



The Challenges of Translation of Igbo and English Languages on Text; The Bible in Discuss

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Translation, Problems, Igbo, English and Effect

Received : 5 May

Revised : 23 June

Accepted: 23 July

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ABSTRACT

Translation of one language to another is an essential part of human communication and existence because we have millions of diverse languages in human society. Translation can only be done by a multi-linguist who knows the languages who knows the languages he or she wants to translate from or to. Translation of language is of two categories: Oral translation and written translation. The former can be done by any multi-linguist while the later requires a skillful personale (Translator) which is the problems translators face in translating a particular language to another and its effect to written works if those problems are not put into consideration and its possible elimination. The study looked into Igbo language translation of the Bible from the English translation . some of these problems highlighted include cultural differences, sentence formation, limited vocabularies, ambiguity and so on. These problems dictated, heavily affect the smooth translation of the Igbo translation of the Bible from the English version to igbo version

INTRODUCTION

Translation is the communication of meaning of a source-language text by means of an equivalent target-language (Wikipedia, 2012). So, there are certain factors a translator needs to consider before translating a written work (text) to another language and if not properly considered will affect the smooth translation of the work. In this study, the researcher tends to use the Igbo translation of the Bible, particularly BIBLE NSO version, translated by the British Anglican, Thomas John Dennis in 1913, to highlight the problems translators encounter during translation process and its effect to the text being translated to. The BIBLE NSO version of Igbo language translation of the Bible is the ideal material for this study; the problems of language translation and its effect to written works., because this version is very influential among Igbo speakers and has been criticized by artists, among them Chinua Achebe , who sees it as stultifying the Igbo language. The ultimate goal of a translator is to transfer a meaning from a particular language to another and if not properly done, the meaning might be tempered with therefore, change the message. For instance, in Acts Chapter 20 Verse 28: it says, "Take heed therefore into yourselves"(Kings James Version) but the Igbo translation in Bible Nso Version says thus: "Nezenu Onwe-unu..." For this to be translated in English, it will mean: "Be careful of one another" and by this the message meaning has been tempered with, so it becomes an error. Some dialect in Igbo may also translate it as "Avoid one another" and a careful linguist will find out that 'Nzenu Onwe-unu' is so ambiguous, contrary to the English translation which have just one meaning. In Igbo language "Onwe unu" can be "Yourselves" or "one another" and these two words have different meanings in English Language.

The Holy Bible in Igbo union version which can also be known as Bible Nso" translated by Rev. James J. Dennis with his committee including Igbo indigenes, was translated through combination of different dialects which include: Onitsha, Owerri, Unwana, Arochukwu and Bony dialects keeping idioms and proverbs common to all, intended to be a sort of "central" or "compromise" Igbo, playing the role of literary medium to the Igbo people (Oraka, 2003) Though many Igbo speakers faulted the combination of various dialects in this translation. But whether there are faults in the combination of dialects in the translation is not the concern of the research, but the language in general and its semantics and pragmatic meanings. There are many translations of the Bible but the Bible first existed in Hebrew language and then Greek before any other language. But the Igbo language translation was directly translated from English and not the original Hebrew translation. So, the researcher concentrates on the two languages involved, being he is a bi-lingual of the two languages of the case study.

Translation is part of human communication, in order to pass information to another language there are things a translator needs to put into consideration and if not well considered it becomes a very critical problem to the translation. Some of these problems translators face include:

- Cultural differences
- Limited vocabulary of the target language

- Ambiguity of meanings (Lexical and structural ambiguity)
- Difference in syntactic structure (sentence formation) of the two language involve

E.t.c.

This research investigated these problems on how they existed in the Igbo translation of the Bible from the English version.

LITERATURE RIVIEW

Etymology of Translation

The word translation is derived from the Latin word 'translatō' (which comes from 'trans' and 'fero', the supine form of which is Latin, together meaning is "to carry across' or to bring across) Christopher Kasparek, *The Translator's Endless*. The ancient Greek term for translation, metaphrasis, ("a speaking across") has supplied English with metaphrase ("a literal or "word- for for word, translation'), as contrasted with paraphrase ("a saying in other words from Greek's paraphrasis). Hyuhmetaphrase corresponds in one of the most recent terminologies to "formal equivalence", and paraphrase, to "dynamic equivalence". Strictly speaking, the concept of metaphrase of "word for word translation" is an imperfect concept, because a given word in a given language often carries more than one meaning and because a similar given meaning may often be represented in a given language by more than one word. Nevertheless, "Metaphrase" and "Paraphrase" may be useful as ideal concept that marks the extremes in the spectrum of possible approaches to translation.

At the very beginning, the translator keeps both the source language and target language in mind and tries to translate carefully. But it becomes very difficult for a translator to decode the whole text literally; therefore he takes the help of is own view and endeavours to translate accordingly Wikipedia (2013).

Translation is a bridge that connects two or more cultures or more people. Translation allows common understanding among two or more people or groups and it allows them to take advantage of the special or event knowledge of the other. Translation is also a social process that is embedded in particular social contexts and is subjected to the dictates of that context. For example, the burden of translation is often expected to fall upon the lower status or less dominant group. Thus, many Igbo speakers in Nigeria are expected to learn English. People who lack fluency in the dominant language are often considered ignorant. This research capture a key difficulty in translation as it concerns language in which one is regarded as superior to the other (English and Igbo as a case study). The ancient Greeks distinguished between metaphrase (Literal translation) and Paraphrase. This distinction was adopted by English poet and translator John Dryden (1631-1700), who described translation as the judicious blending of these two modes of phrasing when selecting in the target language, "counterparts" or equivalents for the expressions used in the source language'.

When [word] appear literally graceful, it were an injury to the author that they should be changed. But since what is beautiful in one [language] is often barbarous, nay sometimes nonsense, in another, it would be unreasonable to

limit a translator to the narrow compass of the author's words: tis enough if he choose some expression which does not vitiate the sense.

Dryden cautioned, however, against the license of imitation" i.e., of adopted translation; "when a painter copies from the life...he has no privilege to alter features and linement. "This general formulation of the central concept of translation- equivalence is as adequate as anything has been proposed since Cicero and Horace, who in 1st century- BCE Rome, famously and literally cautioned against translating "word for word" (*verbum pro verbo*). Kasparek (1983:88).

Despite occasional theoretical diversity, the actual practice of translation has hardly changed since antiquity. Except for some extreme metaphrases the early Christian period and the middle ages, and adapters in various periods (especially pre-classical Rome, and the 18th century), translators - 'literal' where possible, periphrastic where necessary- for the original meaning and other crucial 'values' (e.g. style, verse form, concordance-with musical accompaniment or, in films with speech articulatory movements) as determined from context.

There are other theories of translation which are not for this research. Many theories had contributed much in translation but there are still difficulties and problems of translation.

Translation Problems

In looking at the factors responsible for these problems, the research will study the Bible; the Igbo translation (Bible Nso) and the English translation (King James and NIV Version). In doing this, the Igbo version will be taken into consideration. According to Thomas John Dennis, the translator of the Bible Nso version:

Our translational difficulties were two fold, viz, firstly arising from the poverty of the language and secondly, such as arose from difference of dialect. The former are of course largely chronic in character and are common not only to all the Ibo dialect, but also many of them, to all barbarous language...QTD, Chinua Achebe.

With the above quotation from Dennis himself, one will find out that the translation had difficulties during translation and these lead us to the discussion of the problems or the factors responsible for these difficulties.

Cultural Differences

One of the identified translation problem is cultural difference of the two languages involved. Language is a reflection or, and a window into culture, Umberto Eco (2001:2). A good translator should not only be a bilingual but also bicultural. An object or activity that does not exist in one's culture will not have a word for it and another language that has the culture will find it difficult to translate it in other language, thereby creating not only problem for the translator but also difficulty to understand by the owners of the target language. This can be seen in Isaiah Chapter 1:18 which says; "Though your sin are like scarlet, they will be as white as snow" (NIV version). Now, while we look at the Igbo version let's observe the word "Snow". And the Igbo translation says:

"O buru na nmehie- unu adika uwe uhie, obu dika snow ka ha gadi ocha." (Bible Nso version).

In the cultural background of West Africa, specifically Igbo geographical location, the object "Snow" do not fall because of its climate and because it does not exist, it has no word equivalent with Igbo word, so the translator borrowed the word but the effect of this, is that some Igbo speakers who do not know, see or heard of the word "Snow" will not understand the comparison in which the Bible is trying to compare white. There are other white objects that can serve as snow but the translator will not use it because it will definitely change the meaning and so it becomes a problem.

Another example of this cultural difference can be seen in psalms 23: 5 which says: "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." this verse in translated in Igbo version as "I nedo table n'usoro n'irum n'anya ndi kpabum".

Looking at this quote of the Bible one will find out that the word "table" which existed in the English also finds its way to the Igbo translation. The question is why is it so? Culturally, the Palestine kingdom of which Bible has its background from has this culture of serving their food on the table and the sentence "preparing a table before me" is a popular saying in Jewish culture which means 'serving food for someone'. The English culture has similar culture of serving food on the table. And wherever one hears "prepare a table" it means "providing food' or 'serving' food in Jewish culture, from (manners and culture of the Jewish land) contrary to the culture of the Palestine and English (westerns), Igbo culture do not have 'table', and so do not use it in serving food. Because of this, the translation was very wrong in the sense that the translator used word - for -word (metaphrase) and thereby meaning another thing, which is "Arranging in order a table in front of me".

It takes only a bicultural reader and bilingual to understand the meaning of the sentence and the word" table" which do not have its equivalent I Igbo language but with time the word" table "has been domesticated as "tebulu" due to cultural contact with westerners, but still an Igbo mono-linguist will definitely not understand the word" table" in that passage of the Bible.

A competent translator is not only bilingual but bicultural. A language is not merely a collection of words and the rules of grammar and syntax for generating sentences but also a vast interconnecting system of connections and cultural references whose mastery writes linguist Mario Pei, "Come close to being a lifetime job". Wikipedia (2013).

Ambiguity

Ambiguity is a major problem in translation, ambiguity which means several meanings of a word or sentence. When a word has more than one meaning it is called lexical ambiguity and when a whole sentence connotes more than one meaning it is called structural ambiguity. Mistranslation due to ambiguity of the word or sentence comes from two dimensions, either from the source language or from the target language. Historically, this problem of ambiguity had caused mistranslation in different languages. A famous "mistranslation" of the Bible is the rendering of the Hebrew word "Keren" which has several meaning as "horn" in a context where it also means "beam of light". As a result, for centuries artists have depicted Moses the lawgiver with horns

growing out of his forehead, and example is Michelangelo's famous sculpture, Wikipedia (2013).

Let's consider the underlined words, "So" and "Ötua" (in Igbo). The word "So" is ambiguous, which can mean "very much", as in 'I love you so much', and can also mean 'Like this' as in 'do it so'. There are other meanings of the word "So" but in this context of the Bible it means "Very much" (For God loved the world very much), but this word "so" is translated as "Ötua" which means "Like this" and it will be quoted as: "For God Loves the world like this.

The right word could have been "Nke Ukwu" which means "So much" in English. This is example where the source language is ambiguous. In the case where the target language is ambiguous.

Limited Vocabularies of Target Language

Understandably, there are languages that are richer in vocabulary than other. Igbo language comprises far fewer words than English, there being fewer synonyms. Although, there is no exact ratio. According to Oxford University Press (2014), English languages are the richest language in terms of vocabulary. Some African languages are richer than the other, example is Hausa and Igbo. Igbo language does not have pronouns like "she", "they", "he", e. t, c English and Hausa languages have it. Now looking at how limited vocabularies effect translation, it's obvious that when a source language is richer than the target language, it's always difficult to translate; sometimes the translator ends up loaning words or uses a whole lot of sentence in translating one word.

For example, in Galatians 5:21, which says thus: "and envy, drunkenness, orgies and the like, I warn you. (NIV version), is translated thus: *Ïkpo-as, inubiga manya oke, ite-egwu, na ihe yiri ndia.* (Bible Nso). The underlined words "orgies" and "ite-egwu" are two words to consider in this quotation. "Orgies" is a type of dance which can be called "seductive dance" and can be likened to "partying". In the Igbo translation, the translators translated it as "Ite-egwu" which means just "dance". While the English translation is taking about a particular type of dance, the Igbo version generalized it. The cause of this mistranslation is limited vocabulary. The Igbo language does not have a word for "Orgies" as type of dance, and to an Igbo speaker, the Bible says "do not dance". This mistranslation had been for a very long time and formed a doctrine among Igbo rural communities where English Bible is rarely read, of which the only translation they know is Igbo translation.

Syntactic Differences or Differences in Sentence Structure

This factor focuses on the grammatical structure or sentence formation and the possibility of the Igbo language to express the Bible (English version) fluently and accurately. In this, it compares and contrasts the syntactic construction of complex sentences in both languages. Many times sentences structure effect the meaning of a text, especially in translation and to avoid that, translators have a to adopt sentences and their clauses from the source language to make reference to the original content. But the result of this act by translators makes it difficult for readers of the target language to read the translated text fluently.

The English language always has the adjective before noun while the Igbo language and many other African languages have the noun before the adjective.

Example: "Fair Lady" will be translated as "Nwayi Ocha" in Igbo, the 'Lady' = 'Nwayi' while 'Fair' = Ócha'.

Now, if the translator chooses to metaphrase instead of paraphrase it will be; "Ócha Nwanyi", thereby changing the meaning: which means "Lady's Fair".

In psalm chapter 23:1, which say: "...I shall not want", (KJV version). And the Igbo translation says: "...O dighing ihe Korom". Looking at the two languages, one will find it as being metaphrased. The English version is in future tense while the Igbo version is in past or even present tense. The word ödighe ihe korom" means 'I do not want' or 'I don't lack,' which means he does not want now, but may lack in future. But if "ga" is inserted into the sentence it would have been same with the English version which is now: 'O dighie ihe ga akom'.

But the translator, on the process of trying to apply the same sentence formation, he tampered with the meaning.

The particular syntax (sentence structure) characteristics of a text's source language are adjusted to the syntactic requirement of the target language. Kaparek (1983:89).

Combination of different dialect in a particular language translation will definitely effect the smooth flow of the meaning and also hard to read and understand. Many writers and preachers condemned the mixture of dialect in the translation of the Igbo Bible I one language. Such persons like Chinua Achebe and G.T. Basden. Basden, a preacher and secretary for the C.M.S. in Onitsha in this letter says

Bible reading becomes a burden, rather than a duty and a pleasure... one cannot find Lancashire, Devonshire, Cornish and Somerset dialects mixed up in our Bible. Why such a system should be inflicted upon a poor, uneducated people QTD. Chinua Achebe.

Looking at the Igbo language in general, it has over 20 dialects. For a translator to consider all these dialects, it becomes a problem for the translator. Dialect is the most difficult factor to consider when translating especially some language that does not have unified language.

Criticism

The related literature reviewed, reveals the etymology and different theories of translation and how these theories affect translation process. The review of literature also reveals that a number of factors that can be attributed to translation problems and how it appeared in the Igbo translation of the Bible (Bible Nso). To this effect, the review of the literature pointed the effects of these problems in the target language (Igbo). The translation problems include: cultural differences and problem of dialects, with regard to the correlation between English translation of the Bible and that of Igbo.

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the method used to conduct this research is discussed. This includes: instrument for data collection, data analysis and definition of terms.

The instrument for data collection

The Bible Nso (Igbo translation) and King James Version (English translation) Bible are used to obtain data for the study. Also NIV version of the Bible is used for clarity.

Data Analysis

The data collected for this study were analyzed by highlighting the errors which are caused by the highlighted problems of translation which include: cultural difference, differences in syntactic structure of the two languages involved, ambiguity, limited vocabularies of the target language and dialect problems.

In this research, English version of the Bible (King James Version) is the source language and the Bible Nso is the Target language.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Translation Terms and Definitions

Translation with time has become a study, with experts fast growing in the field. There have been agencies specialised in translation of languages to another and because of that, different terminologies have sprang up for the purpose of aiding translators in translation processes. Some of these terms include:

Machine Translation

Machine translation (MT) is a process whereby a computer program analyses a source text without human intervention. In reality, machine translation typically does involve human intervention in the form of pre-editing and post-editing.

Fidelity and Transparency

Fidelity (or faithfulness) and transparency, dual ideals in translation that are often at odds. A 17th century French critic coined the phrase “les belles infide’les” to suggest that translations, like women, can be either faithful or beautiful, but not both. Paris, Dider Erudition (1990:231).

Fidelity (faithfulness) is the extent to which a translation accurately renders the meaning of the source text without distortion. Transparency is the extent to which a translation appears to a native speaker of the target language to have originally been written in that language and confirms to its grammar, syntax and idioms. The criteria for judging the fidelity of a translation vary according to the subject type and use of the text, its literary qualities, its social or historical context, e.t.c. The criteria for judging the transparency of a translation appear more straightforward: an unidiomatic translation ‘sounds wrong’ and in the extreme case of word – for – word translations generated by many machine-translation systems often results in patent nonsense Wikipedia (2013).

Trans-Equivalence

The question of fidelity VS transparency has also been formulated in terms of respectively, ‘formal equivalence’ and dynamic (or functional) equivalence. The latter expressions are associated with the translator Eugene Nida and were originally coined to describe ways of translating the Bible, but the two approaches are applicable to any translation, “formal equivalence’ corresponds to “metaphrase” and “dynamic equivalence” to “paraphrase” Wikipedia (2013).

“Dynamic equivalence” (or ‘Functional equivalence’) conveys the essential thought expressed in a source text, if necessary at the expense of literary original seem and word order, the source text’s active VS passive voice e.t.c. By contrast ‘formal equivalence’ (sought via “literal” translation) attempts to render the literally or “word for word” (metaphrases). If necessary at the expense of features natural to the target language.

Interpreting

Interpreting or Interpretation”, is the facilitation or oral or sign language communication either simultaneously or consecutively, between two or among more speakers who are not speaking or signing the same language. The term ‘Interpreting’ rather than Interpretation” is preferentially used for this activity by Anglophone translators to avoid confusion with other meaning of the word “interpretation”.

1. Cultural differences
2. Ambiguity
3. Limited vocabularies of the target language
4. Syntactic differences of differences in sentence structure
5. Problem of dialect

Meanwhile, the above factors which are responsible for translation problems will be carefully analysed below, as discovered in the Bible Nso (the target language) and NIV and KJV English Bible (the source language).

1. *Cultural Difference*: Under the cultural differences, the following problems were discussed:

- In Isaiah chapter 1:18, the word: Snow has no equivalent in Igbo language and was translated as “Snow” in the Igbo version.
- In Psalms chapter 23:5 which says: “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies...” Igbo version “ I doziri m tebulu n’ihu ndiirom na ndi na -Akpagbu m...”

The word “table” and “Snow” find their way to the Igbo version because they do not exist in Igbo culture and since that is the case they do not have word for it. An Igbo mono-linguist cannot interpret the word “table” “Snow”. ERROR: also an error occurred during the translation of psalms chapter 23: 5 as quoted above, if back -translation is applied, it will be “Arranging in order a table before me”. Pragmatically, the two sentences in the different versions are not the same because the sentence; “prepare a table before me...” is a figurative way of saying “you provide food for me”. Because “table” is a metonymy of food in the western and Palestine culture. For the fact that the Igbo do not have the culture of serving food on a table, the translation becomes an error though Igbonized.

2. *Ambiguity*: Under ambiguity, the word “So” was wrongly translated because of its ambiguity. In the book of John chapter 3: 16, “For God so love the world that he gave his only begotten son” (KJV).

The word ‘So’ can mean more than one thing in English Language, it can be

- a. “Such an Extent” (adverb) as in “why are you so angry” and can also mean
- b. As previously mentioned or described as in “I think so”

In the context of the Bible passage the word “so” means a great degree”, which can also mean “very much”. There is a notable error as previously

explained in Chapter 2, which changes the meaning in the Igbo translation. Looking at the sentences in the Igbo version which says thus: “N ihi na Chineke huru uwa n’anya otua...”, one will find “so” being translated as *ötua*” of which if translated back to English will mean “Like this” while the right translation should be “Nke ukwu” which means “very much” or “so much” in English. The right translation should be “N ihi na Chineke huru uwa n’anya nke ukwu” instead of “N ihi na Chineke huru uwa n; anya otua”.

3. Limited Vocabularies of the target Language: The third problem discoursed was under limited vocabularies. The following were unable to be translated because of limited vocabularies:

a. In Galatians 5:21, the word “Orgies” which can also means ‘partying’ or ‘seductive’ dance’ is translated as ‘*ite-egwu*’ which means ‘dance’.

The dictionary meaning of “orgy” is a wild drunken festivity, especially one at which indiscriminate sexual activity takes place which also involves dancing. So if ‘orgy’ is a type of dance, the Igbo translation for it should not be “*ite-egwu*” (dance), but there is no vocabulary in Igbo language that will be equivalent to the English word “orgies”. So it becomes a problem.

b. In Romans 13: 15, the word “Abba Father” was unable to be translated rather it was translated as “Aba Nna”. The meaning of “Abba” still remains a mystery to Igbo speakers.

As previously stated in Chapter 2, if the word “Abba” conveys both warm intimacy and respect the right vocabulary in Igbo language that will match it is still missing.

c. In Habakkuk 2:1; the word “tower” (KJV) or “Ramparts” (NIV) means a high or tall square structure, often part of a church, castle e.t.c. which can be a place for defense or protection. But in the Igbo version it was translated as “N elu ebe ewusiriike” (Bible Nso) which can be translated back to English as “a well-built place” or “strongly built structure”.

The Igbo version “ebe ewusiriike”, is a phrase rather than a word which does not equivalent the word “tower” or “rampart” in English. The word “tower” is not just any strong building or structure. So the vocabulary for it in Igbo language is still missing.

d. Difference in Syntactic Structure: Under this problem some errors were discovered. For example, in Psalms 23:1, “...I shall not want” (KJV), was translated as “...O dighi he korom” which means “I do not want” or “I don’t lack” when translated back to English.

Looking at the translation one will find it as being paraphrased. While the English version is in future tense, the Igbo version is in past tense or even present tense. “I don’t lack” may mean that he does not lack now but may lack in the future, but the English version “I shall not want”, carries the present and future quality. But if “ga” is inserted into the sentence it would have mean same with the English version which will now be “O dighi ihe ga akom”. The translator, on the process of trying to supply the same sentence formation he tempered with the meaning.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The importance of translation to our society has made writers and researcher to realise the problems translators encounter during translation, and the effect of these factors on the target language. The previous chapters have shown the problems translators face in the course of translation of a richer language. In this case, translation from English language to Igbo Language. Also, errors were highlighted as they occur in the translation of English Bible (source language) to the Igbo "Bible Nso" (target language). The findings of the study as revealed from analysis of data are supported by the earlier findings of the other writers and researchers in the same and related areas. The problems behind translation were revealed through the discovered errors in the translation of the Igbo "Bible Nso".

FURTHER STUDY

The study made the following recommendations which a translator must possess in order to overcome the problems of translation and as to eliminate errors.

- i. A competent translator must have a very good knowledge of the language, written and spoken from which he is translating (the source language)
- ii. An excellent command of the language into which he is translating (target language) is needed for smooth translation.
- iii. He must be familiar with the subject matter of the text being translated
- iv. He must have a good understanding of the etymological idiomatic correlates between the two languages

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