A Critical Examination of the Translation Philosophy of the New Testament of the New Revised Asante-Twi Bible (2018)

Yaw Worae[1] & Jonathan E.T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor [1]

[1] Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana.

ABSTRACT

Bible translation activities have been documented since the return of the Jewish people from the Babylonian captivity in the period of the 5th century BCE (Before the Common Era). In Ghana, the earliest translation of portions of Scripture was in Ga in 1805. Bible translation into mother tongues overtly or covertly employs one or more of the philosophies known in translating the Bible. This article examined the philosophy that underpinned the translation of the Asante-Twi Bible, a mother-tongue Scripture that is widely used by the Akan-speaking people of Ghana. Two texts (Acts 1:12 and Hebrews 12:1) were examined exegetically through the lens of mother tongue biblical hermeneutics. The researcher discovered that the two main theories of formal and dynamic equivalences have been employed where appropriate in the translation. However, there are a lot of passages (such as Jewish systems of measurements and dates) that call for using appropriate equivalences in the mother-tongue to make the message of the New Testament understandable and unambiguous. The article also argues for the need for commentaries in the mother-tongue Bibles.

Keywords: *Bible translation, theories of translation, skopos theory, functional equivalence, formal equivalence, Asante-Twi Bible, mother tongue biblical hermeneutics.*

INTRODUCTION

Bible translation continues to be at the heart of every evangelisation effort. It has provided the avenue for indigenous people to dialogue with the Scriptures within their contexts. According to Nida and Taber, Bible translation is "the reproduction in a receptor language of the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning, and second in terms of style."[1] Translation also means to produce the meaning of a text in a receptor or target language just as the author intended for the text.[2] A translation should communicate in 'exact' terms and elicit in the new target audience the 'same' response as the original recipients of the source text.

---

[1] Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (E. J. Brill: Leiden, 1982), 208.
[2] Peter Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation* (New York: Printice Hall, 1988), 5.

The Old Testament was fully translated into Greek during the 3rd and 2nd century BCE purposely for the Jewish community in Alexandria (Egypt) who had taken on the Greek culture.[3] It is traditionally known that about seventy (or seventy-two) Jewish scholars did the translation over a period of time. This material known as Septuagint (LXX) became "the chief source of all the earliest versions, excepting only the Aramaic Targum and the Samaritan Pentateuch."[4] Thus, the LXX became the source text for translation for some of the earliest Bibles.

Brief Overview of Bible Translation Activities in Ghana

Missionary activities in West Africa were done alongside Bible translation activities. It was believed that the church in Africa will grow only if there were Bibles in their mother tongues. In 1816, a Bible Society auxiliary committee was set up in Freetown, the first of its kind on the continent. In the same year, the first Gospel in a West African language, Bullom, spoken in Liberia was produced by the Bible Society.[5] The earliest known translation of portions of Scripture in Ghana is dated as far as 1805. In 1843, the New Testament Gospels were produced and in 1859, the full New Testament Bible in Ga was published.[6] Translation activities continued with the missionaries at the forefront assisted by the indigenous people. Then arose the era of translation agencies which either revised the existing translations or championed new translation activities in areas that had no portion of Scripture in their mother-tongue.

Bible translation activities in Ghana are currently championed by three main agencies: The Bible Society of Ghana (BSG), Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT), and the International Bible Society (IBS), also known as Biblica. Biblica, according to its Website has completed Bible translations for Akuapem-Twi, Asante-Twi and Ewe mother-tongue Bibles.[7] The BSG has currently translated the Bible into eight (8) major Ghanaian languages whiles working on other translations and revising older translations.[8] GILLBT is known for translation and literacy activities in minority language groups in Ghana. The institution has published fourteen (14) complete translations and twenty (20) New Testaments.[9] GILLBT also is working on a sign language project in Ghana to get the Bible closer to hearing impaired people.

The Akan language and the Asante-Twi Bible

The Akan language which includes Asante-Twi is spoken by majority of Ghanaians. The Akan language is a cluster of dialects such as Akuapem-Twi, Mfantse, Wassa, Agona, Akyem, Bron and Kwahu.[10] The term *Twi* is often used to refer to dialects of Akan such as Akuapem and Asante. Mfantse is however not *Twi*. According to *Ethnologue*, the Akan-speaking people are about 9,100,000 comprising about 3,820,000 Asante-Twi-speaking people.[11] If Ghana's total population is 30.8 million, it stands to reason that the Akans (who can read and understand the Asante-Twi Bible) are almost one-third of the overall population of Ghana.[12]

---

[3] Eugene A. Nida, ed., *The Book of a Thousand Tongues*, 2nd ed. (London: United Bible Societies, 1974), 165.

[4] Nida, ed., *The Book of a Thousand Tongues*, 165.

[5] Ype Schaaf, *On Their Way Rejoicing: The History and Role of the Bible in Africa*, trans. Paul Ellingworth (Akropong-Akuapem: Regnum Africa, 2002), 47.

[6] Schaaf, *On Their Way Rejoicing*, 48.

[7] "Gateway Translations," The International Bible Society, accessed November 18, 2021,
https://www.biblicaafrica.com/ministry/gateway-translations/

[8] "About Us," The Bible Society of Ghana, Accessed November 18, 2021, https://biblesociety-ghana.org/about-us/

[9] "What We Do," GILLBT, accessed November, 19, 2021, https://www.gillbt.org/who-we-are/what-we-do/

[10] John D. K. Ekem, *Early Scriptures of the Gold Coast (Ghana): The Historical, Linguistic, and Theological settings of the Ga, Twi, Mfantse and Ewe Bibles* (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2011), 50.

[11] Eberhard David M., Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fenning eds., "Akan," *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* 24th ed., (Dallas, Texas: SIL International, 2015), accessed November 18, 2021, http://www.ethnologue.com

[12] "2021 Population and Housing Census," *Ghana Statistical Service*, accessed November 18, 2021, https://census2021.statsghana.gov.gh/index.php

The Akuapem-Twi Bible (AkBT) was originally the Bible for the Akan speaking people with the exception of the Mfantes. There came the need to get a revised edition of the AkBT that would be well understood by all other Akans (the Mfantes were not in focus at this time). The Asante-Twi Bible (AsTB) emerged as a result of this revision of the AkTB.

The Basel Mission is known to have spearheaded the translation of the AkTB. These missionaries were Johann Gottlieb Christaller, J. A. Mader and Eugene Rapp. [13] However, the missionaries' activities would not have seen the light of day without the immeasurable effort of the indigenous people such as David Asante, C. A. Akrofi, Keteku, Birikorang and a few others. In 1871, the full AkTB was published through the efforts of the European missionaries and their indigenous counterparts.[14] Revision of the full AkTB started sooner than later and in 1900, a revised edition of the AkTB was published.[15] Attempts were made to revise the AkTB and publish separate Bibles for the Akuapem-Twi and Asante-Twi speaking people using a different orthography for the Asante-Twi Bible. These efforts yielded fruits and the outcome was the publication of the AsTB in 1964. Further works on the full Asante-Twi Bible led to the publication of the 2012 and 2017 revised versions of the AsTB. In 2018, the Bible Society of Ghana published a diglot comprising the New Revised Asante Twi and the English Standard Version. This article examines critically the translation approach that has been mainly used in the translation of the AsTB (2018).

Overview of Bible Translation Approaches

There are many translation theories that have been in use consciously or otherwise. One reason for the varied approaches to translation is due to the fact that translation can be viewed from many perspectives: original author's intent, translator's intent, cultural gaps between the original text and the target text, the worldview of the receptors, diversity of languages and the manner in which the translation is to be used. The two main theories undergirding Bible translations are the literal (also known as formal or word-for-word) and the functional equivalence (also known as sense-for-sense, meaning based or thought-for-thought) theories. Others also include the *skopostheorie* and relevance theory. These approaches draw from the fields of linguistics, anthropology, neurophysiology, communication theories and psychology.[16]

Functional Equivalence and Bible Translation

The functional equivalence approach to translation has been associated with the linguist and bible translator Eugene A. Nida. This approach finds its roots in ancient times, for approaches such as 'free,' 'communicative,' and translation via 'paraphrasing' which are oriented towards the receptor group were gradually developed. Nida's seminal work, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, which was co-authored with Charles Taber has been considered a leading work in the field of mother tongue bible translations. Nida's use of "equivalence" denotes words that are close in meaning and not necessarily in form and as such the translator must "strive for equivalence rather than identity."[17] Dynamic or functional equivalence, therefore, in translation aims at rendering the translation so as to elicit a response in the receptors substantially the same way as the original receptors of the message.[18] The responses of both original receptors and receptors of the translation can never be the same since there could be socio-cultural gaps between the two cultures but there should be a high level of equivalence

---

[13] Ekem, *Early Scriptures of the Gold Coast (Ghana)*, 51-61.

[14] Ekem, *Early Scriptures of the Gold Coast (Ghana)*, 66-67.

[15] Ekem, *Early Scriptures of the Gold Coast (Ghana)*, 66-69.

[16] Mardiha Mahzad, "Theories of Translation: Does One Exist?" *Elixir International Journal* 66 (2014): 20452. Accessed November 20, 2021. www.elixirpublishers.com

[17] Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1982), 24.

[18] Nida and Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, 12.

in both responses. Many have criticized this functional equivalence approach as being "too sloppy, too paraphrastic, too inaccurate" and that literal translations are more preferable.[19]

Formal equivalence and Bible Translation

Literal translation has been defined by J. H. Roberts as "that type of translation in which the translator seeks to lead the reader to the text by means of word substitution. This is done by using words from the reader's language milieu in place of words from the text's language milieu."[20] John Beekman considers literal or formal equivalence translation as a translation in which the receptor language takes on the linguistic form and style of the source language.[21] Formal equivalence places much emphasis on the form and style of the source language rather than the content.

To Nida, the essence of formal correspondence in translation is to help the receptor recognise and to acknowledge the linguistic characteristics by which the "cognitive content or the emotive response" of the original document was relayed.[22] He continues to explain that formal correspondence translations have a keen interest in the source language, expressing vividly the formal characteristics of the source text in the receptor text.[23] Peter S. Cameron stipulates that in translation, possibilities inherent in formal equivalence should be exhausted first, and if they do not make meaning then one can employ dynamic (functional) equivalence.[24]

Formal equivalent translations have served and continue to serve a good purpose in Bible translation activities. They are translations useful in:

(1) "identifying the formal features of the original text,
(2) examining Hebrew or Greek idioms and formal patterns of language,
(3) tracing recurrent words,
(4) identifying ambiguities in the text, and
(5) tracing formal verbal allusions (which might be obscured by idiomatic renderings)."[25]

Beekman fiercely criticizes literal translations as producing obscure meanings. When certain biblical images and idioms that have no direct equivalence in the receptor language are formally translated they will make no sense at all. In quoting Beekman, he claims that:

> "A Person who translates literally wants to convey the meaning of the source language while making a minimum of adjustments in its grammatical and lexical structure. This desire to retain the linguistic form of the original, which is typical of this approach to translation, results in much wrong, zero, and obscure meaning.… One of the worst faults of most literal translations is the choice of literal equivalents for the words used in the translation. Inadequate consideration is given to usage and context resulting in ridiculous collocations and non-sensical meanings."[26]

The *Skopos* Theory

Skopostheorie (*skopos* theory) speaks to the purpose of the translation. The Greek word *skopos* means 'purpose', 'aim' or 'intended purpose'.

---

[19] D. A. Carson, "The Limits of Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation and Other Limits, Too," in *The Challenge of Bible Translation: Communicating God's Word to the World,* eds. Glen G. Scorgie, Mark L. Strauss and Steven M. Voth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 67.

[20] J. H. Roberts, "Dynamic Equivalence in Bible Translation," *Neotestamentica* 8 (1974): 8. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43070430

[21] John Beekman, "'Literalism', a Hindrance to Understanding," *The Bible Translator* 17, no. 4 (1966): 178. https://doi.org/10.1177/000608446601700405

[22] Eugene A. Nida, "The Nature of Dynamic Equivalence in Translating," *Babel* 23, no. 3 (1977): 103. doi:10.1075/babel.23.3.01nid

[23] Nida, "The Nature of Dynamic Equivalence in Translating," 101.

[24] Peter S. Cameron, "Functional Equivalence and the *Mot Juste*," *The Bible Translator* 41, no. 1 (1990): 102.

[25] Mark L. Strauss, "Form, Function, and the "Literal Meaning" Fallacy in English Bible Translation," *The Bible Translator* 56, no. 3 (2005):158.

[26] Beekman,"'Literalism', a Hindrance to Understanding," 178.

This theory was developed by Vermeer and Reiss who stressed that the purpose of a translation determines the strategy that is to be used in the translation process, thus, a translation is directed by its purpose and aim.[27] According to the '*Skopos* rule,' "any action is determined by its purpose, i.e. it is a function of its purpose or *skopos*."[28] With respect to translation, the rule explains that the intended use of the translation determines the mode or style of translation. To wit, "the end justifies the means."[29] Thus, the *skopos* of the translational activity will inform the translator whether to paraphrase, render word-for-word or re-edit. In throwing more light on the *skopos* of a translation, if the purpose is to produce Matthew chapter 1 as an aesthetic text, it would be more useful to produce an aesthetic material that satisfies the demands of the receptors rather than concentrating on form and content.

De Vries lists some of the functions that inform translation activities in the Netherlands such as the liturgical and ecclesial functions, study function, common language use, secular literary-cultural functions, and personal reading or family reading.[30] In that light, translations are geared toward the specific function the translation is supposed to serve.

Despite *skopos* theory giving room to a number of translation strategies, criticisms have been raised that the theory promotes the maxim that the end justifies the means in translation and that would make the theory inappropriate for the translation of literary or biblical materials that are basically directed by the aim of the source author.[31] Another criticism is that if a translator takes into account the needs of the receptors in order to please them, then he or she must at all costs devalue the source text's originality.[32] Critics of this approach claim that it has no regard for the source text.

The Translation Theory of the Asante-Twi Bible
The work of the Bible translator is to reproduce God's words in the simplest form that speaks to the heart of the receptors. This is a daunting task since the translator needs to have a working knowledge of the languages in which the Bible was written as well as the receptor language. In addition, it is expedient that the translator is aware of the cultural gaps between the source and the receptor texts and be mindful that certain features in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures are not commonplace in Africa specifically. Nevertheless, translation must go on and inform the receptors of what the original authors intended for them.

Carefully reading through the New Testament of the AsTB, one can detect that the translation is more inclined towards the formal equivalence approach with functional equivalence used where there is the need for interpretation of the text to make it clearer to the AsTB reader. This has been corroborated by Pastor Ernest Boateng who has established the fact that the translation and revision of the AsTB New Testament is more literal than functional in its approach. He added that where it was necessary for the translators to make the text more understandable, they employed the thought-for-thought approach. It is noteworthy that the AsTB was translated from Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts.[33]

Acts 1:12 has some characteristic features which are unfamiliar to the AsTB user. Expressions such as "olives", and "Sabbath's day journey" are very unfamiliar in the context of the Asante Christian. In this text, both literal and functional approaches have been employed in the translation.

---

[27] Katharina Reiss and Hans J. Vermeer, *Towards a General Theory of Translational Action: Skopos Theory Explained,* trans. Christiane Nord (New York: Routledge, 2014), 85.

[28] Reiss and Vermeer, *Towards a General Theory of Translational Action*, 90.

[29] Reiss and Vermeer, *Towards a General Theory of Translational Action*, 90.

[30] Lourens De Vries, "Bible Translations: Forms and Functions," *The Bible Translator* 52, no. 3 (2001): 307.

[31] Christiane Nord, "Manipulation and Loyalty in Functional Translation, Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa," *Current Writing* 14, no. 2 (2002): 32. DOI:10.1080/1013929X.2002.9678123.

[32] Nord, "Manipulation and Loyalty in Functional Translation," 35.

[33] New Revised Asante Twi-ESV Diglot, *Note to The User of the Asante-Twi English Diglot* (Accra: The Bible Society of Ghana, 2018).

Acts 1:12 *Τότε ὑπέστρεψαν εἰς Ἰερουσαλὴμ ἀπὸ ὄρους τοῦ καλουμένου Ἐλαιῶνος, ὅ ἔστιν ἐγγὺς Ἰερουσαλὴμ σαββάτου ἔχον ὁδόν.*[34] This text has been variously translated into English and Asante-Twi as:

New King James Version: Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey.

New International Version: Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city.

New Revised Standard Version: Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.

Weymouth's New Testament: Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mountain called the Oliveyard, which is near Jerusalem, about a mile off.

AsTB: *ɛno na wɔfiri bepɔ a wɔfrɛ no Ngo Bepɔ a ɛbɛn Yerusalem bɛyɛ homeda kwan no so sane kɔɔ Yerusalem.*

The translation of "*ὄρους τοῦ καλουμένου Ἐλαιῶνος*"
The expression as found in Acts 1:12 means "the mountain called Olivet" and this has been translated as "bepɔ a wɔfrɛ no Ngo Bepɔ" in the AsTB (2018).

Ἐλαιῶνος is the genitive singular noun of *Ἐλαιῶν*, an olive grove, olive orchard.[35] *Ἐλαια* denotes an olive tree and the expression "Mount of Olives" was so called from the numerous olive trees on the mountain.[36] From the AsTB, "*Ἐλαιῶνος*", *Olive grove,* has been translated as "*Ngo Bepɔ,*" which literally means "mountain of Oil", or "Oil Mountain".

The mountain from which the disciples descended was known for its olive trees. The Mount of Olives is a general term for the series of peaks in the ridge east of the city of Jerusalem.[37] According to the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Online, Jewish writings use the expression *har ha-Mishnah*, "Mount of Oil" to describe the nature of the mount."[38] The Olive tree is known for the fruit and the oil it produces. The Olive tree is not a known tree in Ghana. There are many trees that may produce oil as extracts but the Olive tree is not cultivated in Ghana. Hence, any attempt to translate the Olive tree literally would leave the AsTB readers confused about what the tree is and represents. So to make the translation of "Olive orchard" meaningful to the AsTB user, the translators rendered it as "*Ngo Bepɔ,*" "Mountain of Oil". The expression *Ngo Bepɔ,* does not connote a mountain that produces oil by itself but a mountain that is cultivated with olive trees producing the olive oil (which has some medicinal properties).

The rendition in the AsTB is an illustration of the principle of functional equivalence in Bible translation, where there is a "thought-for-thought" expression of ideas such that the end users of the translation would understand the translation better in their own socio-cultural contexts.

---

[34] Michael W. Holmes ed., *The Greek New Testament*: *SBL Edition* (Atlanta, Georgia: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 243.

[35] C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 85.

[36] W. E. Vine, Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words (Fleming H. Revell Company: Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1981): 136.

[37] John Briggs Curtis, "An Investigation of The Mount Of Olives in the Judaeo-Christian," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 28 (1957):137-180, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23506509

[38] Olive Tree, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Online,* accessed November 27, 2021. www.internationalstandardbible.com/O/olive-tree.html

The Translation of σαββάτου ἔχον ὁδόν in Acts 1:12

The translation of *σαββάτου ἔχον ὁδόν* is a clear illustration of a translation without cognisance to the sociocultural background of the receptors. It also follows the principle of formal, literal or word-for-word translation. The AsTB has translated *σαββάτου ἔχον ὁδόν* as *bɛyɛ homeda kwan* (about the journey or walk of a Sabbath). As intimated earlier, this is a literal and direct translation of the source text without any attempt to find appropriate equivalent terms for what *σαββάτου ἔχον ὁδόν* means. Many AsTB readers will find it really difficult to understand what "*bɛyɛ homeda kwan*" (about the journey or walk of a Sabbath) is without the use of Bible commentaries or aids. However, there are many readers of the AsTB who may not be able to read any commentary in English to understand what "a Sabbath day's journey" means.[39] Eugene A. Nida has said that in translation, "absolute identity of meaning is impossible."[40] What he intends is that the source language text can never be reproduced in the receptor language text in a way that communicates fully the details of the source text in the receptor text. However, what a translator should aim at is the "closest natural equivalent"[41] of the source text in the receptor text to illicit similar responses in both source and target audiences.

Exegesis of *σαββάτου ἔχον ὁδόν*

Luke recounts the command of Jesus to his disciples to "wait for the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4) in Jerusalem. But Jesus ascended to heaven and the place from where he was taken from their sight was the Mount of Olives, to the east of Jerusalem, on the other side of the Kidron ravine.[42] After the ascension and in obedience to the words of Jesus the disciples returned to Jerusalem, a journey described by Luke as *σαββάτου ἔχον ὁδόν* (here only in the New Testament).

Σαββάτου ἔχον ὁδόν which translates as a "Sabbath day's journey" is taken to be 2000 cubits and a cubit is 56 centimetres. The distance given is 1120 metres (1.12 kilometres); and this is the distance from a central point in the city to the summit of the mountain.[43] A Sabbath day's journey was reckoned by interpreting Exodus 16:29 ("let no one go out of his place on the seventh day") in light of Numbers 35:5 (where the Levites' pasturelands are defined by a radius of 2000 cubits from any one of the six "cities of refuge").[44] F. F Bruce argues that *σαββάτου ἔχον ὁδόν* is rather less than one kilometre.[45]

Darrell also intimates that a Sabbath's day journey was probably a distance of anywhere from about 900 to 1,120 metres or a little over 1,000–1,200 yards, about three-quarters of a mile.[46] Ernst Haenchen also states that a Sabbath day's journey (the distance a Jew might travel on the Sabbath day without contravening the commandment of Ex. 16:29) comprised 2000 ells which is equivalent to 960 yards.[47] He cites Josephus, *Ant*. XX 169, that the Mount of Olives was five stadia distant from Jerusalem.[48]

The exact distance for *σαββάτου ἔχον ὁδόν* seems to be disputed and no two scholars agree on the same thing. However, being a way of describing the distance between two different locations it is

---

[39] The author's personal experience with many readers of the AsTB in Kumasi, the capital of the Ashanti region (where Asante-Twi is the dominant language) shows that though they are able to read and understand the AsTB they have no formal education to read any Bible commentary in English to assist them to understand certain expressions literally translated in the AsTB.

[40] Nida, "Meaning and Translation,"98.

[41] Eugene Albert Nida, "Meaning and Translation," *The Bible Translator* 8, no.3 (1957): 97, https://doi:10.1177/000608445700800301.

[42] F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 105.

[43] Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 85.

[44] Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles,* 105.

[45] Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles,* 105.

[46] Darrell L. Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2012), www.bakeracademic.com

[47] Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 150.

[48] Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, 150.

prudent to estimate the length of the distance involved. A distance of 1000 yards (0.57 miles) or one kilometre will suffice for *σαββάτου ἔχον ὁδόν* in this discourse.

An Alternative Translation of *σαββάτου ἔχον ὁδόν* in Acts 1:12

Σαββάτου ἔχον ὁδόν could be rendered as *bɛyɛ kwansini fa*. *Kwansini* in Asante-Twi means one mile whiles *ɛfa* means half of an object. Since an approximation of the exact distance between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives is being dealt with here, 0.57 miles can be approximated to half a mile (0.50 miles). Hence 0.57 miles can be rightly translated as *bɛyɛ kwansini fa* as the nearest rendition *σαββάτου ἔχον ὁδόν* in Acts 1:12.

Literal and Functional Equivalences in the Translation of the AsTB

It can be inferred from the above discourses that both literal and functional approaches to translation have been used in the AsTB. Another fascinating example of a literal translation that was later revised to reflect the thoughts of the author instead of the form of the text can be found in Hebrews 12:1.

In the 1964 version of the AsTB, *τοσοῦτον ἔχοντες περικείμενον ἡμῖν νέφος μαρτύρων* (since we are surrounded with so great a cloud of witnesses) in Hebrews 12:1 had been translated as "*ɛnam sɛ yɛwɔ adansefoɔ mununkum a ɛte sɛɛ a atwa yɛn ho ahyia yi*". The problem with this text was the literal translation of *νέφος μαρτύρων* as "*adansefoɔ mununkum*". A "cloud" was a common metaphor for a great throng of people.[49] The position of τοσοῦτον, "so great," is emphatic and qualifies the "cloud of witnesses".

The description *νέφος μαρτύρων*, "a cloud of witnesses," connotes not only the great number of persons but also the unity of the crowd in their witness to the integrity of the faith.[50] Literally speaking, *νέφος* means *mununkum* but its use does not denote a great throng of people. *Μαρτύρων* also refers to *adansefoɔ*, however, the combination of both words does not make any linguistic meaning to the AsTB reader.

In the New Revised Version of the AsTB (2018), *τοσοῦτον ἔχοντες περικείμενον ἡμῖν νέφος μαρτύρων* has been rendered as "*ɛnam sɛ yɛwɔ adansefoɔ pii a ɛte sɛɛ a atwa yɛn ho ahyia yi*" to reflect the 'exact' thoughts of the author of the epistle. Thus, in the mind of the translators, there is the need to adapt and conform to the linguistic features of the receptor language by using the closest natural equivalents in the texts where appropriate and relevant.

In translating, Nida postulates that among other things, the translator should be mindful of "the people for whom a translation is being prepared: their background knowledge, their intrinsic interest in the message, and their attitudes toward communication,"[51] all help in determining to what extent adaptations can be made to bring the meaning of the text closer to the receptors. In this case, making meanings of the text obscured through literal translations would impede the understanding of the text since many AsTB readers may not be able to read further materials in English – which is not their mother tongue – for further elaborations on such texts.

Interpretation of Mother-tongue Biblical Texts

A correct interpretation of texts in the mother tongue Scriptures is an essential ingredient for theologizing among indigenous people who use the Scriptures. In some cases, mistranslation or errors in translation creates room for ambiguous interpretation of the mother tongue Scriptures. One's mother tongue is considered as the first language that a person learns and it is the language one is born into by virtue of what the 'mother' nurtures him/her with. According to Kuwornu-Adjaottor, the mother

---

[49] Peter T. O'Brien, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 436.

[50] William L. Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 47B (Hebrews 9–13)* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2017), Part IV.

[51] Nida, "Formal Correspondence in Translation," *The Bible Translator* 21, no. 3 (1970): 106.

tongue "is a person's own native and indigenous language, very much intertwined with a person's identity; it confirms and affirms who a person is, where one comes from and one's sense of identity."[52]

.

CONCLUSION

In this article, there was a critical examination of specific texts (Acts 1:12 and Hebrews 12:1) through mother tongue hermeneutics to know what the translation says and means to the AsTB reader. In doing so, the philosophy underpinning the translations was unearthed and alternative translations proferred. This study has shown that the AsTB is largely shifted to the literal philosophy of translation with little modification of the source text where necessary to suit the understanding of the receptors. The overreliance on the literal approach in translations makes certain texts too difficult to unravel their meaning in Asante-Twi. It is recommended that mother tongue Scriptures are produced in the simplest, clearest and most natural form for the readers to make meaning out of them as they were intended by the authors for the original recipients.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barrett, C. K. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* Vol. 1. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994.

Beekman, John. "'Literalism', a Hindrance to Understanding." *The Bible Translator* 17, no. 4 (1966): 178-189. https://doi.org/10.1177/000608446601700405.

Bock, Darrell L. *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Acts.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2012. www.bakeracademic.com.

Bruce, F. F. *The Acts of the Apostles: Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990.

Cameron, Peter S. "Functional Equivalence and the *Mot Juste.*" *The Bible Translator* 41, no. 1 (1990): 101-109.

Carson, D. A. "The Limits of Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation and Other Limits, Too." In *The Challenge of Bible Translation: Communicating God's Word to the World,* edited by Glen G. Scorgie, Mark L. Strauss and Steven M. Voth, 65-11. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.

Curtis, John Briggs. "An Investigation of the Mount Of Olives in the Judaeo-Christian." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 28 (1957):137-180. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23506509.

David M., Eberhard Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fenning eds. "Akan," *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* 24th ed. Dallas, Texas: SIL International, 2015.Accessed November 20, 2021. http://www.ethnologue.com.

De Vries, Lourens. "Bible Translations: Forms and Functions." *The Bible Translator* 52, no. 3 (2001): 306-319.

Ekem, John D. K. *Early Scriptures of the Gold Coast (Ghana): The Historical, Linguistic, and Theological settings of the Ga, Twi, Mfantse and Ewe Bibles.* Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2011.

Haenchen, Ernst. *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971.

Holmes, Michael W. ed. *The Greek New Testament*: *SBL Edition*. Atlanta, Georgia: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010.

Kuwornu-Adjaottor, Jonathan Edward Tetteh. "Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics: A Current Trend in Biblical Studies in Ghana." *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies* (JETERAPS) 3, no. 4: 575-579.

Lane, William L. *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 47B (Hebrews 9–13).* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2017.

Mahzad, Mardiha. "Theories of Translation: Does One Exist?" *Elixir International Journal* 66 (2014): 20446-20452. www.elixirpublishers.com

---

[52] Jonathan Edward Tetteh Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics: A Current Trend in Biblical Studies in Ghana," *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies* (JETERAPS) 3, no. 4: 577.

Newmark, Peter. *A Textbook of Translation.* New York: Printice Hall, 1988.

Nida, Eugene A., and Charles R. Taber. *The Theory and Practice of Translation.* E. J. Brill: Leiden, 1982.

Nida, Eugene A. ed. *The Book of a Thousand Tongues*, 2nd ed. London: United Bible Societies, 1974.

_____. "Formal Correspondence in Translation." *The Bible Translator* 21, no. 3 (1970): 105 -113.

_____. "The Nature of Dynamic Equivalence in Translating." *Babel* 23, no. 3 (1977): 99–103. doi: 10.1075/babel.23.3.01nid.

_____. "Meaning and Translation." *The Bible Translator* 8, no.3 (1957): 97-108. https://doi:10.1177/000608445700800301.

Nord, Christiane. "Manipulation and Loyalty in Functional Translation, Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa." *Current Writing* 14, no. 2 (2002): 32-44. doi:10.1080/1013929X.2002.9678123.

O'Brien, Peter T. *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Hebrews.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010.

"Olives, Mount of." *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Online.* Accessed November 27, 2021. www.internationalstandardbible.com/O/olive-tree.html.

Reiss, K., and Hans J. Vermeer, *Towards a General Theory of Translational Action: Skopos Theory Explained,* translated by Christiane Nord. New York: Routledge, 2014.

Roberts, J. H. "Dynamic Equivalence in Bible Translation." *Neotestamentica* 8 (1974): 7-20. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43070430.

Schaaf, Ype. *On Their Way Rejoicing: The History and Role of the Bible in Africa*, trans. Paul Ellingworth. Akropong-Akuapem: Regnum Africa, 2002.

Strauss, Mark L. "Form, Function, and the "Literal Meaning" Fallacy in English Bible Translation." *The Bible Translator* 56, no. 3 (2005):153-168.

Vine, W. E. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words.* Fleming H. Revell Company: Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1981.

ABOUT AUTHOR

Yaw Worae is a PhD candidate of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi. His research areas cover New Testament and Bible translation studies. He also researches on the relationship between Bible translation and Church growth in Ghana.

Jonathan Edward Tetteh Kuwornu-Adjaottor is an Associate Professor in New Testament and Mother Tongued Biblical Hermeneutics in the Department of Religious Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology – Kumasi Ghana.