In this paper Neville Alexander argues that translation is an important tool in the intellectualisation of African languages. The dawning of the 'African renaissance' and the advent of ACALAN, the African Union's language body, have created new possibilities for overcoming the hegemony of English through the implementation of mother tongue-based bilingual education and the development and expanded use of African languages. Translation has a key role to play in restoring the continuity between 'tradition' and modernity, which had been ruptured by colonial conquest in African societies. The translation of important scientific and literary texts into the AU's official languages and selected cross-border languages would drive the creation of a language industry across the continent.

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The potential role of translation as social practice for the intellectualisation of African languages

Neville Alexander

PRAESA

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Neville Alexander is director of PRAESA. He has done much pioneering work in the field of language policy and planning, and has contributed widely in political, educational and academic fora to the struggle for anti-racism and for mother tongue-based bilingual education. A current research interest is the relationship between language and economic development.

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The potential role of translation as social practice for the intellectualisation of African languages

Neville Alexander

Contents

Abstract

This paper argues that translation is an important tool in the intellectualisation of African languages and in the empowerment of speakers of African languages. Post-colonial ruling elites in Africa have yet to acknowledge the devastating consequences of the 'static maintenance syndrome' in which the languages most people know best are maintained at home but hardly used at school, in favour of the former colonial languages. The hegemony of English (and, to a lesser extent, of French and Portuguese) has contributed in a major way to the failure of the education system across the continent. The dawning of the 'African renaissance' and the advent of ACALAN, the African Union's language body, have, however created new possibilities for mother tongue-based bilingual education and the development and expanded use of African languages. Translation has a key role to play in this endeavour. Translation is viewed as a way of restoring the continuity between 'tradition' and modernity, which had been ruptured by colonial conquest in African societies. By versioning the 'foreign achievement' into a local medium, the translated text becomes part of an expanding, globalising core of features. In this way translation becomes a tool of intercultural communication. ACALAN's translation project, together with other bodies, is charged with the historic responsibility of ensuring that the contribution of African peoples to world civilisation is recognised. The translation of important scientific as well as literary texts into the AU's official languages and selected cross-border languages would drive the creation of a language industry across the continent, with implications for translators as a profession and for the training of language specialists.

Opsomming

In hierdie referaat redeneer die skrywer dat vertaling 'n belangrike instrument in die intellektualisering van Afrika-tale en in die bemagtiging van sprekers van Afrika-tale kan wees. Die regerende elites in post-koloniale Afrika (suid van die Sahara) moet nog die verwoestende gevolge van die 'statiese handhawings-sindroom' erken, waarvolgens die tale wat die meeste mense die beste ken slegs tuis gehandhaaf word maar nie op skool gebruik word nie, ten gunste van die voormalige koloniale taal. Die hegemonie van Engels, en tot 'n mindere mate van Frans en Portugees, het wesenlik tot die mislukking van die onderwys dwarsoor die kontinent bygedra. Die aanbreek van die sg. 'Afrika-renaissance' en die stigting van ACALAN, die

Afrika-Unie se taalliggaam, het egter nuwe moontlikhede vir moedertaal-gebaseerde tweetalige onderwys sowel as die uitbou en toenemende gebruik van Afrika-tale geskep. Vertaling het in dié verband 'n sleutelrol om te speel. Vertaling word beskou as 'n manier om in Afrika die kontinuïteit tussen 'tradisie' en moderniteit te herstel, wat deur die kolonialisme verbreek was. Deur die 'van buite af komende prestasie' in 'n plaaslike taal en idioom weer te gee, word die vertaalde teks deel van 'n groeiende, globaliserende kern van kulturele kenmerke. Op dié manier word vertaling 'n instrument van interkulturele kommunikasie. ACALAN se vertalingprojek, tesame met ander liggaame, het die historiese verantwoordelikheid om te verseker dat die bydrae van Afrika-mense tot wêreldbeskawing erken word. Die vertaling van belangrike wetenskaplike en literêre tekste in die AU se amptelike tale sowel as geselekteerde oor-grens tale behoort die skep van 'n taalindustrie dwarsoor die kontinent aan te dryf, met spesifieke implikasies vir die vertaalberoep en die opleiding van taalspesialiste.

Isishwankathelo

Eli phepha lixoxa ngomba wokuba uguqulelo sisixhobo esibalulekileyo ekwenzeni ukuba iilwimi zaseAfrika ziphuhliselwe ukuze zisetyenziswe kwimiba ekwiqondoqo eliphezulu kwanokuthi zisetyenziswe ukuxhobisa abantu abazithethayo. Oorulumente abaphetheyo emva kolawulo lweng-cinezelo yobukononiyali e-Afrika kusafanele bavume iziphumo ezimbi ezibangelwa yi 'meko yokubakushica bengagungqi' apho iilwimi ezininzi ne-zaziwa ngabantu ngokupheleleyo zisetyenziswe emakhaya kuphela zingazi-setyenziswa esikolweni, ndaweni yoko kusetyenziswe iilwimi zobukoloniyali kuphela. Ubungangamsha besiNgesi (kwaye nobesiFrentshi nesiPuthukezi ubuncinane) bunenxatheba enkulu obuyidlalileyo ekuphanzeni kwezem-fundo kwilizwekazi (iAfrika) jikelele. Ukusungulwa 'nokuzalwa ngokutsha kweAfrika' ukuyilwa kweACALAN, kunye nequmrhu lembumbha yeelwimi yaseAfrika kuye kwanika ithemba elitsha kumathuba angemfundo engel-wimi ezimbini nesekelwe kulwimi lwenkobe, nophuhliso nasekwandisweni kosetyenziso kweelwimi zaseAfrika. Uguqulelo lunendima ebaluleke kunene kwezinzame. Kwaye uguqulelo lubonwa nje ngendlela yokugcina inqubela phambili nethi inxulumanise 'iizithethe' nendlela ekuphilwa ngayo kulemi-hla nezaqhawukaniswa bubungangamsha bamakoloniyali kwelilizizwe lase-Afrika. Ukuphinda kubaliswe 'okuphuhliswe ngaphandle' kulungele imeko yasekhaya ngokuthi kuguqulwe kuze kubhalwa kwakhona kuthi kube yinxalenye yokwanda yokubhaliweyo, lonto ithi kananjalo yenze neempawu ezingundoqo zokuba isizwe esithile sizibone ziyinxalenye yehlabathi jik-elele. Ngalendlela uguqulelo luba sisixhobo sokunxulumelana kwezithethe namasiko awohlukeneyo. Iprojekti yoguqulelo yeACALAN namanye amasebe inikwe uxanduva oluyimbali ekuqinisekiseni ukuba inkcubeko yabantu baseAfrika ithatyathelwa ingqalelo kwihlabathi liphela. Uguqulelo lwezibhalo zenzululwazi ndawonye noncwadi kwilwimi ezisemthethweni zeAU kunye neelwimi ezikhethiweyo nezisetyenziswa ngaphaya kwemida yezinye izizwe zizo ezizakusetyenziswa kulomba wophuhliso lweelwimi kwilizwekazi jikelele, nanto leyo engakhokhelela ekubeni uguqulelo lubonwe njengesakhono somsebenzi nasekuqeqeshweni kwengcali ngezelwimi.

1. European and African languages in post-colonial Africa

> Developing countries have been the sites of translation strategies and cultural identities that assimilate those prevailing in Anglo-American cultures and yet deviate from them in remarkable ways, some with greater social impact than others (Venuti 1998:159–160).

It is an indisputable fact that in the modern world, English is *the* global language[1]. All other contenders for that title find themselves on the defensive. As in most other respects, Africa occupies also in this context a peripheral position. For reasons connected with the history of colonialism, slavery, imperialism, apartheid and neo-colonialism, the languages of Africa, generally speaking, are dominated by English and, to a lesser extent, by French, much more than are indigenous languages in other regions of the world. This situation was illustrated in dramatic fashion in July 2004 when, according to media reports, the assembled heads of state of Africa were 'baffled' when the outgoing chairperson of the AU, President Joaquim Chissano, addressed them in Kiswahili instead of English, French or Portuguese, which is the usual practice. There was even more bemusement when the incoming, chairperson, President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, proceeded to address them in Arabic which, like the three languages of European origin, is and has been an official working language of the African Union (AU) and its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). The irony is that only recently it had been resolved that Kiswahili would finally in practice become one of the five working languages of the AU[2].

For reasons of analytical clarity, we should distinguish between *dominance* and *hegemony*. The dominance of English is clearly the result of the political, military and economic might of the former British and of the current US American empires. It is the result of what as a form of short hand, we might call 'market forces'. On the basis of historical experience, we can confidently predict that its dominance will last as long as its superior status is reinforced by the material wealth and power of the ruling strata of the United States. Like Latin in the era of the Roman Empire, English will, however, eventually make way for other languages[3], including incidentally what are labelled the 'new Englishes'. In other words, this is an eminently socio-economic and a socio-political issue. The hegemony of English, though inextricably connected with its dominance, resides in the socio-psychological and cultural domains of life. As opposed to the empowering, or enabling, effects of individual and societal proficiency in English, which is the expression of its dominance as manifested in job adverts, the ubiquitous ESL course offerings and the monolingual *habitus* of youth throughout the world today, the hegemony of English manifests itself as disempowerment and disablement. On the African continent, for the reasons I have intimated earlier, it is no less than a social pathology, a condition to which I have given the name, Static Maintenance Syndrome[4]. This refers to the fact that most Africans cherish their home or first languages ('mother tongues') and maintain them with pride in the primary domains of language, i.e., in family, community, religious and elementary school contexts. They do not, however, believe that these languages are capable of becoming languages of power, i.e., dominant in what Sibayan and other Philippine sociolinguists call 'the controlling domains of language' such as government administration, the formal economy, secondary and tertiary education. Their disabling language attitudes are a reflection of what Bourdieu refers to as the linguistic market where ownership of cultural capital prescribes the rules of distribution. They are afflicted by a monolingual *habitus* in spite of the paradoxical fact that most of them are plurilingual. The ultimate irony, however, is that English is usually not one of the many languages in which most of them are proficient[5].

Post-colonial African governments, with very few exceptions, have failed singularly and repeatedly to address the language question

with any measure of seriousness or consistency. Language planners and other scholars of applied language studies are agreed on the facts. In the words of Ayo Bamgbose (2000:2), the most prominent of these men and women:

> Apart from lack of political will by those in authority, perhaps the most important factor impeding the increased use of African languages is lack of interest by the elite. They are the ones who are quick to point out that African languages are not yet well developed to be used in certain domains or that the standard of education is likely to fall, if the imported European languages cease to be used as media of instruction at certain levels of education. Hence, a major part of non-implementation of policy can be traced to the attitude of those who stand to benefit from the maintenance of the status quo.

Such judgements could be multiplied effortlessly[6].

2. The African Renaissance and the African Academy of Languages

With the proclamation, by President Mbeki of South Africa, of the African renaissance and the realisation of the related economic and political processes connected with the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the AU, a new situation has been created. For concrete economic, political and socio-cultural reasons, the language question has to be, and in fact is being, reviewed by most of the leadership of the continent. The most urgent and decisive reason for this review is the palpable failure of education in Africa. Professor Pai Obanya (2002:3), the immediate past director of the UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Africa (BREDA), after an analysis of the most important international and Africa-specific conferences on education in 1990–2000 concludes that all of them result in

> … an acknowledgement that Africa is at the bottom of the world's educational league table, and of the fact that this should justify urgent, concerted, innovative responses.

This realisation, deriving from the pressures for achieving Universal Primary (or Basic) Education, was the reason for what has turned out to be the decisive move in the sphere of language education, i.e., the gradual but definite turn by an increasing number of African states to what for convenience I shall call mother tongue-based bilingual education[7].

The logic of the proposition, to which I am committed, that *unless the educational systems of the continent are based on the mother tongues of the people of Africa instead of on foreign languages as most of them are at present, all attempts at establishing a platform for improving the quality of education will in the final analysis benefit only the elite and its progeny*, is not yet openly acknowledged even by the most courageous of our intelligentsia. This is

particularly true when the discussion is about the modalities of delivery at the level of tertiary education. It is still impossible for most African intellectuals and academics to conceive of universities where the main languages of tuition are indigenous African languages. I recall the ironic but all the more disturbing statement made by Ali and Alamin Mazrui to the effect that

> … [An] important source of intellectual dependence in Africa is the language in which African graduates and scholars are taught … [Today], in non-Arabic speaking Africa, a modern surgeon who does not speak a European language is virtually a sociolinguistic impossibility … [A] conference of African scientists, devoted to scientific matters and conducted primarily in an African language, is not yet possible … It is because of the above considerations that intellectual and scientific dependence in Africa may be inseparable from linguistic dependence. The linguistic quest for liberation … must … seek to promote African languages, especially in academia, as one of the strategies for promoting greater intellectual and scientific independence from the West (Mazrui and Mazrui 1998:64–65).

The stir caused by President Chissano's use of Kiswahili in the AU corridors of power shows clearly that this statement does not only apply to the lecture and conference halls of the continent. In the context of the information society of the 21st century, where production is increasingly dependent on scientific and technological knowledge, African societies, because of their malfunctioning educational systems, are pushed inexorably towards the periphery of the world economy. Indeed, it can be said that during the post-colonial period, except for specific primary commodities such as oil and precious metals, far from being integrated into the world economy the economies of most African states have experienced a de facto de-linking from the global economic system.

It was this understanding of the connection between language policy and national development that gave birth to the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN). The then president of the Republic of Mali, Alpha Oumar Konare, who is now the President of the Commission of the AU, i.e., the highest executive official of that institution, acting in the spirit of the African renaissance, established the Mission for the African Academy of Languages on 19 December 2000. He appointed Adama Samassekou, the former Minister of Basic Education of the Republic, as Head of the Mission on 26 January 2001. In view of the significance which this move would acquire during the following two years, it is appropriate that we consider Samassekou's understanding of his mission. In his foreword to the

Special Bulletin of the ACALAN, issued in January 2002, he writes, among other things:

> Four decades after the political 'independences' … the situation of African languages keeps on widening inequalities in the fields of science, technique, and technology. This imbalance between official languages, inherited from colonisation, and African languages, far from facilitating a better sharing of modern knowledge and practices, jeopardises any significant involvement of our populations in decision making on the one hand, and in the improvement of their living conditions on the other. Therefore, our commitment to the ideals of the OAU, the pressing call of our people for a quick and more involving access to writing and true democracy, the requirements of an ever lasting sub-regional and regional stability, have imposed upon us the creation of an instrument for the development of our languages, likely to facilitate and reinforce linguistic co-operation between African states and, moreover, to promote the harmonisation and the actual implementation of language policies conform [sic] to the aspirations of our working populations.

This is not the occasion for a full-length history of ACALAN[8]. Suffice it to say that together with linguists and language professionals from every region of the continent, Samassekou and his associates achieved the approval of ACALAN by the OAU Heads of State and Government meeting in Lusaka on 9–11 July 2001. At the inauguration of Professor Samassekou as the President of ACALAN, President Konare called on him and his colleagues to

> … take up the challenge to put in place a pan-African institution capable of helping our States and our peoples to conceive and develop a language policy, relevant and efficient enough to quickly contribute to the Renaissance and the Unity of Africa (ACALAN 2002:8).

3. Implementing the Language Plan of Action for Africa (ILPAA)

The subsequent developments around ACALAN have been documented in some detail (see Alexander 2005). The first of a series of significant workshops and gatherings took place at the University of Cape Town in July 2003 where Applied Language scholars had come together in order to consider strategies and concrete action for what we named the 'intellectualisation' of African languages[9]. The symposium resolved to maintain and expand the existing network of scholars and institutions and to initiate, mutually support, and conduct workshops on a range of practical issues such as language medium policy and practice, translation, terminology development, the development and use of human language technology and advocacy for the use of African languages at all levels of education.

In February 2004, at the University of Yaoundé 1 in Cameroon, it was agreed that ACALAN establish a steering committee to drive the implementation of a revised and updated version of the Language Plan of Action for Africa, originally drafted for and adopted by the OAU in June 1986. That workshop formulated five continent-wide core projects which, it was agreed, would constitute the heart of the substantive programme of ACALAN for the next decade or so. They are, in summary:

- The Year of African Languages in 2006, to be co-ordinated by ACALAN. It was decided that the AU, by way of the Commission of the AU, would be approached to declare 2006 as the Year of African Languages in order to commemorate the 20th year of the formulation and adoption of the original Language Plan of Action for Africa.

- The Joint Masters' and Doctoral Programme, the purpose of which is to provide financial and academic support to students who will strengthen the corps of language professionals on the continent. The central co-ordination of this programme will be undertaken from the University of Yaoundé 1, Cameroon.

- The Terminology Development Programme, to be co-ordinated centrally from the Institute of Kiswahili Research in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

- The Stories Across Africa Programme, to be co-ordinated from PRAESA, Cape Town, South Africa.

- The Translation Programme, to be co-ordinated from ACALAN in Bamako, Mali.

4. Potential of the translation programme: general considerations

These five core projects, to which should be added another focal activity of ACALAN, i.e., the establishment of African languages in cyberspace, are integrally related to one another. For our present purposes, however, I will confine myself to the potential of the translation programme for the intellectualisation of the languages of the continent.

It has been said that 'Western Europe owes its civilisation to translators' (Kelly 1979:1). It ought to be obvious that the process of 'civilisation', in this antiseptic formulation, glosses over the fact that it was most often, and necessarily, accompanied by violent conflict and the forcible subjugation of peoples throughout the history of the world. Venuti (1998:158) with reference to our own times, makes the position crystal clear:

> Translation is uniquely revealing of the asymmetries that have structured international affairs for centuries. In many 'developing' countries … it has been compulsory, imposed first by the introduction of colonial languages among regional vernaculars and later, after decolonisation, by the need to traffic in the hegemonic lingua francas to preserve political autonomy and promote economic growth. Here *translation is a cultural practice that is deeply implicated in relations of domination and dependence, equally capable of maintaining or disrupting them*[10]. [emphasis added]

For my own purposes, I want to dwell on the 'disruptive' and reconstructive potential of translation as a social practice in the context of the goals that ACALAN has set itself. Scholars who have focused on the issue of intellectualisation or modernisation of local languages are agreed that translation of major works of literary and scientific creation that exist in the more 'developed' languages is one of the main mechanisms for bringing about

and driving this process. With regards to Filipino, for example, Sibayan (1999:464) states unequivocally that

> Translation of important publications now available in English (the chief source language of intellectualisation) is the single most important way of intellectualising Filipino for a long time to come.

Newald (1960:4), in an epigrammatic reference to this complex, states that the German humanists of the 15th and 16th centuries were forced through the contemplation of the classically normed Latin and Greek languages to reflect on the German language and this facilitated the development of German grammar. Kelly (1979:3) records the fact that the European poets and authors of the Romantic period '… sought through translation to transfer the creative power of great writers of other languages into their own'. Most recently, Umberto Eco (2003) has shown by means of practical examples how 'translation as negotiation' impacts on the target language. Citing Friedrich Schleiermacher, he refers to the strong version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, according to which one's native language determines one's perceptual and conceptual possibilities, but points out that Schleiermacher himself accepted that thinking people '… play their part in shaping their language' (Eco 2003:81) and that Wilhelm von Humboldt had been the first to remark on the fact that translations 'can augment the significance and the expressivity of the native language' (Eco 2003:81–82). Recently, the translation of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* into ancient Greek, led the translator/author to say tongue-in-cheek that 'Ancient Greek has a massive vocabulary. Now it's got a slightly bigger one' (Anonymous 2004).

In this forum, I do not have to expound on the fact that translation and interpreting are the archetypal forms of what we now call inter-cultural communication. Translation is the graphical counterpart of the oral process by which peoples have since time immemorial through interaction in countless different modalities mutually influenced and, thus, 'developed', one another. In this context, I want to raise the fundamental issue of how we view the contributions of diverse peoples to world civilisation. This question is in many ways an *African* question because of the systematic manner in which racist beliefs and practices have denigrated and misrepresented the contribution of African peoples to world civilisation. This is not the place to undertake a general rebuttal of such reactionary and prejudiced 'scholarship'[11]. Instead, I want to concentrate on the

particular contribution that translation can and does make towards the so-lution of the conundrum created by specious notions of the ownership of intellectual and cultural property. For African peoples south of the Sahara, more or less, and for most other peoples who did not develop or acquire a pre-industrial tradition of literacy, there arises a real question of the continuity between tradition and modernity. Colonial conquest constitutes in these contexts an apparently unbridgeable rupture between 'yesterday' and 'today'[12]. It is, however, precisely at this point that our understanding of translation as social and cultural practice makes it possible for us to see the question in a different light.

In summary, the notion that given inventions, scientific discoveries or philosophical insights 'belong' to a specific people, nation, continent, or even 'race', is so deep-rooted that it requires a leap of the imagination to be able to see that in fact the political-historical contingency that leads to the relevant phenomenon being located in a specific geographical space is no more than that. In so far as every advance builds upon that which has gone before, every single such discovery, invention or insight belongs, in principle, to all of humanity.[13] In order to undermine racist notions of 'culture' and 'civilisation', it is necessary, therefore, to see all such advances within the dynamic of world history rather than within the arbitrary or artificial confines of a given time and place. It is, secondly, essential that we understand that there is no such thing as 'modernity'[14] in the abstract. Every 'tradition' has its own 'modernity' and in the ('sub-Saharan') African case, we have to restore the continuity between the two. It is my conten-tion that translation, because it integrates the 'foreign' achievement into the target language, the overtones and rhythms of which are charged with the force of tradition, is able to facilitate this reconstruction of a world where, apparently, 'all that is solid melts into air'.[15] This decisive insight is premised on the fact that what we call 'modernity' is constituted by a body of knowledge and a set of dispositions that are ultimately instantiated in a multitude of technological or material goods and concomitant social, economic, political and cultural practices and beliefs that have become universal. This globalising core of features can be expected to expand as, increasingly, peripheral features are integrated into the core[16]. To put it differently: is there any point in still considering that acupuncture is a 'Chinese' practice when today this approach to health care is practised by people all over the world who are in no sense 'Chinese'? Or, are the herbal remedies of African healers, which are now to be found in different

guises in pharmacies all over the world to be adjudged to be permanently 'African' because of their known origins?

These questions may appear to have little or nothing to do with the craft and the task of the translator. The answer to them is, however, the key to understanding the modernising or even the 'civilising' potential of the act of translation. If we accept, as I do, the weak version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, we begin to understand that every language has the potential, under the appropriate social conditions, to naturalise the core features of modernity in its peculiar ambience. The Meiji Revolution of the second half of the 19th century led to what Coulmas (1990:70) calls 'modernisation without westernisation' in Japan but, as he demonstrates compellingly, this *was the result of, among other things, the systematic translation into the Japanese language of the main features of what was perceived to be the 'western genius'.* As a slogan, this phrase captures the ultimate intention behind one of the central goals of the ACALAN project.

5. Language planning and the ACALAN translation programme

Joshua Fishman, one of the founders of the modern discipline of language planning, states unequivocally that by means of such planning

> … speech communities have not only altered and elaborated their writing systems and lexicons, … they have also changed various tight and pervasive systems of their languages such as color typologies, kinship typologies, pronoun systems, number systems, honorific systems, verb systems, etc. (Fishman 1985:464).

A consciously structured translation programme is one of the most effective ways of changing both the body and the functional potential of a language. Venuti (1998:76–77), indeed, maintains that because translation makes possible 'the invention of domestic literary discourses, it has inevitably been enlisted in ambitious cultural projects, notably the development of a domestic language and literature'. It is precisely what Eco (2003:82) calls 'this dynamic capacity of languages to evolve when exposed to a foreign challenge'[17] that African university programmes in applied language studies are going to have to explore and use in innovative ways in order to initiate and sustain the rapid intellectualisation of certain – in principle, all – languages of the people by agreement in the appropriate forums and constituencies. Just how difficult this task can and will be can be inferred from the tremendous investments that the Japanese intelligentsia, for example, was called upon to make over many generations. Like the Japanese and the followers of Kemal Ata Türk in the 1920s and 1930s, we will have to find the most cost-efficient ways of increasing rapidly the corpus of great works of world literature and science in the relevant African languages. Writing about the intellectualisation of Filipino, Sibayan (1999:203) warned that

> … Filipino scholars in all subjects and disciplines must either translate what have been called the classical works … in their disciplines or write original research and writing (sic) in Filipino. We need to have a body of work in Filipino that can be used to retrieve past knowledge in all disciplines. Until we have such a body of work, there is no escaping the need for a foreign or second language that makes the world's knowledge accessible to the Filipino.

It is my view that one of the most appropriate and acceptable ways of doing this is to ask all universities to consider introducing as an elective component of post-graduate assessment of course work in each discipline, the translation into a relevant African language of a key text or part thereof. Very few exercises could vie with this practice in respect of gauging the grasp of a subject by an examination candidate. The practical implementation of this crucial strategic move is completely manageable. Essentially, we would need a few focus groups of people consisting of linguists, translators and subject specialists in each of the relevant languages to decide whether the document produced by the candidate concerned is an acceptable translation.

Above all, however, we need people who have the vision, the courage and the energy to do it. In this regard, the stated intention of ACALAN to launch a large-scale translation programme in tandem with the appropriate terminology development project(s) is of the utmost significance, since it will serve as a compass for the individual institutions and translators of texts. The plan is to coordinate the programme with existing Africa-wide associations of academics and specialists in the numerous relevant fields of scholarly endeavour. These would include organisations such as the African Association of Universities (AAU), the Council for Development and Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), regional and national associations of linguists, applied language scholars across the spectrum, including crucially organisations of translators, as well as the relevant academic forums and institutions that can advise on particular disciplines and publications.

Criteria for the initial selection of texts are being considered[18]. A careful balance will have to be established between various binary couples such as classical and modern, popular and academic, children's and adult literature, information and entertainment, prose and poetry, immediate and fundamental, natural sciences and social sciences, as well as between texts originating on all the continents of the world. In this connection, Hofmeyr's study, which details the conscious and implicit literacy and translation strategies of the protestant missionaries, provides us with valuable insights

that can be used as points of departure and, in particular, for purposes of avoiding strategic mistakes. By way of example, it is clear that catalytic texts that are likely to motivate people to want to read have to be identified and translated in whole or in part in different formats depending on the target readerships, and that distribution networks linked to these constituencies (pre-schools, schools, mosques, churches, universities, academic associations, professional guilds, etc.) have to be mobilised in order to generate the essential momentum.

6. Concluding remarks

Translators as a body of professionals have a vested interest in maintaining linguistic and cultural diversity. As it happens, this self-interest coincides with larger social projects that have the protection of and are being promoted by UNESCO and other international organisations concerned about the threats to the environment and to humanity's material and intangible heritage that emanate from the uncontrolled and irresponsible exploitation of the natural and human resources of the planet[19]. Seen in this light, therefore, the translation and terminology development programmes that are being proposed by ACALAN and its associated organisations and language networks represent an important moment for the profession at the international level. Because of the particular history of the continent, this programme is as important for African languages as it is for the relevant languages of Western Europe and we can expect to see partnerships forged between European and African language associations.

In this regard, an important and innovative feature of the plan is the intention to translate the relevant texts initially into the official languages of the AU (in so far as they do not already exist in those languages) as well as into selected 'cross-border' languages[20]. From the point of view of the promotion of literacy and of the culture of reading in African languages, this may turn out to be one of the most significant strategic moves, since it will enlarge the potential readership of the texts concerned and provide added incentives for publishers to print larger editions of major texts in African languages. Given the mystifications that abound in this domain, however, we can expect that the move will be resisted, sometimes even vigorously. For the translation profession, it will constitute a serious challenge not only of a technical, but also of a language policy and even of a specifically political kind.

Whatever direction is eventually agreed upon by means of democratic debate, discussions at conferences, workshops, university seminars and other

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relevant forums, it is clear that this programme, together with the other core projects of ACALAN, is going to drive the creation of a language industry across the continent. In the light of this realisation, therefore, the training of applied language scholars, both generalists and professional specialists, especially translators and interpreters, is going to become one of our highest priorities. It would be a major boost for ACALAN if the International Federation of Translators were to link up with ACALAN with a view to assisting us to conduct this historic programme of language planning and language advocacy with a real hope of success. Dlodlo (1999:321) speculates enigmatically that the success of the indigenisation of Christianity in Africa as opposed to the failure of education, especially of mathematical and science education, probably relates to the fact that the Bible and other texts of the Christian faith were made available – through translation – in the languages of the people of Africa, whereas, with rare exceptions, most educational materials were available only in the European languages. I believe that the ACALAN programme, including the translation programme, is the requisite response to the implicit challenge.

Endnotes

1. It should be stressed, of course, that this is the current situation. Historical developments could alter the situation overnight and our grandchildren may well grow up having to know Mandarin in ways that are similar to our current English *habitus*.

2. See *BBC News*, 7 July 2004. Kiswahili had, on paper, been a working language of the OAU since 1986.

3. On the basis of our current knowledge, the most likely scenario, in linguistic terms, is a contest between Mandarin Chinese and English, with High Noon scheduled for some decade towards the end of the current century.

4. See Alexander 2002:119–120.

5. According to the Pansalb (2000:177) survey, only 36% of South Africans say that they 'understand' English, although, significantly, an increasing number of younger South Africans 'understand' English.

6. In post-colonial Africa, proficiency in the relevant European language is a major factor determining the class location of the individual citizen. In Bourdieu's paradigm, such proficiency functions as 'cultural capital'. More often than not, it is also an index to the class position of that person. For a more detailed analysis of the relationship between language, class and power in modern Africa, see, among others, Alexandre 1971, Prah 1995, Alexander 2003.

7. This phrase refers to an educational system in which the mother tongue (or the language/s of primary socialisation of the child) is used as the language of teaching as far as possible and if it is either replaced or complemented by a language of wider, or of international, communication, is never abandoned but rather sustained as a complementary language of teaching or as a subject taught by well-qualified L1 language teachers. The shift referred to is discussed in Bamgbose 2000:76–77; also see Obanya 2002:192–203.

8. For such an account, see ACALAN 2002.

9. Sibayan (1999:229) defines an intellectualised language as one 'which can be used for educating a person in any field of knowledge from kindergarten to the university and beyond'.

10. The translation of the Bible into the languages of Africa undoubtedly served to 'maintain' and reinforce the relations of domination and dependence but at the same time equipped these languages with the terminology and the relevant conceptual universe that would eventually lead to those relations being challenged. Isabel Hofmeyr's brilliant study of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* in Africa at various points touches on the transformative effects of translation on the languages of the continent.

11. Although some of the factual material on which it is based requires updating, Benjamin Kies's lecture, *The Contribution of the Non European Peoples to World Civilisation*, delivered in 1953, is still one of the pithiest and most illuminating treatments of this question.

12. According to Marshall Berman 1988:15–17, this sense of discontinuity is experienced by all peoples catapulted into the maelstrom of 'modernisation'.

13. In a famous passage, Karl Marx wrote that the logic of the capitalist system of

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production necessarily created the situation where '… [the] spiritual creations of individual nations become common property … and from the numerous national and local literatures there arises a world literature' (Cited here from Berman 1988:123).

14. Berman 1988:123–126, taking his cue from Marx, discusses the dilemma of non-Western states which on the one hand, are willy-nilly integrated into the global experience of modernity and on the other hand, attempt to maintain the continuity with the inherited traditions of the people. Also see Castells 1997.

15. Isabel Hofmeyr's discussion of the many different strategies by which the people of Africa indigenised Christianity is an excellent example of what I am referring to here. 'The technologies of modernity, in this case print and literacy, are … made ancestral and are seen to emanate not from colonially aligned missions but from the spiritual realms of "tradition"'(Hofmeyr 2004:26).

16. The corollary proposition in terms of which the peripheral features should shrink symmetrically does not hold in practice, since a counter-hegemonic dynamic is generated. Indeed, the very experience of modernity gives rise to a more profound and selective appreciation of the specific tradition. For one of the more carefully argued theses in this area, see Castells 1997.

17. Eco (2003:89) refers to the fact that Martin Luther used the verbs 'to translate' and 'to Germanise' as synonyms, thereby '… making evident the importance of translation as cultural assimilation 'and that he answered the critics of his Bible translation by asserting that '… they are learning to speak and write German from my translation, and so in a sense stealing my language, which they hardly knew a word of before'. Also see Venuti (1998:178–179) for the exertions of Chinese translators at the turn of the 19th century, who 'pursued a program of modernisation by introducing numerous Western works of fiction and philosophy'.

18. We believe that once the programme acquires momentum and something like a culture of reading academic and scholarly, as well as popular and entertainment, texts becomes established, it will get an autonomous (unplanned) dynamic.

19. For a detailed analysis of the evolving study of the interconnections between biodiversity, cultural and linguistic diversity, see, among others, Skutnabb-Kangas 2000 and May 2001.

20. Professor Kwesi Prah, who has been specialising in the harmonisation of mutually intelligible varieties of African languages for almost 30 years, rejects this terminology in favour of the term 'core languages'.

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