

Africa, the final economic frontier

Afaf Steiert & Yasin Steiert

In a period where we have all gotten continually used to negative economic rhetoric, it's tough to predict what will guarantee the next wave of prosperity. If you're like us, you've turned numb to the weak forecasted growth of the world's largest economies, and have learned to ignore the continual "warnings" of what is going to be the catalyst to the next economic slowdown.

So where is the final economic frontier? Where is the region of the world that remains open to foreign investment, growth and has a relatively barren translation sector? Africa. Yes, the continent infamous for chronic civil wars, political unrest and widespread poverty will become the center of investment, growth and prosperity.

It can be agreed that translation companies have settled in fairly well across every other region of the world since investment has become globalized. Most emerging markets in Latin America and Asia have already been occupied by various companies, and attempting to compete within those markets would require quite a lot of capital without the guarantee of promising profits.

Africa, however, is primed for growth. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasts that during this fiscal year, Africa will experience 5.3% economic growth. To prove that this growth has been consistent, *The Economist* compiled all IMF data from the 1970s on African growth. This data showed that Africa's growth rate has been skyrocketing from about 3% in the 1990s to the now more than 5% growth. The World Bank claims that Africa's average growth will outpace the world's average in the next three years. Additionally, when looking at the IMF's top ten fastest growing economies, seven of the ten are African states. The analysis and data are clear: Africa's economic advancement has quickened, rushing it ahead in the economic rat race.

These forecasts for growth and increased capital do not come without

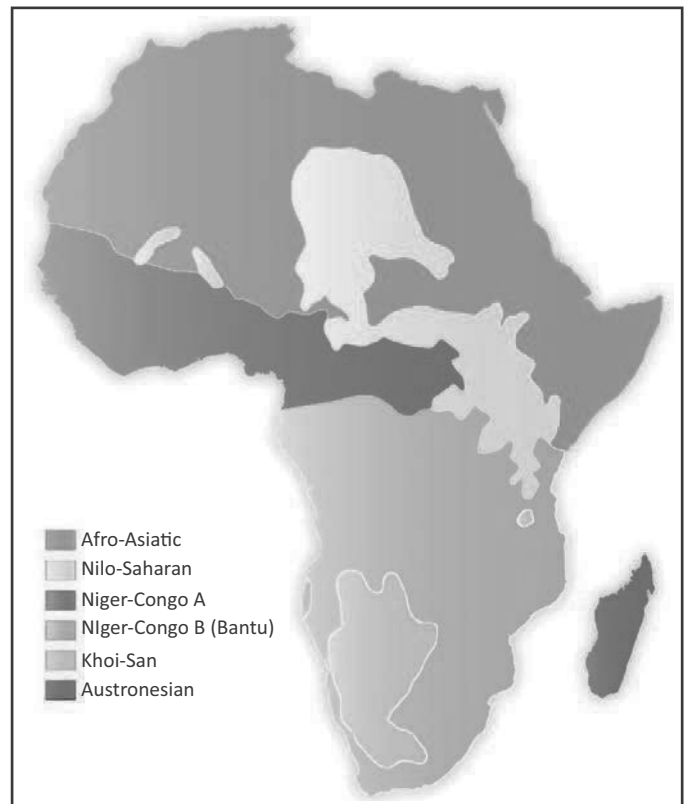


Figure 1: Major language families in Africa. Source: Common Sense Advisory.



Afaf Steiert is president and cofounder of Afaf Translations. She works as a conference Arabic interpreter, voiceover and translator.



Yasin Steiert has been an intern at Afaf Translations since 2009 and is studying international relations at the American University of Sharjah.

challenges. The income disparity and political instability within some African states still do pose a risk. These issues do have to be kept in mind, but it also must be calculated that there is a lot of international and regional support to help with these challenges. The most prominent restrictive factor to this growth, however, is Africa's linguistic diversity. Africa is a continent compiled of over 2,000 local and regional languages. Most of the information that enters African states is transmitted in the more commonly known colonial languages such as English and French. In major cities, this tactic can work with ease. But anywhere outside of these international hubs, almost all communication is done through the original regional languages. This leaves a massive translation gap for one of the fastest growing economies. In turn, Africa's growth is very much dependent on the translation sector that will come to serve it.

Of course, Africa has one-third of the world's languages; there is no way that any business will end up putting in the time



Figure 2: The inside of a Nakumatt store in Nairobi, Kenya.

and effort to target a demographic that is so fragmented. It's costly and inefficient, because when it comes down it, some of these languages are spoken by no more than 100 people and are essentially extinct. So what do the primary languages in Africa come down to? They have been identified and categorized into six major groups. These include Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan, Niger-Congo A, Niger-Congo B, Khoi-San and Austronesian. You can see how these are regionally divided in the Figure 1 map

compiled by Common Sense Advisory in its report "The Need for Translation in Africa."

Within all of these language groups there are extinct languages that can be dismissed from a business case perspective. Some of them, however, such as Amharic, Berber, Hausa, Igbo, Oromo, Swahili and Yoruba are used by tens of millions of people. These languages are common enough for nonindustry companies to actually recognize them, and for the majority of the language service industry to recognize. Where we can expect growth is the translation of languages such as Umbundu, Fang, Ruanda, Ga and Tonga. These languages fall into their own category since they are spoken by between 1,000,000 to 2,000,000 people each, according to a report compiled by Travel Language Services. There are dozens of other languages that fall into the same mid-sized spectrum of speakers. So while certain portions of the African population are served, a major information gap still exists.

It must be understood that most Africans know two or more languages. Whether



Why do so many leading organizations turn to EQHO for audio & multimedia localization?

For almost 10 years, media companies, eLearning developers and MLVs have been placing their trust in EQHO for audio and multimedia localization. Perhaps it's because of our level of quality, speed of delivery and our flexibility. However, feedback from EQHO's many satisfied customers would suggest it's for all of these reasons plus so much more.

Audio and multimedia localization isn't such a dark art. Why not find out what EQHO can offer and see why so many top companies swear by our services?

Contact EQHO at +66 [0]2 637 8060, or email info@EQHO.com

www.EQHO.com

Transcription | Voiceover | Subtitling | Integration | Flash | Articulate | Lectora | Captivate | HTML5



Thinking about Africa?

Interested but wondering how to venture into African markets? Localize Africa and its sister company eLocalize, the localization experts covering the continent from the Cape to Cairo, are the answer.

Whatever your requirements and target markets, we have the expertise and knowhow from many years of experience in local markets on the continent to ensure your total success.

Look no further, we are the experts in Africa. Meet us at www.localizeafrica.com or www.elocalize.net.

Localize Africa

Johannesburg, South Africa • Cairo, Egypt
info@localizeafrica.com • www.localizeafrica.com



Your Gateway to Africa

Located in Cape Town, South Africa, the Folio Group is ideally positioned to "translate Africa to the world."

Since 1988 we have evolved into the largest LSP in sub-Saharan Africa — a global leader in the provision of African languages.

Areas of special expertise:

- LSP for the IT, telecommunications and medical industries
- Instant telephonic interpreting via Folio InterTel

Contact us for translation, localization, interpreting, voiceovers, copy-writing, editing, proofreading and transcriptions.



Folio Online

Cape Town, South Africa
international@folio-online.co.za • www.folio-online.co.za



Africa...Where It All Begins

Africa could fit China, USA and Europe within its borders. Think of the linguistic and cultural diversity, yet business opportunity in these countries and how it will benefit your business to expand here.

Now all of that can be done through BayanTech, your localization sage in Africa. Rely on us in all languages, including most rare ones. We guarantee you the quality and consistency to crack benchmarks.

BayanTech

Giza, Egypt
mkt_bayan@bayan-tech.com
www.bayan-tech.com

regional or colonial, UNESCO reports that Africa is one of the most multilingual continents, resulting in regions that have communicative bridges to each other, allowing some fluidity to the information being dispersed.

A major issue in tackling the daunting translation services required within Africa is the attention that will need to be paid to the regions in which information will be distributed. Just as international aid organizations such as the United Nations have issues translating materials for the public in Africa, businesses face the same issues in regard to advertisements. In Africa, cultural differences do not occur over a span of large areas. Advertising within Nigeria, for instance, is very much susceptible to the people's opinions. In an April 28, 2011 article, "Nigeria's mad men," *The Economist* details the reactions to ads in the predominantly Muslim north versus the Christian south. Occasionally, people protest and riot due to ads that are not deemed acceptable to their cultural inclinations, forcing companies to abolish certain campaigns and in turn, waste resources. The article states that

"When *ThisDay*, a Nigerian newspaper, printed a lighthearted column speculating that the Prophet Muhammad might have enjoyed the Miss World contest, 200 people died in the ensuing riots, a *ThisDay* office was torched and the writer had to flee to Norway."

Localization of the information and products that are introduced into Africa is crucial to the success of businesses and the reputation of language service providers. Since the continent is so diverse and in some cases so segmented by its communities and traditions, adaptability and localization remain critical to success in Africa.

Taking the diverse cross-regional tastes, customs and demographics into account, localized translators are the most viable option to guarantee high quality language solutions within Africa. Social boundaries within Africa are not depicted by a state's border since the imperialistic tendency of European colonists to set African countries free was by essentially dividing them up randomly and propping puppet governments in each country. Fast forward less than a century and we're left with the

current socioeconomic situation of Africa, with an isolated population that primarily receives its information from the individuals that bridge the information gap between communities. The only way to limit misinterpretation in African translation is by hiring capable contractors from each region. This method of localization fits Africa and its language diasporas.

As businesses are just beginning to attempt to tackle advertising in such a diverse and changing continent, it must be understood that the previous mindset was that Africa only had resource-driven growth, yet in McKinsey & Company's article "What's driving Africa's growth," it was found that between 2000 and 2008, resources only contributed to 32% of Africa's gross domestic product growth. The majority of growth came from wholesale and retail, telecommunications, manufacturing and agricultural industries. This, combined with climbing wages in the continent, directly leads to higher consumption rates. This rate of course varies among states, but an estimate from Stephanie McCrummen in the *Washington Post*

TRANSLATION AT THE *SPEED* OF TODAY



smartling HI!

www.smartling.com/multilingual

claims that about 300 million Africans fall into the low to middle class. To put this into perspective, the African Development Bank Group finds that the middle class has tripled in the last three decades.

In turn, Africans as a whole have increased consumer potential. For example, superstore chain Nakumett has over 40 outlets across Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda. *Ventures Africa* reports that it also plans to raise \$50 million this summer in order to continue East African expansion. Keep in mind that this is only one superstore chain. The capital and consumerism exists and it's going to be tapped into in the near future. To guarantee that this new middle class actually has the spending power, and this isn't only targeted growth at the elite, it is always good to look at the amount of money businesses expend on advertisements to the consumer in areas such as Nigeria. *The Economist* reported in 2011 that advertising expenditures had nearly quintupled even after the economic downturn that plagued the world's markets. The increase in advertising expenditures is seen across the continent. Nielsen stated in its "Global Advview Pulse" report that spending related to advertisement was up 2.9% in Africa in the first quarter of 2013. So we have a clear number of indicators all pointing at economic growth and which leads to the idea that the translation market can experience an increased demand in African language service requests. Furthermore, foreign direct investment was up to \$50 billion last year according to an April 12, 2013 article in *Ventures Africa*. Africa saw a 5% increase in foreign investment while global figures fell by 15% in total. Ernest & Young Global Limited also reiterated the increased foreign direct investment seen in Africa and verified that it has been on the upswing for the past five years.

As in any market, higher consumption results in more information being relayed to the consumers. Yet rather than developing within one common language family, Africa presents the translation industry with thousands of languages and a diverse cultural foundation to adapt to. For the past few centuries, Africa has been relatively immobilized economically. Granted that the current conditions remain somewhat stable and continue to follow the upward trend, it can be guaranteed that a large number of African states will become emerging markets. Africa still remains the rich final frontier in our overdeveloped economic landscape. **M**

editor@multilingual.com