

**Modelling English-French-Yoruba Translation for Unifying the History of a People
Spread over Linguistic Boundaries; A Socio-Economic Imperative**

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Abstract

The migrations and settlements of the Yoruba in West Africa are historically connected. However, the European partitioning of Africa at the Berlin conference in the late 19th century resulted in the spread of the Yorubas across the national boundaries of three countries. The majority is found in the British colonized Nigeria, while a significant population is found in the French colonized Benin Republic and Togo. Documentation of the history of the Yorubas on the Nigerian side of the divide is done in the English language, while on the Benin side, it is done in the French Language. Scholars have, however, established in the literature that there are discrepancies and inadequacies in the different versions of the history of the Yorubas. Given that a people's history plays a significant role in land occupancy, traditional economic endeavours and human affiliations, its completeness and coherence are of great value in achieving stability across the region. This paper thus explores the potential of applying tools of Linguistics, Translation and History in improving the coverage of the history of a people separated by language boundaries. Leveraging existing translation model and incorporating the principles of contrastive analysis, a model for the unification of histories is proposed. This could be applied to updating and unifying the histories of the people. The unified histories that this model could generate will serve to bridge the language and politics induced gaps in historical documentation across West Africa to improve the stability of the region and for its socio-economic benefits.

Keywords: Translation model, British colony, French Colony, Anglophone Yoruba, Francophone Yoruba

Introduction

The basic functions of language are communicative and cognitive. The cognitive function of language is based on the fact that human consciousness is manifested or coded in the signs of language (Korneeva, Kosacheva, & Parpura, 2019). To aid cognition, humans have developed the art of writing and documenting knowledge for present and future purposes. The roles of language thus transcend communication. Language also plays vital roles beyond being the conventional tool of interpersonal interaction in speech. This paper is hinged on the role of language as a tool for the documentation of knowledge. In this instance, we focus on the documentation of the history of the Yoruba of Western Nigeria as a case for developing a model applicable to unifying the history of a people spread over linguistic boundaries. This should help to resolve controversial information and to update the stories documented. Controversies often do result from inconsistencies in historical documents. For the Yoruba, such inconsistencies are hinted at in the excerpt below.

I was often fascinated by the different versions of uncoordinated folk stories we were told about the origin of the Yoruba. As a very young Yoruba man from Abeokuta I was told Oduduwa was the first man created by God... I asked in my innocent mind as a student in the primary school then who created Oduduwa and how did Oduduwa marry his wife? Where did the parent of the wife of Oduduwa come from? My Teacher never told me the answer. We were even told Oduduwa was the son of one Lamurudu from the far East most likely Saudi Arabia and that some Yoruba cousins can be found in Uganda, in fact, they call the Yorubas in Uganda Akarabas, which is true. Most of these uncoordinated conflicting stories were very difficult to prove or be binding on history for any academic mind-KunleSowunmi

This excerpt indicates how many controversies and inconsistencies could exist in a people's history. Nevertheless, history plays a significant role in the political and socio-economic privileges that a race could be entitled to. Land ownership, claims to royalty and thrones, validation of political positions, connections and affiliations with countries and peoples are but a few of such benefits. This makes the history of a people, especially the documented ones, a powerful tool with which one could derive benefits capable of eradicating poverty and

its attendant menace of unemployment and insecurity. It is therefore essential to ensure accuracy in the documentation of histories. The inconsistencies highlighted in the excerpt are a few of the myriads of those that exist in the history of the Yoruba. Some factors engender these inconsistencies:

1. The migration of the people makes the Yoruba one of the widest spread ethnic/language groups on the continent.
2. The Berlin conference of 1884 split the Yoruba among three countries in West Africa. Many Yorubas are also indigenes of the Benin Republic and Togo (Leroy, Olaleye-Oruene, Koeppe-Schomerus & Bryan, 2010; Ayandele, 2004); (Agai, 2017).
3. The Yoruba in Nigeria speaks the English Language as the Official Language, and the Yoruba in the Republic of Benin and Togo speak French as their official language.

The situation thus creates Francophone Yoruba and Anglophone Yoruba. In the words of Babalola, “the division of Yoruba people as a nation was caused by colonialism and the artificial boundaries” (Babalola, 2020). In an interview granted *The Guardian*, Anthony Asiwaju highlighted this factor in clarifying the controversies surrounding the attempt to install a parallel Alaketu in Nigeria. He affirmed that one of the enduring colonial legacies of the Yoruba kingdom is the creation of the anglophone and the francophone versions of the same people on other sides of an international boundary or border (Asiwaju, 2020)

From the situation presented above, we could deduce that the documented history of the Yoruba, particularly those written by Yoruba scholars, are either written in Yoruba, French or English Language. For a race with so many inconsistencies in its history, therefore, there is a need for all materials available chronicling the existence of the people to be accessed and unified. To do this, we propose a model of translation which imbibes Contrastive Analysis to identify the points of inconsistencies and incompleteness. With the model, it is hoped that the people’s history could be unified and eradicate the controversial parts of the stories and fill in gaps that might exist. Such unification could result in an improvement of the fortunes of the Yoruba people.

The Yoruba

The Yoruba are one of the most homogenous groups in Africa and one of those greatly affected by the partitioning of territories by the European colonial powers who practically shared the continent of Africa at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 (Gathara, 2019). Yoruba land stretches from the Warri area and inland until they almost reach the Niger in

Nigeria and westwards, cutting across the whole of the Republic of Benin and reaching into the east of the Republic of Togo (Adediran, 1994). They inhabit a contiguous territory and speak the same language. The vast majority of the Yoruba are found in the southwest of Nigeria, while others are found in the Republics of Benin and Togo.

Origin:

The origin of the Yoruba is one of the areas in need of unification. The Yoruba have several oral traditions about their origin. One version is that life for the Yoruba, and indeed humankind began at Ile Ife. It states that the Yoruba are descendants of Oduduwa, who is said to have descended from the sky and landed at a spot in Ile Ife where he created the earth. Another tradition claims that the Yoruba journeyed from the far east, probably Egypt, Yemen, Mecca, Kush, Meroe or Arabia and eventually arrived at Ile Ife, under the leadership of Oduduwa, whose descendants established various Yoruba Kingdoms (Akande, 2016). Though these traditions of origin differ, they agree on some grounds. One, they accept Ile Ife as the centre of Yoruba historical consciousness and two, the place of Oduduwa as the progenitor/ ancestor of the Yoruba. The apparent inconsistencies, however, are indications that the history of the Yoruba requires update and validation.

Formation of kingdoms in Yorubaland

The period of the formation of kingdoms was to follow after the establishment of Oduduwa's hegemony in Ile Ife. Tradition relates this phase to the dispersal of Oduduwa's children. One such tradition claims that Ile Ife was hit by a prolonged drought, which resulted in famine and decimation. To solve the problem, emigration was counselled. Oduduwa accepted this advice and asked his children to emigrate. The emigration was orderly and was led by Oduduwa's sons. The leaders met at Itajero in Ile Ife, where they agreed on the directions to move towards and how to maintain future contacts. So, they moved in search of greener pastures (Aribidesi&Falola, 2019).

However, there is no agreement on the number of kingdoms established by Oduduwa's Sons and grandsons. Some traditions claim that one of Oduduwa's sons established seven Yoruba Kingdoms. Other sources claim fourteen and others, twenty-two. However, dynastic links with Ile Ife and Oduduwa became an essential criterion for kingly status in different parts of Yoruba land. Several Yoruba kingdoms were formed after the dispersal. An example is Ketu.

Ketu

Ketu is one of the kingdoms established in the process of this migration, and this kingdom is found in the present-day Republic of Benin. Tradition claims that Oduduwa's eldest daughter was the mother of the first Alaketu of Ketu. Another tradition claims that Ketu was founded by one of the princes who left Ile Ife and migrated westward with princes who founded Egba and Oyo. Its leader was Soipasan, who settled at OkeOyan, which they abandoned for AroKet. They left Aro Ketu and finally settled in Ketu under the leadership of Ede (Biodun, 1994). These are inconsistencies that require unification.

Ketu expanded and developed a stable political institution and administrative structure and was governed by several taboos, with the King at the centre. This is similar to those of other Yoruba kingdoms found in present-day Nigeria. The Yoruba kingdoms share a common traditional lineage system known as the Ebi system and are tied by common ancestry. This speaks to the fact that the Yorubas are one continuous family that has grown to cover this vast area of south western Africa. The identity of the Yoruba as a continuous race of a homogenous people was to be polarized by the demarcation of the continent into countries under different colonial powers at the Berlin Conference.

The Berlin Conference

The Berlin Conference, held between 1884 and 1885, could be described as a gathering of potential colonizers to share the continent of Africa for ease of trade and administration. The resultant effect of this conference was a demarcation of countries which brought distinct and different races together under the same government. Such is the case of the Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo and several others within Nigeria, as well as a separation of peoples with socio-cultural links, such as the Yoruba and the Ogu, whose people became Nigerians and Benenoires. This separation has led to different fortunes for these people. Some bear the Nigerian passport, while some bear the Benin passport with all its resultant effects.

Another consequence of the boundary demarcation is the imposition of different official and National languages. On the Nigerian side of the divide, the Yoruba people speak English as their official language. Consequently, English is their official language of education, Language of documentation, and Language of official communication, including conferences, research and publications. On the Benin side of the divide also, the Yorubas speak the French language for the same purposes, and the children of the Yorubas have been schooled in one of these languages, depending on the side of the divide they find themselves.

There are, however, a few who, by their education or opportunities, speak and write both English and French Languages. These people, especially those who were opportune to speak both languages, and be versed in the culture of the Yorubas on both sides of the divide, have a unique opportunity to become the bridge between the Nigerian and the Benenoire Yoruba. This is because such people have the basic tools for translation which is being proposed in this paper, as a means of unifying and completing the history of the Yoruba race.

Translation

Translation, according to Mahmoud (2007), typically has been used to transfer written or spoken Source Language (SL) texts to equivalent written or spoken Target Language (TL) texts. This allows more people to access the material in the SL, specifically those who read and speak the TL. However, this is not a simple process as language bears with it a lot of allusions, connotations and implications stemming from their use of form, meaning, style, proverbs, idioms etc. which are difficult to capture in TL because these might not exist in them. “Languages are not nomenclatures, and the concepts of one language may differ radically from those of another since each language articulates or organizes the world differently. and languages do not simply name categories; they articulate their own” Culler (1976). The resultant difficulty led Mahmoud (2007) to conclude that “the difference between an SL and a TL and the variation in their cultures make the process of translating a real challenge”. Translators use different strategies to overcome this challenge and produce a TL with the closest approximation of the SL possible.

Translation Strategies

In Loescher (1991), translation strategy is “a potentially conscious procedure for solving a problem faced in translating a text, or any segment of it.” In the same vein, Krings (1986:18) defines translation strategy as “translator’s potentially conscious plans for solving concrete translation problems in the framework of a concrete translation task”. The task of doing a French – English translation or English-French translation of materials that capture the migrations of the Yoruba race, some of which might be written in Yoruba by French-influenced and educated writers or English-influenced and educated writers, speaks to the attendant complexity of this task. Successful execution of this task requires what Jaaskelainen (1999) expresses as “a series of competencies, a set of steps or processes that favour the acquisition, storage, and utilization of information.” The competencies required for the task proposed here thus include a vast knowledge of the Yoruba culture and language. This puts

the task on the work table of Yoruba scholars of French and English language, especially those in the field of translation.

Seguinot (1989) believes that translators employ at least three global strategies:

- (i) translating without interruption for as long as possible;
- (ii) correcting surface errors immediately;
- (iii) leaving the monitoring for qualitative or stylistic errors in the text to the revision stage.

These address the translator's decision about the flow of execution of the translation exercise.

A more specific and technical procedure is highlighted by Nida (1964) as follows:

I. Technical procedures:

- analysis of the source and target languages;
- a thorough study of the source language text before making attempts to translate it;
- Making judgments of the semantic and syntactic approximations.

II. Organizational procedures:

- constant reevaluation of the attempt made;
- contrasting it with the existing available translations of the same text done by other translators,
- checking the text's communicative effectiveness by asking target language readers to evaluate its accuracy and effectiveness and studying their reactions.

Newmark (1988) differentiates between translation methods and translation procedures. He writes, "While translation methods relate to whole texts, translation procedures are used for sentences and smaller language units". The following methods of translation are thus highlighted:

Word-for-word translation: in which the SL word order is preserved and the words translated singly by their most common meanings, out of context.

Literal translation: in which the SL grammatical constructions are converted to their nearest TL equivalents, but the lexical words are again translated singly, out of context.

Faithful translation: it attempts to produce the precise contextual meaning of the original within the constraints of the TL grammatical structures.

Semantic translation: which differs from 'faithful translation' only as far as it must take more account of the aesthetic value of the SL text.

Adaptation: which is the freest form of translation and is used mainly for plays (comedies) and poetry; the themes, characters, and plots are usually preserved, the SL culture is converted to the TL culture, and the text is rewritten.

Free translation: it produces the TL text without the style, form, or content of the original.

Idiomatic translation: it reproduces the ‘message’ of the original but tends to distort nuances of meaning by preferring colloquialisms and idioms where these do not exist in the original.

Communicative translation: it attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership.

As found appropriate, translators should avail themselves of resources, strategies and methods suitable for this kind of translation. However, it is apparent that best practices will be required to achieve this translation model’s goals. Consideration could also be given to emerging technology-driven tools for doing a translation. Products of these, however, cannot serve the purpose of this translation model without the impute of translation experts, Yoruba scholars and linguistics experts.

Translation model

Many models have been proposed in the field of translation. Larson’s faithful translation process which entails discovering the meaning of the source text and re-expressing it in the receptor language is adopted for this study. Thus, wherever translation is required, the following model applies.

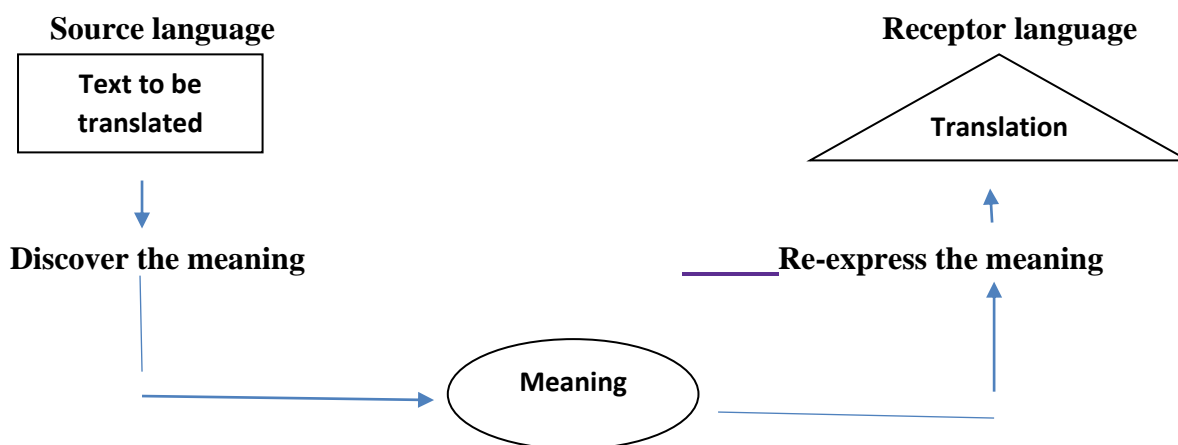


Figure 1. Translation Process (Larson, 1994)

The core value of this model is the avoidance of literal translation, which often yields meanings outside the intended meaning of the source text. It rather re-expresses the meaning of the source text in the target language. The proposed model in this paper is based on this translation model. It however comprises some unique features. The first feature is the source texts.

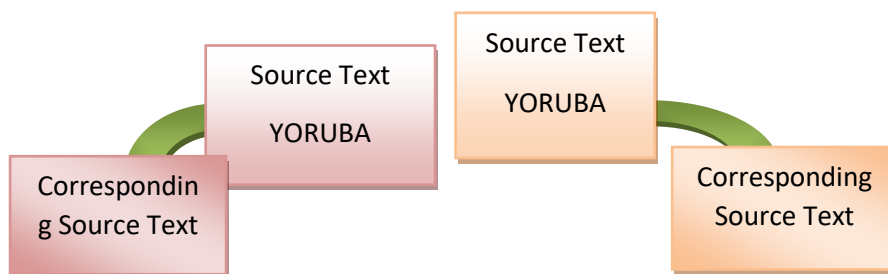
The Source Texts

The hypothetical source texts in the scenario in focus include

- source texts in Yoruba from the Anglophone part of the divide;
- source texts in Yoruba from the francophone part of the divide;
- texts in English from the francophone part, and texts in French from the francophone part.

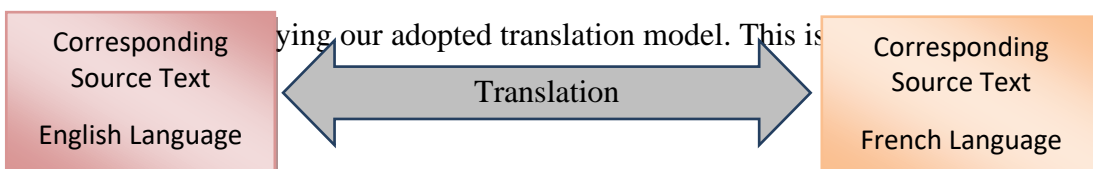
The first part of the model is designed to make these texts available to both sides of the divide. Thus, source texts in Yoruba are translated into French or Yoruba, depending on the part of the divide it is sourced from. If the text is originally written in French or English, it has already gone beyond the initial step. The source texts are thus modelled at two levels, as presented below.

Translation Translation



Cross-Linguistic translation

The source texts, now in the English language on the Anglophone part of the divide and in the French language on the Francophone part, are set for correlation. To do this, each of the Francophone and the Anglophone versions of the same history texts is translated into another

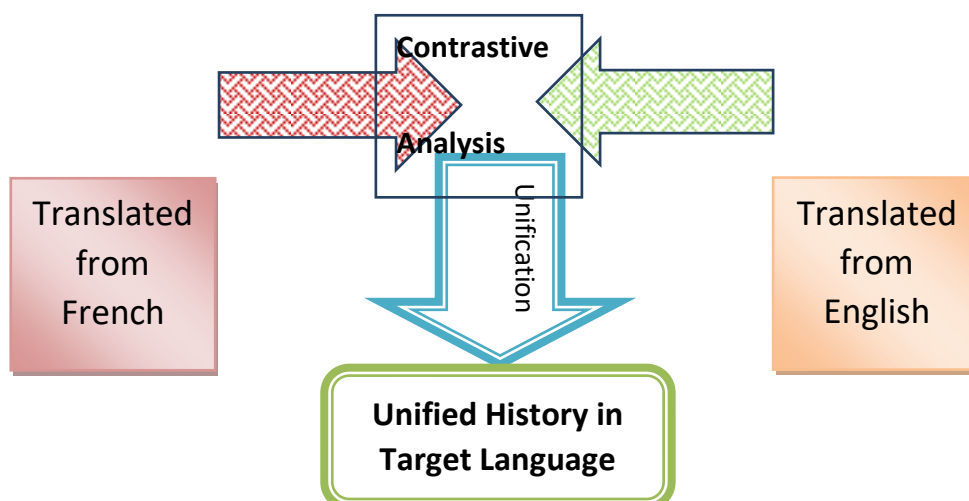


Contrastive Analysis of Source Texts and Corresponding Translated Source Texts

Employing Contrastive Analysis, the two versions of the history texts are compared and contrasted to highlight areas of inconsistency, gaps and contradictions. This analysis is done on both sides of the divide to capture both the Francophone and the Anglophone perspectives on the facts of the history under consideration.

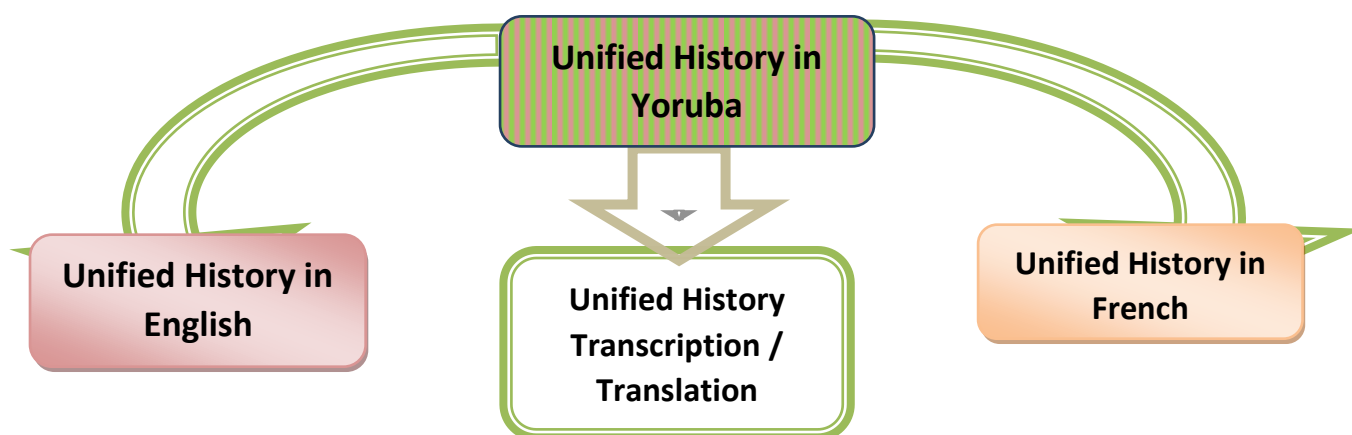
Unification of the Texts

The highlights of the Contrastive Analysis could then be subjected to a process involving research, conferences, mediations and any other acceptable means of reaching a consensus on a logical and complete version of the history text. This process is tagged “Unification” in the model. The unification process must be done via a process that makes the outcome academic and empirical while being free of bias.



Documentation

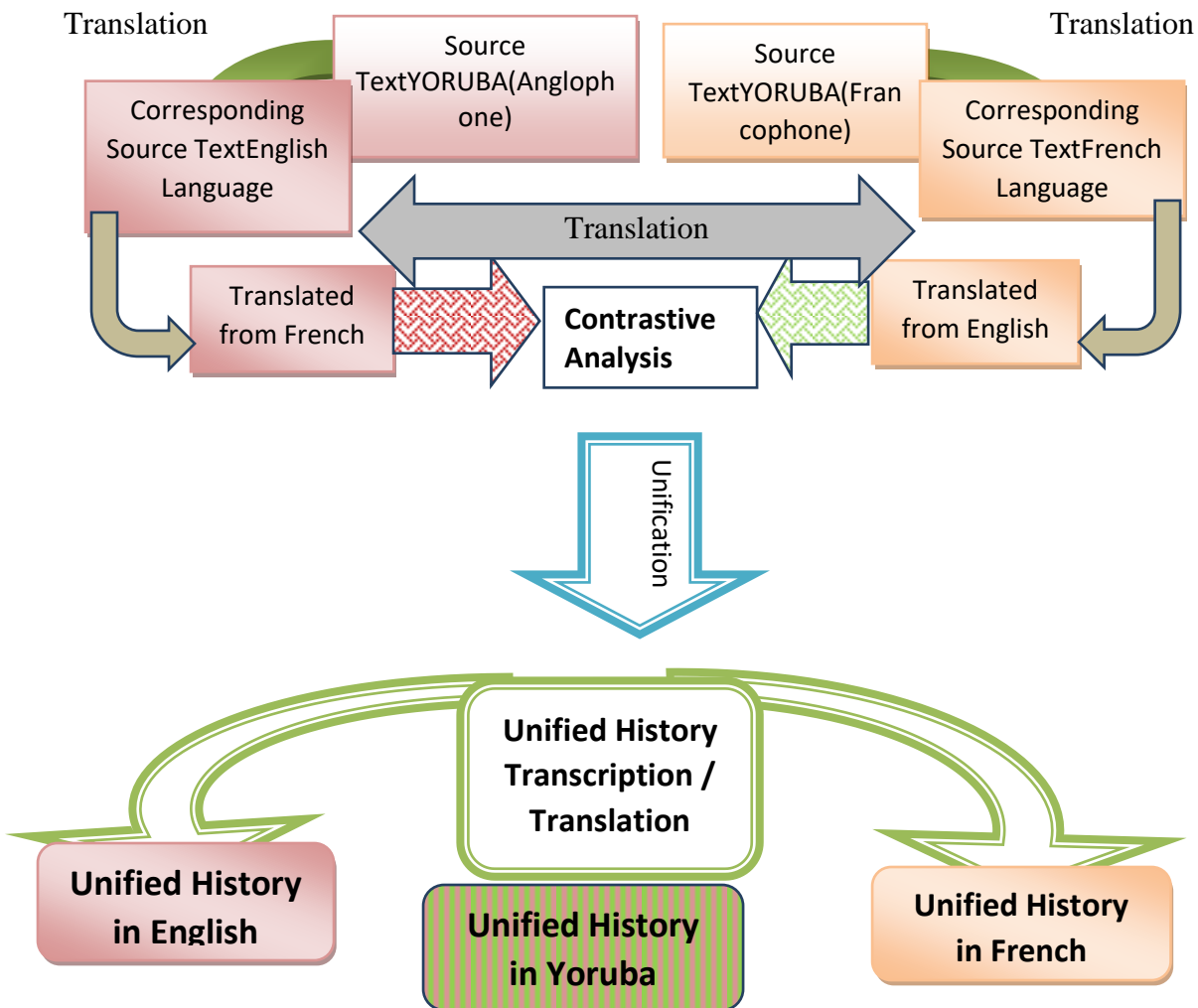
Documentation is the final part of the process involved in this proposed model. It involves translation and transcription. The consensus unified version of the history text is, in this step, transcribed in one of the languages and translated into the other languages involved in the process. In other words, if the source text is written in Yoruba, at this point, the text should be translated into English and French. This is basically to make the text available in English, French and Yoruba languages for the francophone and the Anglophone Yoruba.



The process described above is presented in the proposed model below. It models the process of deriving a unified version of the histories of a people from different linguistic sources through translation and Contrastive Analysis. It is a five-step model. The first step is a translation from the source text if it is in Yoruba. The second step is a cross-linguistic translation from English to French and French to English to make the same materials available across the linguistic boundaries. The third step is a contrastive analysis of the two versions of the texts to reveal the areas of inconsistencies and inadequacies. The fourth step is a unification process which is proposed to be academic and high powered to ensure mutual

acceptability among the people. The fifth and final step is translating the unified version of the historical text into the other languages to have an accurate version in English, French and Yoruba Languages.

The Proposed Translation Model for the Unification of History of a people Spread over Linguistic Boundaries.



The model proposed here takes cognizance of the fact that the texts on the history of the Yoruba, their migration and settlements could be in any of Yoruba, French or English language. Suppose the history text is in the Yoruba language, depending on the side of the divide where it is sourced. In that case, it should be translated, following the translation

method diagrammed in figure 1, into English or French. The French material should then be translated into English, and English material should be translated into French. Applying contrastive analysis, the translations should be correlated to derive the areas of contrast, inadequacies and contradictions. These should then be resolved academically to arrive at a unified history. The unified history should then be translated into the other languages to make it available to both sides of the divide.

Conclusion

The unification of the history of the Yoruba people should be beneficial to improving their socio-economic and political fortunes. This lends significance to the proposition of this paper. Thus, the developed model, which is subject to further research, particularly in the area of application, has the potential to become a tool for the application of translation and contrastive analysis to the task of updating historical texts. Over the years, the number of incoherencies and controversies highlighted by scholars has underscored the need to get the facts right as much as possible. There is also a need to look beyond the legacies of colonialism in handling our heritage. The cultures, histories and religions of the African continent must be given the attention it deserves without recourse to colonial influences. All these justify efforts at regaining the originality in our history.

Recommendations

It is only logical, since it is beyond the scope of the present paper, to attempt a unification of an aspect of a people's history, following the process modelled in this paper. This should not only provide empirical support for the value of the model but also yield a unified history with the value of being free of controversies and being acceptable across linguistic boundaries

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