2020.

⁷ Adebite, Wale. "Multilingualism and Language Policy in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects." *Journal of African Languages and Linguistics* 36, no. 2 (2015): 101–120.

⁸ Nwike, Christopher Chinedu, and Kosisochukwu Emmanuella Nnaka. "The Effect of Migration on Igbo Language Survival: Challenges and Opportunities." *Journal of Chinese & African Studies (JOCAS)* 4, no. 1 (2023). ISSN: 2782-7879.

⁹ Gumperz, John J. *Discourse Strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

OBJECTIVE(S)

The primary objective of this study is to examine the impact of migration on translation practices, with the following specific objectives:

- a. To ascertain the frequency of translation methods.
- b. To investigate the satisfaction with translation accessibility.
- c. To explore the perceived efficacy of translation methods in multilingual communities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Given the social and cultural dynamics of translation in multilingual communities, this approach enables a comprehensive understanding of how migration influences language mediation practices. The study's areas are urban cities in Nigeria, specifically Abuja, Lagos, and Port Harcourt. It uses a qualitative research design with a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both ethnographic fieldwork and case studies. The data collection method is a survey of 300 participants, with 100 people selected from each city. Here, the participants are Igbos who live in these study areas where Pidgin English and other indigenous languages like Yoruba, Hausa, etc. are spoken.

The major language of focus in this study is the aforementioned languages, considering the ways they are used for effective communication among the speakers, where they are spoken. A structured Likert-scale questionnaire designed to assess the frequency and types of translation methods used by migrants was employed to elicit information from the participants (see Appendix 1). The questionnaire was administered on the spot to meet the deadline, as well as to ensure the smooth retrieval of the data from the participants. The participants are educated and have basic knowledge of Information and Communication Technology. Descriptive statistics were used in the data analysis to measure language mediation preferences and translation trends in the survey replies. To investigate differences in translation experiences across linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the results from various migrant groups were finally compared.

RESULTS

Appendix I contains the data that were used in the investigation. However, the data in this section are presented and analysed based on the objectives of the study, hence, ascertaining the frequency of translation methods usage, investigating the satisfaction

with translation accessibility, and exploring the perceived efficacy of translation methods in multilingual communities. Based on this premise, the survey data's structured tabular analysis and discussion are shown below:

Survey Section	Key Findings	Implications	Recommendations
Frequency of Translation Usage	The majority of respondents use translation tools frequently or always.	Migrants rely heavily on translation for daily communication.	Improve accessibility to translation services and tools in public spaces.
Preferred Translation Methods	Machine translation (Google Translate, DeepL) is the most used, followed by informal interpreters (family, friends).	Digital tools are convenient, but informal interpretation signals a lack of access to professional services.	Expand affordable human translation services in critical areas (healthcare, legal, education).
Situational Use of Translation	Healthcare, legal services, and education are the most frequent domains requiring translation.	Migrants face language barriers in essential services.	Institutions should implement multilingual support programmes and provide for the employment of certified interpreters.
Satisfaction with Translation Accessibility	The majority are dissatisfied with the availability of translation services in public institutions.	Current language mediation efforts are insufficient.	Mandate translation support in government offices, hospitals, and schools.
Accessibility of professional translation services	Many respondents reported that professional translation is rarely or never accessible.	Cost, availability, and bureaucratic barriers may limit access to professional interpreters.	Develop subsidised or free public translation services for migrants.

Perceived efficacy of translation methods in multilingual communities	Human translators are rated as more accurate than machine translation.	Machine translation lacks context and cultural adaptation.	Hybrid translation models (AI-assisted human translation) should be implemented.
Reliability of machine translation for official documents	The majority consider machine translation unreliable for legal and medical documents.	Critical errors may occur when using automated tools for official communication.	Encourage human review for important documents and certified AI-assisted translations.
Challenges with machine translation	Inaccuracy, lack of cultural context, and poor grammar are the top concerns.	Machine translation struggles with nuances and specialised terminology.	AI developers should improve context-based learning in translation tools.
Confidence in translation tools	Many respondents feel only slightly confident in relying on translation services.	Trust in current translation solutions is low, especially in high-stakes situations.	Enhance AI translation accuracy and increase public trust through verified language mediation services.
Suggested improvements	Respondents request better machine translation for minority languages, culturally adaptive AI, and more public translation services.	There is a demand for more inclusive language mediation solutions.	Policymakers should fund multilingual initiatives and enhance AI-based translation for underrepresented languages.

DISCUSSION

This area of the study discusses the different specific objectives of the study. These objectives were designed specifically to fill the gaps that were raised in this study.

Based on this, the findings on ascertaining the frequency of translation methods usage reveal that the majority of respondents frequently or always use translation methods, primarily machine translation tools such as Google Translate and DeepL, followed closely by informal human interpreters like family and friends.

This finding confirms the observations of O'Brien and Cadwell,¹⁰ who argue that digital translation tools have become indispensable for migrants navigating daily communication in host countries. Similarly, Koskinen¹¹ observed that informal linguistic support networks often emerge in multilingual settings where professional services are inadequate. However, our study nuances this perspective by emphasising the structural factors, such as cost and accessibility, that push migrants toward these informal or automated solutions. In contrast to Pöchhacker¹², who advocated that state institutions should ensure professional interpreting in public services, our findings highlight that such institutional support remains largely absent or inaccessible for many respondents.

Implications for theory and practice include the need to reassess the dichotomy between formal and informal translation practices within migration contexts. Translation studies should further explore how these everyday practices shape migrants' linguistic agency. Practically, this underscores the urgent need for policy-driven investment in accessible and multilingual translation infrastructures, particularly in urban centres with high migrant populations.

Again, the findings on investigating the satisfaction with translation accessibility indicate the widespread dissatisfaction with the availability of translation services in public institutions. This aligns with Tipton and Furmanek's¹³ critique of public sector interpreting, which they describe as underfunded and inconsistently implemented.

¹⁰ O'Brien, Sharon, and Patrick Cadwell. "Translation in Crisis Contexts." *The International Journal of Translation and Interpreting Research* 9, no. 2 (2017): 5–11. <https://doi.org/10.12807/ti.109202.2017.a02>.

¹¹ Koskinen, Kaisa. *Translating Institutions: An Ethnographic Study of EU Translation*. London: Routledge, 2010.

¹² Pöchhacker, Franz. *Introducing Interpreting Studies*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Respondents in this study expressed concerns about inadequate language support, especially in healthcare, legal, and educational domains, critical areas previously highlighted by Bischoff¹⁴ as requiring consistent and professional language mediation. Unlike previous studies that have primarily focused on the linguistic or operational challenges of translation in public settings, the current study emphasises users' perspectives on the systemic absence or insufficiency of such services. This modifies earlier claims by integrating experiential dissatisfaction as a metric of effectiveness, not merely availability.

Theoretically, the findings contribute to an understanding of translation as a right rather than a service, supporting Munday's¹⁵ argument that language access should be framed within the discourse of social justice. Practically, there is a clear call for institutional reforms that mandate multilingual services in hospitals, courts, schools, and government offices. These reforms should include the training and employment of certified interpreters, as well as the implementation of quality control mechanisms for language access services.

Moreover, on exploring the perceived efficacy of translation methods in multilingual communities, the respondents in the current study ranked human translation methods as more effective than machine translation, particularly in high-stakes or culturally nuanced situations. This supports the findings of Gaspari¹⁶, who observed that while machine translation can facilitate basic communication, it often fails to capture cultural subtleties and specialised vocabulary. The mistrust in machine translation for official documents (e.g., legal and medical) confirms Kenny and Way's¹⁷ assertion that AI-based tools lack the pragmatic awareness necessary for high-accuracy outputs. However, the current study extends these insights by revealing an emerging preference for hybrid models, human-AI collaborations where machine-generated outputs are reviewed by professional translators. This points to a pragmatic shift in user expectations and opens up new avenues for research in AI-assisted human translation. From a theoretical standpoint, this underscores the need to rethink traditional binaries in translation studies, machine vs. Human, as evolving into more collaborative models. In practice, the findings advocate for the integration of AI in public translation services, provided it is mediated by trained human professionals. This approach would

¹³ Tipton, Rebecca, and Olgierda Furmanek. *Dialogue Interpreting: A Guide to Interpreting in Public Services and the Community*. London: Routledge. 2016

¹⁴ Bischoff, Alexander, Thomas V. Perneger, Patrick A. Bovier, Louis Loutan, and Hans Stalder. "Improving Communication Between Physicians and Patients Who Speak a Foreign Language." *British Journal of General Practice* 53, no. 492(2003): 541–546.

¹⁵ Munday, Jeremy. *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications*. 4th ed. London: Routledge. 2016

both improve efficiency and ensure cultural and contextual fidelity, especially for minority language speakers. In sum, this study's findings largely confirm existing research on the high frequency and low satisfaction associated with current translation practices among multilingual populations. However, they also modify prior claims by introducing user-centred insights on access, trust, and hybrid translation models. The implications are profound: theoretically, they prompt a shift toward more dynamic models of language mediation; practically, they demand policy reforms, improved funding, and inclusive translation strategies that centre the needs of linguistically marginalised groups.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the frequency of translation method usage, satisfaction with translation accessibility, and the perceived efficacy of translation methods in multilingual communities, particularly among migrant populations. The findings demonstrate a high level of reliance on translation tools, primarily machine translation and informal interpreters, due to inadequate access to professional services. Respondents expressed considerable dissatisfaction with the availability of translation in public institutions, particularly in critical sectors such as healthcare, education, and legal services. Furthermore, while machine translation tools were commonly used for convenience, their perceived efficacy was significantly lower than that of human translation, especially for high-stakes or culturally sensitive communication.

These findings confirm and, in some cases, extend prior research on the gaps in institutional language support and the limitations of current translation technologies. They also underscore the lived realities of multilingual communities, who often navigate complex linguistic terrains without adequate support. The study highlights the urgent need to prioritise language mediation as a public service and to explore hybrid human-AI models as viable solutions for inclusive and effective communication.

¹⁶ Gaspari, Federico, Antonio Toral, Sudip Kumar Naskar, Declan Groves, and Andy Way. "Perception vs Reality: Measuring Machine Translation Post-Editing Productivity." *Machine Translation* 29, no. 3 (2015): 195–215. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10590-015-9176-6>.

¹⁷ Kenny, Dorothy, and Andy Way. Human and Machine Translation: Revisiting the Divide. *Machine Translation* 31 (2017): 1–2. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10590-017-9194-3>

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and their implications, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Improve access to translation services in public institutions:** Governments and institutions should mandate and fund multilingual support in public offices, hospitals, courts, and schools. This includes employing certified interpreters and ensuring translated materials are readily available in the most common languages spoken by migrant communities.
2. **Subsidise or provide free professional translation services:** To address the financial and bureaucratic barriers that prevent access to professional interpreters, public agencies should develop subsidised or cost-free translation and interpretation services, particularly for low-income migrants.
3. **Enhance the quality and reach of machine translation tools:** Developers should focus on improving AI translation tools by integrating contextual, cultural, and domain-specific learning. Special attention should be given to minority and underrepresented languages.
4. **Promote hybrid translation models:** Encourage the adoption of AI-assisted human translation systems, especially in high-stakes settings. These hybrid models combine the efficiency of machine translation with the accuracy and cultural sensitivity of human translators. **Build public trust in language mediation services:** Establish quality control standards and certification for translation services and tools. Transparency in the development and deployment of machine translation tools will help boost user confidence.
5. **Support community-based translation initiatives:** Invest in training bilingual community members as para-professional interpreters and cultural mediators, helping to bridge the gap between formal and informal translation services.
6. **Implement language access policies:** Policymakers should introduce legal frameworks that recognise language access as a human right and enforce compliance through monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can foster more equitable, inclusive, and efficient communication in multilingual societies, ultimately empowering migrants and enhancing social cohesion.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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