

## Translating *Εὐαγγέλιον*, *ἀποστόλος* and *ἱερεύς* in the Oshindonga Dialect of Namibia: A Proposal

Magdalena Ndatoolewe Shilongo<sup>1</sup> and Isaac Boaheng<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Bible Translator, Bible Society of Namibia.

<sup>2</sup> Lecturer in Christian Theology and Ethics, Christian Service University College, Ghana; Research Fellow University of the Free State, South Africa.



### ABSTRACT

Throughout the world, Bible translators face several challenges as they attempt to transfer God’s word from the source languages into their native languages. This paper looked at the rendering of three biblical terms—namely, *εὐαγγέλιον*, *ἀπόστολος* and *ἱερεύς*—in the old Oshindonga Bible (published in 1954) and the theological and socio-religious impact these renderings have on the Oshindonga community. The data for the research was collected using personal interview based on structured and non-structured questions. The researchers used a sample size of thirty (30) people—including pastors from different denominations, theologians, “ordinary” congregants and translators of both old translation and the ongoing translation of the Oshindonga Bible and church elders—selected from Ondangwa and Omuthiya towns and some selected villages. These interviews were done face-to-face and via telephone with the chosen participants. The non-structured questions consisted of open-ended questions designed to meet the objectives of this research which were met. Field notes were taken during the contact sessions, whether during phone call interviews or face-to-face sessions. The analysis of the results resulted in the proposal of an alternative and a more meaningful translation of the Greek words under study.

Correspondence

Isaac Boaheng

Email:

[revisaacboaheng@gmail.com](mailto:revisaacboaheng@gmail.com)

Publication History

Received 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2022

Accepted 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2022

Published online 19<sup>th</sup> January,  
2023

**Keywords:** *Apostle, Gospel, Oshindonga, Priest*

### INTRODUCTION

Bible translation refers to the process of rendering a biblical text from the source language (Hebrew, Greek or Aramaic) into another language.<sup>1</sup> It is the communication of the meaning of a source-language text employing an equivalent target-language text. In doing so, one has to mediate between the cultures of the biblical world and the receptor community.<sup>2</sup> In the translation process, different techniques are used to render the biblical texts meaningfully, accurately, faithfully, clearly and naturally in the receptor language. However, inadequate knowledge about translation principles, the

<sup>1</sup> Isaac Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-tongue Bible Translators* (Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2022), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-tongue Bible Translators*, 4.

wrong application of translation principles, inadequate knowledge about receptor culture and other factors may result in “bad” translations.

The Oshindonga Bible Translation Project traces its history to the days of the Finnish missionaries who visited the community in 1870.<sup>3</sup> The missionaries realized that without breaking the linguistic barrier, their work could not bear much fruit.<sup>4</sup> The people, on the other hand, were also eager to learn how to read and write.<sup>5</sup> The existing Oshindonga Bible, published in 1954, is not free from inaccuracies.<sup>6</sup> The existing Oshindonga Bible has many transliterated terminologies that need to be re-examined. The transliteration of the Greek words *εὐαγγέλιον*, *ἀπόστολος* and *ἱερεύς* respectively as *Evaangeli* (or *elaka etoye*), *Aayapostoli* and *Omupristeli* is the case in point. The existing translation poses socio-cultural and theological challenges to the readers. Currently, a new version of the Bible is being translated into two Oshiwambo dialects, Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama. The production of these two Oshiwambo Bible versions started on 15 January 2017 and the projects are estimated to be completed in 2029.

The purpose of the paper, therefore, is to examine how the biblical terms, *εὐαγγέλιον*, *ἀπόστολος* and *ἱερεύς*, have been rendered in the old Oshindonga Bible (published in 1954), the theological and socio-religious implications or difficulties associated with the existing renderings and then propose ways in which the ongoing Oshindonga translation may go about the translation of these terms. The paper adopted an empirical research method to collect data about the subject; the data collected were processed and analysed to arrive at informed conclusions and recommendations.

### Translation Philosophies

A translation philosophy is an approach used to translate a text from one language into the other.<sup>7</sup> In the case of Bible translation, it is the approach used to render the biblical text from the source language into any other language. There are many different translation philosophies; none of them can be used alone for translating the whole Bible. Bible versions may, however, be tagged with the predominant philosophy used. In this section, three of such philosophies are examined to help the readers appreciate the various ways in which texts can be rendered based on the translation model to adopted.

### Literal Translation or Formal-Equivalence Theory

Literal translation deals with rendering the Bible from one language into another word-by-word.<sup>8</sup> This approach prioritizes the form of the original text rather than its meaning. Here, the translator is much interested in the word-to-word correspondence between the source and the receptor texts. Formal-equivalent translators are accused of reproducing the text from its original form without considering the meaning of the text in the receptor language.<sup>9</sup> The following quote by Robert P. Martin summarizes the formal-equivalence theory of translation very well: “With this philosophical orientation, the translator is ... concerned that paragraph corresponds to paragraph, sentence to sentence, clause to clause, phrase to phrase, and word to word. The formal equivalence philosophy or method of translating attempts to say “what” the original text says by retaining “how” it says it (as far as [receptor language] grammar allows).”<sup>10</sup> Martin, underscores the translator’s focus on equivalence in word order and form rather than meaning. Martin also notes the difficulty in finding equivalence in words, saying,

---

<sup>3</sup> Martin Ngodji, “The Story of the Bible among Ovakwanyama: The Agency of Indigenous Translators” (Master of Theology Thesis: University of KwaZulu Natal, 2004), 33.

<sup>4</sup> Ngodji, “The Story of the Bible among Ovakwanyama,” 48.

<sup>5</sup> Ngodji, “The Story of the Bible among Ovakwanyama,” 48.

<sup>6</sup> The Aandonga are indigenous people that speaks Oshindonga, which is one of the Bantu languages spoken in the northern part of Namibia. Currently spoken by about 810 000 people, Oshindonga is a dialect of the Ovawambo language, and mutually intelligible with Oshikwanyama, another Ovambo dialect.

<sup>7</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-tongue Bible Translators*, 89.

<sup>8</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-tongue Bible Translators*, 89.

<sup>9</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-tongue Bible Translators*, 89-90.

<sup>10</sup> Robert P. Martin, *Accuracy of Translation and the New International Version* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 8.

“Although clear [receptor language] expression does not always allow the formal equivalence translator to do so, he [or she] tries not to adjust the idioms which the original writer used; rather he [or she] attempts to render them more or less literally...”<sup>11</sup> A literal translation is based on the belief that if the Bible is the word of God, then it must not be altered in any way; it must be rendered literally, being careful about lexical details.<sup>12</sup>

In Africa, most of the pioneering translations followed the literal approach because the missionaries who pioneered these translations were not thoroughly familiar with the languages and culture of the receptor communities. For example, the missionary translator, Martin Rautanen, with his limited knowledge of Oshindonga and with the help of indigenous people managed to translate the Bible into Oshindonga (1954). The role of indigenous people in the first translation of the Bible into Oshindonga was suitably proper and relevant for the use of the words and terms. The missionary-translator only consulted the indigenes to supply him with local terminologies. The influence of the indigenes on this translation was minimal. The same can be said of other African countries where Christian missionaries pioneered Bible translation. The KJV is predominantly literal in its renderings.

### **Dynamic-equivalence Translation Theory (or Functional Translation)**

The dynamic-equivalence approach, as opposed to formal equivalence, developed from the 1980s onward. Most Bible translations done during and after this period were based on the dynamic equivalent approach. The expression “dynamic equivalence” means “the closest natural equivalent to the source-language message.”<sup>13</sup> It emerged due to the difficulties that translators go through looking for linguistic equivalence which sometimes do not naturally exist. Nida rightly argues that “Since no two languages are identical, either in the meanings given to corresponding symbols or in how such symbols are arranged in phrases and sentences, it stands to reason that there can be no absolute correspondence between languages. Hence there can be no fully exact translations.”<sup>14</sup> In this approach, the translator aims at producing the same response in the modern reader as the original text produced in the original audience. A functional equivalent approach to translation does not prioritize the wording from a source language to a target language but prioritizes the meaning of the text or the equivalent meaning of the text.

Translation requires linguistic and cultural mediation between two societies. This is the effectiveness of the functional equivalent translation; therefore, the functional equivalent theory is considered to be the best option as far as the communication of the message is concerned. It places the contemporary reader in the shoes of the ancient reader and invokes in the contemporary reader, the same response that the text evoked in the original reader. To achieve its purpose, the text goes through three stages, namely, analysis, transfer, and restructuring.<sup>15</sup> Boaheng summarizes these processes as follows: The translator examines “the original text in terms of grammatical relations to know the meaning of the words and combination of words to the original audience, transfers that meaning to the modern reader in a way that bridges the gap between the language and culture of the biblical world and those of the contemporary world, and restructures the message in a way that sounds natural and acceptable in the receptor language.”<sup>16</sup> The NIV is noted for this kind of translation.

### **Skopos Theory**

The search for equivalence, whether dynamic or literal, continued to reign in the field of translation until the later twentieth century when people began to question the legitimacy and effectiveness of these approaches in helping the modern reader to appreciate the biblical text. Mary Snell-Hornby

---

<sup>11</sup> Martin, *Accuracy of Translation and the New International Version*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-tongue Bible Translators*, 90.

<sup>13</sup> Eugene A. Nida, “Principles of Correspondence,” *The Translation Studies Reader*, Edited by Lawrence Venuti (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 136.

<sup>14</sup> Nida, “Principles of Correspondence,” 126.

<sup>15</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-tongue Bible Translators*, 93.

<sup>16</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-tongue Bible Translators*, 93.

concluded that “equivalence is unsuitable as a basic concept in translation theory: the term equivalence apart from being imprecise and ill-defined (even after a heated debate of over twenty years), presents an illusion of symmetry between languages which hardly exists beyond the level of vague approximations and which distorts the basic problems of translation.”<sup>17</sup> The quest for a new approach to translation yielded the skopos theory.

Skopos is the Greek word for ‘purpose’. According to Skopostheorie (the theory that applies the notion of Skopos to translation), the prime principle determining any translation process is the purpose (Skopos) of the overall translational action. This theory underlines the fact of intentionality being part of the very definition of any action. The skopos theory was developed by Katharina Reiss and Hans J. Vermeer and influenced by Justa Holz-Mänttäri and Christiane Nord. According to this model, Bible translation has to focus on a particular goal (purpose) which is “the most important fact in translation”<sup>18</sup> Thus, translated texts are expected to achieve a purpose which must inform the translation process and choice made in the process.

## METHODOLOGY

This research is an empirical study that used personal interview (based on structured and non-structured questions) to collect data. Thirty people were chosen from Ondangwa and Omuthiya towns and some selected villages. Both face-to-face and telephone interviews were based on their suitability. The study has various variables that were demonstrated which contributed to these findings. These included gender, age group, occupation, responsibilities of respondents in the church, denomination, duration that the participants have been in church, and the number of years that the respondent has read the Bible.

The key research questions that were asked include the following:

1. Which version of Oshindonga Bible do you currently use and why?
2. Do you know that the Bible was translated from a certain language to Oshindonga? Do you know why the Bible version you use was translated?
3. Do you understand everything when you are reading the Oshindonga Bible without help from someone or from dictionaries?
4. Do you think we need another translation in Oshindonga? And why?
5. Do these biblical terms mean the same to you: “Good News” and “the Gospel”? If not, can you explain the difference?
6. The term “Gospel” in English is sometimes translated in Oshindonga Bible as “Evaangeli,” and sometimes as “Elaka etoye.” Which one do you think is the correct translation and why?
7. Do you think the transliteration of “Evaangeli” from Greek means that there is no correct and meaningful translation?
8. Will the change of this word change the way you interpret and apply the Bible?

To make readers appreciate the backgrounds of the respondents, the following sections present further analysis of the respondents. The sections also present the responses given according to the respondent’s background.

---

<sup>17</sup> Mary Snell-Hornby, *The Turns of Translation Studies: New Paradigms or Shifting Viewpoints?* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2006), 21.

<sup>18</sup> Snell-Hornby, *The Turns of Translation Studies*, 54.

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

### Gender responses

The results show that more males had responded to the questionnaires than their counterparts. Of the total number of respondents, eleven (11) were male and nine (9) were female, which shows that more males were eager to answer and get involved in the word of God. The percentages in the chart below show that fifty-five per cent (55%) of the respondent were male and forty-five (45%) were female. This is indicated in figure 1 below.

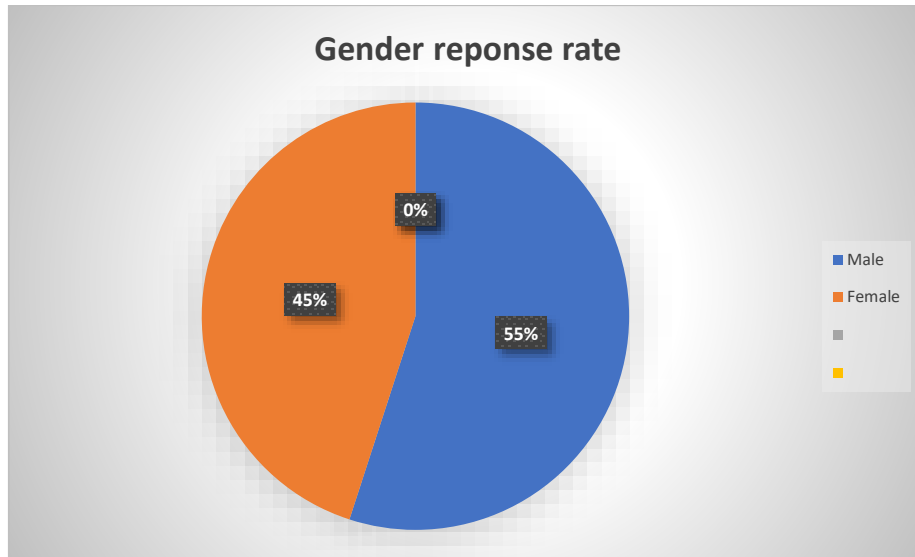


Figure 1: Gender responses

One may reason that male respondents' percentages are higher than female respondents' simply because most theologians and pastors in the selected communities are males. Another contributing factor is that many church elders in the targeted towns are also male and this has cemented the outcomes of the findings of this study. The females are interested in the Word of God; however, most of them have been denied the opportunity to study theology or become pastors of their churches. Women's involvement in this study is very crucial because they gave their unbiased ideas on the transliteration of these words.

Most women suggested that the Bible be free from foreignization, and they hope that the Bible may have meaningful words. However, the males were more literal, and they advocated for these three biblical words; namely, *Evaangeli*, *Aayapostoli* and *Omupristeli* not to be changed. Most of the males were reluctant for changes as they seem to believe that changing those words will have an impact on the catechetical and religious books that are being used in the churches.

### Age Responses

The study was based on a group of people who are twenty (20) years old and beyond. The researchers clustered these people in groups and distributed questionnaires to them in accordance with their age groups. The first group was made up of respondents between 20-35 years of age, the second category was between 36- 45 years, the third category were aged between 46-59 years and the last category consisted of people above sixty (60) years.

From a total number of twenty (20) people who responded, 10 of them which represent fifty per cent (50%) of the population were between the age of 20 to 35, the next category of 36-45 years was five (5), which represent twenty-five (25%) of the population. The next category was the smallest group of people from the age of 46-59 years with two (2) people which is ten per cent (10%) and the last group of sixty (60) years old and above are three (3) people which is fifteen (15%) of the participants. This is presented on the following figure 2 below.

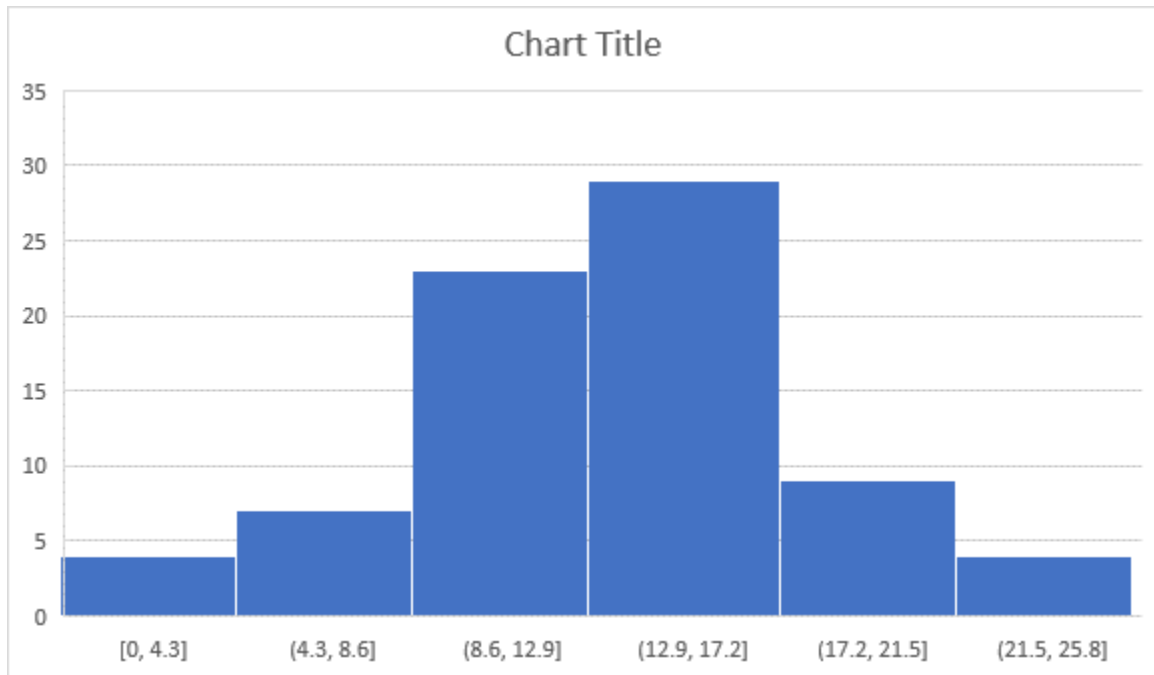


Figure 2: Age group of the respondents

The age group in this study played a key role because it tells how a certain age group has some knowledge of the Bible. The respondents in the category of people who are twenty (20) years to thirty-five (35) years of age indicated their concern about the usage of transliterated words. The researchers recall one youth saying there were times she preferred to use English Bible translation because Oshindonga Bible is sometimes very confusing in its nuances. She noted this because there are terminologies that she finds difficult to understand, and this sometimes discourages her to read Oshindonga Bible translation.

Questions 4 and 7 of the questionnaires, asked the respondents to give their understanding of the transliterated words “Gospel,” “Apostle” and “Priest.” The researchers noted that most of the respondents do not know the meaning of these words, especially those that do not have much of the Bible. Many or rather all of the young people suggested that these biblical terms be changed so that they could understand them better without going to ask people for help. Many of them also do not have any idea about whether there are several Oshindonga Bible translations, which is why they do not have any problem accepting the new terms.

The elderly who are in the category of 46 years or above, and have adequate knowledge of the old Oshindonga Bible translations were so hesitant to propose changes in these words. This is because, when they received the Bible for the first time, they were told that the Bible is the Word of God which must be rendered word for word and hence, no word in it can be changed for any reason. Therefore, putting Oshindonga terms, idioms and expressions into an understandable and meaningful way in the Bible is regarded as adding or removing something from the Holy Book. This is regarded as an unforgivable sin based on their interpretation of Revelation 22:18, 19.

### Occupational Responses

The researchers distributed the questionnaires to people of diverse occupational backgrounds. There were variety of people with different education levels the researchers encountered during the data collection. Some respondents were Bible translators, theologians, pastors, teachers, students, pastors in training, administrators and accountants. Even though there were varied occupational backgrounds, the researchers categorized them into two groups; respondents with theological backgrounds and non-theologians. The research findings show that theologians were seven (7) which made up thirty-five per

cent (35%) of the total group and the non-theologian were thirteen (13) which is sixty-five per cent (65%) of the respondents. This is shown in figure 3 below.

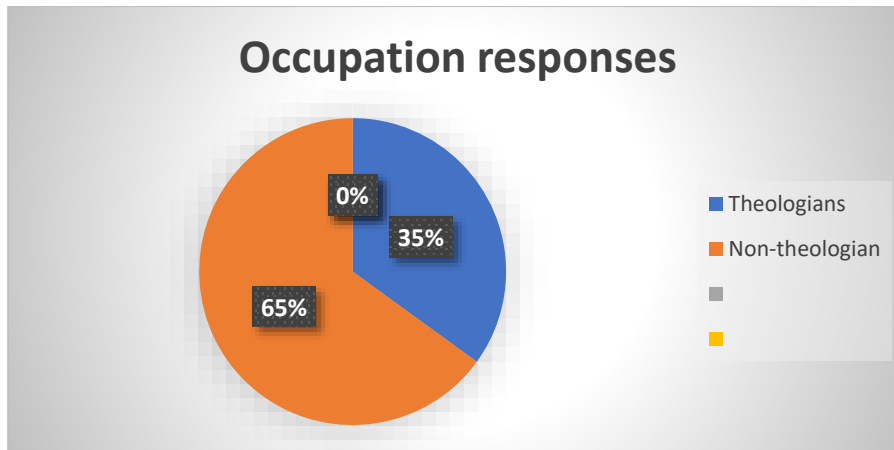


Figure 3: Occupation responses

The researchers noted that the participants that have biblical backgrounds, for example, pastors or priests as well as pastors in training have understood the Bible translation, and they know the history of Oshindonga Bible translation. Most of them support the idea that the first Oshindonga Bible which was translated literarily is the best because it has had the Greek culture which is integrated into this translation. Theologians understand that the Bible language does not need to be easy, nor does its language need to be difficult to have a taste of the ancient culture and style. This view was also shared by Laukkanen, the General Secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia, at that time. The time of publication of the second Oshindonga Bible translation in 1986 was not met with much enthusiasm as the publication of the first translations into various languages. People in Ovamboland already had the *Nakambale Bible* the first Oshindonga Bible that was printed in 1954, and many older readers continue to favour this older version. Not only elderly people but also many adult theologians prefer the old version although the younger generation has taken the 1986 version to be their preferred choice.

However, the non-theologians indicated that there is a need for the Oshindonga Bible to be revised so that the terms may be more meaningfully translated where applicable. When they were asked if they were aware of the different Oshindonga Bible versions, most of them responded that they were not aware if there had been other old versions apart from the current one that they are using.

### Denominational Responses

Questionnaires were distributed among Christians of different denominations, and the results showed that forty-five per cent (45%) of responses were from the Catholic Church while thirty-five per cent (35%) were from the Lutheran Church and finally the Anglican and Pentecostal Churches shared ten per cent (10%) each. The low response rate from some different denominations is as a result of the language barrier. Oshindonga is mostly spoken by Lutheran and Catholic Christians and that is why they constitute the larger number of respondents in this study. Other denominations like Anglican and Pentecostal Christians use the Oshikwanyama Language, one of the Oshiwambo dialects. This happened because there were missionaries from different countries and different denominations who brought the Gospel to the Namibians. Finnish missionaries who are Lutheran came to the northern part of Namibia specifically to the Ondonga kingdom. Most of the Aandonga were thus converted to Christianity by the Finnish missionaries and became Lutheran believers. While the German Roman Catholic missionaries also came to the Northern part of Namibia to the Uukwambi kingdom where people speak Oshikwambi another Oshiwambo dialect. Oshikwambi is a language, but it is not officiated in Namibia, so it is not a written language. Therefore, they use Oshindonga in schools and

all their written materials. The missionaries that brought the Anglican church, on the other hand, arrived in the Oukwanyama kingdom and most of the Aakwanyama people were converted by the Anglican missionaries. At the time when the missionaries came to Namibia, the country was under colonial power, so missionaries were given specific areas where they had to operate and restricted not to go to other parts of the country either than the area that was given to them politically.

That is why in Namibia certain parts of the country are occupied by only one faith denomination. The percentages of different denominations are shown in figure 4 below.

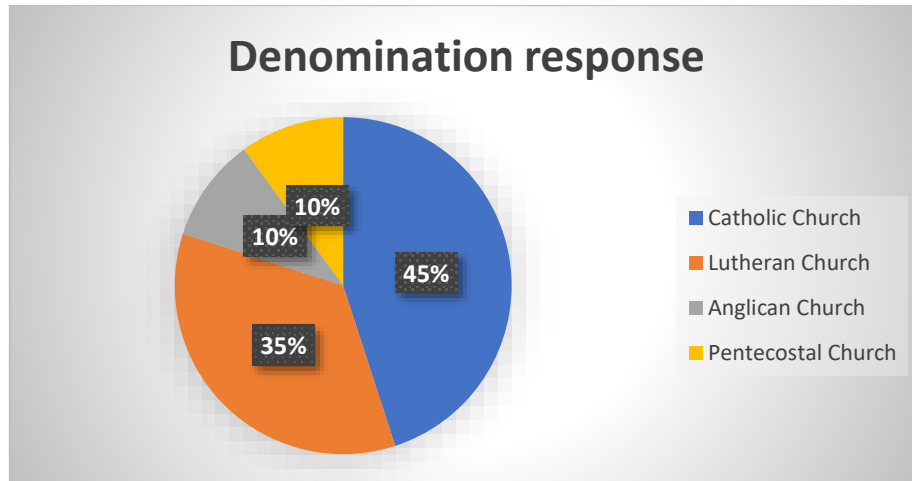


Figure 4: Denominational responses

Most respondents who are Roman Catholics suggested how some transliterated terms may be meaningfully translated. They suggested that the terms “*Evaangeli*” and “*Priest*” may be changed and translated meaningfully; however, they are against the translation of *Aayapostoli* (Apostle) into an expression that gives it meaning because, they believe that it is a proper noun, and in linguistics, a proper noun cannot be translated. They argued that if this “Apostle” happened to be translated meaningfully, in Oshindonga as “*Aatumwa*” meaning “messengers,” it will bring confusion to the Bible readers. Respondents that have a biblical background were concerned that there will be differentiation of terms when people are talking about the messengers (*aatumwa*) that were sent by John the Baptist to ask Jesus (Matt. 11:2-6), and *aatumwa* (apostle) that were chosen by Jesus for a special reason (Matt. 8:23-7). They believe strongly that there is a need to draw a distinction between the two terms. The Lutheran members suggested that the words “*Evaangeli*” (gospel) and “*Priest*” may be translated as they will serve the intended purpose to the Bible reader, and it will strengthen their faith in the Word of God. However, they were sceptical about the changing of the term “*Aayapostoli*” (Apostle) simply because there is no equivalent translation of that term in their vernacular. Other denominations like Anglican and Pentecostal strongly suggested that some words need to be reconsidered in order to be translated meaningfully. However, some were concerned about losing biblical words and that the taste might not be the same again. They understand that some words that were also transliterated in English need also to be transliterated in Oshindonga vernacular, given the example of the word “Apostle.”

#### Duration respondents had been reading the Oshindonga Bible

Regardless of age, many participants indicated that they have been reading the Oshindonga Bible for over ten (10) years. The people were clustered into four (4) categories. The first group has been reading the Bible for less than a year with a percentage of 10%, the second category had read the bible from 2 to 5 years with 20%, the third group had been reading the bible from 6 to 10 years with 5% and the last group for more than ten (10) years with 65%. This is shown in figure 5 below.



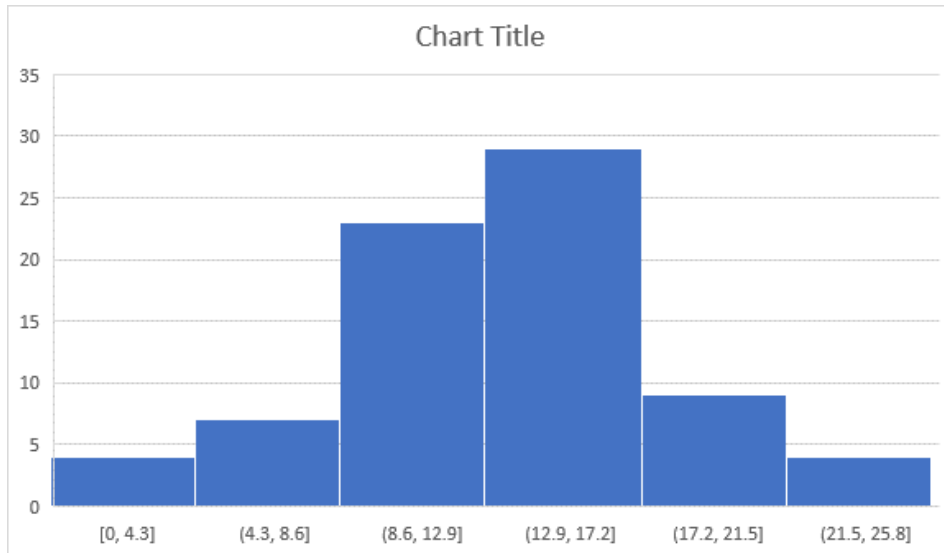


Figure 5: Duration the Respondents have been Reading the Bible

The duration of a person's reading says a lot about the understanding of the Bible, and the possible changes that need to be done. Most of the respondents that have been reading the Bible for less than ten (10) years noted that there is a need to translate the words “*Evaangeli*” (gospel), “*Aayapostoli*” (Apostle) and “*omupristeli*” (priest) differently. However, some of those that have been reading the Bible for more than ten (10) years were not convinced that there is a need for these words to be changed. This is because they are used to the way they are and have been using those terms in the church for many years, it will be like changing the Bible itself by removing something and/or adding. It may be assumed that many of these people tend not adapting to changes which is why it is very difficult to accept any change in the Bible.

### Level of Responsibility in the Church

Many duties and responsibilities in the church are distributed among the faithful. Some of the duties in the church were grouped by the researchers as follows: Bible study leader with 5%, church choir member with 10%, Youth leader with 5%, Pastoring the church with 25%, serving as church council with 15% and others with 40%.

Most respondents that are pastoring the church and those who are serving in the church council were not fully in support of translating biblical terms into new literal words, as they were more concerned about the older version of the Oshindonga Bible and preferred that it remained that way. They were also concerned about losing terminologies that are significant in the history of the Bible translation. Bible study leaders and others also suggested that the word in question needs to be reconsidered in order to enrich the Oshindonga language with new and exciting terms. The percentages of responsibilities in the church are shown in figure 6 below.

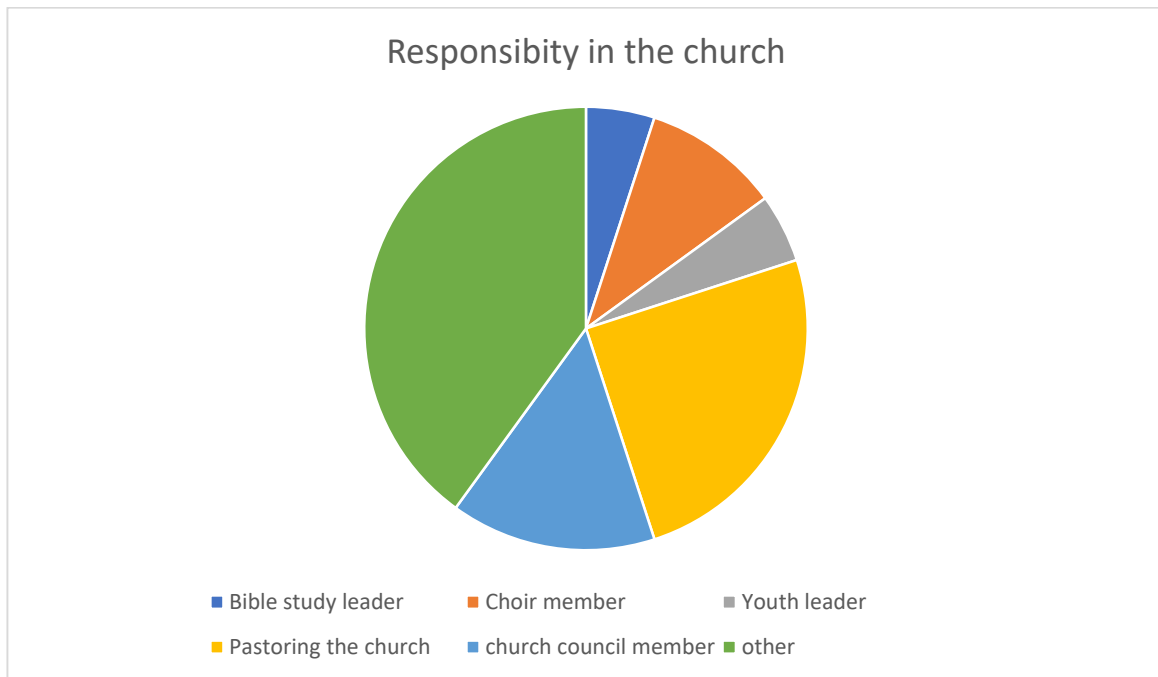


Figure 6: Level of Responsibility in the Church

### The Gospel (εὐαγγέλιον) as a Transliteration in Oshindonga Bible

In the Greek New Testament, *gospel* is the translation of the Greek noun *euangelion* “good news,” and the verb *euangelizo*, means “to bring or announce the good news.” Both words are derived from the noun *angelos*, meaning “messenger.” In classical Greek, *euangelos* brought a message of victory or other political or personal news that caused joy. In addition, *euangelizomai* (the middle voice form of the verb) meant “to speak as a messenger of gladness, to proclaim the good news.” Further, the noun *euangelion* became a technical term for the message of victory, though it was also used for a political or private message that brought joy. In this study Gospel/*euangelion* is used as a biblical word that was a transliteration in the Oshindonga Bible Translation.

The demonstration of the transliteration of different terms in the Oshindonga Bible is stated in the structured questions 1, 2, 3, and 5 of the survey. Question 1 asked the respondents whether they have any difficulties understanding the Oshindonga Bible translation. The majority of the respondents indicated that some terminologies are difficult to understand and sometimes they discourage them from reading the Bible. Most young people who are educated, opted to use the English Bible instead simply because some English Bible versions have used contemporary English terms and they have simplified the words. Most young people have this notion that Bible translations are to be used by pastors, priests, and theologians, and that is why the Bible has some difficult terminologies. However, some respondents indicated that they are happy with the translation as it is and all the terminologies are satisfactory.

Respondents also indicated in question 2 that there is a need to revise the Oshindonga Bible so that some terminologies be simplified and or translated literally. They mentioned certain foreign (borrowed) words that are found in the Bible which need to be revisited and given proper translation. In question 3, the respondents were asked to choose the correct word between the transliterated word *Evaangeli* and an inconsistent word that is used in the current translation of *Oshindonga Bible Elaka Etoye* which literally means sweet voice, good voice, to identify the correct word and to give their suggested meaningful word. Most of the respondents to this question preferred the *Elaka Etoye* in Oshindonga rather than the “*Evaangeli*,” and many also proposed other translations. However, the respondents who are pastors were more adamant about the transliterated word, this is simply because they seem to tend not to adapt to changes and they are concerned more about losing the “*Evaangeli*”

word in the future. About sixty per cent (60%) of the respondents to question 5 (which asked whether the respondents suggest this term to be translated differently), were all positive that, yes there is a need to translate it with other words.

The researchers also contacted some Bible translations of Bantu-speaking people to see how they translated the word “Gospel.” There are about three Bantu languages in Namibia; namely, *Otjiherero*, *Oshikwanyama* and *Rukwangali*. *Otjiherero* version translated the term “Gospel” as “*Omuroombo muwa*” (literally, “Good News”), while in *Rukwangali*, it is translated as *Ombudi zoNgwa* also meaning “Good News.” Another Bible Translation of a Bantu language that the researchers looked at is the Shona language, spoken by the people of Zimbabwe and Mozambique. In Shona Bible, the word “Gospel” is translated as “*Naulwa yakanaka*” which also means “Good News.” It may be concluded that Oshindonga Bible may as well translate the word gospel in another way rather than “*Evaangeli*.”

### **The Apostle (ἀποστόλος) as a Transliteration in Oshindonga Bible**

The word “Gospel” is another word that this study is analysing as a transliterated word in Oshindonga Bible. “Gospel” refers to those appointed by Christ for a special function in the church. Their unique place is based not only on having witnessed the resurrection but also on having been commissioned and empowered by the resurrected Lord to proclaim the gospel to all nations.

The general question was asked in the questionnaire whether the respondents have difficulties understanding the Bible when reading it on their own as aforementioned. This question was formulated to demonstrate that indeed, the word “Gospel” was a mistranslation in the Oshindonga Bible translation. Many respondents have indicated that they do have some problems with certain terminologies which were not well translated which sometimes discourages them to read the word of God. The respondents were also asked to explain or define the word “Gospel” the way they understood it in Oshindonga, and many young people could not give the real meaning of this term ἀποστόλος, which shows that there is a need to translate it differently. The people with theological backgrounds have indicated that this word should not be changed as it carries more meaning when it is transliterated. Therefore, one of the objectives of this study is to demonstrate that the word *Omuyapostoli/Aayapostoli* in the Oshindonga Bible translation is truly a transliteration of the Greek word ἀποστόλος. However, most of the Bantu languages have kept this word as it is in their Bible translation.

### **The Priest (ἱερεύς) as a Transliteration in Oshindonga Bible**

The Greek noun ἱερεύς refers to a mediator who stands between God and man. He offers sacrifice to God on behalf of man and administers other worship obligations that people feel unworthy to offer personally. The nearest thing to a definition found in the Scriptures is probably in Hebrews 5:1. The office of the priest is stated some seven hundred (700) times in the Old Testament, and approximately eighty (80) times in the New Testament.

The term “Priest” seemed to be translated in Oshindonga Bible as *omupristeli*, which is a transliteration of the English word *Priest*. To demonstrate that indeed “Priest” (*omupristeli*) is a transliteration in Oshindonga Bible, question 7 in the questionnaire was to identify if people know the meaning of this word. Many of the respondents from various denominations, gave different answers to question 7. The Catholics were more familiar with the word because they call their priests/presbyters *Aapristeli*, however, their definition of the word priest is more on pastoring the church and not the biblical word which involves more responsibilities as given in both Old Testament and New Testament. The Lutheran and Pentecostal Christians are not familiar with the term *omupristeli* (Priest). Many of them suggested for the word to be changed when they were explaining the duties and responsibilities of Priests in the Bible. In the interview that was conducted with some congregants, it was asked if there are traditional beings that have the same duties and responsibilities as the priests in the Bible. They responded that there is no one of that calibre in their culture unless they got the meaning from what a priest does.

## DISCUSSION

### **The Impact of the Transliteration of the words “Gospel,” “Apostle,” and “Priest” to the Aandonga Community**

To analyze the impact or effect of transliteration of these terms of ‘Gospel’, ‘Apostle’ and ‘Priest’, the researchers interviewed community members who did not have any knowledge on theology. In their responses, many interviewees indicated that the usage of these transliterated words have an impact on them because initially, they have the perception or opinion that the Bible is supposed to be read and used only by pastors. Most of the congregants only use the Bible when they are in the church so that they get more understanding when the pastor is there to explain things clearly. This has affected and discouraged many, mostly the youth not to read Oshindonga Bible translations because some of the terms are not translated meaningfully.

The community members felt that they were being robbed of their vernacular terminologies which were supposed to be in the Bible. They have the understanding that the Bible is the only book that will forever exist, so their language will not get extinct because of the influx of foreign language that is now widely used worldwide. They also feel a sense of ownership because of real Oshindonga terms that are used in the Bible. Question 2 asked what will be their suggestions to improve the current translation if there would ever be another translation of the Oshindonga Bible. The respondents suggested that a new Oshindonga Bible should have words that are simplified and well-translated to cater to their needs.

### **Theological Implications of the Transliteration of the words, ‘Gospel’, ‘Apostle’ and ‘Priest’**

When the researchers interviewed people that have a theological background, fifty per cent (50%) of the whole sample was positive on the usage of these transliterated words. They believe that those words are more of proper nouns than common nouns in their usage. They understand that there is no other meaning which is equivalent to the one that has been translated into the Oshindonga Bible. The notion is that they have been using those words in their everyday sermons, and they have also used them in their liturgical books, and it will cause more damage than good if these terminologies are changed. This will affect them negatively. They were reluctant to suggest a re-translation of the words in question, especially the word “Gospel” (*evaangeli*). They understand and believe that this word is sacred and cannot be changed at all. Therefore, the changing of those terms will have a negative impact on the theologians who are skeptical about translating these words using expression that connote their meanings.

### **Alternative renderings**

#### **For εὐαγγέλιον**

In the current Oshindonga Bible translation, the word “Gospel” has two translations. The first one is “*Elaka etoye*” which literary means “sweet or good voice.” The second translation to this word is “*Evaangeli*” which is a transliteration of the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον. The researchers asked the respondents to identify the correct words between the two translated words and for them to propose their own meaningful translation according to the literal meaning of the word. Several terminologies were suggested by respondents. Some of them chose “*Elaka etoye*” and some gave their suggested Oshindonga terms according to their knowledge of the term. About seventy-five per cent (75%) of the sample size indicated that the term “*Evaangeli*” needs to be changed, as it gives no meaning to the Bible leader who doesn’t have theological background or knowledge. However, there were twenty-five (25%) of the respondents suggested that the term remains unchanged. During both interviews and questionnaires that were conducted and administered, most respondents indicated that there is a need to translate “*Evaangeli*” as a possible translation.

The following table shows the proposed meaningful terms of “*Evaangeli*” translation and their literal meaning in English.

**Table 1: Proposed Meaningful Terms of Gospel (εὐαγγέλιον) in Oshindonga**

Words in Oshindonga	Literal meaning in English
<i>Onkundana Ombwaanawa</i>	Good News
<i>Elaka Etoye</i>	Sweet tongue/voice
<i>Omuloombo gwenyanyu</i>	Joyous news
<i>Ewi lyehupitho</i>	Voice of Salvation
<i>Evaangeli</i>	Transliteration of Evangelion

The frequency of the proposed translated terms established *Onkundana Ombwaanawa* with the highest number of people proposing it as the rightful meaning of the term gospel or Good News. In translation (especially according to the *Skopos* Theory), the roles of initiator, translator, source-text producer and target-text addressee are crucial for the choice of translation methods and strategies. *Skopos* states that one must translate, consciously and consistently, in accordance with some principle respecting the target text. Therefore, the audience or target group being the Aandonga, the proposition of this term has to consider what the target group needs, but not the source text. Hence, the right proposed meaning translation of the Gospel is *Onkundana Ombwaanawa* in Oshindonga.

**For ἀποστόλος**

This word “*apóstolos*” is translated in *Oshindonga* Bible as “*omuyapostoli*” in singular and “*aayapostoli*” in its plural form which is a transliteration of the Greek word “*apóstolos*.” The researchers asked to see if they understood this term in their vernacular language, and many respondents gave different views and understanding of who or what an apostle is. Some respondents understand that this term is a proper noun making a word that cannot be translated. However, some of them understood the meaning, but they indicated that this term needs to be preserved as it is. They were also asked to propose meaningful translations if there was a need to translate the term. The different translation was proposed through questionnaires and interviews which are now grouped in the table below.

**Table 1: Proposed Translation in Oshindonga for Apostle (apóstolos)**

Proposed translation in Oshindonga	Literal English translation
<i>Omuyapostoli</i>	Transliteration of Apostle
<i>Omwevaangelithi</i>	Evangelists
<i>Aahogololwa ya Jesus</i>	The chosen ones of Jesus
<i>Omutumwa</i>	Someone who is sent/ messenger
<i>Aalongwa</i>	Disciples
<i>Aalanduli yaJesus</i>	The followers of Jesus Christ

The researchers noted that many participants believe that the term *omuyapostoli* is the appropriate translation of this Greek term “*apóstolos*.” More than fifty per cent (50%) of the respondents proposed the word “*aayapostoli*” while others proposed terms like the messenger (*omutumwa*) which was criticized to possibly confuse Bible readers. They believe that the apostles were special and carefully chosen by Jesus Christ himself.

The respondents gave an example of John's messengers that were sent to Jesus (Matt. 11:2-6) who were merely messengers, and the people that Jesus chose as Apostles among his disciples (Mark 3:13-19). Mathew 11:2-6 says John sent his messengers, which is in Oshindonga, messengers will be translated "aatumwa." In Mark 3:13-19, where Jesus is choosing the twelve (12) Apostles, the same word "Apostles" will be translated in Oshindonga as "Aatumwa." So if the word "Apostle" is translated in Oshindonga Bible as "Aatumwa," then there will be no distinction between the two texts. Given this challenge, the Bible readers want the word Apostles "Aayapostoli" to remain as it is in the Oshindonga Bible, unless, there is a different word rather than messengers, because it might confuse them. This issue is clearly about the translation of nouns (as noted earlier). On the translation of names, A. P. Vermes asserts that:

The translation of proper names has often been considered a simple automatic process of transference from one language into another, due to the view that proper names are mere labels used to identify a person or a thing. The translation of proper names is not a trivial issue but, on the contrary, may involve a rather delicate decision-making process, requiring on the part of the translator careful consideration of the meanings the name has before deciding how best to render it in the target language.<sup>19</sup>

Every language has specific proper nouns; however, some are completely related to the culture of the people of that specific language. Accordingly, these nouns can bring about special understanding problems for the readers of that text. Proper nouns may have particular implications and removing the hidden connotations leads to a translation which is not acceptable. They believe that translators have two options while rendering nouns. They can either transfer nouns to the target text without any changes or adapt them to follow the target language's phonetic and orthographic conventions. The first option brings into the translation a foreign sense<sup>20</sup>, and this is what the *Oshindonga* Bible translation did by foreignization of the "Apostle" but using *Oshindonga* phonetics and orthography.

### **The Proposition of the Word Priest (ἱερέυς)**

The word "Priest" shares a root with *Presbyterian*, the Greek *presbyteros*, which means "an elder." It is derived from Greek via the Latin word *presbyter*, which means elder. Priests have different responsibilities in the Bible and in the current context, some people are called priests in the church and cultures. The problem occurs sometimes when this term is translated into *Oshindonga*. For example, in today's context, a *priest* is a religious figure who performs ceremonies, predominantly in the Roman Catholic, Anglican, or Orthodox church. Though priests are often thought of as Christian, there are other religions with priests, including some branches of Shintoism and Hinduism. Priests often lead religious services, perform weddings and other religious rites, and in many cases work full-time for their churches. In the *Oshindonga* Bible, the term 'Priest' is translated as "omupristeli" and in an old *Oshindonga* version which is the first translation it is translated as "omusaseri."

The respondents were asked to explain how they understood the term, "Priest." Different people gave various explanations according to their knowledge of the Bible and their denomination. About forty per cent (40%) of the respondents have an understanding that the priest is a pastor in a current context in the sense that, pastors are the ones that conduct offerings sessions in terms of prayers during worship in the church. The researchers asked the respondents to propose their meaningful translation if there was a need to translate it. Different translations were proposed through questionnaires and interviews which are now grouped in table 3 below.

---

<sup>19</sup> A. P. Vermes, "Proper names in translation: An explanatory attempt." *Across Languages and Cultures*, 4(1), (2003): 89-108, 89-90.

<sup>20</sup> Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Andy Cheung, "Foreignising Bible Translation: Retaining Foreign Origins When Rendering Scriptures) In *Tyndale Bulletin* 63(2), (2012): 257-273.

**Table 2: Proposed Translation of Priest (*ἱερέυς*) in Oshindonga**

Proposed translation for Oshindonga	Literal English translation
<i>Omupristeli</i>	A transliteration of priest
<i>Omuyambi</i>	Someone who do sacrifice
<i>Omuhongi</i>	Teacher/ pastor
<i>Omuuvithi</i>	A preacher
<i>Omusita</i>	Shepherd
<i>Omugwayeka gwaKristus</i>	The anointed of Christ

The higher frequency among the respondents that have suggested this term to be meaningfully translated is noted, and they are eager for the new word in Oshindonga. About sixty per cent (60%) of the respondents were in favour of the word “*omuyambi*” simply because by mentioning this word in the Bible, the reader will already be able to understand what is being talked about without consulting the dictionaries. This is because “*omuyambi*” is from the verb “*yamba*” which means sacrifice. The researchers also found out that, many of the Bantu languages have a problem translating “priest” in their vernacular.

Shona Language for example translated the word “Priest” as “*mufundisi*” which means teacher, “*Rukwangali*” used “*omoupristeli*” which is a transliteration of “priest. In *Skopos* theory, the purpose of a translation depends on the expectations, requirements, or norms of the target culture, which may be considerably different from other cultures that may have received their own translation of a given source text.<sup>21</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper aimed to propose alternative renderings for *Εὐαγγέλιον*, *ἀποστόλος* and *ἱερέυς* in the ongoing Oshindonga Bible Translation Project. Based on the results and analysis, the researchers give the following recommendations. First, there is a need for awareness in the community and in the church to explain the significance of Bible translation and having different versions at their disposal. Secondly, the Bible Society of Namibia needs to make a distinction between the *Oshindonga* Bible translation versions, the old version that is being supported by the elders, and the one with meaningful translation for the youth and people without theological background. Thirdly, in the current ongoing *Oshindonga* Bible translation, the translators should not use “*Evaangeli*” as a translation of the word “Gospel”. The proposed meaningful word that most of the participants supported is *Onkundana Ombwaanawa*. For the term “priest” the recommended term is “*Omuyambi*” and for “Apostle”, it is recommended that the translators maintain what the old version has. Finally, it is recommended that the Bible Society of Namibia organize extensive consultation with the main stakeholders in the translation project to settle on acceptable words.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed to demonstrate that the three biblical terms *Εὐαγγέλιον*, *ἀποστόλος* and *ἱερέυς* in the Oshindonga Bible are transliterated. This was identified and examined using literature and interviewing people to ascertain if they knew these terminologies. Most participants have agreed that those transliterated words need to be meaningfully translated. The authors have proposed possible translations of *Εὐαγγέλιον*, *ἀποστόλος* and *ἱερέυς* in the Oshindonga Bible. The paper underscores that no translation project is free from difficulties. It is important that the translation committee, together

<sup>21</sup> Snell-Hornby, *The Turns of Translation Studies*, 54; Benjamin Stephen Green, “A Skopos-Based Analysis of Breytenbach’s *Titus Andronicus*” (MPhil Thesis: University of Stellenbosch, 2012).

with the opinion leaders in the receptor community, resolves whatever challenges they encounter as they attempt to produce quality and acceptable translation.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Boaheng, Isaac. *A Handbook for African Mother-tongue Bible Translators*. Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2022.
- Cheung, Andy. "Foreignising Bible Translation: Retaining Foreign Origins When Rendering Scriptures." *Tyndale Bulletin* 63(2), (2012): 257-273.
- Green, Benjamin Stephen. "A Skopos-Based Analysis of Breytenbach's Titus Andronicus." MPhil Thesis: University of Stellenbosch, 2012.
- Martin, Robert P. *Accuracy of Translation and the New International Version*. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989.
- Ngodji, Martin. "The Story of the Bible among Ovakwanyama: The Agency of Indigenous Translators." Master of Theology Thesis: University of KwaZulu Natal, 2004.
- Nida, Eugene A. "Principles of Correspondence," *The Translation Studies Reader*, Edited by Lawrence Venuti. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Snell-Hornby, Mary. *The Turns of Translation Studies: New Paradigms or Shifting Viewpoints*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2006.
- Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Vermes, A. P. "Proper names in translation: An explanatory attempt." *Across Languages and Cultures*, 4(1), (2003): 89-108.

## **ABOUT AUTHORS**

Magdalena Ndatoolewe Shilongo holds a Master of Theology degree from St. Paul's University, Kenya. She is a Bible Translator with the Bible Society of Namibia with research interest in Translation Studies, Biblical Studies and African Christianity.

Isaac Boaheng (PhD) is a Lecturer in Theology and Christian Ethics at the Christian Service University College, Ghana, and a Research Fellow at the Department of Biblical and Religion Studies, University of the Free State, South Africa. Boaheng is an Ordained Minister of the Methodist Church Ghana serving the Suame Circuit of the Kumasi Diocese.

## **DEDICATION**

This paper is dedicated posthumously to Rev. Dr. Martin Ngodji who was the both the exegete and leader of the Oshindonga translation team.