


## Constraints of Attaining Pragmatic Relevance from English into Selected Luhya Varieties in Interpreter-mediated Sermons

Annet Aromo Khachula<sup>1</sup> , Bernard Angatia Mudogo<sup>2</sup>   and Lucy Mandillah<sup>3</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>PhD candidate in Linguistics, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kenya

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kenya

 **Corresponding Author:** Bernard Angatia Mudogo, **E-mail:** dmudogo@mmust.ac.ke

### ARTICLE INFORMATION

**Received:** April 03, 2021

**Accepted:** May 11, 2021

**Volume:** 4

**Issue:** 5

**DOI:** 10.32996/ijllt.2021.4.5.23

### KEYWORDS

Constraints, Interpreter-mediated sermons, Pragmatic Relevance, Luhya varieties

### ABSTRACT

Interpretation is an ultimate bridge among people who speak more than one language. In the case where the audience fails to understand the source language (SL), it is necessary to get the message to communicate with the target language (TL) speaker through an interpreter. This paper aims to evaluate the possible constraints of attaining pragmatic relevance during the delivery of interpreter-mediated sermons from English into selected Luhya varieties. The rationale for this position is that since English and Luhya belong to different language families, rendering information between these two languages can be very challenging. The Relevance Theory by Sperber and Wilson (1986) provided the background for discussing the data. Data was collected through Key-Informant Interviews for the interpreters, Focus Group Discussions for the congregants and the researcher's non-participant observation during church services. The audio recording was used to collect corpus for analysis. The following constraints were revealed; grammatic and structural constraints, time lag, idiomatic expressions in the SL, lack of compatible hyponyms, phonological and prosodic constraints, semantic constraints, lack of lexicalized TL versions, culture-specific words in the SL and polysemous words. The findings also revealed that interpreters need to be aware of the constraints they face in interpreting sermons to determine the appropriate strategies to counteract the constraints.

### 1. Introduction

Interpretation is a skill which is used to communicate source language (SL) words and their meanings in the target language (TL). Communication can only be successful when the audience understands the informative intention of the SL speaker. This shows that in interpretation, the interpreters play an important role in enabling the congregation in a church setting to understand the preacher's message (Karlik, 2013). Interpretation of church sermons in Kenya has become common, specifically in a mixed congregation where the people do not speak a common language. To communicate, therefore, there has to be somebody assuming the role of a mediator to interpret the message delivered by the SL speaker and then successfully communicate the same in the TL. This shows that interpreting information from one language to another is a complex but vital task (Kirimi, Muriungi & Njogu, 2012).

Chishiba (2018) suggests that the services of an interpreter are crucial in interpreter-mediated sermons as they help prevent linguistic exclusions. He calls for removing obstacles to communication by providing a clear, direct and compelling voice to those who would otherwise not understand what is being said in a different language and relaying a complete message to those who depend on the interpretation. The interpreter's identification of the existing constraints would enable him to develop the appropriate strategies to apply in delivering relevant messages to the target audience.

The increase in churches where preaching is done in more than one language has led to embracing interpretation as a preaching strategy in Kenyan churches. In interpreting, the interpreter may encounter some factors that are likely to limit the delivery of relevant information to the target audience, thus affecting the meaning of the message delivered. This paper analyzed the linguistic and paralinguistic constraints that interpreters face in bridging language gaps, which may hinder the audience's comprehension of interpreted sermons emanating from relaying SL messages that were not relevant.

## **2. Literature Review**

Several studies in relation to interpretation point to the fact that constraints may deliver the wrong information to the audience. According to Jones' (1992), constraints are the limitations to the concept of equivalence in the interpretation process, which may block the interpreter from attaining pragmatic relevance during interpretation. According to Musyoka and Karanja (2014), unsuccessful interpretation is caused by the interpreters' challenges during interpreting. However, Mudogo (2018) posits that rendering the SL into the TL requires an adequate audience understanding. For this reason, audience's comprehension of the interpreted message was the key concern in this paper.

According to Biamah (2013), the main aim of the interpretation of sermons to the TL of the audience is to enhance communication, but her research shows that sometimes communication between the speaker of SL and TL can be impossible. In the findings, a number of hindrances that made interpretational preaching difficult were revealed. Therefore, the importance and place of the interpreter of facilitating communication between the two parties could not be realized as a result of the prevailing constraints. This paper aims to shed some light on how interpreters determine the strategies to use to control the effects of the limitations they face, as it helps the interpreter provide the so much needed similarity or approximation between the source language and the target language.

Wangia (2003) examined aspects of mistranslations in the 1957 Luloogoli Bible. She looked at different types of translation problems using various linguistic indicators. She sites language problems that are the main causes of translation problems such as structure, ambiguity, obscurity and figurative expressions, which led to mistranslations and therefore need to be resolved. In relation to Wangia's (2003) findings, this paper focused on the obstacles to delivering relevant messages to the target audience.

Kariuki (2004) analyzed the comprehension problems that the speakers of the Gikuyu language faced in their attempt to understand the 2004 Draft Constitution of Kenya. In his study, he outlines the inconsistencies exhibited by men and women in the comprehension and interpretation of the constitution. He feels that there is a need to preserve important documents in a source language, which calls for an interpretation that would be the equivalence of an important document.

In attempting to show the challenges facing an interpreter during the process of interpreting which is similar in many ways to the challenges facing a second language learner during a difficult conversation task, EL- Shiyab and Hussein (2000) concluded that an interpreter never knows what is waiting around the bend when he/she accepts a commitment to interpreting. This professional challenge is precisely a type of linguistic and emotional roller coaster, which keeps the interpreter on his toes.

Jones' (1992) gives a list of difficulties encountered by interpreters for both the source language and the target language. These are the limitations to the concept of equivalence in the interpretation process, which may block the interpreter from attaining pragmatic relevance during interpretation. In this study, emphasis is on the interpreter's identification of the existing constraints, which would enable him to come up with the appropriate strategies to apply in delivering relevant messages to the target audience.

Chishiba (2018) discusses the problems interpreters encounter while interpreting from the SL to the TL, in his essay, 'The translator's challenges to achieving equivalence in translation practice'. In the essay, he has attempted to present some possible areas of limitations and explain why some scholars contend that there are no words or expressions that are perfectly identical in meaning in any two languages. He asserts there is a need to find out how interpreters deal with the problems they encounter in the course of interpreting since knowledge is a fundamental requirement to guide interpreters in their work. This paper aims to shed some light on how interpreters determine the strategies to use to control the effects of the limitations they face, as it helps the interpreter provide the so much needed similarity or approximation between the source language and the target language.

In the interpretation of church sermons, the interpreter's awareness of the existing constraints may help in coming up with the right strategies that lead to the delivery of relevant information to the TL speakers, as the interpreter employs the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedures to guide him/her in the search for the preacher's intended meaning. Relevance Theory plays a crucial 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 pinpoint the difficulties they encounter in identifying the relevant message from the SL (Sperber & Wilson, 1986).

### 3. Methodology

The study was carried out in Busia County, in five Sub-Counties where Luhya varieties are spoken. The varieties 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 constraints of attaining pragmatic relevance in interpreter-mediated sermons.

### 4. Results and Discussion

In this section, the various constraints of attaining pragmatic relevance when interpreting church sermons from the collected data are discussed. The samples are randomly drawn from the data collected from sermons delivered in Luhya and interpreted to English during the study. The selected texts were analyzed to ascertain the constraints in the interpreted utterances and make inferences from the interpreters in terms of the relevance of the preachers' messages to the target audience.

#### 4.3.1 Grammatical and Syntactical mismatches between the SL and the TL

According to (Williams, 2019), grammatical mismatches mean a situation where the SL does not encode a grammatical specification that the target language requires. In contrast, syntactical mismatches entail a disparity between an SL sentence structure and its equivalent TL sentence structure (Mel'cuk & Wanner, 2006). Consequently, the different word order for the two languages (in SL and TL) puts a heavy burden on the interpreter, leading to ungrammatical and irrelevant utterances.

Example 1

Preacher 9: A big crowd surrounded him.

Interpreter 4: *Abandu bamubodokhana*.

Example 2

Preacher 9: They knew he would save them.

Interpreter 4: *Bamanya mbwe anabaonia*.

The preacher emphasized the 'big crowd surrounding' but the interpreted message did not specify the size of the people. The message is also ambiguous since *bamubodokhana* could mean 'surrounded' or 'went round'. In the second part, the word 'save' was interpreted as *anabaonia* meaning 'to heal'. This relays a different message to the target audience because the preacher intended to talk about 'saving' and not 'healing'.

#### 4.3.2 The Polysemous Nature of Words in the SL and TL

According to Jones (1992), the words we use on a daily basis are all polysemous, carrying multiple meanings. Polysemy explains the use of words that have more than one meaning such that when the words are used, they may have the obvious or straightforward meaning and the hidden meaning.

Example 3

Preacher 11: It was alleged that their head was behind the murder.

Interpreter 8: *Baparisia mbwe omurwe kwabwe nikwo kwera*.

According to the context of use, in this case, the preacher used the word 'head' to mean something different (leader) from the common usage known to the interpreter (upper part of the body). However, in the interpreted version, the interpreter mentions *omurwe* to mean 'head', hence failing to deliver the preacher's intended meaning. 'Hand' was also used to mean 'a generous person'. The interpreter's message was irrelevant to the target audience since the head (body part) cannot commit murder. Cruse & Croft (2004) claim that when a hearer hears a polysemous word, the immediate linguistic context helps him or her open an appropriate frame by using sense boundaries to assign meaning to it. In the cases above, the interpreters could not infer the linguistic context of the preachers' utterances which led to the wrong interpretation.

#### 4.3.3 Culture-Specific Concepts

Interpreters could find themselves in a fix whenever they encountered an abstract or concrete concept in the TL. However, even words from different languages often do not correspond to each other because of cultural differences (Baker, 2011).

Example 4

Preacher 13: They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues as the spirit guided them.

*Interpretation 9: Bosi bechula roho omulafu nibachaka okhulomaloma endimi nga roho yabanyalira okhuboola.*

In the TL (*Olusamia*), the concept of being holy is equated to purity. Among the speakers of *Olusamia* dialect, purity is close to cleanliness so holy is interpreted as 'omulafu' which literally means clean. This happened because in the TL culture the concepts of the 'Holy Spirit' and 'speaking in tongues' do not exist so the interpreters did not deliver the preacher's message from the SL to the target audience because of the foreign words which were given TL equivalents that did not carry the exact meanings. Therefore, the message was not relevant to the audience, even after the interpreter had replaced the abstract concept 'holy' with a word omulafu that the audience was familiar with.

**4.3.4 Absence of Localized Concepts in TL**

According to Baker (1992), absence of localized concepts occurs when the source language expresses a word that people from the target culture easily understands but is not lexicalized and expresses a concept that is easy to understand in the TL.

Example 5

Preacher 16: The youth have forgotten about God in church but have turned into worshipping other gods in form of WhatsApp and Facebook.

*Interpreter 9: Abaraga bamwibirira nyasaye mukelesia mana benamiranga banyasaye bandi okhubitira mu whatsapp nende facebook.*

The message was directed at the young people who are conversant with the internet due to the frequent use of 'whatsapp' and 'facebook'. For the members of the congregation who had no idea what the two concepts referred to, the message was irrelevant since the information did not make any sense to them. The two words are part of the concepts used daily by young people in their daily conversations and would be relevant without interpreting or explaining exactly what they mean but the older folks required some explanation for the message to be meaningful.

**4.3.5 Semantic Complexity of Terminology in SL**

According to Trammel (2016), semantic complexity correlates with the number of ways meaning can be derived and interpreted from an utterance. When interpreting church sermons, the interpreter may be faced with a situation where the preacher may use a word or phrase in the SL that derives more than one meaning in the TL, making interpreting difficult.

Example 6

Preacher 17: We must be willing to give sacrifices to God and tithe because these sacrifices will open doors for blessings in our lives.

*Interpreter 10: Khukhoyere okhurusia ebianwa okhubera esianwa sia omundu simwikuliranga echingira chia chikhabi mubulamu.*

According to the biblical context, one can give back to God in three ways: through the sacrifice of animals, tithing and personal offering. In the English version, the three different ways are distinguished clearly. However, an interpreter cannot differentiate the three using different terminologies in *Oluvhayo* because any form of giving back to God is referred to as 'okhurusia esianwa'. In other words, the phrase 'okhurusia esianwa' is used to mean three different but related situations biblically. This interpretation ends up giving the target audience the impression that the preacher was talking about the same concept. In conclusion, the message from the SL was distorted by the time it reached the TL (*Oluvhayo*) speakers due to the different meanings encountered from the SL utterances.

**4.3.6 Phonological and Prosodic Constraints**

Baker (2011) describes phonological and prosodic constraints as features that are non-existent in either the SL or the TL pertaining to segmental phonemes.

Example 7

Preacher 16: Good heavens! They didn't believe their eyes after discovering that they had been conned.

*Interpreter 9: Bosi sibasubirira mbwe omurobi wa obubacha yali ababachire.*

The preacher used an interjection 'Good heavens!' to emphasize the fact that the people were conned. The interpreter understood the effect of the interjection in the preacher's utterance but could not interpret it in the TL (*Olunyala*) due to the absence of equivalent interjections. Since the interpreter went ahead to interpret the message based on the meaning and ignored the exclamation, the emphasis was not captured, giving the target audience a message that did not capture the preacher's informative intention.

#### 4.3.7 Lack of Specific Equivalents

According to Baker (1992), lack of specific equivalents means the TL lacks specific term (hyponym) Usually, languages tend to have general words (super ordinate), but lack the specific ones (hyponyms), since each language makes only those distinctions in meaning which seem relevant to its particular environment. Hyponymy is the relationship between two words in which the meanings of one word includes the meaning of the other.

Example 8

Preacher 7: The rose smelt sweet in the compound and attracted bees

Interpreter 5: *Amaua kaunya ebilayi mudala omwo mani nikareta enjukhi.*

The word 'rose' is a specific name of a flower in English. However, *Olusamia* has no specific names for flowers; they are generally called flowers (*amauwa*) hence 'rose' is a flower. In this case, flowers (*amauwa*) is a hypernym for 'rose'

#### 4.3.8 Wrong Interpretation of Idiomatic Expressions

Chishiba (2018) insinuates that the challenge in using idiomatic expressions is how to interpret them and manage to achieve equivalence in the TL. Failure to consider the semantic structure of an idiomatic expression, the interpreter, will miss the point and pass across a message that is contrary to what the preacher expected to deliver to the target audience.

Example 9

Preacher 7: Those of us who know God are privileged. Let's use this golden opportunity to prepare our ways as we wait upon the Lord.

Interpreter 5: *Efwe abasabanga Nyasaye khuli nende ekhabi. Ni ebilayi okhwekhonyera obweyangu buno obwa edhahabu okhukhwania engira chiefwe nikhumulinda Nyasaye.*

The interpreter's message leaves the audience confused as a result of applying word for word translation, which gave rise to an irrelevant utterance; thus, the wrong interpretation of idiomatic expressions leads to the misinformation of the target audience. The interpreter interpreted 'golden opportunity' directly into 'obweyangu obwa edhahabu', a phrase that does not make any sense in Luhya (*Olusamia*). The findings are similar to Mudogo (2019) who established that most English-Luhya translations are not relevant to the TL audience. According to Baker (1992), the relevance of any given utterance is determined by the impact it makes semantically to the TL speakers, failure to which the utterance becomes irrelevant to the target audience.

#### 4.3.9 Time Lag

The syntactic and lexical complexities and the pile-up of information segments forced the interpreters to lag behind the preachers because they struggled to understand the message as they prepared to reformulate it in the TL. According to As-Safi (2007), time lag has an impact on putting a burden on the short-term memory of the interpreter who might have missed the subsequent segments of information. This leads to the production of poorly cohesive structures and/or rushed sentences.

Example 10

Preacher 3: God's standards are too high since he demands that anybody who receives sacrifice at his holy altar should meet specific qualities. God will always stick to his decrees and anybody who goes against the expectations of God should be prepared for a legal battle with God.

Interpreter 3: *Standards cha Nyasaye chiri ekulu muno khulwa okhubera Nyasaye yalaka mbwe omundu yesiyesi oubukulanga ebianwa khubwali akhoyere okhuba nende qualities chenyekhanya...*

In the above example, the preacher presents a long utterance which makes it difficult for the interpreter to remember the entire content. This happened as a result of the interpreter trying to accommodate important points that the preacher emphasized or due to the use of specific words like *standards*, *qualities* and *legal*. As the interpreter struggles to put up with the preacher's speed, he also has to remember the important words that contribute to the meaning of the message and decide which words in

the TL (*Olumarachi*) are suitable replacements to the preacher's words in the SL (English). This therefore, leads to irrelevant sentence structures or incomplete utterances by the interpreter who may stammer and come to an abrupt stop.

## 5. Conclusion

From the findings, interpreters encounter some constraints in their line of duty that can distort the TL meaning leading to communication breakdown. The constraints arise from the fact that two languages can never be the same in terms of their structure. This gives the interpreters a hard time transferring the SL words to the TL, which may result in relaying the wrong message to the target audience.

Most of the constraints arose from lack of direct correspondence between the SL and the TL, but the pile-up of information due to limited time, forced the interpreters to lag behind the preachers as they struggled to get a clear understanding of the message before reformulating it in the TL. A number of words were left out as the interpreters picked what they could and ignored the rest. This obviously denied the target audience a chance to get the full intended message from the preachers.

The findings show that the task of interpreting cannot be smooth due to the structural differences of the SL and TL, so interpreters should be prepared to encounter the constraints as they interpret utterances from the SL into the TL.

Since interpreters encounter some constraints in their line of duty, it is advisable that they should find a way of counteracting them so that they relay the SL message as intended by the preacher. They need to be attached to experienced interpreters to see how they deal with the constraints they face. Interpreters should be made aware that there are obstacles to the interpreting process so that they are alert as they interpret to avoid relaying irrelevant messages. This can help them identify the right strategies to deal with the constraints present. Churches need to sponsor the interpreters to attend formal training, workshops, and seminars on interpretation to adequately equip them with information on how to deal with the constraints encountered.

## Reference

- [1] Al-Khanji, R., et al (2000). *On the Use of Compensatory Strategies in Simultaneous Interpretation*. Retrieved from: <https://www.erudit.org/journals/meta>
- [2] As-Safi, B. (2007). Theories, Methods and Strategies of Translation. *Atlas Global Center Studies and Research*, 2(1), 15-22.
- [3] Baker, 1992 (Ed.). *Other Words: a Coursebook on Translation*, London: Routledge, Oxford University Press.
- [4] Biamah, J. (2013). *Factors That Necessitate Interpretation of Sermons in Churches in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya*. Retrieved from: <http://jeteraps.scholarlinkresearch.org>
- [5] Chishiba, G. (2018). *The Translator's Challenges to Achieving Equivalence in Translation Practice*. Retrieved from: <https://www.DOI.org/10.15520/JASSH42281>
- [6] El-Shiyab, R. & Hussien, R. (2000). On the Use of Compensatory Strategies in Simultaneous Interpretation. *META: Vol XIV, No3*, 2000. Montreal: La Press de l'Université de Montreal, pp. 548 – 557
- [7] Jones, H.M. (1992). *The Beginning Translator's workbook or the ABCs of French to English Translation*; Revised Edition, University Press of America, New York.
- [8] Kariuki, P. (2004). Comprehension Problems in Understanding the 2004 draft Constitution among Kikuyu Speakers. [Unpublished M.A Thesis], Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya.
- [9] Kirimi, H, Muriungi, P. & Njogu W. (2012). *Misinterpretations in English-Kimuthambi Church Sermons*. Retrieved from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5430/elr.v1n2p88>
- [10] Kirlik, N. (2013). Interpreter-mediated Bible Readings from English to Manjaku in a Group of Gambian Churches. [Unpublished PhD Thesis], University of Leeds.
- [11] Mudogo, B. A. (2018). Baker's Strategies in Translation: A Lexico-Semantic Analysis of Four Luhya dialects: Lukabras, Lwisukha, Luwanga and Lukhayo in Informative Text. *The African Journal of Education and Social Sciences (AJESS)*. 3, 71-85 <https://ajess.kibu.ac.ke/bakers-strategies-in-translation-a-lexico-semantic-analysis-of-four-luhya-dialects-lukabras-lwisukha-luwanga-and-lukhayo-in-informative-text/>.
- [12] Mudogo, B. A. (2019). The relevance and applicability of English –Luhya translations in an informative text. *Coretrain*, 1(1) 1-8, 2415- 6432
- [13] Musyoka, E. & Karanja, P. (2014). Problems of Interpreting as a Means of Communication: A Study on Interpretation of Kamba to English Pentecostal Church Sermon in Machakos Town, Kenya. Retrieved from: [www.ijhssnet.com/journalsv](http://www.ijhssnet.com/journalsv)
- [14] Newmark, P. (1991). *A Textbook of Translation*. Hemel Hempstead : Prentice Hall
- [15] Sperber, D. & Wilson. D. (1986). *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- [16] Wangia, J. I. (2003). Aspects of Mistranslation in the 1951 Lulugooli Bible. [PhD Thesis], Kenyatta University.
- [17] Wangia, J. I. (2003). Aspects of mistranslation in the 1951 Lulugooli Bible. [Unpublished PhD Thesis], Kenyatta University
- [18] Williams, M. (2019). *Theorizing about Translation and Translation Studies*. Retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/p9kacv9>