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THE TRANSLATION OF *ΠΑΡΑΒΟΛΗ* [PARABLE] AS *ABE* IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS OF THE GA NEW TESTAMENT OF THE BIBLE

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ABSTRACTS

Bible translation is not hermeneutics but it involves interpretation because some of the words in the source languages are difficult to translate into other languages. Using the mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics approach that employs exegesis and information from readers of mother-tongue Bibles, the paper studied the translation of *παραβολη (parabolee)* as *abe* in the Synoptic Gospels of the Gā translation of the New Testament to see whether a new term could be generated to improve upon the translation of the word. It was found out that *abebuamewiemɔ* (a proverb with a story) best translates *παραβολη (parabolee)*. This rendering depicts the story aspect of the parables Jesus used in the Synoptic Gospels. The finding of the paper contributes to knowledge by finding a term that helps in the rendering of *παραβολη (parabolee)* in the Gā translation of the New Testament. It has added to the traditional definition of parable in the Synoptic Gospels from a contextual hermeneutics perspective. The paper recommends that the Bible Society of Ghana should consider using the finding of this study in the future revision of the Gā Bible.

INTRODUCTION
Parable

A parable is a story with two levels of meaning; the story level provides a mirror by which a reader or listener perceives and understands reality.[2] In the Synoptic Gospels, a parable revolves around one main point of comparison between the activity in the story and Jesus' understanding of the kingdom of God, and thus teach one primary lesson.[3] About one-third of Jesus' teaching is in parable. The Greek word *παραβολη (parabolee)*[4] occurs 50 times in the New Testament, and except for Hebrews 9:9 and 11:9 all the occurrences are in the Synoptic Gospels.[4] If one accepts the four-source hypothesis of the Gospel origins, parables make up about sixteen percent of Mark, about seventy-nine percent of Q, about forty-three percent of M and about 52 percent of L.[5] John does not have story parables, but does have forms that would fit the broad sense of *māšal (mashal)*, a Hebrew word that is literally translated *παραβολη (parabolee)* in the Septuagint. Examples are the good shepherd (Jn 10) and the true vine (Jn 15). John uses the word *paroimia,* a word similar in some respect to *παραβολη (parabolee)*, four times.[6] Snodgrass notes that in the Synoptic Gospels parables are longer stories but proverbs (Lk 4:23), riddles (Mk 3:23), short sayings (Mk 7:15) and questions (Lk 6:39) are also designated parables.[7]

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[2] R. K. Snodgrass, "Parable" in J. B. Green, S. MacKnight, I. H. Marshal (eds.) *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Leister/England: InterVarsity Press:1992), 594.

[3] Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, IL: 1990), 30.

[4] The sound of the long vowel h (ee) is use in its transliteration to make for easy pronunciation by the reader.

[4] Snodgrass, "Parables", 594.

[5] Snodgrass, "Parables", 594.

[6] Snodgrass, "Parables", 594.

[7] Snodgrass, "Parables", 594.

Snodgrass give some characteristic features of the parables in the Synoptic Gospels. Jesus' parables are brief and terse. They are marked by simplicity and symmetry. Parables focus mainly on humans, that is, they mirror first-century Palestinian human life. They are fictional descriptions taken from everyday life, but they do not necessarily portray everyday events. Parables are engaging, that is, they are told to create interest, and various schemes are used to draw hearers and compel dealing with issues at hand. Parables seek to reorient though and behaviour, and in keeping with Jesus' teaching everywhere, they always contain elements of reversal. Parables are told in context, that is, they are not general stories with universal truths. Parables are theocentric, that is, the make reference to God's kingdom. Parables frequently allude to Old Testament texts. Most parables appear in longer collection of parables.[8]
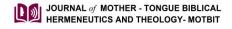
Bultmann gives literary characteristics of parables in general. They are usually concise; they are usually told from a single perspective; characters in parables usually are presented to the reader through a process of showing rather than telling. In parables, feelings and motives are described only when they are essential to the point of the story. Parables give little or no interest to motivate the reader. Often, there is no expressed conclusion to the story. Usually, there is a bare minimum of event in parables.[9] Parables are longer stories. How is $\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\beta o\lambda\eta$ *(parabolee)* translated in the Gā Bible?

BIBLE TRANSLATION INTO GĀ

The translation of the Bible from the original languages - Greek and Hebrew - to other languages dates back to the 3rd Century when the Jews in Alexandria whose first language is Greek translated the Old Testament, originally written in Hebrew to Greek. After this translation known as the Septuagint[8] came many translations of the Bible into other mother-tongues[9] which became an important issue for reformation within the church. The issue of mother-tongue translations of the Bibles became one of the contentious themes of the Reformation. By the 16th century, the view was gaining grounds that a personal knowledge of scripture is precisely what ordinary people mostly need for their own spiritual good.[10] Erasmus expressed the view that the holy text should be in every language so that even Scots and Irishmen might read it. Within a decade this wish had become a central demand of the Reformation. The translation of the Bible into mother-tongues, a central demand of the Protestant Reformation, subsequently became the main weapon in the armoury of Protestant missionaries. These missionaries encountered more and more languages in their line of work into which the holy texts can be usefully translated. Noss asserts that it was during the Missionary Era that the notion of scripture translation to the languages south of the Sahara Desert became a reality.[11] The very first scripture translated is the Lord's Prayer in Kikongo, publish in the Jesuit Fathers Doctrinal Christiana in San Salvador (Loanda, Angola) in 1624. By the 19th century, translations of the whole Bible or in parts were published in some 400 new languages and by the 20th century, the number has doubled.[12]These languages include Ga, the language of the indigenes of the Greater Accra Region of Ghana, and many other Ghanaian languages.[13]

According to *Ethnologue* Gā belongs to the Niger-Congo Kwa family. Gā is a mother-tongue spoken in the South Eastern part of Ghana; by the indigenous people of Accra and its environs - Osu, Teshie, La, and Nungua. Some tribes in Togo also speak Gā. Quarshie defines mother-tongue as one's native language, into which one is born, and grows up in. It is a person's first language as compared to other languages one might learn later in life, for example, in school. The mother-tongue is not the same as a vernacular, the common language of a region or group, no matter how natural such a language and its usage

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[8] K.R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 17-22.

[9] Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition,* 3rd. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 188-192.

[8] F. F. Bruce, J. I. Packer, P. Comfort and C. F. H. Henry, *The Origin of the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003), 232.

[9] Bruce et al, *The Origin of the Bible,* 273-281.

[10] Bruce et al, *The Origin of the Bible,* 275-276.

[11] Noss, "The History Bible Translation", *American Bible Society* (2007): 2-3.

[12] Noss, "The History of Bible Translation", 2-3.

[13] J. D. K. Ekem, *Early Scriptures of the Gold Coast (Ghana)* (Rome/ Manchester, UK: Edizioni di storia eletteratura/St. Jerome 2007), 23-48; D. N. A. Kpobi, *Entrusted with the Word: History of the Bible Society of Ghana* (Accra: Heritage Publications), 22-28.

may be.[14] Mother-tongue translations of the Bible are important theological interpretation documents; they enable readers hear God speak to them in their mother-tongues.[14]

A revised version of the Gā translation of the Bible (published in 1886) with a simplified language to make it easier for Gā speaking people to read and understand was published by the Bible Society of Ghana (BSG) in 2006.[15] This revision became necessary because of the difficulties readers encountered in understanding the 1866 translation, which was had a complex diction.[16] The revision of the Gā Bible which started in 1977 with the New Testament, was to replace the earlier translation; the revision was done with a new orthography.[17] It took 20 years for the revised edition of the Gā Bible to be completed.[18] The translation was the third Bible launch after Nzema in 1999[19] and the Dangme in 2000.[20]

The General Secretary of the BSG at the luncheon of the new version of the Ga Bible in Accra on 9th June 2006[21] said that, just as every publication is always subject to review by its readership, the BSG would welcome suggestions from its readers via the Bible House to help improve upon its content. This paper contributes in this direction. It employs the mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics methodology to investigate the difference in meaning between of παραβολη (*parabolee)* in the Greek New Testament and *abe* (proverb) in Gā translation. It explores how the understanding of these meanings can generate a new that can help to revise the translation of the word in the Synoptic gospels of the Gā translation of the New Testament of the Bible. Anum[22] and Laryea[23] have done similar studies on the Ga Bible. Krupp-Dakubu[24] has compiled a Ga dictionary with a glossary.

Methodology

This paper employs the mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics methodology that Ekem defines 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."[25] Kuwornu-Adjaottor builds on this definition by providing a step-by-step procedure for mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics.[26] The methodology requires that readers of the mother-tongue bibles are consulted in the translation process to find out terminologies in the mother-tongue that best translate the words in the source text such as Greek that are confusing.

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[14] B. Y. Quarshie, "Doing Biblical Studies in the African Context – the Challenge of Mother-tongue Scriptures," *Journal of African Christian Thought* Volume 5 Number 1 (June 2002): 7. It must be noted however that in some countries such as Kenya, India, and the various Asian countries, mother-tongue refers to "mother-language" or "native language" and is used to indicate the language of none's ethnic group, in both common and journalistic parlance rather than the first language. Also in Singapore, "mother-tongue " refers to the English. As a result, Ekem has said that, a mother-tongue can also become a vernacular, depending on its wide usage across geographical boundaries. See J. D. K. Ekem, *Priesthood in Context* (Accra: SonLife Press, 2008), 188.

[14] J. E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "Assessment of Three Problematic Texts in the Synoptic Gospels of the New Testament of the Dangme Bible", Doctoral Thesis, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, 2018.

[15] Kpobi, *Entrusted with the Word: History of the Bible Society of Ghana,* 64-65.

[16] The tile of the 1886 translation is *Ṅmāl̯e Kroṅkroṅ L̯e*

[17] Cf. the title of the 1886 translation above with the 2006 of version, *Åmalâ Krôåkrôâ Lâ.*

[18] Kpobi, *Entrusted with the Word: History of the Bible Society of Ghana,* 65.

[19] Kpobi, *Entrusted with the Word: History of the Bible Society of Ghana,* 67.

[20] Kpobi, *Entrusted with the Word: History of the Bible Society of Ghana,* 68.

[21] Kpobi, *Entrusted with the Word: History of the Bible Society of Ghana,* 65.

[22] E. N. B. Anum, "The Pursuit of Well Being: The Relationship of the New Testament Concept of *Ẽịr̄ĕn̯ĕ* (Peace) and that of *Omanye* among the Gas of Southern Ghana", *International Journal of Asian Social Science,* 2014: 62-73.

[23] P. T. Laryea, "Reading Acts 14:8-17 and 17:22-31 in Ga: A Critical Examination of the Issues, Meanings and Interpretations Arising from Exegesis in the Mother Tongue", *Journal of African Christian Thought* Volume 6 Number 1 (2003): 35-43.

[24] Kropp-Dakubu, M. E. (ed.), *Ga-English Dictionary* (Legon, Accra: Language Centre, University of Ghana, 1999).

[25] J. D. K. Ekem, *Early Scriptures of the Gold Coast (Ghana).* Rome/ Manchester, UK: Edizioni di storia eletteratura/St. Jerome 2011.

[26] J. E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "Doing Biblical Studies Using the Mother-tongue Approach", *Journal of Applied Thought* Volume 1 Number 1 (2012): 55-80. See also J. E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "The Practice of Mother-tongue Biblical Hermeneutics in Ghana: A Case of *bny ysr'l* [Deut. 32:8] in Some Ghanaian Communities", *Journal of Mother-tongue Biblical Hermeneutics* Volume 1 Number 1 (2015): 134-157; J. E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "African Biblical Studies: Mother-Tongue Biblical Methodology", *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* Volume 1 Number 2 (2015): 1-24.

Open and unstructured questionnaire was used to interview 12 Christians who are indigenous Ga and are residents of the following Ga communities in Accra in the Greater Accra region of Ghana: Akweteman, Kwashieman, Odorkor, and Nii-boiman. These communities were chosen because majority of the inhabitants are indigenous Ga speakers. The Christians used for the investigation read the Bible regularly and are well versed in the Ga language and culture. The twelve (12) respondents were made up of seven (7) male and five (5) female, between the ages of 21 and 61, from five (5) denominations – Church of Pentecost, Divine Healers Church, Apostolic Church, New International Central Gospel Church and Seven-day Adventist Church. The respondents comprised three (3) pastors, three (3) elders/deacons/deaconesses, two (2) children service teachers and four (4) church members.[27]

FINDINGS

Data gathered indicates that there is a difference between *abe* (proverb) and parable in Ga. Some of the respondents said that Jesus used stories that formed part of a parable in his teachings. Jesus took into consideration the calibre of people he spoke to and their level of understanding and selected the appropriate parable that will communicate to them. A story Jesus told together with the heavenly explanation given to the story makes a parable. A parable, even though is complex, the story part of it enhances its easy understanding.

Abe (proverb) on the other hand, does not compare to what is heavenly. There is no need for one to understand a story before understanding a proverb since one can deduce the meaning from a proverb from the context in which the proverb it is said. Furthermore, proverbs are usually short statements and very easy to understand especially when they are said within the right context to the "wise". Example of a proverb in Ga is *yitso kome yaa ajena* meaning, "two heads are better than one". The meaning of this proverb can be deduced from the words that constitute the proverb depending on the context in which it has been used. This proverb teaches an earthly lesson on the importance of seeking other views on an issue and the need to share whatever is going on in one's life with others so that they can also share their views.

There are, however, some similarities between a parable and a proverb in Ga in the sense that both are said within a context and both have concealed meanings to be unravelled. Again, among the Ga, story-telling (tales), giving proverbs and saying parables have the same goal; they teach a lesson. Furthermore, there are sometimes a story behind a proverb but this is very rare. Due to these similarities, one of the respondents claimed that a parable in the Ga language is *abe* because its meaning is hidden in the parable as in the case of proverb. But the fact that there are these similarities between parable and proverb does not make them the same. The difference in approach in understanding the meaning makes them distinct from each other. Although both parable and proverb belong to the same family their usage and the meaning they communicate are different.

Another group of respondents say that Jesus did not speak to people in *abe* (proverbs) but he used *abebuamewiemɔ* (a proverb within a story) to teach his audience. A proverb is a short and wise saying but *abebuamewiemɔ* brings to mind statement or story or series of collected wise sayings. The story together with the connection to heavenly things makes it a parable. For these respondents, therefore, *abebuamewiemɔ* is how parable should be translated in Ga but not *abe*.

Akwasaŋwiemɔ (idiomatic expression) also came up as to how parable should be translated in Ga. Usually in Ga, *akwasaŋwiemɔ* is used to make an unpleasant statement sound good. The heavenly meanings that parables communicated, however, were not unpleasant statements that were covered up by Jesus, but instead they were massages concerning the kingdom of God.

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[27] Millicent Aidoo, "The translation of Parable *παραβολη* [parable] as *abe* in the Synoptic Gospels of the Ga New Testament of the Bible", BA Long Essay, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, 2018.

Discussion of the findings

There are two schools of thought as to how parable should be translated in Ga: *abebuamewiemɔ* (a proverb with a story) and *akwasaŋwiemɔ* (idiomatic expression). *Abebuamewiemɔ* is in line with Kropp-Dakubu (1999) who defines a parable in Ga as *abebua*. Even though *abe* (proverb) is part of this definition, a proverb cannot be said to be a parable because of its shortness. A parable may include proverbs (Lk 4:23), riddles (Mk 3:23), short sayings (Mk 7:15) and questions (Lk 6:39) (Snodgrass, 1992); but do not necessarily constitute parables. *Akwasaŋwiemɔ* does not translate parable in Ga because the parables in the Synoptic Gospels are not idiomatic expressions; they are earthly story used to illustrate teaching about the kingdom of God.

Anum (2014) who did a study on the translation of the Greek word (peace) in the Ga New Testament says that the understanding of a particular word and how it is used by the Ga plays an important role in translation. How the receptor language speakers use a word should be considered before it is used in a translation that is meant for them. Anum has re-echoed what Layea (2003:35) says that Bible translation is a process and should not be understood as simply an "exercise of grammar, linguistics and usage, whereby translators look for equivalent words, idioms and expressions. It is also theological and involves the transmission of the cultural, social and religious issues, meanings, concepts from the world of the source language into the world of the receptor language". Regarding Bible translation from the source language to a receptor language Nida (1969/1982) says, a translated text should have an immediate meaning to the receptor language speakers, hence, even if the receptors do not get the exact translation for a word, the substitute should communicate the same meaning as the original source language did. The findings of this research affirms the proposition of Ekem (2007:48) 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." Further, "the mother-tongue approach to biblical interpretation is likely to shape the future of Biblical Studies in Africa" (Ekem, 2008: 189).

CONCLUSION

Bible translation is not static; it is a dynamic venture that involves interpretation. The study has shown that the translation of *παραβολη* (*parabolee)* as *abe* in the Ga New Testament can best be translated as *abebuamewiemɔ* (a proverb with a story). This rendering depicts the story aspect of the parables Jesus used in the Synoptic Gospels. The paper has added to the traditional definition of parable in the Synoptic Gospels. The paper recommends that the Bible Society of Ghana should consider using the finding of this study in the future revision of the Gā Bible.

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