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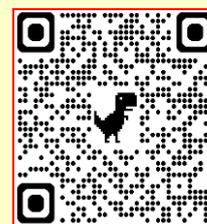
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AN AUDIENCE-BASED ANALYSIS OF YORUBA TRANSLATION OF CHRIST APOSTOLIC CHURCH SUNDAY SCHOOL STUDY MANUAL

OLUSANYA Phillip Siji (PhD)

Department of French, Ekiti state University, Ado-Ekiti

Corresponding Author: OLUSANYA Phillip Siji (PhD)

ABSTRACT

The significance of making the translation fit the target audience lies in the ability to effectively convey the intended message and purpose of the original text to the specific readership. This study titled, "An audience-based appraisal of Yoruba translation of Christ Apostolic Church Sunday School study manual". It aims to investigate, first, whether the translator of the study manual followed the due process in the production of the Yoruba version of the study manual. Secondly, it examines whether the translations meet the expectation of the receiving audience in term of language and meaning. The current Sunday School study manual, both English and Yoruba texts are being compared to assess how the translator has been able to adapt the message of the author(s), both at the levels of grammar, style and context, to the understanding of the non-English speaking audience. The sections of the booklet selected for analysis are the main theme and Unit I. The unit consists of six lessons. Each lesson is structured into sub-theme, lesson topic, devotional thoughts, and study outline. The selections are considered an adequate representation of the lessons as they will afford the researcher ample opportunity to carry out a thorough analysis of the text. Drawing on functionalist and communicative translation theories (Nida, 1964; Nord, 2018; House, 2015), the paper evaluates how translation choices affect theological clarity, audience accessibility, and rhetorical force. The analysis demonstrates that excessive reliance on literal and structural calque frequently results in reduced communicative effectiveness, theological ambiguity, and diminished emotional engagement. Conversely, strategic deployment of explicitation, transposition, modulation, and adaptation enhance clarity and doctrinal precision. The study argues that translation of theological discourse into Yoruba requires interpretive mediation grounded in biblical theology and audience-oriented functionalism rather than structural imitation of the source text. It is expected that the findings of this research would help improve the quality of translated documents, and as well reposition the Education department of the CAC mission for proper management of interlingual activities.

1. Introduction

Translation is a very challenging task to undertake. It is not just merely rendering the surface structure of one language into another. It involves a deep understanding of the two languages involved, and also of knowledge of the subject-matter of the text to be translated. Likewise of importance is the consideration of the audience that will consume the product of translation. The consideration will be in form of the culture context and cognitive competence. Cognitive

competence is the mental ability, on the part of the target audience, to associate the message as communicated through the linguistic content of the text with his/her own reality to make meaning. All this will require that the translator be adequately trained and informed in the language, culture and context of both the source and target texts in order to avoid a situation whereby the translation only conforms to the wordings of the original but is lacking in communicating the actual message.

Translation in the area of religious materials, especially of the Christian religion, has continued to be on the high rise since 1970s following the advent of charismatic gospel which necessitated the need for use of English and Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa for the dissemination of the gospel message. According to Ojo (1988:175), the emergence of the charismatic movements in Nigeria in the 1970s is a remarkable religious phenomenon. He attributes this growth to many factors, but the central factor which clearly emerges is that the movements have been presented in a manner acceptable and relevant to Nigerians, and they have been adapted to the situation in Nigeria. He further opines that the continuous growth of the movements into the 1980s attests to the fact that they are acting as responses to certain areas of need in Christian commitment in Nigeria.

Many churches who had hitherto restricted their medium of communication to the use of local languages then began to adopt dual-language for fear of losing membership. It began with interpretation of messages into English. The initial intention was not only to take care of English speakers, but to be able to attract elites and the educated converts, and as well, retain elite members who were being targeted for membership by the movement.

Meanwhile, the criteria for recruiting these bilingual go-between was just proficiency in English and strong fluency in the local language. New recruits were sourced from among young secondary school leavers, and were made to develop competence through constant practicing. Formal training was not required.

Today, not much has changed: formal training of translators and interpreters is not yet embraced. Therefore, the quality of translation continues to be of serious challenge, despite the fact that the exercise of translation has been receiving wider attention by religious bodies, especially, among Pentecostal churches. The increase in the volume of translation has not reflected much in its quality.

2. What is translation?

Some scholars define translation as an art or craft and some others call it a science. It is called an art as all good translations are expressions of the creative urge of the translators. Likewise, it is a science because of the technical formalities and complexities involved in its process. In the 1970s, a revolution took place which transformed translation theory and translation science into 'Translation Studies', which term was coined by James Holmes, who proposed it in a 1972 paper. Scholars, at this point, started to look at translation not in normative terms, as the linguistic school had done, but from a descriptive perspective. The translated texts were viewed not only as target texts (i.e., in relation to their sources), but also as texts in their own right (cf. Even-Zohar 1978). In this sense, translation came to be viewed as a manipulative operation rather than a simple textual substitution. According to Bassnet and Lefevre 1990, preface):

Mary Snell-Horby (1995:22) defines the concept of translation as an interaction process between the author, the translator and the reader; and mentions their complexities in the following quotation:

Translation is a complex act of communication in which the SL—author, the reader as translator and translator as TL—author and the TL—reader interact. The translator starts from a present frame (the text and its linguistic components); this was produced by an author who drew from his own repertoire of partly prototypical scenes. Based on the frame of the text, the translator-reader builds up his own scenes depending on his own level of experience and his internalised knowledge of the material concerned

The definition reflects the dynamics of translation exercise as it

affects the synergy between the author, the translator and the target audience. Where this kind of synergy is lacking, the product of translation would be lacking in meaning and effect. This has been observed in the production of Yoruba versions of Christ Apostolic Church study manuals. While the language can be adjudged as good, the communicative intent is often weak, and sometimes, distorted.

Bassnet is of the opinion that the translated work does not need to look exactly like the source in terms of language, culture and context. This is due to translator's concern to produce a text that communicates and leaves the audience with the same effect as the audience of the original work.

On the other hand, Nord (in Shuttleworth and Cowie, 2007: 182) a functionalist theorist views translation as "the production of a functional target text which maintains a relationship with a given source text that is specified according to the intended or demanded function of the target text". In this case, translation becomes a function of how it is expected to be received. The translator is guided, not only by the language and culture of the original, but principally, by how the message will fit into the target language, culture and context.

Consequently, translation assumes, with the context of its functional role in the target culture, a process interaction and negotiation.

Hornby affirms that the interaction is a function of translator's ingenuity based on his creativity, experience and expertise.

The ingenuity of the translator is deplored to achieve a particular purpose with the context of the recipient of translation product. That informs Carbonell's (2006: 48) definition of translation as follows:

The above definitions emphasize the fact that translation should go beyond rendering the surface expression of words, but capture the intended meaning of the author, as well as the peculiarities of the receiving public. Which means that the act of a good translation is primarily contextual: it cannot be explained through the mapping of linguistic correspondence between languages, or judged with respect to universal standards of quality and accuracy. In this sense, translation is adapted to suit the preferences of the audience, while at the same time conserving the original intention of the author and achieving the effect.

3. Audience-oriented considerations

In the context of translating religious study manuals, the translator is expected to consider certain factors to make his work audience-oriented. First is the understanding of the subject matter. The subjects of the Sunday Schools bother on wide range of Christian doctrine with a blend of biblical theology. The authors of the study manual are individuals who already have academic certificates in Theology. Various biblical and theological terminologies are often used that will require proper understanding to be effectively communicated to the target audience. But, since the translators are largely composed of people with no background of formal knowledge of Theology, they sometimes ignore the contextual meaning of doctrinal terms, but instead, resort to linguistic rendering

The second challenge is the understanding of the target audience. TA possesses peculiar characteristics that are not often factored into the translation process as it exists in Christ Apostolic Church in the south-western axis of Nigeria. First is the level of education of the TA. The Yoruba audience is a mixture of literate, semi-literate and illiterate. The choice of language must reflect the audience's composition and the oral mode of delivery of the study. It is observed that the language of the source text appears too formal and academic that the Yoruba

version also tilts towards the same pattern. This makes the oral delivery by the study teachers to be tedious and thereby, robs the message of its communicative intent and effect.

Another major challenge is the limited knowledge of the translators. They are not often aware of what is required to produce an audience-driven translation. Major shifts had occurred in the history of Translation that have brought tremendous progress to the way and manner the cultural, linguistic and cognitive challenges of translation can be handled. But most of the translated materials being produced within the religious circle are still being haunted by the linguistic and cultural challenges of the Post-Translation Study era. The Church needs to embrace professionalism in order to overcome these challenges.

Lastly, the knowledge of structure and teaching principles guiding Sunday school in general is very germane to the work of the translator. His understanding of the communicative of the Sunday School teacher is a factor that guides him through the translation process. The translator has to flow along with the Sunday School teacher who assumes the role of communicator per excellence by making the translated material fulfill its communicative intent.

4. Translation of Religious Texts

Religious translation requires sensitivity to doctrine, culture, and language. Sanneh (2009) observes that Christianity historically depends on translation, since scripture must be rendered into diverse languages for the faith to spread. Similarly, Walls (2002) argues that Christianity is a “translated religion,” constantly adapting its message across linguistic and cultural boundaries. In the Nigerian context, Adebite (2010) emphasises the role of indigenous languages in ensuring effective communication of religious teachings. For Yoruba Christianity, translations into the local language are not only about comprehension but also about cultural identity and spiritual resonance. It also has to do with competition for visibility, relevance and acceptability. Poor translation is, therefore likely, going to erode the principles that birthed the idea in the first instance, because it will leave the target audience unmotivated.

5. Audience and Purpose of Translation

Audience determines the purpose and purpose also determines the audience. The audience could be any group: very young children, adolescents, young adults, mature adults, senior citizens or people working in different professional organizations or engaged in different vocations. They could be a mix of consumers belonging to different age groups yet working in the same professional work-setting.

6. Structure of CACSS study manual

CACSS is structured for both children and adults. But the focus of this research is on adult. Children’s manual comes in English language only. For adults, the lessons cover for a whole year with a theme as the title. The theme is further broken down into six sub-themes, with forty-eight lessons in all. The lessons are prepared in series. The title of the current series is “Spiritual Power and Gifts for the Body of Christ”.

A lesson begins with a topic and followed by a memory verse. Under

the memory verse an illustrative picture with caption that seems to introduce the listeners to the content of the study. Followed that is the devotional Bible reading for the week. It does not form part of the study, is rather meant to provide guide for private devotion in preparation for the next Sunday lesson. Next is the Devotional Thought that is intended to interpret the topic in punchy manner to pounder upon and prepare the heart for the actual lesson. The lesson exposition begins with the introduction with textual sources, and is in two parts. At the end of the exposition, we have Lessons Derived which is the summary of the two-part exposition. Lastly, we have the section of the predetermined questions drawn to test the level of understanding of the participants.

7. Theoretical framework

This study draws primarily on Formal and Dynamic Equivalence (Nida, 1964); Functionalist/Skopos Theory (Nord, 2018); Translation Quality Assessment (House, 2015); Comparative Stylistics and Translation Procedures (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995); Communicative vs. Semantic Translation (Newmark, 1988). Nida (1964) emphasizes receptor response as the benchmark of successful translation. Nord (2018) further argues that translation must be evaluated according to its communicative purpose (*Skopos*). House (2015) proposes that overt linguistic correspondence must not compromise pragmatic equivalence.

In theological translation, Sanneh (2015) observes that Christianity historically flourishes when its message is culturally internalized rather than structurally transplanted. Thus, theological translation requires interpretive mediation rather than mechanical transfer.

Scholars of translation have long emphasized the importance of the target audience in evaluating translation quality. Nida and Taber (1969) highlight that the success of a translation depends on the receptor’s response: “the receptors of the translation should understand it in substantially the same manner as the original readers understood the original” (p. 1). Similarly, Venuti (1995) underlines the cultural negotiation that occurs in translation, noting that translators inevitably shape the audience’s reception of texts.

House (2015) proposes that translation quality assessment should be grounded in a functional-pragmatic framework, where equivalence is judged by how effectively the target text functions for its intended readers. This aligns with Vermeer’s (1989) Skopos theory, which asserts that the purpose (*skopos*) of the translation determines its strategies and evaluation.

Newmark’s (1988) Process Theory emphasizes communicative and semantic translation approaches, with attention to both meaning and audience. Vermeer’s Skopos Theory extends this by centering translation evaluation on purpose: if a translation fulfills its function for the target audience, it can be deemed successful. These frameworks are particularly relevant for religious texts, where both fidelity to doctrine and accessibility to readers are essential.

8. Data presentation and analysis

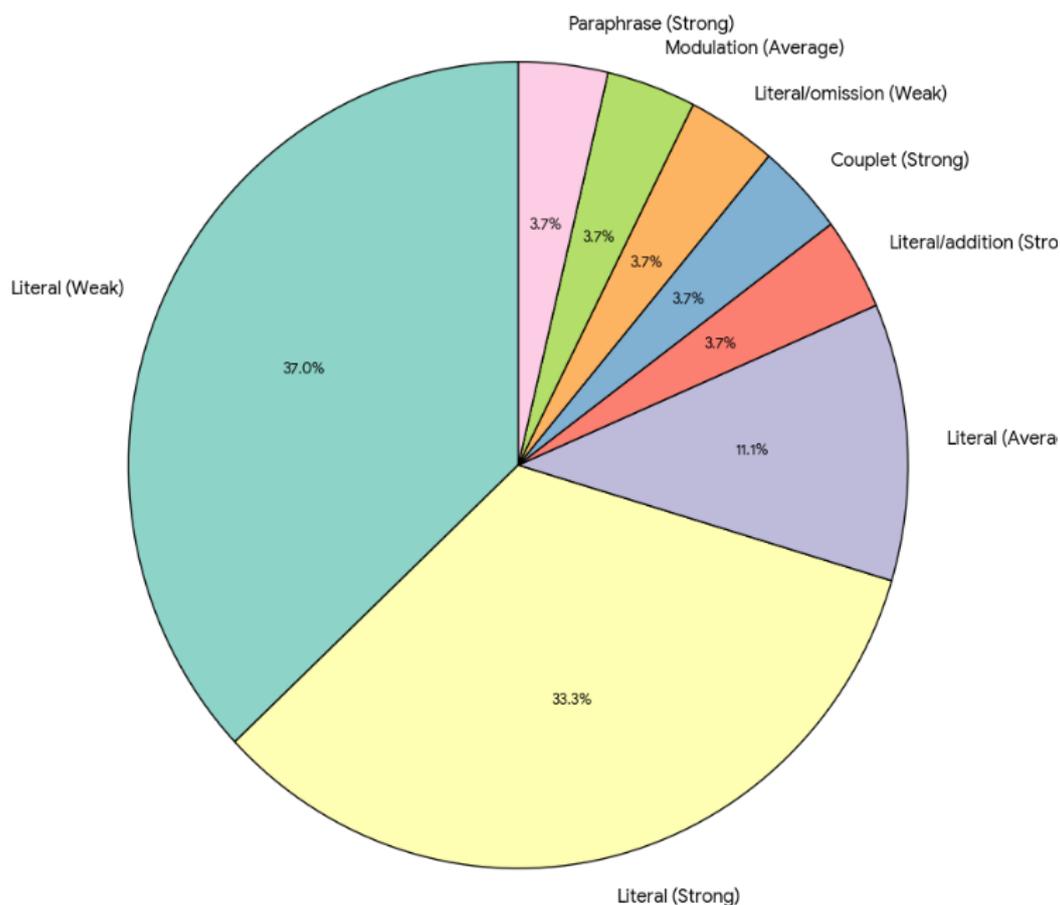
Table 1 provides a clear, structural overview of the observed translational outcomes, emphasising the systematic failure of the literal approach when dealing with semantic density and the consistent success of strategies focused on receptor orientation.

S/N	DATA ITEM	SOURCE TEXT (ST)	TARGET TEXT (TT)	STRATEGY	EVALUATION OF STRATEGY
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1.	Main Theme	Spiritual power and gifts for the Body of Christ	Agbara ati awon ebun emi fun Ara Kristi	Literal	Weak
2.	Sub-themes	God's Spirit and power	Emi Olorun ati agbara (Re)	Literal	Weak
		God gives gifts purposefully	Olorun nfunni ni awon ebun pelu erongba	Literal	Strong
3.	Lessons 1 to 6	(i) Spiritual power and gifts. What are they?	Agbara ati awon ebun emi : ohun ti won je	Literal	Weak
		(ii) Holy Spirit: the spirit and power of God	Emi Mimo: Emi ati agbara Olorun	Literal	Weak
		(iii) The promise of spiritual power for us	Ileri ati agbara emi fun wa	Literal	Weak
		(iv) Holy Spirit and power at Pentecost	Emi Mimo ati agbara ni Ojo Pentikosti	Literal/addition :	Strong
		(v) Holy Spirit in the Body of Christ	Emi Mimo ninu ara Kristi	Literal	Weak
		(vi) Talents versus spiritual gifts	Awon talenti ati awon ebun emi	Literal	Strong
4.	Devotional Thoughts 1 to 6	(i) God graciously gives His power and gifts to believers so that they can sufficiently represent and do exploit for Him in the world.	Olorun nfi oore-ofe yonda agbara ati awon ebun Re fun awon onigbagbo, ki won o le e soju Re daradara, ki won o si sise fun Un lori ile aye.	Couplet	Strong
		(ii) Holy Spirit, the Spirit and power of God, was in the beginning with God and is one with Him.	Emi Mimo ati agbara Olorun ti wa lati atetekose pelu Olorun beeni Oun ni o si wa pelu Re.	Literal/omission:	Weak
		(iii) The commissioner commissions and guarantees power to the commissioned.	Oluranni-nise a ran-ni-nise beeni a si fun eniti o ran nise ni agbara.	Modualtion	Average
		(iv) The coming of the Holy Spirit and its accompanying power completes and furthers God' work on earth through Christ.	<i>Wiwa</i> (isokale) Emi Mimo ati agbara ti o <i>ntele</i> E je asepe, beeni o si n mu ise Olorun lori ile aye tesiwaju nipase Kristi.	Literal	Weak
		(v) The body of Christ is the Church, strengthened, supervised and sustained by the Holy Spirit.	Ara Kristi ni Ijo, ti a ro lagbara, ti a mojuto, ti a si gbero lati owo Emi Mimo.	Literal	Weak
		(vi) Talents may be inherited at birth, but spiritual gifts are received at the new birth in Christ.	Eniyan le jogun awon talenti nigba ti a bi i, sugbon awon ebun emi ni a n ri gba nigba ti a ba ti tun wa bi ninu Kristi.	Paraphrase/Explicitation	Strong
5.	Outlines across Lessons 1-6	I. Spiritual power	Agbara emi	Literal	Strong
		II. Spiritual gift	Ebun emi	Literal	Strong
		I. He is the Spirit of God	Oun ni Emi Olorun	Literal	Strong
		II. He is power of God	Oun ni agbara Olorun	Literal	Strong
		I. In the Old Testament	Ninu Majemu Laelae	Literal	Strong
		II. In the New Testament	Ninu Majemu Tuntun	Literal	Strong
		I. The Spirit comes	Emi naa de	Literal	Average
II. The Spirit begins moving	Emi naa bere sii rin	Literal	Average		
I. Operates in the Church corporately	O n sise ninu Ijo lapapo	Literal	Weak		
II. Operates in individual believers	O n sise ninu olukuluku onigbagbo	Literal	weak		
I. Talents are natural	Talenti je adamo/abimo	Literal	Average		
II. Spiritual gifts are for believers	Awon ebun emi wa fun awon onigbagbo	Literal	Strong		

Chart representation

Distribution of Translation Strategies and Communicative Evaluation (N=27)



9. Analysis and discussion

9.1. Translation of the Main Theme

The main theme employs literal equivalence while maintaining Yoruba syntactic conformity. The rendering of “spiritual power and gifts” as *agbara ati awon ebum emi* preserves lexical alignment. Similarly, “the Body of Christ” is rendered as *Ara Kristi*, reflecting established ecclesiastical equivalence.

Such preservation aligns with formal correspondence (Nida, 1964). However, as Newmark (1988) and Munday (2016) caution, literalism must remain subordinate to communicative naturalness. In this instance, structural adjustments ensure adequacy, and the communicative effect is strong.

9.2. Sub-theme

The omission of the possessive marker in *Emi Olorun ati agbara* introduces theological ambiguity. The more precise rendering, *Emi Olorun ati agbara Re*, restores doctrinal clarity.

This illustrates Nord’s (2018) principle that adequacy must be judged according to communicative purpose. Literalism without theological interpretation compromises meaning.

9.3. Lesson Topics

Across six lessons, four translations demonstrate communicative weakness due to structural calque. Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) classify such imitation as calque, a procedure that often produces unnatural target-language constructions.

i. Structural Inversion and Cognitive Load

In Lesson 1, the calqued structure burdens processing. Transposition improves naturalness, illustrating Vinay and Darbelnet’s grammatical shift procedure.

ii. Doctrinal Ambiguity

Lesson 2 misinterprets appositional structure, producing ambiguity. Explication resolves the issue, consistent with Baker’s (1992) observation that translators frequently make implicit meanings explicit to ensure clarity.

iii. Theological Precision

In Lesson 3, replacing *agbara emi* with *agbara Emi Mimo* aligns translation with doctrinal specificity. Pym (2018) would describe this as risk management: reducing interpretive ambiguity in a high-stakes theological context.

iv. Cultural-Contextual Sensitivity

Lesson 4 successfully translates “at Pentecost” as *ni Ojo Pentekosti*, demonstrating context-sensitive explication.

v. Idiomatic Expressions

Lesson 5 requires simplification by addition to clarify *Ara Kristi*. This aligns with communicative translation principles (Newmark, 1988).

vi. Lexical Economy

Lesson 6 reveals unnecessary plural marking. Structural economy enhances discourse-level clarity.

9.4. Devotional Thoughts

Devotional texts are affective and persuasive. Therefore, translation must produce rhetorical equivalence (Robinson, 2018). Where literal structure is rigidly maintained, ambiguity arises (Lesson 2). Modulation and explication restore clarity. The replacement of passive constructions with active ones (Lesson 5) enhances immediacy and engagement. According to House (2015), such restructuring strengthens pragmatic equivalence.

In Lesson 4, the shift from *Wiwa Emi Mimo* to *Isokale Emi Mimo* demonstrates theological adaptation, reflecting Sanneh's (2015) argument that Christian translation thrives when deeply embedded in local theological cognition.

9.5. Study Outlines

Self-contained outline topics reduce cognitive strain. Nord (2018) emphasizes audience orientation in functionalist translation. Structural calque without contextual anchoring weakens rhetorical force. Substitution strategies such as *Emi Mimo naa de* enhance emotional immediacy, moving toward Nida's (1964) equivalent effect.

10. Findings

The analysis demonstrates a consistent pattern: excessive literalism leads to structural stiffness, ambiguity and reduced emotional force. But functional strategies, such as explicitation, modulation, transposition, adaptation facilitate clarity, theological precision, stronger and communicative effect.

The translation of theological discourse demands interpretive mediation. As Venuti (2019) argues, translation is never neutral reproduction; it is a culturally situated act shaped by readership expectations and ideological commitments.

11. Conclusion

This study concludes that while literal equivalence may preserve lexical alignment, it frequently undermines communicative and theological adequacy in Yoruba Christian discourse. Functionalist strategies grounded in receptor orientation produce translations that are clearer, doctrinally precise, and rhetorically effective.

Future research may extend this inquiry to broader Yoruba Bible translation history and comparative ecclesiastical discourse.

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