

Translation of the Bible into the Yoruba Language: A Functionalist Approach in Resolving Cultural Problems

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Abstract : Through comparative and causal models of translation, this paper examined the translation of 'bread' into the Yoruba language in three Yoruba versions of the Bible: Bibeli Yoruba Atoka (YBA), Bibeli Mimo ni Ede Yoruba Oni (BMY) and Bibeli Mimo (BM). In biblical times, bread was a very important delicacy that it was synonymous with food in general and in the Bible, bread sometimes refers to a type of food (a mixture of flour, water, and yeast that is baked) or food in general. However, this is not the case in the Yoruba culture. In fact, some decades ago, bread was not known in Nigeria and had no name in the Yoruba language until the 1900s when it was codified as bureḍi in Yoruba, a term borrowed from English and transliterated. Nevertheless, in Nigeria presently, bread is not a special food and it is not appreciated or consumed like in the West. This makes it difficult to translate bread in the Bible into Yoruba. From an investigation on the translation of this term, it was discovered that bread which has 330 occurrences in the English Bible translation (King James) has few occurrences in the three Yoruba Bible versions. In the first version (YBA) published in the 1880s, where bread is synonymous with food in general, it is mostly translated as oúnjẹ (food) or the verb jẹ (to eat), revealing that something is eaten but not indicating what it is. However, when the bread is a type of food, it is rendered as akara, a special delicacy of the Yoruba people made from beans flour. In the later version (BMY) published in the 1990s, bread as food, in general, is also mainly translated as oúnjẹ or the verb jẹ, but when it is a type of food, it is translated as akara with few occurrences of bureḍi. In the latest edition (BM), bread as food is either rendered as oúnjẹ or literally translated as bureḍi. Where it is a type of food in this version, it is mainly rendered as bureḍi with few occurrences of akara, indicating the assimilation of bread into the Yoruba culture. This result, although limited, shows that the Bible was translated into Yoruba to make it accessible to Yoruba speakers in their everyday language, hence the application of both domesticating and foreignising strategies. This research also emphasizes the role of the translator as an intermediary between two cultures.

Keywords : translation, Bible, Yoruba, cultural problems

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