

**LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE BIBLE TRANSLATIONS: A STUDY OF THE REDEEMED CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF GOD MANUAL IN IGBO**

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**Abstract**

The globe has people of diverse languages and cultural backgrounds; hence, translation is inevitable to enable transfer of information and cultures from source languages to target languages. There is a need for the translators to work with a high level of fidelity and faithfulness, to ensure that authors' original intended messages which could be captured in a universal understanding are not mutilated. This kind of challenge is observed in translation of religious texts from foreign languages to indigenous languages, especially Nigerian languages. The Igbo version of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) House Fellowship Manual is in focus, as it has triggered the interest of researchers in finding out to what extent errors are observable in the translation of texts from the English language version of the manual. The paper classifies them and seeks to find out the causes of these errors, and to what extent these errors in translation are cultural, linguistic or both. Data for analysis are errors collected from the 2018/2019 manual of the RCCG Igbo House Fellowship Manual, while the English version was used to aid the analysis. Findings reveal several errors noted in the translations, which buttress the point that cultural and linguistic competences are highly needed; both in the source and target languages. The reader(s) of the manual under study will either have difficulty in understanding the messages, or may carry the wrong message as the standard; thereby causing conflicts. This has formed the basis of this research. We shall present the noted examples of wrong translations as found in above quoted text, provide the reasons why they are professionally considered erroneous and as a matter of importance and for the growth of academics, suggest the correct forms. Relying on the principles and

techniques of translation, the descriptive approach was adopted in this paper. The paper recommends that organizations especially religious bodies employ the services of professional and certified translators. Besides, it will not be out of place for them to have a well-established Bureau or Directorate of Translations to handle their translations for the indigenous Nigerian languages.

**Keywords:** Indigenous Language, Bible Translation, Igbo, Redeemed Church

## **Introduction**

The continuous struggle for a better living has made it unavoidable for speakers of different languages to meet and interact in various contexts. Often, effective communication among them is hindered by lack of mutual intelligibility. The need therefore arises, for a process of expressing information from one language to another; without altering the message. In other words, human interaction requires the practice of translation.

In some languages, some words have no existing corresponding lexical items to express messages in the target language. Such words are formed by instinct. This is commonly seen while translating texts from the English language to some Nigerian languages. It's only humans that fill up such a gap by using their natural intelligence to provide equivalent words in such languages. Translation, in effect, cannot be avoided if a proper understanding of information is intended.

Shastri (2012) considers translation as a recent discipline and as a part of Applied Linguistics. He notes that Holmes (1990) gives it the popular name of ‘Translation studies’. Shastri (p.2) further notes that “translation started with religious texts” and observes that religious translations have the biggest market all over the world.” This is without its attendant problems. It has been observed that several religious translations are not done with high level of professionalism needed. This singular reason has motivated this present study. The research studies the level of linguistic and cultural competence of the translators of the text under study

Newmark (1988) defines translation as “rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text”. This definition stresses on rendering meaning of the source language text into the target language text, as what is intended by the author.

Eke and Ugoji (1999, p.1) define translation as “the transfer of the meaning of words and expressions from one language to another.” Shastri (2012) notes

that translation is basically a linguistic activity. Hence, a lot of linguistic knowledge is needed to carry out the job of translation, and any translator lacking in any aspect of linguistic knowledge will surely reveal his ignorance in the product of his translation.

Hatim and Munday (2004) view translation as the process of transferring a written text from source language (SL) to target language (TL). In their definition of translation, they do not explicitly express that the object being transferred is meaning or message. They lay emphasis on translation as a process.

Translation, as Catford (1965), states is the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL).

Shastri (2012, p.3) provides various definitions of translation from notable early scholars: Translation is a natural term used for all tasks where the meaning of the expressions in one language is turned into the meaning of another, whether the medium is spoken, written; or signed (Crystal, 1987).

Translation is probably the most complex type of event, yet produced in the evolution of the cosmos (Richards, 1953).

Translation is the transfer of thoughts and ideas from one language (source) to another (target), whether the languages are in written or oral form, or whether the languages have established orthographies or do not have such standardization. (Brislin, 1976).

Bell (1991) defines it more completely as the transformation of a text originally in one language into an equivalent text in a different language, retaining as far as is possible, the content of the message and the formal features and functional roles of the original text.

From the foregoing, it is established that translation does not just involve the reproduction of a text in one language into another, or end with the transfer of message. Translation is a cross linguistic and cross-cultural activity, while ensuring to bring the message in the source language home; to the target language. In other words, the socio-cultural and linguistic background of the source language text, need to be rendered appropriately in the target language; without losing the message. There may be challenges and problems that could be encountered in the process of translation, that could mar, and mess up the end product; if care is not taken.

Shastri (2012) notes that translation problems arise as a result of lack of bilingual, bicultural knowledge, skills, and tools relevant for the specific translation being carried out. Again, not striking a balance in fidelity between the SL and TL could be catastrophic. Shatri (2012) notes the following problems of translation: finding appropriate equivalence, socio-cultural problems, stylistic problems and genre-related problems. Ajunwa (2014) notes the following agents of erosion of fidelity in translation: the translator's worldview, ideology and personal interest; lack of professionalism; shallow knowledge of either one or both languages; shallow knowledge of the subject matter being translated; language interferences, ambiguities including structural ambiguity and lexical ambiguity; and absence of diacritics.

### **The Concept of Fidelity in Translation: An Empirical Review**

Awa and Ezeorah (2018) study the extent to which the Igbo worldview is conveyed in their corpus, Adichies's *Purple Hibiscus*. They relied on theory of meaning and presupposition for their analysis. Awa and Ezeorah find out that linguistic competence and cultural context, play a significant role in literary translation. According to Guralink (1979) in Okere (2015), faithfulness or fidelity means "the quality of being accurate, reliable and exact".

Ajunwa (2014) likens fidelity in translation to the Biblical concept of fidelity, which requires a wife to be faithful to her husband; and vice versa. According to him, fidelity in translations means the extent to which a translator accurately renders a source language text into a target language text, without distorting, violating or betraying the message; as well as the style of the source language text.

Fidelity deals solely with how precisely a translated document conforms to its source. It can also be referred to as how a document corresponds with its source in a variety of ways, from being 'faithful to the message', to being 'faithful to the author'. Also, one must factor in the register, the language and grammar, the culture and the form.

Hurtado-Albir (1990, p.118) relates fidelity to three things, thus

1. What the author means to say,
2. The target language, and
3. The reader.

According to her, it is as important to grasp the meaning of the source text as is to understand the intention of the author, in order to convey the intentions to target readers. This is fidelity in translation. It does not only mean faithfulness to the words.

### **Infidelity in Translation**

Infidelity in translation has come to be a topical issue or an aspect in translation which has featured in flourishing researches and reviews. It is a major concern and challenge to translators as it is a mark of inaccuracy. Therefore, in order to ensure exactitude, translators should pay a great attention to this issue of great concern.

Infidelity in translation can be seen as the inability of the translator to reproduce the linguistic and socio-cultural message of the source language text, as closely as possible in the target language. These could be caused by some factors beyond the management of the translator as Okeke (2015) submits that a perfect translation is an impossible dream. He goes on to posit that saying exactly the same thing in another way is not possible. This view, to Christian (2011), is true having been convinced from studies that absolute fidelity in translation is difficult to achieve. However, Okeke (2015) cushions the friction in his idea of the impossibility or probable unavoidability of achieving accuracy, by saying that relying on the interpretive theory of translation, it is possible to achieve good translation without a word-for-word correspondence; between SL and TL.

A popular Italian aphorism reads: “*traduttore, traditore*” which means “translator, traitor,” an observation that the translator is helplessly incapable of remaining faithful to the original text. This is explained, as Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure puts it, by the absence of absolute equivalence between the signifier, and the signified.

### **Data Presentation**

The following examples of infidelity in translation are present in the English-Igbo translation of Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) house fellowship manual.

**Wrong Lexical Equivalent**

**Table 1**

S/N	SLT	TLT	Suggested Correction
1	Do you have a heart of gratitude?	I na-enwe obi uto?	I nwere obi inye ekele?
2	Benefits of a heart of gratitude	Ihe mere I ji kwesi inwe obi ebere	Uru dì n'inwe obi inye ekele.
3	The world is a battle field	uwa bu ubi agha	Uwa bụ ọgbọ agha/Uwa bụ agha
4	End of first quarter	Ngwucha kwota nke mbu/agba mkparitauka	Njedebe agba nke mbu/ oge mkparita ụka
5	Consequences of suicide	Ihe na-akpata mmadu igbu onwe ya	Oghom dì mmadu igbu onwe ya.
6	Enemies' weapons shall not prosper over you	Agha ndi iro agaghi enwe ike na ndu gi.	Ngwa aghā nke ndi iro agaghi emegide gi.

**Non – Adherence to Ethics**

**Table 2**

S/N	SLT	TLT	Suggested Correction
1	Suicide, rape and murder are satanic	Igbu onwe, ira n'ike na igbu mmadu bu njo	Ogbugbu onwe, mwakpo, na igbu mmadu sitere n'aka ekwensu
2	Consequences of rape	Ihe na-akpata ira	Oghom di n'iwakpo mmadu (nwoke maobu nwaanyi) n'iké.

### Discourse Shift

**Table 3**

	<b>SLT</b>	<b>TLT</b>	<b>Suggested Correction</b>
1	Partnering with the missionary	Iso ndi ozi ala ozo na-akpakorita	Igbakọ aka mmadu na ndi ọru mgbasa ozioma
2	God was methodical in His creation	Chineke kpachapuru anya n'okike ya	Chineke kere okike ya n'usoro.
3	He established orderliness and coordination right from creation	o weputara idi n'usooro na nchikota bido n'oge okike.	O sitererii n'oge okike guzobe usoro kwu oto nakwa nke ezi nchikota.

### Literal Translation

**Table 4**

<b>S/N</b>	<b>SLT</b>	<b>TLT</b>	<b>Suggested Correction</b>
1	Golden diet of the week	Nri olaedo nke izuuka	Okpuruukpu ihe ndi dikarisiri mkpa ileba anya n'izuuka
2	Can you stand in the gap for nations?	Unu puru iguzo n'owa maka mba	I pürü iwepüta onwe gi ihe maka nchebe nke mba ụwa pụo n'ihe iyi egwu ọbula?
3	Your <b>hospitality</b> can harvest mighty blessings	Nnabata gi nwere ike ighotara gi amara di ike.	Uzo i si ele obia ma o bu ezi mmekorita gi na mmadu ibe gi nwere ike iwetere gi otutu ngozị gbara okpuruukpu.

### Data Analysis

**Table 1**

In table 1, the translation is considered wrong because the original translator(s) did not employ the directly appropriate equivalent expressions or words, in an attempt to render the message from the source language; into the target language.

In the SLT, we have ‘*do you have a heart of gratitude*?’ which was rendered into the TLT by the original translator(s) as ‘*I na-enwe obi uto*?’ as against ‘*I nwere obi inye ekele*?’ that is, the suggested correction. If the equivalent as provided by the original translator(s) is back translated, we will end up having: ‘*are you joyful*?’ Also notable here is shift in tense: from present ‘to have’ to present continuous ‘na-enwe’.

The translated version ended up changing completely the original idea or the intention of the author of the SLT. Same is applicable to the other examples as presented in the table. Hence, the suggested corrections.

**Table 2**

The translated versions of the source texts in *table 2* are viewed unacceptable as the most appropriate forms because the translator(s) made use of stigma-carrying expression in rendering their work. Stigma words or expressions are those that bear a mark or label of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person. The word ‘*rape*’ is one of the words under this category. As a result of the message and experience inherent in the word, it is temporarily more comfortable to use the word ‘*violation*’ in the English language. Same is applicable in the Igbo language as ‘*ira*’ (intercourse) finds its functionality only in the informal setting while we employ ‘*mwakpo*’ as the standard. This is arrived at, having considered the need not to stigmatize the victim, as well as the feeling it may leave the listener with; if rendered in the raw form. More so, the document in question is a religious text, and must as much as it depends on its purpose; not derail from its goal.

**Table 3**

The data presented in *table 3* shows that the SLT lost their meanings in the TLT, because the translator(s) drifted from the original discourse set by the author. It is worthy of note that while the translator(s) missed the target in *table 1* by lexical mismatch, there was a shift in the context in *table 3*.

**Table 4**

Literal translation occurs when a translation of a text is done by translating each word separately, without reference to how the words are used together, in a phrase or sentence. This phenomenon is present in *table 4*, where the translator(s) reflected only the individual meaning of the lexical components of the sentence, without regards to the intended or original message as words may suffer loss, improve or balance their meanings, when in contact with

other words; in a sentence. See: Golden diet of the week (SLT), Nri olaedo nke izuuka (TLT) then the suggested correction thus: ‘*Okpuruukpu ihe ndi díkarísíri mkpa ileba anya n’izuuka*’ other examples are table 4 above.

### **Summary/Conclusion**

Having observed the analysis, one could deduce that it is either the translator is not very knowledgeable in the vocabulary of the target language (Igbo), or that machine translation was adopted (MT).

It is worthy of note that linguistic-based errors are observable in tables 1, 3 and 4, while in table 2, the error is basically cultural. The paper strongly believes that MT was adopted in the translation of the text under study, going by the numerous or countless errors noted, especially the absence of diacritics.

Doubtlessly, the main advantage of MT is speed. It is being able to sensor the environment of target language, and getting the idea of a text in seconds. It is worthy of note that MT focuses on individual word meanings which makes it get the overall translation completely wrong. However, MT should not be completely divorced, as it may aid the translator sometimes, but one should be very alert while employing it, as it functions better for short phrases and quick answers, even at word and short phrase levels, they sometimes fail; most times the results they give do not tally with the context in question.

Ajunwa (2014) notes the absence of diacritics as one of the major problems of translation. The Igbo language profusely makes use of diacritics, and any transition into Igbo without diacritics has failed ab initio.

We strongly adopt this view adding and being more specific that without diacritic marks in the Igbo language, lexical items are mere orthographic displays of possible letters of alphabets of any language; ready to adopt it. Some words without diacritic marks may not find semantic relevance in the Igbo language. This is because some Igbo words have vowels, and or syllabic nasals, which must be distinguished. Diacritic marks are indispensable in order to aid pronunciation and distinction of meaning. This will further enhance the non-native speakers’ comprehension of Igbo text(s).

Human translation therefore, remains the most appropriate way to avoid misunderstanding, if a good communication is intended since MT can sometimes land one into deconstruction of the message intended by the author; in the SL. The MT may yield a lot of unpardonable linguistic and cultural transmission errors.

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