







Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics in African Biblical Scholarship: Contributions of J.E.T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor



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ABSTRACT

The pattern of biblical hermeneutics in Africa was built on Euro-American philosophies, cultures and methodologies until the early 1960s. This necessitated a scholarly call for re-interpretation of the inherited interpretations and translations, as some scholars blamed colonial influence. Consequently, some of the newly developed methods of biblical interpretations in Africa include: neo-prophetic hermeneutics in Africa, postcolonial biblical interpretation, postcolonial perspectives in African biblical interpretations, intercultural exegesis, and mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics (MTBH). This study focused on the methodology of mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics, commending its key proponents, namely, Aloo Mojola, John D.K. Ekem, Jonathan E.T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, and others. Using literature and interviews, this paper assessed the contributions of Kuwornu-Adjaottor in the promotion of MTBH in African biblical scholarship. Findings revealed Kuwornu-Adjaottor's "nine-step methodology" for doing MTBH academically and practically, which is being adopted in many universities, seminaries and Bible translation societies in Africa, including Ghana. In addition to raising many student-disciples as well as taking a philosophical position for deconstruction and dynamic equivalence in biblical scholarship, the scholar advocates that Bible translation involves interpretation in order to produce a meaning that considers the contexts of the receptor or local audience. This paper contributes to the promotion of mother-tongue Bible translation and mother-tongue theologizing in Africa.

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INTRODUCTION

Arguably, Africa is said to be the origin of Biblical Studies as dating back to the days of Origen, the first biblical scholar and one of Africa's famous church fathers from Alexandria in Egypt.¹ Similar to other

¹ Benhardt Y. Quarshie, "Doing Biblical Studies in the African Context: The Challenge of Mother-Tongue Scriptures," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 5, no. 1 (2002): 4–14.

contexts, Africa's context is multidimensional. Being the largest continent, Africa has a huge population comprising different kinds of people and languages.² Among the many indigenous languages, some are only spoken but not written. Besides the native languages, there are some foreign languages received, learned, spoken and written by Africans from colonial masters. These include: Portuguese, English and French.³ In every context, language is very crucial. Although the Bible is a universal book for faith and practice mainly among Christians, it is language-conditioned, hence coded in a particular culture. The Bible is coded in two original (source) languages mainly. The Old Testament is in Hebrew and the New Testament is in *Koine* Greek.⁴ In minor proportion, some parts of the Old Testament are in Aramaic, hence a third language.

Being a crucial component of biblical studies, biblical hermeneutics equips biblical exegetes to both examine ancient texts and narratives and to unearth the meaning. Meanwhile, Euro-American philosophies, cultures and methodologies had occupied the space and thought pattern of biblical hermeneutics in various parts of Africa until the early 1960s.⁵ While this has been arguably considered by some scholars as a colonial influence, some African biblical and theological scholars have argued for the need for re-interpretation of the inherited interpretations and translations since they seem alien to the unique milieu and context of Africa.⁶ This bold campaign has led to the development of African-centered approaches and philosophies for Biblical interpretations, such as postcolonial biblical interpretation, neo-prophetic hermeneutics in Africa, intercultural exegesis, postcolonial perspectives in African biblical interpretations, and mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics (MTBH).

This paper, therefore, outlines, in relation to global biblical hermeneutics, biblical hermeneutics in Africa, the pioneers of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics and the contributions of Kuwornu-Adjaottor in mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics.

METHODOLOGY

As a qualitative research, this work used empirical literature, archives and interviews.⁷ The contributor was interviewed. Fifteen (15) individuals were purposively sampled based on their relationship with and knowledge of the contributor, and their ability and credibility in responding sincerely to interview questions. The sample size comprised five (5) Biblical scholars: two (2) Old Testament scholars from the Christian Service University and three New Testament scholars from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. Five (5) respondents are disciples/mentees of the contributor who studied New Testament Studies and MTBH under Kuwornu-Adjaottor. Two (2) of these five are PhD holders, while the other three are currently PhD candidates at KNUST. The last five (5) of the fifteen are MPhil candidates and theses supervisees under Kuwornu-Adjaottor, who have known him for some time at KNUST, Department of Religious Studies. This study assures that there exists no manipulation of findings and responses from interview conversations.

Biblical Hermeneutics

Biblical studies in the West had ignored the reality that biblical interpretation is also idiosyncratic. This ignorance led to some scholars presuming a particularly fixed and objective interpretation, reading and approach that should be applicable universally.⁸ The era of postmodernist criticism in the 1980s, acknowledged in the works of Dickson and Speckman, brought some changes.⁹ Ideally, being idiosyncratic

² John S. Mbiti, "The Bible in African Culture," in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosino Gibellini (New York: Orbis Books, 1994); John S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa* (London: SPCK, 1970).

³ Quarshie, "Doing Biblical Studies in the African Context: The Challenge of Mother-Tongue Scriptures."

⁴ Jonathan E. T., Kuwornu-Adjaottor, Patrick Yankyera, and Solace Ago Yankson, "Dynamic Equivalence and Mother-Tongue Translations of the Bible," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies (ERATS)* 4 (2018): 243–50.

⁵ George Ossom-Batsa, "African Interpretation of the Bible in Communicative Perspective," *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 2 (2007): 91–104.

⁶ Musa W Dube Shomanah, "Reading for Decolonization (John 4: 1-42)," *Semeia* 75 (1996): 37–59.

⁷ Karen Dunwoodie, Luke Macaulay, and Alexander Newman, "Qualitative Interviewing in the Field of Work and Organisational Psychology: Benefits, Challenges and Guidelines for Researchers and Reviewers," *Applied Psychology* 72, no. 2 (2023): 863–89.

⁸ Andrew M Mbuvi, "African Biblical Studies: An Introduction to an Emerging Discipline," *Currents in Biblical Research* 15, no. 2 (2017): 149–78.

⁹ Kwasi Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (NY, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984); Rev M. T. Speckman, "Beyond the Debate: An Agenda for Biblical Studies in the New South Africa," *Religion and Theology* 3, no. 2 (1996): 135–51, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157430196X00158>.

in nature, biblical interpretation and meaning reside in the nexus between the text and the reader.¹⁰ Following this, it finds African biblical interpretation on the grounds that meaning is context-defined, and that the reader's culture has a significant role. According to Loba-Mkole, this has been the direction of African biblical hermeneutics, unlike that of the West.¹¹

Biblical Hermeneutics in Africa

Realizing how Euro-American philosophies, cultures and methodologies had occupied the space and thought pattern of biblical hermeneutics in various parts of Africa until the early 1960s, there have been several calls for Africans to hear God in their own languages.¹² Therefore, in order to uncover the colonial packages and foreign designs in the translation of biblical texts, some African theologians and biblical scholars call for textual re-interpretation and re-translations that marry and situate themselves within the African context.¹³ Therefore, this necessitated an urgency to decolonize African Biblical Studies in Africa and for Africans.¹⁴ To this end, Kimbi concludes that "God speaks to be understood. We understand better when we hear a message in our first language."¹⁵ This fruitful campaign has led to the development of several indigenous methods of biblical interpretation in the African context.

Methods of Biblical Interpretations in Africa

Mbuvi indicates that a pure African Biblical Studies should comprise the unification of several methods, approaches and foci of interpretation that engage the African context and cosmological reality and the Bible in a creative and reactionary way.¹⁶ In emphasizing Omenyo and Arthur, Mbuvi concludes that biblical interpretations in Africa, as much as African Biblical Studies, are central, should be devoid of any trappings of Western hermeneutical presuppositions and interests and that the African biblical scholar should engage the scriptures freely.¹⁷ Consequently, some of the newly developed methods of biblical interpretations in Africa include: neo-prophetic hermeneutics in Africa, postcolonial biblical interpretation, postcolonial perspectives in African biblical interpretations, intercultural hermeneutics and intercultural biblical exegesis, reconstruction hermeneutics, African womanist hermeneutics, Afro-biblical hermeneutics¹⁸, and MTBH.¹⁹

History of Mother-Tongue Translations

Bible translation is the science and art of decrypting the Biblical languages and the culture of the Bible into the context and language of the new audience. For example, from Hebrew into Asante Twi, a translation is produced. Since Asante Twi is the mother tongue of Ghanaians, such biblical translation is the campaign of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics, passionately being promoted by African biblical scholars such as Gilbert Ansre, John Ekem and Kuwornu-Adjaottor.²⁰ Therefore, the translation of the Bible into a receptor language from its source languages leads to the production of Mother-tongue Scriptures or Bibles.

¹⁰ Mbuvi, "African Biblical Studies: An Introduction to an Emerging Discipline."

¹¹ Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole, "The Rise of Intercultural Biblical Exegesis in Africa," *HTS Theological Studies/Teologiese Studies* 64 (2008): 1347-64.

¹² Ossom-Batsa, "African Interpretation of the Bible in Communicative Perspective."

¹³ Dube Shomanah, "Reading for Decolonization (John 4: 1-42)."

¹⁴ David Tuesday Adamo, *Decolonizing African Biblical Studies* (Delta State University, 2004); Samuel O. Abogunrin, *Decolonization of Biblical Interpretation in Africa* (Ibadan: Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies, 2005).

¹⁵ Paul K. Kimbi, "The Way from Babel: The Role of Language in Advancing God's Mission in the World," 2024, https://www.sil.org/system/files/realdata/20/72/14/20721443526317310878946583141977321150/Kimbi_The_Way_From_Babel.pdf.

¹⁶ Mbuvi, "African Biblical Studies: An Introduction to an Emerging Discipline."

¹⁷ Mbuvi, "African Biblical Studies: An Introduction to an Emerging Discipline."

¹⁸ Julius Gathogo and John Kennedy Kinyua, "Afro-Biblical Hermeneutics in Africa Today," *Churchman Journal* 131, no. 2 (2010): 251-265.

¹⁹ Mbuvi, "African Biblical Studies: An Introduction to an Emerging Discipline"; Chris Ukachukwu Manus, *Intercultural Hermeneutics in Africa: Methods and Approaches* (Nairobi: Acton, 2003); Loba-Mkole, "The Rise of Intercultural Biblical Exegesis in Africa"; Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole, "Bible Translation and Reconstruction Hermeneutics," *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 20 (2009): 28-44; Madipoane J Masenya, "African Womanist Hermeneutics: A Suppressed Voice from South Africa Speaks," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 11, no. 1 (1995): 149-55; Musa W Dube, "Toward a Post-Colonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible," *Semeia*, no. 78 (1997): 11; Julius Gathogo and John Kennedy Kinyua, "Afro-Biblical Hermeneutics in Africa Today," *Churchman*, UK 131, no. 2 (2010): 251-65; Jonathan E.T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics: A Current Trend in Biblical Studies in Ghana," *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies (JETERAPS)* 3, no. 4 (2012): 575-79.

²⁰ Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics: A Current Trend in Biblical Studies in Ghana."

Objectively, the needful discipline and exercise of mother-tongue Bible translations is implicated by the theological truth that God indeed communicates through and understands all languages since all languages are part of his image.²¹ African indigenous languages are included. Kimbi opines that one of the core components of the image of God is communication.²² In terms of the immemorial interaction between God and his image – humanity, Harmelink emphasizes that “we communicate because he communicates.”²³ Historically, Africa witnessed the first Bible translation.²⁴ By the empirical instruction of King Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt, the Old Testament in Hebrew was translated into Greek for faith and practice for Greek-speaking Jews in the diaspora and Africans, as the *Koine* Greek became a universal language since Alexander the Great. This translation is the Septuagint.²⁵

Kimbi concludes that “God speaks to be understood. We understand better when we hear a message in our first language.”²⁶ Moreover, considering “communication” as an essential tool toward missiological effectiveness through the art and science of Bible translation and interpretation, Kimbi likens Jesus’ interpretation of Matthew 13:21 in reference to the “good soil” to language. He asserts that one can liken language to the soil, and that “the good soil” refers to the language in which one understands a message best.²⁷

Mother-Tongue Theologizing and Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics: The Pioneers

Daniel Kwame Bediako, John Samuel Mbiti and Kwesi Kwaa Prah

Bediako emphasizes that the challenge for mother tongue indicates a continuation and re-enactment of Pentecost since the Holy Spirit boosted communication among different individuals who speak diverse languages.²⁸

John Mbiti challenges the need for the African Church to proclaim the name and message of Jesus in such a way that others, too, may hear, in African tongues, God’s wonderful works.²⁹ Moreover, even at Pentecost experience (cf. Acts 2:1ff), there were Africans from Egypt and Libya, hence, indicating God’s personal delight in how Africans should proclaim both his name and good works in the languages and cultures of Africa.³⁰ For Aloysius Pieris, a people’s reality is by their language, and religion is the vehicle to express such language.³¹ Therefore, understanding Pieris, it is obvious that the practice of African Christianity needs a conscious oral expression of the African mother tongues. In that sense, a mere translation of faith, religion and the biblical text in the Greek or Hebrew Bibles does not define the African context unless such translations involve interpretations that reconstruct the Greek and/or Hebrew texts into the people’s context. This is why Kuwornu-Adjaottor and his team have gone to a remarkable extent to produce a Greek Textbook suitable to the African context, first of its kind, namely, *A Greek Handbook for the African Context*.³²

Kwesi Prah shares a critical perspective on the relevance of African indigenous languages for the development of scholarship in Africa. His expression has significance for African Christian intellectualism and African Christianity in the 21st century:

No society in the contemporary world which is scientifically and technologically advancing is achieving this on the basis of a language foreign to its people... If African education is to create a universal type based on African realities, education

²¹ Kimbi, “The Way from Babel: The Role of Language in Advancing God’s Mission in the World.”

²² Kimbi, “The Way from Babel: The Role of Language in Advancing God’s Mission in the World.”

²³ Bryan Harmelink, “A Theology of Embodied Presence: God with] Us Through Translation,” *Paper Presented at the Bible Translation Conference in Dallas, 2019*.

²⁴ Quarshie, “Doing Biblical Studies in the African Context: The Challenge of Mother-Tongue Scriptures.”

²⁵ Quarshie, “Doing Biblical Studies in the African Context: The Challenge of Mother-Tongue Scriptures.”

²⁶ Kimbi, “The Way from Babel: The Role of Language in Advancing God’s Mission in the World.”

²⁷ Kimbi, “The Way from Babel: The Role of Language in Advancing God’s Mission in the World.”

²⁸ Kwame Bediako, “Guest Editorial, in The Challenge of Mother Tongue for African Christian Thought,” *Journal of African Christian Thought* 5, no. 1 (2002): 1–56.

²⁹ Bediako, “Guest Editorial, in The Challenge of Mother Tongue for African Christian Thought.”

³⁰ These audience were from Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Cyrene, Rome, Cretan, Arabia.

³¹ Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Edinburgh/New York: T & T Clark/Orbis Books, 1988).

³² Eric N. B. Anum, Alice Matilda Nsiah, and Jonathan Edward Tetteh Kuwornu-Adjaottor, *A Greek Handbook for the African Context: Essentials of New Testament Greek for Beginners* (Accra: Noyam Publishers, 2022).

must be based on its innermost thoughts: the language in which it is possible to conceptualize with the greatest ease and mental agility, that is, the mother tongue.³³

Aloo Mojola and Gilbert Ansre

Acknowledged by Gilbert Ansre as “the respected African Bible translation consultant from Kenya,”³⁴ Aloo Mojola enlightens that the production of ancient translations such as the Greek Septuagint Bible, the Latin Biblia Vulgata, the Ethiopian Geez Bible, and the Amharic Bible among others constitute the beginning wave of Bible translation and then toward the third wave of indigenous mother-tongue bible translation.³⁵

John David Kwamena Ekem

In praising one of MTBH’s prominent voices and his appreciation of this emerging discipline in Biblical Scholarship in Africa and Ghana, Kuwornu-Adjaottor writes about J.D.K Ekem in these words:

Ekem defines mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics as “a discipline devoted to the interpretation and reinterpretation of biblical texts in languages considered by speakers as their first language into which they were born” (2011:10). He posits that, “The varied mother tongues of Africa have a lot to offer by way of biblical interpretation in Ghanaian/African languages as viable material for interpretation, study Bibles and commentaries” (Ekem, 2007:48); and that using the mother-tongue is likely to shape the future of Biblical Studies in Africa (Ekem, 2008, 188-89).³⁶

In his “Priesthood in Context,” John Ekem indicates that even though other people and religions (unlike the Jews) do not have a special covenantal relationship with God, nonetheless, they also share in God’s universal sovereignty and dynamism.³⁷ Having emphasized that, he further mentioned that with dynamism in the Jewish traditions, the popularly revered *Tetragrammaton* YHWH or JHVH used for God underwent linguistic morphology and morphosis and later read as Adonai “LORD” instead. Following the Jewish dynamism, the Akan Bibles avoided the YHWH/JHVH and replaced it with Adonai everywhere the Divine name was mentioned or rendered.³⁸ This option applied dynamic equivalence as translators of the three Akan Bibles suggested its equivalence *Awurade/Ewuradze* (“Lord”) in the Twi and Mfantse Bibles, respectively. The Ewe Bible rendered it as *Yehowa*, while it was *Iehowa* in the Ga Bible. Ekem indicates a recent development in which the Ewe Old Testament has shifted from *Yehowa* to *Yawɛ* while the Gã Old Testament has rested on *Yehowa*.³⁹ These form part of the basis for MTBH.

MTBH: CONTRIBUTIONS OF J.E.T. KUWORNU-ADJAOTTOR

Empirical Literature and Archives

Brief Profile of the Contributor

Jonathan Edward Tetteh Kuwornu-Adjaottor (PhD) is an Associate Professor of New Testament and Mother Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics in the Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana. He was a veteran Head, Department of Religious Studies, KNUST. His research focus is New Testament, Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics and Bible Translation Hermeneutics. Kuwornu-

³³ Kwesi Prah, “National Languages – Conditions for a National Book Industry,” in *Education and Book Industry: Contribution to Poverty Alleviation. A Symposium* (Accra: Education Fair, 2001).

³⁴ Gilbert Ansre and Paul Opoku-Mensah, “Guest Editorial: New Directions for Bible Translation in Africa,” *Journal of African Christian Thought* 15, no. 2 (2012): 1–56.

³⁵ Aloo Osotsi Mojola, “Bible Translation in Africa—a Brief Historical Overview,” *Journal of African Christian Thought* 15, no. 2 (2012): 5–9.

³⁶ Kuwornu-Adjaottor, “Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics: A Current Trend in Biblical Studies in Ghana.”

³⁷ John D. K. Ekem, *Early Scriptures of the Gold Coast (Ghana): The Historical, Linguistic, and Theological Settings of the Gã, Twi, Mfantse, and Ewe Bibles* (Rome/Manchester: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura/ St. Jerome, 2011); John D. K. Ekem, *Priesthood in Context: A Study of Priesthood in Some Christian and Primal Communities of Ghana and Its Relevance for Mother-Tongue Biblical Interpretation* (Accra: SonLife Press, 2008).

³⁸ John David K. Ekem, “The Rendering of the Divine Name *Yhwh* in Some Ghanaian Bible Translation Projects,” *The Bible Translator* 56, no. 2 (April 1, 2005): 71–76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026009430505600203>.

³⁹ Ekem, “The Rendering of the Divine Name *Yhwh* in Some Ghanaian Bible Translation Projects.”

Adjaottor is a member of the Ghana Association of Biblical Exegetes (GABES), New Testament Society of Southern Africa (NTSSA), and a Fellow of the Directorate of Social Sciences (DSS). He is an Ordained Minister of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) and currently serves as an Associate Minister of the Christ Congregation of the PCG, KNUST-Kumasi, Ghana.⁴⁰

J.E.T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor and Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics (MTBH)

In an interview with Kuwornu-Adjaottor, he posited that his methodology and teaching approach toward MTBH are shaped and founded on the translation philosophy of deconstruction and the theory of dynamic equivalence, a thought-for-thought interpretative method.⁴¹ Moreover, through these, he philosophizes that Bible translation involves interpretation, such that no mere person should qualify to undertake a translation project unless they first understand and are speakers and users of the second language into which a translation is needed. Also, he adds that since interpretation involves the meaning of the text and its communication to the audience in its equivalence, the Bible translator should have a necessity to be able to interpret the cultural equivalence in terms of language, symbols, and elements well known to the receptor audience as well as the translator. Therefore, a translator should speak and understand at least two languages, namely: the first one and the other one into which they are translating.⁴²

In 2012, Kuwornu-Adjaottor published a classic paper which introduced his milestone methodology in doing mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics. In that same paper, he recommended that all religious, biblical and theological universities and seminaries in Ghana embrace MTBH as an academic discipline for studies and practice.⁴³

Kuwornu-Adjaottor's "nine-step" Methodology for doing MTBH

In initiating and advocating for the inclusion and practice of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics as an academic discipline in African biblical scholarship, Kuwornu-Adjaottor wove a contextual approach in a "nine-step" methodology:

- i. Identify a biblical text which you think has been wrongly translated in your mother-tongue.
- ii. Discuss why the translation is problematic in your culture.
- iii. State and explain the methodology you will use, and the proponents.
- iv. Do a study (an exegesis) of that text, using Bible Study resources – Dictionaries, Commentaries, Encyclopaedias, Word Study helps, etc.
- v. Find out what scholars have said about the text, how they interpret it and the reasons for their interpretations.
- vi. Discuss the usage of the concept in your language/culture; interview indigenous speakers of your mother-tongue for deeper insights into the concept you are researching. Use local terminologies in your writing and explain them in English.
- vii. Compare the text in your mother-tongue with other Ghanaian translations you can read and understand.
- viii. Analyze the mother-tongue translation; what do they mean? How are the meanings of the text similar to that of the Hebrew/Greek? How are they different? What might have accounted for the differences in translation?
- ix. Come out with a new translation of the text that fits into your culture.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Profile of Jonathan Edward Tetteh Kuwornu-Adjaottor (PhD) Available at:

<https://webapps.knust.edu.gh/staff/dirsearch/profile/summary/81ca293fe86a.html>. Accessed on 27th April, 2024.

⁴¹ Ernest Jnr Frimpong and Jonathan Edward Tetteh Kuwornu Adjaottor, "Structuralism and Deconstruction in Biblical Scholarship: Annotated Bibliographies.," *Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics & Theology (MOTBIT)* 6, no. 5 (2024).

⁴² Jonathan E.T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "Assessment of Three Problematic Texts in the Synoptic Gospels of the New Testament of the Dangme Bible" (KNUST, 2018). ;Interview conversations with J.E.T Kuwornu-Adjaottor (Office, Social Science New Block, KNUST: 23rd April, 2024, 12:32 PM).

⁴³ Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics: A Current Trend in Biblical Studies in Ghana."

⁴⁴ Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics: A Current Trend in Biblical Studies in Ghana."

Local Contributions and Honors in Relation to MTBH

In 2014, Rev. J.E.T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor received the Royal Bank-CASS Best Researcher Award in the College of Art and Social Sciences (CASS), KNUST, for the 2013/2014 academic year.⁴⁵ Prior to and during this academic period, Kuwornu-Adjaottor had already published fifteen (15) articles in the discipline of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics, in a row, within just two years. These included his classic publication, *Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics: A Current Trend in Biblical Studies in Ghana* in which he unveiled his methodology for MTBH. Five (5) of them include:

1. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, J. E. T. (2012a). Leadership in the Christian Home: Interpreting *kephalē* [Ephesians 5:22-23] in Dangme Bible Reading Communities. WAATI Papers 6: 98-108.
2. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, J. E. T. (2012b). Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics: A Current Trend in Biblical Studies in Ghana. Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies 3 (4): 575-579.
3. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, J. E. T. (2012c) The Law as Our Disciplinarian: A Critical Study of Galatians 3:24 in the Dangme Translations of the Bible. European Scientific Journal 8 (24): 54-63.
4. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, J. E. T. (2012d). Doing Biblical Studies using the Mother-tongue Approach. Journal of Applied Thought 1(1):55-80.
5. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, J. E. T. (2012e). Patronage and Usage of the Ghanaian Mother-Tongue Bibles in Kumasi. Prime Journal of Social Sciences 2 (7):121-129.

International/Global Contributions and Honors in Relation to MTBH

In 2015, the International Agency for Standards and Ratings, India, honoured him with the William Shakespeare Research Award in Religious Studies, for outstanding scientific contributions in religious Studies. IASR adds this honorary expression:

IASR extends best wishes for your endeavours in enlightening the scientific domain with your efforts. [A total of] 4108 nominations from individuals and organizations were received from 82 countries for the batch. IASR recognizes Rev. J.E.T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor among the World's 500 Most Influential Philosopher for the year 2015 on Earth.⁴⁶

Kuwornu-Adjaottor received the World Championship Award in Social Sciences (Employability Skills) 2018, and was certified as World Champion and Fellow, Directorate of Social Science, IASR (Lifetime membership). On the same certificate, IASR gives an honorary statement:

The IASR extends best wishes for your endeavours in enlightening the scientific domain and for your efforts. Your research article was a winner among 5475 nominations from 61 countries, screened for the World Championship-2018 in Social Sciences (Employability Skills). IASR recognizes Dr. Jonathan Edward Tetteh Kuwornu-Adjaottor among the World's 500 Most Influential Experts in Social Science for the year 2018 on Earth.⁴⁷

Two years later, in 2020, "Rev. Professor Jonathan Edward Tetteh Kuwornu-Adjaottor" received an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Literature in Biblical Hermeneutics, D.Litt. (*Honoris Causa*) "in recognition of outstanding contributions" by IASR.⁴⁸

The above-stated recognized contributions were meritorious. After unveiling his methodology in 2012, Kuwornu-Adjaottor worked extensively in the MTBH, producing explicit Ghana-centered papers in

⁴⁵ The Royal Bank – CASS Awards, "Certificate of Honour. CASS: KNUST," January 24, 2014, <https://webapps.knust.edu.gh/staff/dirsearch/profile/summary/81ca293fe86a.html>.

⁴⁶ International Agency for Standards and Ratings (IASR), "Williams Shakespeare Research Award-2015 in Religious Studies," *Certificate Reference No.: QD-786412042015*, April 12, 2015, <https://webapps.knust.edu.gh/staff/dirsearch/profile/summary/81ca293fe86a.html>.

⁴⁷ International Agency for Standards and Ratings (IASR), "World Championship-2018 in Social Science (Employability Skills)," *Certificate Reference No.: Q- 805314082018JETKA*, August 14, 2018, <https://webapps.knust.edu.gh/staff/dirsearch/profile/summary/81ca293fe86a.html>.

⁴⁸ International Agency for Standards and Ratings (IASR), "The Honorary Degree of Doctor of Literature in Biblical Hermeneutics," *D.Litt. Certificate Reference No.: H- 4459230520JETKA*, May 23, 2020, <https://webapps.knust.edu.gh/staff/dirsearch/profile/summary/81ca293fe86a.html>.

the area of mother tongues. This resilience created new works that widened the pool of literature in the area of Biblical Studies, both in Ghana and Africa. From then, the discipline and methodology of MTBH had attracted extensive scholarly attention as emerging trends in both African and Global scholarship, especially in the fields of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences.⁴⁹ Out of the many publications that, in some unique ways, impacted his international recognition in 2015, 2018 and 2020, the following works were in the area of MTBH and mother-tongue contexts:

1. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, J. E. T. (2014b). A Study of the Translation of *arsenokoitai* in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 in some Ghanaian Mother-Tongue Bibles. *Journal of African Biblical Studies*, 5: 102-125.
2. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, J. E. T. (2014c). The Translation of *Kristos* as *Kristo* in the Dangme Mother Tongue Translations of the New Testament Visited. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies (JETERAPS)*, 5(8):203-208.
3. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, J. E. T. (2014d). A Comparative Study of the Translation of *plērousthe en pneumai* [Ephesians 5:18] in some Ghanaian Mother Tongue Translations of the Bible. *WAATI Papers8 (II)* :86-99.
4. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, J. E. T. (2014e). Greetings with a Holy Kiss: A study of 1 Thessalonians 5:26 in some Ghanaian Mother-tongue Translations of the Bible. *European Scientific Journal* 10 (10):530-538.
5. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, J. E. T. (2015a). The Practice of Mother Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics in Ghana: A Case Study of *bny ysr 'l* [Deut. 32:8] in Some Ghanaian Communities. *Journal of Mother Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics* 1(1): 134-157.
6. Fiorgbor E. T., Antwi E. K., & Kuwornu-Adjaottor J. E. T (2017). Theological Examination of Necromancy and Its Parallel in Dangme Religio-cultural Setting. *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 1(1): 1-26.
7. Kuwornu-Adjaottor J. E. T., Yankyerah P., & Wiafe F (2018b). A Critical Study of John 2:1-11 and Its Implication for African Biblical Exegetes. *American Journal of Biblical Theology* 19(22):1-23.
8. Wiafe F., Clotey H., & Kuwornu-Adjaottor J. E. T (2018e). The concept of Enemy in Ghanaian Christianity with Reference to Psalm 35:1-10: A Case Study of Some Selected Churches. *International Journal of Innovative Social Sciences & Humanities Research* 6(1): 48-55.
9. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, J. E. T. (2019a). A Critical Study of the Translation of Mark 1:12 in the Dangme Translation of the Bible. *Oguaa Journal of Religion and Human Values* 5(2):97-109.
10. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, J. E. T. (2020b). A Critical Translation of Matthew 6:12 in the Dangme Bible. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament in Southern Africa* 54(1):67-86.

Recent Publications in MTBH, African Biblical Scholarship and African Christianity

1. Frimpong, E. J. & Kuwornu-Adjaottor, J.E.T. (2024). Structuralism and Deconstruction in Biblical Scholarship: Annotated Bibliographies. *Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics and Theology (MOTBIT)* 6(1):1-8.
2. Frimpong, E. J. & Kuwornu-Adjaottor, J.E.T. (2023). Jesus and the Temple Offerings: An Exegetical Study of Luke 20:45-21:4 and its Socio-Economic Implication for African Christianity. *IBSA-West Africa Journal* 1(1):34-42.
3. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, J. E. T. (2021). Translations and Interpretations of *baptizontes* (Mt 28:19-20) in Some Ghanaian Mother Tongue Translations of the Bible. *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77(1) 2021:1-5. a6859. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i1.6859>.

Institutional and Socio-religious Relevance of Works in MTBH

Kuwornu-Adjaottor's research findings on the Ghanaian mother-tongue Bibles, such as Dangme Bible, Asante-Twi Bible and Ewe Bibles, have had and continue to have relevant impacts on translation institutions and the religious society in Ghana. The Bible Society of Ghana (BSG) consults its findings. This consultation has led to the translation revision of the Dangme Bible (2019); the change of *fa fri* (lend

⁴⁹ Interview conversations with J.E.T Kuwornu-Adjaottor (Office, Social Science New Block, KNUST: 23rd April, 2024, 12:32 PM)

us our sins) (Matt. 6:12) in the Asante-Twi 1964 translation to *fa kyɛ* (let go our sins) in the Asante-Twi 2012 and 2019 revised versions.

Inter-religious Impact of Kuwornu-Adjaottor's Contribution through MTBH

An Islamic cleric and scholar, Sheikh Dr. Seebaway, gave an impressive remark on a genius translation work by a member of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission who translated the Qur'an in a Ghanaian mother-tongue:

Just found the above – A translation of the Qur'an in Asante Twi. The translator is a member of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission. I'm not an Ahmadi, but I'm very happy for him. The Dagbani Qur'an came out a couple of years ago. There's also a Hausa Qur'an. I hope there'll soon be an Ewe Qur'an. That would prompt some of us to take to the path Prof JET has taken – Mother tongue hermeneutics of the Qur'an in Ghana. Blessed Friday, Happy Farmers Day, and a restful weekend to all.⁵⁰

Though a non-Christian, yet another religious scholar, Seebaway appreciates the scholarly and practical path of mother-tongue hermeneutics being championed by his colleague in the same Department of Religious Studies in KNUST. On the other side of the same coin, Kuwornu-Adjaottor praises Seebaway for making such motivating advocacy. He realizes that, beyond the biblical texts of the Christian community, the Qur'anic texts of the Islamic community also need their equivalent mother-tongue translations of the Qur'an, hence their appreciation of Kuwornu-Adjaottor's methodology. This indeed is an inter-religious impact, and a very positive one.

Academic innovations

Since he began teaching and mentoring students of New Testament studies, Kuwornu-Adjaottor has to his credit these two (2) innovatively developed courses: (1) Mother-tongue Biblical Hermeneutics: An MA/MPhil Course, and (2) Bible Translation and Interpretation: A PhD Course.⁵¹ In addition to these, as an expert in New Testament Greek, coupled with his passion and research focus in the African culture and mother-tongues, Kuwornu-Adjaottor, together with Anum and Nsiah, has produced the first of its kind, *A Greek handbook for the African Context*.⁵² This book was produced with the primary objective of aiding students towards the MTBH.⁵³

Interview Findings

Contributor's Own Words concerning MTBH

Knowing how needful it is to hear from the researcher's own mouth concerning his journey so far and expectations toward the future of MTBH, J.E.T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor made this statement orally in a granted interview:

This initiative was from my doctoral thesis. I realized that our mother-tongue Bibles have some limitations, in that some texts were inherently problematic, lacking the exact equivalents of our culture, symbols and wordings as Ghanaians and Africans. This realization became both my research and teaching pursuit. Hence, birthing the Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics methodology in 2012, having carefully and scientifically understood the several propositions of some pivotal African theologians and Biblical scholars like Rev. Prof. Kwame Bediako, Rev. Gilbert Ansere, Rev. Prof. John David Kwamena Ekem, Aloo O. Mojola, Rev. B.Y. Quarshie and others. In fact, this dream-come-true gives me great rest and a continuous desire to raise many others who shall prioritize the relevance of the mother-tongues and the academic discipline of MTBH. If I am known and celebrated today as Associate Professor, it is this MTBH, through the grace and mercies of God Almighty, that merited this gold. It is my life dream that even

⁵⁰ Zakaria M. Seebaway, "Impact of Research in Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics," in *Kuwornu-Adjaottor's Forwarded Message and Commentary in IBSA-West Africa WhatsApp Page*, 2023.

⁵¹ MA/MPhil and PhD courses developed and taught by J.E.T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor at the Department of Religious Studies, KNUST.

⁵² Anum, Nsiah, and Kuwornu-Adjaottor, *A Greek Handbook for the African Context: Essentials of New Testament Greek for Beginners*.

⁵³ Interview conversations with J.E.T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor (Office, Social Science New Block, KNUST: 23rd April, 2024, 12:32 PM)

if I am not around, God shall raise many more disciples and others in such like-mindedness to continue doing MTBH – my passion. Oh, how I wish that MTBH would be appreciated and offered as a programme and/or a course at every institution, university, seminary, and college where religious and theological studies are done.⁵⁴

Some unbiased findings were obtained from the fifteen individuals between April 6, 2024, and May 15, 2024.

Responses from Theologians and Biblical Scholars

Out of the five theologians and biblical scholars, one of them responded in this way concerning J.E.T Kuwornu-Adjaottor and his MBTH:

He is a Christian friend and brother, and a colleague. Yes, he has contributed to my scholarship. He introduced me to (1) NOYAM in the publication of my articles; (2) the Religious Department of KNUST as External Examiner for their PhD and MPhil theses; (3) All Nations University as supervisor for PhD students. I am yet to publish a work with him. In respect of his contributions to academic literature and the entire Religious Studies and Social Sciences, he has published excellent articles in journals; [also] leading in the formation of academic groups, especially in the area of Biblical Studies. Concerning his probably most influential contribution in scholarship, to me, is his organization of biblical scholars in Africa and West Africa, and the introduction of NOESIS: African Journal of Contemporary Trends in Religion and Society. He is among the first two Ghanaian scholars I know of regarding MTBH – Prof JET and Prof Ekem. His MTBH initiative is excellent and helpful. Apart from KNUST, I know somehow that the MTBH is done in Akrofi Christaller Institute and Trinity Theological Seminary. One remarkable impact of the MTBH is that it is helping Africans to appreciate the richness of their language in understanding the Bible. MTBH should be taught at Religious Studies Departments of African universities and seminaries. I would recommend new and existing scholars to tread that path too.⁵⁵

The second biblical scholar gave this response:

Prof. JET is a genius. Surprisingly, he never taught me as his student: I was never in his class. I am an Old Testament Scholar. But he is my mentor. He drew me closer to himself when I was studying for my PhD in the Department of Religious Studies at KNUST. He is known by the university so much that it is as if he is the face of the department. Once I was directed to the Research Commons for some information, and when I was asked which department I was affiliated with, I replied, “Religious Studies.” Quickly, the attendant asked, “Oh Prof JET? As for Religious Studies, it is Professor JET we know.” In fact, in 2015 and somewhere in 2018 and 2020, he won international and local awards. He was recognized as World’s Best 500 Scholars and a World Champion in scholarship. KNUST celebrated him and honoured him as the Best Researcher in CASS. You know, he became a professor before finishing his PhD. In the entire department and at KNUST, Prof JET was consistently publishing. And in scholarship, it is about publication. Teaching is just a small percentage. One of his most influential initiatives, this I must say, is his determined, risky path of birthing Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics as an academic discipline, as well as his solo philosophy of Bible translation and interpretation, in the department and for KNUST wholly. While Prof. Bediako, Prof. Ekem, Prof. Ansre, among others, have done so well in the area of mother-tongue hermeneutics in terms of its advocacy, Prof. JET has extended this advocacy in producing a socio-scientific nine-step methodology for MTBH. Against all the antagonism and discouragement in trying to unpopularize him for the sake

⁵⁴ Interview conversations with J.E.T Kuwornu-Adjaottor (Office, Social Science New Block, KNUST: 23rd April, 2024, 12:32 PM)

⁵⁵ An Old Testament and Biblical Hebrew scholar; Christian Service University; Ghana Baptist University College, Ashanti Region), in an interview with the authors, 5th May, 2024, on-phone, and online.

of MTBH by some scholars and theologians, JET has an inner motivation. He once told me, “I have gone past being careful. Nothing scares me. I love what I do, especially with MTBH.” I recommend that all universities and colleges in which the study of religion, theology, human development and the Bible, mount MTBH in their programmes for studies and practice. And African scholars should theologize in and interpret in and with the mother-tongue.⁵⁶

From the third scholar, this response was given:

I know Prof JET as a Professor of New Testament and Mother Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics. In fact, he taught me Intermediate and Advanced New Testament Greek and Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics during my MPhil studies at the Department of Religious Studies, KNUST, where I am currently a PhD candidate. Also, he was my MPhil thesis supervisor, and is currently my PhD first supervisor, as my research focus was and is in the mother-tongue area. To me, he is my father and mentor. Through his coaching, I have published with him as a co-author. I believe I am one of his numerous disciples/mentees. About his relevance, he is great. He has to his credit several awards and has positively exposed KNUST to the world through his works. In fact, unless someone argues, he is uniquely known as a champion of MTBH in Biblical scholarship. In fact, when it comes to this area, it is he I know very well who has really made MTBH his lifetime passion and focus. And he continues to write and publish more papers, even at this age in his life. One thing I like about him is his motivation toward students, and his collaborative personality, a team player, one who carries others along and his devoted consistency in biblical pursuits. Currently, the only institution I know that does MTBH is KNUST, where he is. Nonetheless, I am aware of how he supervises and examines the works of external institutions in the area of mother-tongue and Ghanaian culture, as well as assessing programmes of some institutions. His works in Greek, Exegesis and mother-tongue are consulted by religious institutions, students, homiletics and the Bible Society of Ghana. I recommend MTBH for all African religious and biblical institutions and scholars.⁵⁷

Brief responses from his Disciples/Mentees/Supervisees

Among the responses from ten interviewees who are disciples, mentees and/or supervisees, here are brief responses from seven (7) of them:

Prof JET is my mentor, my lecturer and was my supervisor. I have read extensively about him; he is an excellent scholar. To me, he is well known for Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics (MTHBH). He is making a positive and significant impact in biblical studies. I recommend his MTBH.⁵⁸

I am a student and mentee of Prof JET. Yes, he opened my eyes to realise some Mother-Tongue Hermeneutics’ relevance to the study of the New Testament. Through his practical method of teaching, the study of Biblical Greek has become simple for Students who passed through his hands. He has also made the study of Mother Tongue an essential area for biblical studies.⁵⁹

Importance of MTBH

Biblical hermeneutics equips biblical exegetes to both examine ancient texts and unearth their meanings. Translation is a product of interpretation.⁶⁰ Biblical hermeneutics utilises philosophies and methods of

⁵⁶ Another Old Testament and Biblical Hebrew scholar; Christian Service University; KNUST, Ashanti Region, in an interview with the authors, 6th April, 2024, at a Wedding at KUNST Protestant Chapel.

⁵⁷ A PhD Candidate (New Testament and Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics; KNUST, Ashanti Region), in an interview with the authors, 15th May, 2024, at KNUST.

⁵⁸ An MPhil. Religious Studies holder (Department of Religious Studies, KNUST) in an interview discussion with the authors, Monday 13th May 2024, at KNUST, and online, at 10:15 AM.

⁵⁹ An MPhil. Religious Studies Candidate (Department of Religious Studies, KNUST; Trinity Theological seminary) in an interview discussion with the authors, Wednesday 15th May 2024, at KNUST, and online, at 11:13 AM.

⁶⁰ Frimpong and Kuwornu-Adjaottor, “Structuralism and Deconstruction in Biblical Scholarship: Annotated Bibliographies,” 2, 4, 6, 7.

interpretation to engage the original languages and contexts of the Bible for translations. Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics is a crucial methodology in African Biblical Scholarship. Being studied as a course equips students and exegetes in contextual theologizing. Also, it translates biblical interpretation from the ancient context into the immediate context of the new audience for whom a mother-tongue translation is to be produced. Paul Kimbi refers to this as a contextual approach by which the messages of God become translated and are better understood in one's first language.⁶¹

RECOMMENDATION

Considering the contributions of Kuwornu-Adjaottor, Ekem, Bediako and other proponents, coupled with the importance of MTBH, embracing and promoting theological research in MTBH in universities, colleges and seminaries is recommended. Moreover, new and existing Ghanaian-African biblical scholars are advised to tread this emergent path since it has such impactful and lasting prospects for Bible translation and interpretation in Ghana and African Christianity. Meanwhile, authors encourage more papers to be written and published in this new area in order to expand the pool of literature for effective studies and research in the near future.

CONCLUSION

Among the several methods of Biblical interpretations in the African Context, this study focused on the methodology of mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics (MTBH), commending its key proponents, namely, Aloo Mojola, John D.K. Ekem, Jonathan E.T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, and others. Findings reveal Kuwornu-Adjaottor's "nine-step methodology" for doing MTBH academically and practically, which is being adopted in many universities, seminaries and Bible translation societies in Africa, including Ghana. In addition to raising many student-disciples as well as taking a philosophical position for deconstruction and dynamic equivalence in biblical scholarship, the scholar advocates that Bible translation involves interpretation in order to produce a meaning that considers the contexts of the receptor/local audience. Interview findings were incredible, and responses indicate that such a scholar as J.E.T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor is worth celebrating. This paper contributes to the promotion of mother-tongue bible translation and mother-tongue theologizing in Africa towards "mother-tongue homiletics" in Africa, and calls for academic commitment and contributions on the part of new and existing scholars.

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⁶¹ Kimbi, "The Way from Babel: The Role of Language in Advancing God's Mission in the World," 5.

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