



THE TRANSLATION OF ἸΗΣΟΥΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ [IĒSOUS KRISTOS] AS YEZU KRISTA IN THE KASEM MOTHER-TONGUE TRANSLATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

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ABSTRACT

This paper contends that the Greek name Ἰησοῦς Χριστός [Iĕsous Kristos] which is translated and spelt as *Yezu Krista* in the Kasem New Testament is inaccurately spelt because the /s/ and /o/ sounds exist in Kasem orthography. Also, the translation *Yezu Krista* does not match with any form of the Greek declining processes. Interestingly, most of the languages spoken in the geographical area have spelt it as *Yesu Kristo*. The major finding of the research is that the French missionaries who first entered the territory from neighboring Burkina Faso pronounced the name Jesus as [ʒe.zy]. So the Kasena converts got used to that pronunciation and when the Bible was to be translated into the Kasem language, the translators resorted to how the people pronounced the name at that point in time without reference to the Greek text. The authors therefore seek to address this anomaly by proposing that the Bible translators should translate Ἰησοῦς Χριστός [Iĕsous Kristos] as *Yesu Kristo* in the Kasem mother-tongue translation of the New Testament.

Key words: Ἰησοῦς, Χριστός, Iĕsous, Yezu, Yesu, Kristos, Krista, Kristo, Kirisito, Kasem orthography, Kasem mother-tongue translation of the New Testament.

INTRODUCTION

Jesus is the traditional name given to the Founder and Source of the Christian religion (Born circa 4 BCE, Crucified 29 CE). It is derived from the Greek Ἰησοῦς [Iĕsous] which is the Hebrew rendition of *Yeshua* or Joshua meaning “savior” (Matthew 1: 21). According to Jewish tradition, Jesus was referred to as Jesus of Nazareth (Matthew 26:71) or Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth (Luke 4:22), just to supplement the name with his father’s name and the name of his hometown. Interestingly, both refer to the historical Jesus who was a typical Jew. There are other names and titles of Jesus which point to his deity such as Emmanuel – “God is with us” (Matthew 1: 21), Christ – “Anointed one” (Matthew 16:6), Lord – “Master” (2 Peter 1: 11), Son of God (John 3:16-17) and Son of man (Matthew 26: 62-66).

For the sake of this paper, we shall limit ourselves to the name Jesus and the title Christ. Inasmuch as Jesus was a name given at birth (Matthew 1: 25), it was a transliteration of the Hebrew יֵשׁוּעַ [Yeshua] into Koine (common) Greek Ἰησοῦς [Iĕsous]. In the transliteration process, the [j] sound was lost due to its absence in the Greek language. Christ on the other hand is a title derived from the Greek Χριστός [Kristos], transliterated in Latin as Christus in the New Testament to depict Jesus. Its usage “Christ Jesus” emphasizes its nature as a title.² It is now often used as a name, one part of the name “Jesus,” but is actually a title, the Messiah. In the Septuagint (LXX) version of the Hebrew Bible, the word Χριστός [Kristos] is used to translate the Hebrew מָשִׁיחַ [Mashiach], Messiah, meaning “anointed.” “Christ” is one of the most familiar terms by which Jesus is known, both in the New Testament and in subsequent Christian tradition. All the canonical Gospels apply the term to Jesus, but each has its own interesting variation in the way Jesus is

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² Doniger Wendy, ed., *Encyclopedia of World Religions* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, 1999), 212.

presented as Christ.

In Ghana, there are three Bible Translation Agencies – Bible Society of Ghana (BSG), the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT) and the International Bible Society (IBS). IBS has translated the New Testament into twenty-seven mother-tongues of sixty-seven Ghanaian languages, and the full Bible into thirteen.

Kasem is a Gur language spoken in the Upper East Region of Ghana and parts of Burkina Faso. It has three versions of the New Testament: *We Ni-duure Tɔnɔ*, 1988 (International Bible Society); *We Ni-duure Tɔnɔ*, 1988 (Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation) and a reprint of GILLBT *We Ni-duure Tɔnɔ* by The Bible League of Ghana 1994. How is the Greek name Ἰησοῦς Χριστός [Iēsous Kristos] transcribed in the Kasem New Testament Bible? What accounts for the difference in the transliteration and spelling of Ἰησοῦς Χριστός [Iēsous Kristos] in the Kasem, Gonja, Sisaale and Farefare translations of the New Testament?

Ἰησοῦς Χριστός [Iēsous Kristos] as *Yezu Krista* in the Kasem New Testament

The name Ἰησοῦς [Iēsous] appears about 917 times in the Bible whilst the title Χριστός [Kristos] appears 531 times. Together the compound name Ἰησοῦς Χριστός [Iēsous Kristos] (Jesus Christ) occurred 258 times in the Greek New Testament.³ In the Kasem New Testament, the exact name Ἰησοῦς Χριστός [Iēsous Kristos] has been translated as “*Yezu Krista*.” What might have caused the change of the sigma sound to zeta in the spelling of Ἰησοῦς [Iēsous] and the omicron sound to alpha sound in the spelling of Χριστός [Kristos] in the Kasem New Testament? Could it be that?

1. The forms in the Greek declining processes have a *Yezu Krista* component
2. Kasem has not got the appropriate alphabets
3. It is a translated term used by various Ghanaian languages.

For the details, we would first look at the components of the compound name in the Greek declining processes, comparison of Kasem and Greek alphabets and then how the other languages in the vicinity translated and spelt it in that order.

Greek Forms of the Name Ἰησοῦς Χριστός [Iēsous Kristos]

Greek nouns are arranged in groups called declensions. There are three declensions in Greek namely; first, second and third declensions. They indicate the particular inflection of a noun in its different cases such as Nominative (N), Vocative (V), Accusative (A), Genitive (G) and Dative (D) as well as its different numbers thus the singular and plural forms of a noun. The Nominative case is the case of the subject of a sentence, the Vocative case is the case of address, the Accusative is the case of direct object, and the Genitive is used in the case of expressing kind or possession whilst the Dative is the case for indirect objects.⁴

The compound name Ἰησοῦς Χριστός [Iēsous Kristos] is a second declension noun declined separately below. It must be noted that Ἰησοῦς Χριστός [Iēsous Kristos] used in this study is limited only to the savior of the universe, and therefore declined in only singular forms.

Table 1.0 Ἰησοῦς (Iēsous) is declined in the following manner:⁵

Case	Declension	Translation	Description
N	Ἰησοῦς	Jesus	Subject of a sentence
V	Ἰησοῦ	[o] Jesus	in the case of address
A	Ἰησοῦν	Jesus	Direct object

³Kuwornu-Adjaottor, J. E. T. “The Translation of *Kristos* as *Kristo* in the Dangme Mother tongue Translation of the New Testament Visited.” *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies* (JETERAPS). 5(8) (2014a): 203

⁴ Ekem D. K. John and Kissi Seth, *Essentials of Biblical Greek Morphology* (Accra: Son Life Press, 2010), 24-25.

⁵Ekem and Kissi, *Essentials of Biblical Greek Morphology*, 43.

G	Ἰησοῦ	Of Jesus	Indicating kind or possession
D	Ἰησοῦ	To/for Jesus	Indirect object

Table 1.1 Χριστός (Kristos) is declined as follows:

Case	Declension	Translation	Description
N	Χριστός	Christ	Subject of a sentence
V	Χριστε	[o] Christ	In the case of address
A	Χριστον	Christ	Direct object
G	Χριστου	Of Christ	Indicating kind or possession
D	Χριστω	To/for Christ	Indirect object

Table 2.0 Comparison of Greek and Kasem Alphabets and their Sounds

Greek Alphabet	Sound	English	Kasem	Sound
A	AHL-fah	A	A	[a]
B	VEE-tah	B	B	[b]
Γ	GHAH-mah	G	G	[g]
Δ	THEL-tah	D	D	[d]
E	EHP-see-lon	E	E	[e]
Z	ZEE-tah	Z	Z	[z]
H	EE-tah	Ē		
Θ	THEE-tah	Th		
I	Yo-tah	I	I	[i]
K	KAH-pah	K	K	[k]
Λ	LAHM-thah	L	L	[l]
M	Mee	m	M	[m]
N	Nee	N	N	[n]
Ξ	ksee	X		
O	OH-mee-kron	O	O	[o]
Π	Pee	P	P	[p]
P	roh, roe	R	R	[r]
σ, ς	SEEGH-mah	S	S	[s]
T	tahf	T	T	[t]
Υ	EWP-see-lon	U	U	[u]
Φ	Fee	ph	F	[f]
X	Hee	ch	ch	[ʃ]
Ψ	psee	ps		
Ω	Oh-MEE-ghah	Ō		

Table 3.0 Comparison of Kasem, Gonja, Sisaale and Farefare Alphabets.

Kasem	Gonja	Sisaale	Farefare
Aa	Aa	Aa	Aa
Bb	Bb	Bb	Bb
CHch	CHch	CHch	
Dd	Dd	Dd	Dd
Eε	Eε	Eε	εε
Ee	Ee	Ee	Ee
Ff	Ff	Ff	Ff
Gg	Gg	Gg	Gg
		GBgb	GBgb
	Hh	Hh	Hh
Ii	Ii	Ii	Ii
Jj	Jj	Jj	Jj
Kk	Kk	Kk	Kk
		KPkp	
Ll	Ll	Ll	Ll
Mn	Mm	Mm	Mm
Nn	Nn	Nn	Nn
NYny	NYny	NYny	NYny
Ɖɲ	Ɖɲ	Ɖɲ	Ɖɲ
		ƉMɲm	ƉMɲm
ɔɔ	ɔɔ	ɔɔ	ɔɔ
Oo	Oo	Oo	Oo
Pp	Pp	Pp	Pp
Rr	Rr	Rr	Rr
Ss	Ss	Ss	Ss
Tt	Tt	Tt	Tt
Uu	Uu	Uu	Uu
Vv		Vv	Vv
Ww	Ww	Ww	Ww
Yy	Yy	Yy	Yy
Zz	Zz	Zz	Zz

Table 3.1 Comparison of Greek, Kasem, Gonja, Sisaale and Farefare translations of Jesus Christ.

Greek	Kasem	Gonja	Sisaale	Farefare
Ἰησοῦς Χριστός	Yezu Krista	Yesu Kristo	Yesu Kirisito	Yesu Kristo

Discussion

Table 1.0 indicates the forms which the noun Ἰησοῦς Χριστός [Iēsous Kristos] undergoes in the Greek declining processes. It can be seen clearly that the SEEHG-mah /σ/ sound between the EE-tah /η/ and OH-mee-kron /ο/ sounds does not change. In a like manner, the form of Χριστός [Kristos] does not have an AHL-fah /α/ sound at the end. So the substitution of the SEEHG-mah /σ/ sound for the ZEE-tah /ζ/ sound and the AHL-fah /α/ sound instead of the OH-mee-kron /ο/ sound in the Kasem translation of noun Ἰησοῦς Χριστός [Iēsous Kristos] has no declining basis.

Secondly, from the table of Greek and Kasem alphabets above, it is clear that the Kasem have the

/s/ sound equivalent to the SEEHG-mah /σ/ sound in Greek. The Kasem also have the /o/ sound equivalent to the OH-mee-kron /ο/ sound in Greek and therefore have no justification for the use of /z/ as in *Yezu* and /a/ as in *Krista*.

However, Table 3.0 clearly shows that the /s/ and /o/ sounds are present in the Kasem, Gonja, Sisaale and Farefare alphabets. Interestingly, of the 258 occurrence of the noun Ἰησοῦς Χριστός [Iēsous Kristos] in the Greek New Testament, the corresponding translations in Gonja, Sisaale and Farefare⁶ are *Yesu Kristo*, *Yesu Kirisito* and *Yesu Kristo* respectively. The similarities in the three languages could be attributed to the presence of related alphabets. The Kasem also have all it takes to translate along the same line but did not. What might account for that?

The Reason for the Translation of noun Ἰησοῦς Χριστός [Iēsous Kristos] as “*Yezu Krista*” in the Kasem Translation of the New Testament.

The history of the Kasem language development began with the introduction of formal education in 1907 through the efforts of the Catholic missionaries. Awedoba⁷ maintains that the pioneer missionaries made various translations of catechism manuals, biblical texts and hymns from French and Latin into Kasem for use by their converts. He stresses that the current orthographic convention in use by the Catholic Church reflects only slight improvement on the earlier convention which has also influenced other later conventions such as those used by the Bureau of Ghana Languages (Kasem) and the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT). His assertion paints a clear picture that most inaccuracies in the mother-tongue translations detected by biblical scholars notably Ekem and Kuwornu-Adjaottor might have been influenced by these earlier works by foreign missionaries.

The contention that the term “*Yezu Krista*” used in the Kasem New Testament instead of “*Yesu Kristo*” was influenced by the transliterations promulgated by the Missionaries is supported by the prayer before and after receiving the Holy Communion recorded in a book titled *Kassem Warrem, Missa de Lee Tɔnɔ*, 1976 Edition.

EUKARISTI GYODEM YIGA WAREM (Prayer before Communion)

Kasem	English
Am'Tero Yezu Krista, am'siine a boŋ se Mo O' yoba, Eukaristi Sakramen wone, de Mo yira, de Mo gyana de Mo gyoro, de Mo weem. Am'Tero Yezu Krista, a gyɔɔne Mo Eukaristi Sakramen wone, y'a nii Mo na ye an kero d'am Verno d'a Tero na doe mama to.	O Lord Jesus Christ, Who said to Your Apostles: “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you,” regard not my sins but the faith of Your Church, and deign to give her peace and unity according to Your Will: Who live and reign, God, world without end. Amen.
Am' Tero Yezu Krista, a o maŋ se Mo ba am'wo ne, se Mo na tay' botare-bu dedoa yirane, o o fayɛ am'gyoro.	O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, Who, by the will of the Father, with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, have by Your death given life to the world, deliver me by this Your Most Sacred Body and Blood from all my sins and from every evil. Make me always cling to Your
Am tu Wɛ, am' ban' zaŋ dedɛ d' a wellera s' a bɛɛse Mo mo, a na kyul' a doe Mo na ye am' Kwo d' am fayno lao ŋwaane to, ye Mo na vɛi wellera ŋwaane to. Gyã gyã. ta n' wol' ne s' a ta waare a tete s' a da yi ke ya biri biri.	commandments, and never permit me to be separated from You. Who with the same God the Father and the Holy Spirit, live and reign, God, world without end. Amen.

⁶ Sisaale and Farefare just as Kasem belong to the Gur family of languages and widely spoken in the Upper West and Upper East regions of Ghana respectively. Gonja is Guang language and widely spoken in the northern region of Ghana

⁷ Awedoba K. Albert “Kasem Tones and Orthography,” *Journal of West African Languages* XX, 2(1990): 31.

<p>Am' Tero Yezu Krista, am' tiin dede se Mo na pe ne Mo tete Eukaristi Sakramen wone, Mo o duri a nwaana, ye Mo o pa ne grasias mama yiniga na gyege ne s' a vere a tete.</p> <p>Am' Tero Yezu Krista, mo som ba gyege kwelem Mo ye am' Kwo d' am We. Konto mo am' so' Mo d' a bane mama, ye ko doe wonno mama. Mo som nwaane a so' a donna a man d' a tete, ye a pa bal'na gyooore am' to apaasa kyega kyega.</p> <p>Am' Tero Yezu Krista, a lay' dede se Mo ba am' gyoro ne, se Mo da yi yaye amo, ye se Mo grasias ta o am' gyoro ne dama dama.</p>	<p>Let not the partaking of Your Body, O Lord Jesus Christ, which I, though unworthy, presume to receive, turn to my judgment and condemnation; but through Your goodness, may it become a safeguard and an effective remedy, both of soul and body. Who live and reign with God the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, world without end. Amen.</p> <p>Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof; but only say the word, and my soul will be healed.</p>
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EUKARISTI GYODEM KWɔyA WAREM (Prayer after Communion)

Kasem	English
<p>Am' Tero Yezu Krista, am' bon se Mo siine n' ora am' wone, de Mo yira de Mo gyana, de Mo gyoro de Mo wɛem, ye am' bon konto kyega mo ga ko doe a yia na ne.</p> <p>Am' Tero Yezu Krista, a gyɔne Mo na ora am' tete bane wone, ye a lore Virigo Mary kalao am' poru malka, d' abam males de nɔn-Laaro na wo tilao ne to, t' a kena Yezu Krista le a pa ne.</p> <p>Am' Tero Yezu Krista, a so' Mo d' a ban' mama, da dam mama, a lay' sa ta soe Mo te to, pa sa soe Mo ko doe wonno mama tiketike.</p> <p>Am' Tero Yezu Krista, Mo na pe ne Mo tete Eukaristi Sakramen won' to a lay' se N' ta Ngyege a tete; gyon a bane d' a gyoro d' a yira mama. A pe Mo a nwem mama, ye a laya se N' ta n' gyege am' tike tike.</p> <p>Am' Tero Yezu Krista, Mo na wora lele am' gyoro wone to, am' tiine dede we Mo da ba yaye amo, ye Mo o zege dama dama am' gyoro ne de Mo grasias.</p> <p>Am' Tero Yezu Krista, am' kwoore Mo, pa ne grasias mama yiniga am' gyoro d' a yira, tan wole am' Tero, a Kwo de a Nu, d' a di nɔna mama, am' badonna, am' fayna, Purgatore tiina de wellere tiina.</p>	<p>What has passed our lips as food, O Lord, may we possess in purity of heart, that what is given to us in time, be our healing for eternity. May Your Body, O Lord, which I have eaten, and Your Blood which I have drunk, cleave to my very soul, and grant that no trace of sin be found in me, whom these pure and holy mysteries have renewed. Who lives and reign, world without end. Amen. We humbly beseech You, Almighty God, to grant that those whom You refresh with Your sacraments, may serve you worthily by a life well pleasing to You. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, Who lives and reigns, world without end. Amen.</p>

Navrongo as the Radiating Center of Catholicism in the Three Northern Regions of Ghana.

The small detachment of the members of the Society Missionaries of Africa (S.M.A.) of French-Canadian descent, who arrived in 1906 pioneered the evangelization of Navrongo and its environs. Using Navrongo as the radiating center, the missionaries entered the interior of the three Northern Regions and successfully propagated the word. From their efforts, a new ecclesiastical territory emerged, first, in the form of an Apostolic Prefecture in 1926, and then an Apostolic Vicariate in 1934. The territory became part of the

newly created diocese of Tamale in 1950. In 1956 the Diocese of Navrongo was erected, and remained so until 1977 when its name was changed to Diocese of Navrongo-Bolgatanga,⁸ as a result of the erection of the Tamale Ecclesiastical Province. Below is a table of the historical positions and ministers in charge since 1926.⁹

Table 4.0 Diocese of Navrongo-Bolgatanga

YEAR	POSITION	MINISTER	TITLE	NATIONALITY
1926.01.11	Apostolic Prefecture of Navrongo	Oscar Morin	Rev. Father	Canadian
1934.02.26	Apostolic Vicariate of Navrongo.	Oscar Morin	Bishop	Canadian
1950.04.18	Suppressed to establish Diocese of Tamale)	Gerard Bertrand	Bishop	Canadian
1956.04.23	Restored as Diocese of Navrongo from Diocese of Tamale and Diocese of Keta	Gerard Bertrand	Bishop	Canadian
1977.05.30	Renamed as Diocese of Navrongo–Bolgatanga	Rudolph Akanlu	Bishop	Ghanaian
(1994.03.14 – 2009.12.23	Diocese of Navrongo–Bolgatanga	Lukas Abadamloora	Bishop	Ghanaian
2011.04.05 – ...	Diocese of Navrongo–Bolgatanga	Alfred Agyenta	Bishop	Ghanaian

The French Factor in the pronunciation of noun Ἰησοῦς [Iesous] as *Yezu* in Kasem.

Twenty years before Fr. Oscar Morin achieved Apostolic Prefecture status for Navrongo, the early missionaries who entered Navrongo through Burkina Faso were of French descent and their language had an impact on the way the Kasena spelled their words. One such influence is manifested in the way the noun Ἰησοῦς [Iesous] is pronounced by the French and Kasena people. The name Ἰησοῦς [Iesous] is written as Jésus in the French language but pronounced [ʒe.zy]. Let us consider the French Alphabets in the table below.¹⁰

Alphabets	Pronunciation
A a	[a]
B b	[be]
C c	[se]
D d	[de]
E e	[ə]
F f	[ef]
G g	[ʒe]
H h	[a]
I i	[i]
J j	[ʒi]

⁸ Now in its 112th year.

⁹ Diocese of Navrongo-Bolgatanga, www.gcatholic.org/dioceses/diocese/navr0.htm.

¹⁰ French alphabets, www.omniglot.com/writing/french.htm

K k	[ka]
L l	[ɛl]
M m	[ɛm]
N n	[ɛn]
O o	[o]
P p	[pe]
Q q	[ky]
R r	[ɛR]
S s	[ɛss]
T t	[te]
U u	[y]
V v	[ve]
W w	[dubløve]
X x	[iks]
Y y	[igrɛk]
Z z	[zɛd]

Table 5.0. The French alphabet (l'alphabet français)

Dr. Melvin Nartey, a French scholar, a Lecturer in French and the Head of the Department of Modern Languages at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, when called upon, asserted that the /s/ sound in the French language is pronounced as the /z/ sound in English and other local languages. According to him, a word with only one /s/ is pronounced as /z/ but the one with double /ss/ is pronounced as /s/. For example, *poisson* (fish) is pronounced as /pwa.sɔ̃/ whereas *vous* (you) is pronounced as /vu/. In a related development, the letter /c/ before /i/, /e/ and /y/ is pronounced as /s/ in the French Language. However, the /s/ sound remains mute when it appears at the end of a word unless the next word begins with a vowel. In pronouncing the name Jésus, the [ɛss] sound that appears at the end of the word Jesus remains silent in the French pronunciation whilst the [ɛss] in the middle is written and pronounced as [zɛd] in the French language. Hence the spelling of Jesus as [Jésus] in the French language but pronounced as [ʒe.zy]. It must be noted that even though the French pronounce the name Jesus as [ʒe.zy], it is spelt as Jésus. It goes without saying therefore that when the French Missionaries pronounced the name Jesus as [ʒe.zy], the Kasena converts adopted it and when it was time for Bible to be translated into the Kasem language, the translators resorted to the familiar pronunciation of the name at that point in time without reference to the Greek text. It is therefore appropriate to propose that this anomaly be corrected in subsequent publications of the Kasem translations of the Holy Bible.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, it is recommended that the Greek compound name Ἰησοῦς Χριστός [Iēsous Kristos] be translated and spelt as *Yesu Kristo* in the Kasem New Testament. The contention is that the spelling of Ἰησοῦς [Iēsous] in the Greek language does not include the /z/ alphabet and the spelling of Χριστός [Kristos] in the Greek language does not include the /a/ alphabet. In the same way, the alphabets used in the Greek translations have their corresponding sounds in the Kasem language. These alphabets should be used in spelling the words for accurate pronunciation. It is also evident that most of the indigenous Ghanaian mother-tongue translations have translated the compound name as *Yesu Kristo* or *Yesu Kirisito*. *Yezu Krista* should therefore be spelt as *Yesu Kristo* in the Kasem New Testament.

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