


## Levels of Equivalence in Interpreter-mediated Sermons from English into Luhya Varieties

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### ABSTRACT

Languages have different concepts for conveying meanings; hence there is a problem in finding equivalents between the source language (SL) and the target language (TL) in the process of interpreting. The transfer of meaning is identified as one of the basic problems in interpreting due to the absence of equivalence between two languages. This paper identifies levels of equivalence in the interpretation of selected sermons from English into Luhya varieties. Data was collected through key-informant interviews of interpreters, Focus Group Discussions by the congregants, and the researcher's non-participant observation during church services. An audio recorder was used to collect the corpus for analysis which was later transcribed and translated for analysis. Relevance Theory by Sperber and Wilson (1986) provided the background for the discussion of the data. The findings revealed the following levels of equivalence in the interpretation of English sermons into Luhya varieties; one to many, one to part-of-one and nil equivalence. Further, it was also revealed that interpreters need to identify these three levels of equivalence in interpreting English sermons into Luhya varieties to determine the appropriate measures to counteract the situation.

### 1. Introduction

If the audience fails to understand the source language, it is necessary to get the message and communicate with the target language speaker through an interpreter. By so doing, the interpreter breaks the communication barrier which may be caused by a character in the communication process not understanding one of the languages used. (Biamah,2013). According to Qian (1994), the difference in the culture of the source language speakers and the culture of the target language speakers and linguistic differences between the SL and TL may be an issue of concern in attaining equivalence during interpretation. Riccardi (1998) claims that many researchers contend that there are no words or expressions that are perfectly identical in meaning in any two languages.

Chishiba (2018) asserts that equivalence is a fundamental requirement to guide interpreters in their work as it helps them provide the so much needed similarity or approximation between the SL and the TL. He adds that it is usually very difficult to find equivalence in interpretation as a result of the constant development of terminologies in some languages, coupled with increased innovations and changes in phenomena. Consequently, interpreters struggle to keep up with the changes in order to find relevant, efficient and effective equivalents during their interpretation exercises. Therefore, making the sermons relevant to the TL speakers may prove difficult to the interpreters in churches where interpretation is used during the delivery of sermons.

### 2. Literature Review

Equivalence refers to a situation where a specific linguistic unit in one language carries the same meaning encoded in another specific linguistic unit (Moafi, 2015). Equivalence is the factor that determines the closeness of the target language to the source language. According to Chishiba (2018), when a linguistic unit in the source language carries the same meaning encoded in another linguistic unit in the target language, these two units are considered equivalent. Hence, finding equivalence is the most

problematic stage of interpretation. This paper is guided by the fact that the interpreter has to deal with the problem of non-equivalence in order for the interpreted message to be relevant to the target audience.

Earlier researchers like Odero (2017), Leonardi (2000), Chishiba (2018), Mudogo (2018) and Kenny (1998) who discussed the notion of equivalence, did not take a step further to determine whether the interpreted message was meaningful and hence relevant to the speakers of the target language. Odero (2017) looked at the 'Problems of Finding Linguistic Equivalence when Translating and Interpreting for Special Purposes'. The interpreter has to observe the target culture's stylistic conventions to render equivalent and precise information. He feels that understanding is arrived at by way of interpretation and finding the most equivalent terms to express meaning, which greatly impacts understanding any SL text. There are different levels of equivalence and interpreters need to make decisions on how to tackle them as the interpretation progresses.

Pym (2010: 12) posits, "In whatever direction the interpretation goes, from a SL to a TL and back to a SL, the same terms would be supplied as equivalents of the other terms". The conceptualization of the target language word as having an equal or similar value as the source language word does not happen naturally. Rather, the word takes that status because the interpreter has ascribed it during interpretation. The relation between the source language and the target language is asymmetrical because equivalence is located on one side more than the other (Pym, 2010).

Kenny (1998) views equivalence-oriented interpretation as a procedure that replicates the same situation as in the original whilst using completely different wording. According to Kenny, equivalence is the ideal method when the interpreter has to deal with proverbs and idioms. This leads to the conclusion that the need for creating equivalences arises from the situation and it is in the situation of the source language that interpreters have to look for a solution (Munday, 2008). This paper aimed to highlight the levels of equivalence that interpreters exhibited in interpreting church sermons.

The identification of the levels of non-equivalence in interpreting church sermons is guided by Relevance Theory, according to Sperber and Wilson (1986). The more the interpreter identifies the level of non-equivalence and deals with it, the more relevant the message is to the target audience. The interpreters of church sermons are obliged to ensure that the messages they relay to the target audience are relevant. Relevance Theory plays a fundamental role in making the interpreted message meaningful to the TL speakers during the delivery of church sermons. The context of Relevance Theory allows interpreters to determine the levels of non-equivalence they encounter in trying to relay relevant messages from the SL. (Sperber and Wilson, 1986),).

### 3. Methodology

The study was carried out in Busia County, in five Sub-Counties where Luhya dialects are spoken. The dialects include *Olusamia*, *Olunyala*, *Olumarachi* and *Olukhayo*. In the study, a descriptive research design was used to identify the key respondents and categorized them in terms of the churches they belonged to; mainstream or Pentecostal. The study targeted interpreters, preachers and selected congregants from two Pentecostal churches and two Mainstream churches in every Sub-County: namely: Bunyala, Samia, Matayos, Nambale and Butula. A total of eighty congregants, thirty preachers and twenty interpreters were involved in the study. Primary data for this study was collected through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and non-participant observation. Data was analyzed using content analysis. The Relevance Theory by Wilson and Sperber (1986) was used in the process of analyzing the levels of equivalence in the interpreting interpreter-mediated sermons.

### 4. Results and Discussion

In this section, levels of pragmatic equivalence in interpreting church sermons from the collected data are discussed. The samples were randomly drawn from the data collected during the study. The selected texts were analyzed to identify the levels of non-equivalence in the interpreted utterances and inferences were made from the interpreters in terms of the relevance of the preachers' messages to the target audience. The analysis of the collected data was done in comparison to the Luhya version of the SL messages. In data presentation, the abbreviations B.I and F.E have been used. B.I stand for back interpretation while F.E shows the functional equivalence; that is, the intended meaning for the misinterpreted form. Back Interpretation means interpreting a word or a phrase back into the English language after being interpreted into Luhya in order to test its accuracy for the sake of those who do not understand the Luhya dialect

#### 4.1 One-to-many Equivalence

Hann (1992) views this type of equivalence as one where the interpreter has several equivalents in the target language for the given source language expression. The interpreter may use more than one target language expression for a single source language expression.

Example 1

Preacher 4: Think about your actions as a Christian.

Interpreter 4: *Linga ebikhole biao nga omukristo.*

B.I: Look at your actions as a Christian.

F.E: *Para khubikhole biao nga omukristo.*

The interpreter interpreted the word 'think' as 'linga' which means 'look'. In real sense, the preacher aimed at requesting the congregants to meditate on whether what they did was acceptable in Christianity. In the TL (*OluKhayo*), sometimes the two words 'linga' (look) and 'para' (think) may be used interchangeably in informal settings. This is what prompted the interpreter to come up with an utterance that did not reflect the preacher's intended message hence relaying a message that was not relevant to the target audience.

Example 2

Preacher 1: God will answer our prayers if we humble ourselves before Him.

Interpreter1: *Nyasaye anatumbulira nihweduduyia emberi waye.*

B.I: God will hear us if we humble ourselves before Him.

F.E: *Nyasaye anakalusia amalamo kefwwe niweduduyia emberi waye.*

The interpreter misinterpreted the preacher's message of God's response to our prayers. The preacher says God will answer 'anakalusia' but the interpreter says He will hear us 'anatumbulira'. The interpreter informs the target audience that God hears their prayers, but forgets to emphasize the fact that He answers them. This misinterpretation did not serve the purpose of relaying the preacher's intended meaning to the target audience, who received a different message from the preacher's context.

Steiner (1998) believes that equivalence is sought by means of substituting equal verbal signs for those in the original. The fundamental characteristic of the interpretive use of language is not just the fact that two utterances interpretively resemble one another, but that one of them is intended to be relevant in the virtue of its resemblance with the other utterance (Gutt, 2000). Failure to bring out the meaning of the SL item in the TL word leads to the delivery of unintended information to the target audience. From the findings of this study, the fact that a single lexical form can yield different meanings in one Luhya dialect proves a big challenge in interpreting church sermons from English.

#### **4.2 One-to-part-of-one Equivalence**

In this type of equivalence, the meaning of a source language expression is divided between two target language equivalents (Oanh, 2013). There are instances where the interpreter may select a target language expression that covers part of a concept designated by a single source language expression, leading to the misinterpretation of the SL speaker's utterances.

Example 3

Preacher 5: The word of God is the light to those who believe in it.

Interpretation 4: *Elikhuwa lia nyasaye ni itara khu balia abamwesika.*

B.I: The word of God is a lamp to those who believe in him.

F.E: *Elikhuwa lia Nyasaye ni obulafu khu balia abalisubira.*

The preacher mentioned the word 'light' in his utterance when referring to the word of God because it is believed that the word of God brightens the life of a Christian the way light does. The interpreter understood that God's word makes a believer shine just like one who is exposed to the light from a lamp. However, when the interpreter interpreted light as *itara* 'lamp', he misinterpreted the preacher's SL message thus the informative intention was not achieved. Another misinterpretation from the same utterance is noted when the preacher says 'believe in it' which should be interpreted as *abalisubirira* but the interpreter says *abamwesika* to mean 'depend on Him'. The preacher was talking about those who believe in the word of God but the interpreter misinterpreted the utterance to mean 'those who depend on God'.

According to Munday (2012), what is functionally suitable has to be determined by the interpreter, who is the expert in the interpretation action and whose role is to make sure that the intercultural transfer of concepts takes place satisfactorily. These findings form Munday's assumption because in the case of the above examples, the interpreters relayed information that was not relevant to the target audience by interpreting the SL items into TL items that were closely related in terms of meaning, although the SL speakers' meanings were not captured. As seen in the example above, *obulafu* 'light' includes *itara* 'lamp' but the two do not carry the same meaning. The preacher's informative intention was not achieved since the target audience missed

the preacher's intended message. The same case occurred in the second example when *abalisubirira* 'believe in it' was misinterpreted as *abamwesika* meaning 'depend on Him'.

Allot (2013) argues that the hearer generally seeks maximal relevance in order to understand the speaker. If the SL message is misinterpreted, then its relevance to the target audience cannot be achieved. According to Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986), since the communicative principle and presumption of optimal relevance set bounds on the relevance to be expected from any utterance, the interpreter needs to choose TL items that would guide the target audience to obviously make compliant to the search for an interpretation of an utterance in order to get the preacher's intended message. However, in this study the relevance of the SL message to the target audience was not achieved as a result of misinterpretation caused by the interpreters' use of TL words that elicited approximate meanings to the preacher's intended meanings. .

### 4.3 Nil Equivalence

According to Bayar (2007), nil equivalence occurs when there are no one-to-one equivalents between the SL and the TL. This happens when the interpreter deals with concepts which contain culturally-bound words or expressions. The interpreter in such a case is forced to use the SL word in its original form or domesticate it to enable the TL speakers to pronounce it with ease. This type of equivalence is also referred to as zero equivalence because there is no word in the TL that can replace the SL concept (Kade, 1968). There are many words that cannot be found to accurately translate the meaning of the source language. Because of linguistic and cultural differences and some scientific terminology, it is difficult to find the right word for interpretation therefore, by retaining the icon of the source text and transcribing them in the TL it turns out to be a reasonable choice (Oanh, 2013). When a word in the SL is transcribed in the TL in order to favour the audience, domestication is said to have occurred. Alhammad (2011) views domestication as a strategy for eliminating cultural differences. He argues that the idea of domestication is to recreate the source text in a fluent, flowing manner in the target language, which does not demonstrate any obvious signs of being a translation rather than an original text.

#### Example 4

Preacher 6: We are not ready to interfere with our programs.

*Interpretation 3: Sikhunyala okhunyasia chiprogram chiefwe.*

#### Example 5

Preacher 7: In that party nobody preached about the word of God.

*Interpreter 5: Muparty omwo abulao wayala likhuwa lia Nyasaye.*

In example 4, the interpreter failed to find a word that would replace the SL word 'programs' in the TL (*Oluhayo*). This was due to the unavailability of a TL equivalent term for the source word 'programs'. Therefore, the interpreter decided to retain the word in the original form in the process of interpreting the preacher's utterance. The word 'programs' is strange to the TL speakers; furthermore, the word is likely to cause pronunciation problems to the target audience. For the sake of the audience who would not pronounce the English word well, the interpreter domesticated it in order to give it the local pronunciation, hence '*chiprogram*' instead of 'programs'. The preacher's intended message was not relevant to the TL speakers who did not understand the meaning of the word 'program'.

In example 5, the interpreter used the word *muparty* as the interpretation for 'in the party'. The word party is foreign in the TL language and may not have any impact on the comprehension of the preacher's message by the target audience. This made the interpreter's information lack the relevance required since the preacher's intended message was not relayed to the audience. The interpreter's failure to deliver a relevant message to the audience fails to meet the presumption of optimal relevance in Relevance Theory, which makes it reasonable for interpretation to follow a least effort path because relevance varies inversely with effort (Sperber & Wilson, 1986). When a word is borrowed directly from the SL and domesticated into the TL, the target audience does not appreciate the word as one of their own since they still view it as alien.

### 5. Conclusion

In summary, the findings of the study have revealed that there are three (3) levels of pragmatic non-equivalence in interpretation of church sermons in both MS and PC churches in Busia County. The levels used include; one-to-many equivalence, one-to-part-of-one equivalence and nil equivalence. When comparing the three levels of equivalence, nil equivalence had the highest number of misinterpreted items with 16 items followed by one-to-many equivalence that had 7 items and finally, one-to-part-of-one equivalence with 5 items. When interpreting sermons, interpreters need to decide how to tackle the level of non-equivalence they identify as the interpretation progresses. The items that exhibited nil equivalence were borrowed directly into the TL and domesticated to recreate the source text in a fluent, flowing manner in the target language.

Whenever a foreign word is domesticated in the TL, it is easily pronounced by the language speakers who easily identify with the local pronunciation.

The examples from the data collected prove that achieving equivalence is not easy because of the difference in the SL and TL structures. For this reason, communication does not occur as interpreters struggle to render the preachers' message to the target audience; instead, the messages are misinterpreted, making them irrelevant. It was also discovered that the three levels of equivalence did not help interpreters to render the preachers' intended messages due to the misinterpretations made.

## **6. Recommendations**

Interpreters should be reminded that communicating the same content or finding pragmatic equivalence does not necessarily mean that there is semantic equivalence. Sometimes, equivalence at the semantic level may not bring about cohesion or will not work as meaning is culture specific. Therefore, the interpreted church sermons should be brought out in a way that represents the same things, ideas and intentions in both the TL and SL for them to be relevant.

There is need for churches to invest in training their interpreters to ensure quality interpretation of the sermons since the word of God gives hope to the people and should therefore not be made irrelevant to the target audience. Interpreters should be exposed to workshops meant to familiarize them with the levels of non-equivalence and demonstrate how to deal with the levels identified. There is also a need for interpreters to familiarize themselves with the preachers' message prior to the interpretation to help them deliver the preachers' intended messages by planning how to deal with the non-equivalence.

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