

## The Translation of διελέγετο (dielexeto) in Acts 17:2 in Asante-Twi Bible: The Implication on Paul Personality

David Adu-Kyei<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi.



### ABSTRACT

This article seeks to examine the translation of the Greek word *διελέγετο* (*dielegato*) in Acts 17:2 as *gyee akyinnyee* in Asante Twi Bible. Using the Mother Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics approach and exegesis, the study finds out that the translation of *gyee akyinnyee* sounds more derogatory. It is therefore suggested that the Twi word *gyee akyinnyee* should be retranslated as *mpensempensemu* in order to vindicate a man full of the Holy Spirit. The study will add to the interpretation of Acts 17:2 in the Asante Twi Bible. It is recommended that subsequent revisions of the Asante Twi Bible could consider *mpensempensemu*.

Correspondence

David Adu-Kyei

Email: [adukyeid@gmail.com](mailto:adukyeid@gmail.com)

Publication History

Received 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2022

Accepted 25<sup>th</sup> July, 2022

Published online 31<sup>st</sup> March,  
2023

**Keywords:** Akan formal communication, Bible translation, mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics, eristic reasoning

### INTRODUCTION

The substantial work of translating the Bible into other mother tongues by orthodox missionaries cannot be underrated. However, there is a question posed by Jim Harries that needs to be answered “why such non-orthodox movements (AICs-African Indigenous Churches) are so quick to immerse if the translation process has been so successful?”<sup>1</sup> He further thought that the reason might seem that the narratives do not comprehend or utilize the Bible as they ought to.<sup>2</sup> If Harries thought is right then it presupposes that the translation process has not been so successful with which this author may not disagree. In order for any translated scripture to be accepted and used in a particular community, there is a matter of trust and this must be pursued by the translators.<sup>3</sup> The task of interpretation is to make meaningful all strange and unfamiliar terms in the recipient language. Since both Translation and interpretation have the same mission of transforming the incomprehensible into something meaningful, translation cannot be useful without interpretation.

<sup>1</sup> Jim Harries, “Biblical Hermeneutics in Relation to Conventions of Language Use in Africa: Pragmatics Applied to Interpretation in Cross-cultural Context,” *ERT* vol. 30 no.1 (2006):49-50.

<sup>2</sup> Harries, “Biblical Hermeneutics in Relation to Conventions of Language Use in Africa,” 50.

<sup>3</sup> Roy Ciampa, “Contemporary Approaches to Bible Translation Origins, Characteristics and Issues,” *Journal of the Science of Religion* (2010), 59.

## The Hermeneutical Challenges in Asante Twi Translation of Acts 17:2

The Translation of Acts 17:2 in Asante Twi reads: *Na sɛdɛɛ Paulo taa yɛ no, ɔkɔ wɔn kyɛn nnawɔtwe mmiensa ne wɔn gyee twere nsem no ho akyinnyeɛ* (And Paul as his manner was, went in to argue with them for three weeks about the scriptures.) This translation suggests that Paul is an eristic person whose manner is to spend a lot of time arguing in the synagogue. The Asante Twi Bible translation of Acts 17:2 suggests that Paul uses an eristic argument in proclaiming the gospel. This translation does not portray how a man full of the Holy Spirit should convey the Good News. There is a saying in Akan: *dɛɛ ɔwɔ nteaseɛ no ngye akyinnyeɛ* (the one who understands never argues). *ɔkyinnyeɛfoɔ* in the Akan worldview is seen as one who does not have understanding. The Asante community does not accept this translation as an appropriate rendering that portrays a man full of the Holy Spirit.

## METHODOLOGY

The selected text is placed in its pericope in the source text-language (Greek) to dialogue with the English text, and the Asante-Twi text using the Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics approach.<sup>4</sup> The study was done with a comparative analysis of the Asante-Twi Bibles (AsTB) (1964, 2012, 2013 editions and Nkwa Asɛm, 2020) with the Akuapem-Twi Bible (AkTB) (1964 and 2012 editions) and the Mfantse Bible (FB) (1974 edition) to ascertain the variations in translations of Acts 17:2 in the Asante-Twi and the hermeneutical problems such translations pose to the Asante-Twi mother-tongue Bible readers. Views of both biblical and linguistic scholars were analyzed to ascertain what such translations mean to the Akan Christian before re-translating the text, with the Greek text as a basis.

## PROBLEMS IN BIBLE TRANSLATION

There are problems in translating the Bible from the original languages to mother-tongues. Studies in Bible translation have recognized the need to revise the mother-tongue translations of the Bible. Reasons given for the need for revision of the translated mother-tongue Bibles include the evolution of language and the recent discoveries that have been made. The knowledge of receptors has been enhanced as a result of the numerous ancient documents discovered. For example, the archaeological findings after 1870 have enhanced the understanding of the lands and times in the Biblical era which was not known previously.<sup>5</sup> The limited knowledge could not help in effectively examining the translated text. Mazid referring to Ronald and Rusell in his work opine that the fact that one can speak a language does not mean that one can translate it. It is one thing to speak a language and another thing to translate it. It can be argued that most of the Bible translators in Africa especially on the Gold Coast now Ghana were mere speakers of both the Source Language(s) (SL) and the Target Language(s) (TL). They were not Hebrew/Greek; they were not Akans Mazid explains that in the context of translation,

...lack of adequate knowledge of, for example, idioms or proverbs in the target language (TL) may result in anxiety and tension when dealing with these forms of expression. Poor achievement due to anxiety and tension can contribute to developing a feeling of hatred toward the TL. Alternatively, an antagonistic stance toward a foreign culture, for religious or political reasons, may manifest itself in a wholesale avoidance of its language or in developing a pragmatist attitude where idioms, jokes, and so on, are unnecessary for doing business or simply communicating information in that language.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Jonathan Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "Doing African Biblical Studies with the Mother-tongue Biblical Hermeneutics approach," *All Nations University Journal of Applied Thought*, Vol. 1, no.1 (2012):1- 60.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur Ferch, "Which Version Can We Trust?" *The Adventist Review*, (1990):1-15.

<sup>6</sup> Mazid Bahaa-eddin, "Translations of Fear and (Basic) Fears of Translation - The Little Foxes that Spoil the Vine." *Egyptian Journal of Linguistics and Translation*, Vol 1, no 1(2014):1-19.

Greenstein understands that translation is always selective.<sup>7</sup> Even the most strong-willed activists of translation acknowledge that in translating from language to language one must leave something behind. Greenstein, who in general promoted the style of translation that renders meaning for meaning and not word for word wrote of the "omissions, additions, and alterations that a translator must make in "substituting the idioms of his own for those of another tongue."<sup>8</sup> The great Russian writer and translator Kornei Chukovsky praised the art of translation perhaps beyond anyone else. Yet, he was fully aware of its constraints. Not only did he recognize that "not even the semantics of words in Russian and other languages coincide", but he also discussed "the impossibility of conveying the musical form of poetry from one language to another."<sup>9</sup>

As the saying goes, every translator is a traitor and this challenge was realized by the Rabbis long ago. It is said that conducting a literal translation of the scriptures is perjury while adding to scriptures is considered sacrilege.<sup>10</sup> This saying recognizes the limitations of the two main philosophies behind translation; formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. In his article, Bruce M. Metzger identifies various factors that distort the scriptures during the translation process.<sup>11</sup> Dickson and several mother-tongue biblical scholars believe that a faithful translation of the Bible into the mother-tongue of a people was necessary for achieving relevant theological understanding, as the lack of a good translation impedes effective understanding of the text.<sup>12</sup> These same challenges reviewed by these scholars were faced by those who translated the Asante-Twi Bible. It is in this direction that this Text-Acts 17:2 from the Asante-Twi Bible should be retranslated to achieve its relevant theological understanding.

## THE CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF ACTS 17

Where ever Paul went through his missions, he never ceased sharing the gospel. The Greek terms κήρυγμα, (*Kerugma*) means proclamation and κηρύσσω, (*kerusso*) means "to be a herald (*kerux*)."<sup>13</sup> Hence, the *Kerygma* is what is proclaimed. The apostles began their work by proclaiming a gospel that was clear and simple.

The main content of the *kerygma* was that Jesus is the chosen of God - the promise. Even though he had to suffer a disgraceful death, he was gloriously resurrected, appeared to his disciples and thereafter was exalted to his rightful position with his Father. He now entreats all to surrender to him and this is proclaimed by the Church. This proclamation (*kerygma*) must be conducted persuasively to win more souls to Christ. On his second mission, Paul together with his company extensively proclaimed the gospel in many Gentile lands (Acts 17:1-4) before coming down to Athens (17:15-34). He faced great opposition to the gospel in Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:1) and therefore left alone for Athens (Acts 17:13-15).<sup>13</sup>

This great opposition in the form of uproar and attacks did not take place in the synagogue but in the house of Jason. In the synagogue, Paul was successful in convincing many; but the Jews who were not convinced felt envious and later caused an uproar. Two things suggest that Paul's *manner* of preaching and teaching in the synagogue was acceptable. First, he was allowed there three

---

<sup>7</sup>Edward L. Greenstein, "Assessing a Bible Translation," in *Essays on Biblical Method and Translation*, (Atlanta, Georgia: Brown Judaic Studies, 2020), 1-138.

<sup>8</sup> Greenstein, "Assessing a Bible Translation," 131.

<sup>9</sup> Greenstein, "Assessing a Bible Translation," 131.

<sup>10</sup>Ben Spackman, "Why Bible Translations Differ: A Guide for the Perplexed," *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel*, Vol 15, no. 1 (2016): 30-65.

<sup>11</sup>Bruce Metzger, "Persistent Problems Confronting Bible Translators," *Bibliotheca Sacra 150 Dallas Theological Seminary* (July-September 1993): 273-284.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph M.Y. Edusa-Eyison, "The Bible in Dialogue with African Life and Thought and the Role of the Mother-tongue: The Contribution of Kwesi Dickson to a New Creative Stage in Theology," *Journal of African Christian Thought*, 10 (2007):1-67.

<sup>13</sup>Walter King, *St. Paul's manner of preaching, recommended for imitation, in a sermon delivered at the ordination of the Rev. Daniel Hall to the pastoral care of the church in Sag-Harbor, Long-Island: Presbyterian Church* (Sag Harbor, N.Y. 1998), 1797.

consecutive Sabbath days and also many were convinced. The uproar and the attacks were not triggered by the *manner* of Paul's preaching but by the *jealousy* of the devout Jews.

### The Greek Text

κατὰ δὲ τὸ εἰωθὸς τῷ Παύλῳ εἰσήλθεν πρὸς αὐτοὺς καὶ ἐπὶ σάββατα τρία διελέγετο αὐτοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν γραφῶν

### Transliteration

*kata de to eioothos to Paulo eiselthen pros autous kai epi sabbata tria dielexeto autois apo ton graphon*

### English

*And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures,*

### Asante-Twi<sup>14</sup>

*Na sedee Paulo taa ye no, akoo won kyen nnawotwe mmiensa ne won gyee twerereensem no ho akyinnye. (Asom. 17:2)*

### TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF διελέγετο

Luke's use of *dielexomai* starts in Acts 17, the part of the text that deals mainly with evangelism in Greece and Macedonia (16:9–18:18). The term together with other verbs within the same context gives a thorough idea of the mode of Paul's communication.<sup>15</sup>

For a discussion on the grammatical nature of the verb, F.F. Bruce identifies the complex link between preaching and defense.<sup>16</sup>

The classical Greek understanding of *dialexomai* adds a touch to the evangelistic method that Paul used in missions. The active form of διαλέγω means to “pick out, glean, separate, select, examine or scrutinize,” and was generally used in agricultural terms or handling documents.<sup>17</sup>

The middle deponent used in this discourse referred to the process of communication which logicians normally practised.<sup>18</sup> *dielexeto autois* is reasoned, rather than disputed, as the word is sometimes rendered—ten times in Acts, seven times rendered by R.V., “reasoned,” (cf. also Heb. 12:5); and twice “discoursed,” Acts 20:7; Acts 20:9, once only “disputed,” Acts 24:12, (cf. Judg. 1:9).<sup>19</sup> Here the word may point to Paul's discourse with his companions (cf. Acts 17:17 and Mk 9:34). That such interplay of speech could occur in the synagogue as evidenced from John 6:25; John 6:29, Matthew 12:9. In classical Greek, with the dative or *pros* the word means to converse with. There is a construction in the Greek grammatical structure that goes with *dial ptni or prostina* to mean to discuss a question with another so that the word might easily have the meaning of arguing or reasoning about a question, but not of necessity with any hostile intent; even in Hebrews 12:5, it is the fatherly παράκλησις which reasoned with sons. Blass supports the imperfect as in T.R., Gram., ἀπὸ γραφῶν, i.e., drawing his evidence from them, or if a discussion is meant, starting from them;

<sup>14</sup> Twere Kronkron (The Bible in Asante-Twi), Bible Society of Ghana: Accra, 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Walter Bauer, “διαλέγομαι,” in *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker and F. Wilbur Gingrich, trans. William F. Arndt, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 232.

<sup>16</sup> Frederick F. Bruce, “Acts of the Apostles To-Day.” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of Manchester*. (Autumn 1982) (1): 36–56.

<sup>17</sup> Frederick F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1955), 254.

<sup>18</sup> Henry G. Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry S. Jones, and Roderick McKenzie, eds. *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 400.

<sup>19</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2007), 163.

Winer-Moulton, xlvi., Grotius, so Overbeck, Kuinoel, Weiss, Wendt take the word with *διανοίγων*.<sup>20</sup> From the textual analysis, the grammatical structure suggests that Luke's use of *dielexegeto autois* should mean reasoning about a question but not necessarily with any hostile intent. Again if it is meant for discussion it should rather begin with them, not Paul. *Sabbata* in Greek means a seventh day or a week. According to the context, *sabbata* cannot mean a week since it is unnatural to spend three continuous weeks arguing. The context suggests the Jewish Sabbath day of worship. This means Paul went to them on three Sabbath days, not 3 weeks as rendered by the Asante-Twi translation.<sup>21</sup>

### The Manner of Paul Preaching and Teaching

Paul himself clarified in 1 Corinthians 2:4 that his speech and message were not attractive to the wisdom of man. They were, however, demonstrating the power and spirit of the Word. This may at first instance seem excellent and worthy of emulation. This is because it is very unsuitable for a gospel worker to speak in any manner. Paul had a manner of preaching and he perfected it as his mission expanded. Rome, Athens, and Corinth had several sophists who were known for their tact in analysis and building their own theories. They were successful in articulating their theories for a while but after the gospel started spreading, their mode became less attractive and was eschewed by many.<sup>22</sup>

### The Meaning of *Akyinnyeε* in Akan

Some traditional and religious leaders of Asante as well as those experts in Akan Linguistics were interviewed about the meaning of the word *akyinnyeε* (hot argument) in English. The following meanings were given; *se nnipa bi retwe daawere wo asem bi ho na obiara pese ne yonko nte aseε* ( a hostile argument) (An act of argument that aims to win an argument and values that more highly than arriving at the truth.) *Se woretwe asem twann a wo mpese nteaseε ye adwuma* (trying not to understand what is being argued). A person who enjoys *akyinnyeε* usually wins his debates with his false argument. Such a person argues with other people angrily. The word *akyinnyeε* has some negative connotations like *abirabε*, (contrary) *twintwaan* (controversial) combative, quarrel, *mansotwe* (dispute, contention). In the Akan community when one is *akyinyefεε* (eristic) people do not feel comfortable listening to him or her since such a person always doubts everybody and is not willing to listen to others.<sup>23</sup> *Akyinyefεε* are always seen as people who do not have anything serious to do but just to arouse tensions and confusion.<sup>24</sup> Sometimes they end up fighting.

In Akan, *akyinnyeε* is not a proper way of convincing someone to believe you.<sup>25</sup> People who usually *gye akyinnyeε* (make tense arguments) are not taken seriously. Sometimes they may have good reasons but because of their manner, they are mostly rejected. Especially, when the argument takes a lot of time, people become fed up. It is believed that they usually cause chaos wherever they are. Such an attitude makes them lose respect in their community.<sup>26</sup>

### RECOMMENDATION

The phrase *akyinnyeε* in Acts 17:2 is more derogatory. It is recommended that the word should be replaced by *mpensempeseεmu* in order to vindicate the manner or the intention of a man full of the Holy Spirit. The 1964 version translated *διελέγετο* (*dielegeto*) as *kεkaa twere nεεm no ho asem* (speak about the scripture). Even though this translation does not describe how Paul speaks, however,

<sup>20</sup> Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 163.

<sup>21</sup> Samuel Bacchiocchi, *Rest for Modern Man* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1976), 368.

<sup>22</sup> King, *St. Paul's manner of preaching, recommended for imitation...*

<sup>23</sup> An interview with Nana Akwasi Aquah, Adansihene Kyeame of Bodwesango on December 20, 2019.

<sup>24</sup> An interview with Gideon Adomako, a Twi Tutor at Dadiase SHS, Sekyere East on December 23, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> An interview with Obaapanin Adwoa Pinanmang of Amansie Kokofu, March 5, 2020.

<sup>26</sup> An interview with Okyeame Kwame Dompere of Akyease on March 12, 2020.

the context indicates that there was no dispute else he would not have been allowed there on three Sabbath days. This translation seems to portray how a man full of the Holy Spirit should convey the gospel message. Therefore, it is recommended that the Asante-Twi translators of the Bible Society of Ghana can repeat this phrase in the subsequent translation. It is also recommended that subsequent editions of mother-tongue translations of the Bible should start providing some footnotes to certain texts and phrases as a step toward full Bible commentaries for Ghanaian mother-tongue Bible readers. This will help clear the suspicion in the minds-of certain Christians that the Bible has been “changed”.

## CONCLUSION

The word *διελέγετο* (*dielegeto*) portrays how a man full of the Holy Spirit should convey the Good News. The problem with this translation is that the Asante-Twi versions which translate the *dielegeto* as *akyinnyeæ* (hot argument) make Paul's manner of communicating the gospel questionable to Asante mother-tongue Bible readers. This is so because, among the Asante, politeness is an essential component of Akan formal communication to which every speaker is expected to conform. Among the Akan, an individual's moral character is judged by the degree of politeness in his or her public speeches; he or she may thereby maintain his or her reputation or lose it.<sup>27</sup> Politeness is a social indexing tool that identifies an individual as belonging to a class of cultured people. So, for Paul to be able to speak convincingly so that people may get to know the truth of the Gospel, he cannot be eristic – a person who loves to win an argument and values that more highly than arriving at the truth. The 2012 Asante-Twi translation makes Paul usually wins his debates with his false argument. This translation does not portray how a man full of the Holy Spirit should convey the Good News. The 2013 Asante Twi Edition and Mfante Baebol translated *διελέγετο* (*dielegeto*) as *mpensmpesemu* (discussing) which seems to allow others to bring out their views on the issue under discussion. Acknowledging the relevance of acceptability theory, Larson asserts that “acceptability should be a major concern to translators” as the absence of this benchmark in a text could result in the receptor audience rejecting the translation.<sup>28</sup> As Dansieh rightly observes, the merit of translation must not only be based on it being of good quality; it must also be perceived to be of good quality by the target audience.<sup>29</sup>

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agyekum, Kofi, “The Ethnopragsmatics of the Akan Palace Language of Ghana,” *Journal of Anthropological Research*, Vol. 67, No. 4 (2011), 573-593.
- Bacchiocchi, Samuel. *Rest for Modern Man*. Nashville: Southern Publishing Association 1976.
- Bahaa-eddin, Mazid. “Translations of Fear and (Basic) Fears of Translation - The Little Foxes that Spoil the Vine.” *Egyptian Journal of Linguistics and Translation*, Vol 1, no 1(2014):1-19.
- Bauer, Walter. “*διαλέγομαι*,” in *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker and F. Wilbur Gingrich, trans. William F. Arndt, 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000.
- Bock, Darrell L. *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2007.

---

<sup>27</sup> Kofi Agyekum, “The Ethnopragsmatics of the Akan Palace Language of Ghana,” *Journal of Anthropological Research*, Vol. 67, No. 4 (2011), 573-593.

<sup>28</sup> Mildred Larson, *Meaning-based Translation*. (New York: University Press of America, 2001), 14.

<sup>29</sup> Solomon Ali Dansieh, “Proverbs and Naturalness in Mother-Tongue Translation: The Dagaare New Testament in Perspective.” *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 30 no.1 (2019):1.

- Bruce, Frederick F. "Acts of the Apostles To-Day". *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of Manchester*. (Autumn 1982) (1): 36–56.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Book of the Acts*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1955.
- Ciampa, Roy. "Contemporary Approaches to Bible Translation Origins, Characteristics and Issues," *Journal of the Science of Religion* (2010): 59-101.
- Dansieh, Solomon Ali. Proverbs and Naturalness in Mother-Tongue Translation: The Dagaare New Testament in Perspective. *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 30 no.1 (2019): 1-132
- Edusa-Eyison, Joseph M.Y. "The Bible in Dialogue with African life and Thought and the Role of the Mother tongue: the Contribution of Kwesi Dickson to a new Creative stage in Theology," *Journal of African Christian Thought*, 10 (2007):1-67.
- Ferch, Arthur. "Which Version Can We Trust?" *The Adventist Review*, (1990):1-15.
- Harries, Jim. "Biblical Hermeneutics in Relation to Conventions of Language Use in Africa: Pragmatics Applied to Interpretation in Cross-cultural Context," *ERT* vol. 30 no.1 (2006):49-50.
- King, Walter. *St. Paul's manner of preaching, recommended for imitation, in a sermon delivered at the ordination of the Rev. Daniel Hall to the pastoral care of the church in Sag-Harbor, Long-Island: Presbyterian Church* (Sag Harbor, N.Y. 1998), 1797.
- Kuwornu-Adjaottor, Jonathan. "Doing African biblical studies with the mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics approach," *All Nations University Journal of Applied Thought*, Vol. 1, no.1 (2012):1-60.
- Larson, Mildred. *Meaning-based Translation* (New York: University Press of America, 2001).
- Liddell, Henry G., Robert Scott, Henry S.Jones, and Roderick McKenzie, eds. *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.
- Metzger, Bruce. "Persistent Problems Confronting Bible Translators," *Bibliotheca Sacra 150 Dallas Theological Seminary* (July-September 1993): 273-84.
- Spackman, Ben. Why Bible Translations Differ: A Guide for the Perplexed. *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel*. Vol 15, no. 1 (2016): 30-65.
- Twere Kronkron (The Bible in Asante-Twi), Bible Society of Ghana: Accra, 2012.

## ABOUT AUTHOR

Pr. David Adu-Kyei (Mphil) is an Associate Member Institute of Biblical Scholarship in Africa (IBSA) -West Africa, Publishing Director, Ashanti Central Ghana conference and an ordained minister of Seventh-Day Adventist Church.