The Role Of Fidelity And Morality In Pragmatic Translation: A Comparative Evaluation Of Old And New English Versions Of The *Holy Bible*

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Abstract

Unlike scientific, literary and other types of pragmatic texts, the *Holy Bible* is a divine book containing the Word of God as well as God's dealings with human beings over the ages. Besides, the faith of those (Christians), who adhere to its teachings, anchors on its tenets and provisions. Consequently, the translation of the *Holy Bible* from one language into another or its revision poses a very sensitive challenge, which calls for fidelity and morality in order to ensure accuracy. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to discuss the role of fidelity and morality in pragmatic translation, with special focus on the comparative evaluation of old and new English versions of the *Holy Bible*, vis-à-vis accuracy. In so doing, excerpts from three versions of the Bible were also compared and it was discovered that certain expressions in the old edition were archaic and unintelligible, especially to the young generation of adherents, leading to revisions. Hence, it was recommended that the translation of the *Holy Bible* or its revision should be handled by competent and authorized pragmatic translators, who would not willfully pervert the meaning of the scriptures.

Key Words: Translation, Pragmatic Translation, Revision, *Holy Bible*, Scripture, Morality, Fidelity

1.0   Introduction

The central theme of this study is the role of fidelity and morality in pragmatic translation, with special focus on Bible translation and revision. Today, many versions of the *Holy Bible* have emerged, but not all of them are accepted and used in liturgies by different Christian denominations. However, for the purpose of this study, I will limit my analysis and discussions to only three versions of the Bible, the Dake's annotated *King James Version* (1963), the *New King James Version* (1982) and the *Bible in Basic English* (1965). I have chosen the *King James Versions* (old and new) because they "remain popular among many English-speaking people worldwide" (Norton Herbst 2015, *www.exploregod.com*). Also, my choice of the *Bible in Basic English* translated by Professor S. H. Hooke in 1965 is based on fact that "This version is effective in communicating the Bible to those with limited education or where English is a second language" (Wikipedia).

For Christians, who believe in and adhere to its teachings, "the Bible is more than a historical document to be preserved. And it is more than a classic of English literature to be cherished and admired" (RSV 1971: vii). What then is it? "It is a record of God's dealing with men, of God's revelation of Himself and His will" (RSV 1971: vii) and it has been translated into virtually all the major languages of the world.

This being the case, one can state without fear of contradiction that the translation of the Bible or any part of it into English or any other language demands the application of

morality and professional integrity by the translator, with a view to ensuring an acceptable level of fidelity and accuracy. In other words, the pragmatic translator is required to handle the translation of such scriptures with special care, moral standard and professional integrity in order to produce a target language text, which is faithful to the original text to a reasonable and acceptable extent. By implication, therefore, on no account should a pragmatic translator compromise, modify, falsify, add to or remove from the message, information or content of the Bible source language message.

2.0   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In developing a theoretical framework on which my analysis and discussions will be anchored, let me define some of the key words as well as explain some of the major theoretical concepts.

2.1   Distinction between Bible translation and Bible revision

On the one hand, Jacques Flamand (1983 : 29), defines translation as "*... rendre le message du texte de départ avec exactitude (fidelité à l'auteur) en une langue d'arrivée correcte, authentique et adaptée au sujet de la destination (fidélité au destinataire)*" [the rendering of the source language message, with precision, into an authentic error-free target language, which is adapted to the target language public (translation mine)]. For Nida (1969:30) translation is "the production in the target language of the closest natural equivalent to the message of the source language, first to meaning and then to style." Mooning (1963:61) perceives it as "*... le passage d'un monde culturel à l'autre.*" [the movement from one cultural world to another (translation mine)]. According to Newmark (1998:5), translation is "*... rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text.*" For Schulte (1992:6), it is the "*... transplantation of a text from one language to another.*"

On the other hand, the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2010:1267), perceives revision as the act of changing something such as a book or an estimate, in order to correct or improve it. Also, the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2005) defines it as the process of changing something in order to improve it by correcting it or including new information or ideas.

Whereas translation is interlingual, i.e., it involves moving a text from one language into another, revision is intralingual, i.e., it involves correcting, updating, rewording or paraphrasing a text within the same language (Hatim and Munday 2006:5).

Based on the above definitions therefore, Bible translation is the transfer of the content of the holy book from one language into another, in such a way as to remain faithful to the spirit of the original text, while Bible revision is a process of rewriting the Bible in the same language, with the intention of correcting and updating it. Language is not static; it evolves with time to reflect human development and contemporary reality. Hence, there is need to revise the Bible to reflect current language usage.

2.2   *Pragmatic Translation*

All texts, which are neither scientific nor literary, are classified as pragmatic. This domain embraces several fields: administrative, sociological and anthropological, economic, commercial, journalistic, political, historical, legal, religious, and other forms of text of a general nature. Each field could still be divided into a very wide range of branches. For instance, the following branches fall within the legal field: constitution, law report, code of conduct, court proceedings, judgment, agreement, affidavit, will, statement of case, statement

of claim, statement of defense, etc. Therefore, the translation of this type of text is known as pragmatic translation and needs careful handling. Our focus in this research is on Bible translation.

2.3   The Notion of Fidelity

In a general sense, fidelity is the quality of being faithful or loyal to someone or something, as a wife would to the husband or a soldier to his superior officer. However, in translation operations, fidelity refers to the extent to which a translator is faithful to an author and his work in terms of rendering the source language text as accurately as possible in the target language. In other words, a faithful pragmatic translator renders a source language text into a target language text without distorting, violating or betraying the message as well as the style of the source language text. Fidelity in translation could also be viewed as the level of thematic and stylistic conformity of the version to or its compliance with the original text.

Another way of explaining the notion of fidelity is to view it from the perspective of the framework of the theory of meaning, such as the one formulated by Seleskovitch and Lederer in their useful book, *Interpréter pour traduire* published in 1986. The central tenet of this theory can be summarized in three words: *comprehension*, *deverbalization* and *re-expression*. In other words, for fidelity to apply in any translation process, the translator is required first and foremost to capture the actual meaning *(sens)* of an expression, a text or an utterance in its proper context and then convey or re-express it in the target language. In other words, a text is composed of chunks of meaning, which must be assimilated and deverbalised by the translator for fidelity to set in. Theoretically therefore, fidelity cannot occur in a situation, where a translator tries to render a text he does not understand.

According to Seleskovitch and Lederer (1986 :20), "*Il ne suffit pas de savoir une langue pour comprendre ce qui s'y dit et être à même de le traduire...la langue à elle seule ne permet pas de dégager le sens et que l'on fait toujours appel à des connaissances extralinguistiques pour comprendre un énoncé linguistique. »* (It is not enough to know a language so as to understand what is said in it and to be able to translate it...the language in itself alone does not allow one to bring out the meaning and therefore one always requires extra-linguistic knowledge to be able to understand a linguistic utterance. (Translation mine.)). Therefore, to have an excellent knowledge of the source and target languages by a translator does not and cannot guarantee fidelity in translation, especially in the translation of religious texts such as the Bible. The translator is bound to equally understand the spiritual contexts and implications of the text he is translating. Mere transcoding (*transcodage*) i.e. literal or word-for word translating will result in great defects of the translation, especially when handling certain fixed expressions such as proverbs or idioms.

For some years now, scholars have continued to debate on the notion of fidelity in translation in many local, national and international conferences worldwide. In 1959, the International Federation of Translators held a conference in Bad Godesberg, Germany, in which the notion of fidelity in translation was hotly debated. During one of the sessions, George Mounin argued that the only hallmark of quality in translation was absolute fidelity to the entire source language text, i.e., the translation must be exactly equal to the original text, in terms of the message and style. According to him, "In our translations, like women, we must be perfect in both faithfulness and beauty" (qtd in Hurtado Albir (1990:14)). Also, Cary supported Mounin's point of view by asserting that the most fundamental hallmark of quality in translation must include fidelity, exactness and equivalence (1963:54). Defining translation, Flamand (1983:50) equally emphasized the importance of rendering the message of the source language text with exactitude.

However, the idea of "perfection" and the attainment of "exactness" in translations expressed by Mounin, Cary and Flamand seem to raise more questions than they have tried

to settle. For instance, is it possible to produce a perfect translation, which is 100% exact to the original text? If a translation is considered as "perfect" or "exact" today, will it continue to remain so in the next century? For instance, why is it necessary to revise the King James Version of the Bible published in 1611? Is it not because of change in English language usage? Where does one place cultural and linguistic divergences and their implications? Assuming a source language text is given to several translators to render, will they produce identical texts, all of which are exact to the source language text?

At the other end of the debate table, however, existed another school of thought, which expressed a contrary view by postulating the theory of untranslatability in translation. They bluntly disagreed with the view that translation is possible in the first place, let alone being faithful or exact. According to *Wikipedia, free encyclopedia*, untranslatability is a property of a text or of any utterance, in one language, for which no equivalent text or utterance can be found in another language when translated. Therefore, any attempt at translating such a word or expression will amount to betrayal. An Italian aphorism, *"Traduttore, traditore!"* (Translator, traitor!), tends to support this view by insinuating that every translation is fatally infidel and, therefore, betrays the intention of the author of the original text. A similar French aphorism, *"Traduire c'est trahir"* (To translate is to betray), also postulates that every translation is a betrayal of the original text.

Hence, two contrary or opposing views emerged, that is, the proponents of exactitude in translation on the one hand, and those who do not believe that translation is possible at all, on the other hand.

However, another group of intellectuals came up with some sort of mediatory ideas designed to reconcile the two opposing views. According to this school of thought, translation is quite possible, but aiming at a hundred percent accuracy and exactitude in translation is rather utopian and unrealistic. For instance, Nida (1969:47) has this to say on the subject of absolute fidelity in translation:

> If we must insist on a translation without any loss of information, therefore, not only translation, but also all communication will be effectively impossible, because no communication whatsoever… may take place without some loss (or gain) of information. The loss (or gain) of information is an integral part of the process of communication.

For Newmark (1998:6), "A satisfactory translation is always possible, but a good translator is never satisfied with it. It can usually be improved. There is no such thing as a perfect, ideal or 'correct' translation."

Despite all the heated arguments and debates over the importance of fidelity in translation, Ajunwa (2014:19) believes that "the phenomenon has stood its ground as the most important characteristic, hallmark and indicator of quality in translation" and that "the professional value of any translator is defined or measured by the level or degree of fidelity attained in his translations." However, whereas absolute translation is impossible, all translations, including Bible translation, are subject to perfection.

2.4 The Notion of Morality

According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2010:960), morality has to do with the "principles concerning right and wrong or good and bad behaviour". In this context, I am referring to a standard or degree of conduct, which people generally accept as good, proper, right or correct. Therefore, it is morally wrong or improper for any pragmatic translator to deliberately, capriciously or cunningly falsify, alter, modify, add to or remove from the message of the source language text, which he is engaged to translate.

Professionally, a pragmatic translator should remain faithful to all the elements of translation, especially, the author and his text in terms of the message and style of the source language text as well as the target language audience also known as the translator's client. Therefore, one can state without fear of contradiction that in translation, fidelity and morality are two closely related notions in the sense that it is morally wrong for a translator to pervert willfully the meaning of text. For instance, in the 16th century "Etienne Dolet (1509-1546), one of the earliest translators, was tried and publicly executed by the authorities for heresy after 'mistranslating' one of Plato's dialogues" (Bassnet-McGuire 1980:54).

Bible translations today provoke worrisome controversies because some of the intellectuals, who rebel against some aspects of the provisions of the holy book, are now getting involved in its translations by virtue of their training. In the same vein, it has been observed that, in recent times, different interest groups have been working overtly or covertly to bring about alterations, modifications or attenuation of some key scriptural principles, points and issues on which the Christian creed anchors. These interest groups include, for example, atheists, women's lib, homosexuals as well as those who believe neither in the fact that Jesus is the Son of God nor in the virginity of His birth. For instance, according to Internet sources,

> "Bible translations referring to Jesus as God's son always have been problematic in Muslim contexts, and **translators have experimented with looser translations** (emphasis mine) in the past 15 years, said Warren Larson, scholar in residence at the Zwemer Center for Muslim Studies. The translation tension also points to the broader challenge of communicating the Gospel with Muslim cultures. The Christian Gospel directly contradicts Muslim teaching by saying that Jesus is also God, and there is no way to avoid that teaching without losing the Gospel message.
> (http://www.christianitytoday.com).

By implication therefore, "looser translations" in the above quotation mean translations that have been watered down or diluted, with the intention of attenuating, falsifying, modifying or even changing the provisions of the scriptures. In an online article entitled "Controversial Bible Revision: About the Virgin Thing", Alexandra Silver (March 04, 2011) has this to say: The 1970 version of Isaiah 7:14 says "the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. The 2011 text refers to "the young woman" instead [of "the virgin"]. Also, it elaborates that the original Hebrew word, *almah*, may, or may not, signify a virgin.
(http://newsfeed.time.com/2011/03/04/controversial-bible-revision-about-that-virgin-thing)

By implication, therefore, the replacement of the word "virgin" with "the young woman" is a ploy carefully crafted and designed by those who do not believe in the scriptural teaching of Mary's virginity to expunge the idea from the Bible, thereby perverting the main scriptural message in the 1970 version of Isaiah 7:14. Therefore, it is not surprising to hear Coogan (qtd by Alexandra Silver (see source above)) state thus, "Each of these translations has its own sort of sponsoring group, and some are more conservative, evangelical than others. The more conservative and evangelical, the more likely they are to have 'virgin' instead of 'young woman.'"

Furthermore, let us imagine a situation where a religious text is given to a professional pragmatic translator, who incidentally is an atheist and/or a homosexual. Supposing he throws morality overboard and decides to let his personal convictions bear on his translation, then, he is most likely going to compromise the source language content or message of the scripture, especially on issues relating to faith in God, marriage, gay

practices, holiness, righteousness, etc. Invariably, this will lead to "fidelity erosion in the pragmatic translation" (Ajunwa 2014:22). Therefore, if the source language audience does not discover the anomaly and goes ahead to believe in and practice the provisions of the translated version, then this would amount to the existence of two different religions under the same canopy. Apart from its spiritual implications and consequences, this type of situation could culminate in religious bigotry, persecutions, fanaticism and ultimately terrorism in the name of religion, which are capable of destabilizing a nation and slowing down its socioeconomic development. I think that it is for this reason that the Vatican (1997) made their views known on Bible translation in a write-up entitled*"The 1997 Norms for Translations of Bible Texts for Use in the Liturgy."*

> i. The Church must always seek to convey accurately in translation the texts she has inherited from the biblical, liturgical and patristic tradition and instruct the faithful in their proper meaning.
>
> ii. The first principle with respect to biblical texts (that is) Biblical translations should be faithful to the original language and to the internal truth of the inspired text..."

As far as the translation of the *Bible* or its portions is concerned, the Vatican demands "maximum possible fidelity" and nothing less, because the belief of the adherents hinges on the provisions of the text. This feat can only be achieved if the translator applies moral integrity in his/her translation operations, his/her personal convictions notwithstanding.

3.0   COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EXCERPTS FROM SOME VERSIONS OF THE *HOLY BIBLE*

The use of comparative methodology in the analysis of excerpts taken from some versions of the *Bible* will further highlight the role of fidelity and morality in Bible translation and revision. According to the British and Foreign Bible Society (1971: vii), the message of the *Holy Bible* "must not be disguised in phrases that are no longer clear, or hidden under words that have changed or lost their meaning. It must stand forth in language that is direct and plain and meaningful to people today." Against this background, I have chosen the following three versions of the *Bible* for comparison, analysis and discussions: *King James Version* (KJV) first published in 1661, *the New King James Version* published in 1982 and the *Bible in Basic English* published in 1965. Below are excerpts taken from the three versions for the purpose of showing some forms of expressions that are now archaic and mean something else in modern English usage.

Excerpt 1:

King James Version	New King James Version	Bible in Basic English
Matthew 9:10 And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. (KJV)	Matthew 9:10 Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. (NKJV)	Matthew 9:10 And it came about, when he was in the house taking food, that a number of tax-farmers and sinners came and took their places with Jesus and his disciples. (BBE)

Comments:
"And it came to pass" is an archaic usage in KJV translated as "Now it happened" and "Now it came about" in NKJV and BBE respectively. Also "sat at meat" in KJV is translated as "sat at the table" and "was…taking food" in NKJV and BBE respectively. Although the word "publican" is still in use, it now conveys a different meaning altogether from what it was in 1611, when KJV was first published. In KJV, the word "publican" denoted "tax collector", while in contemporary English, the word denotes someone who manages a pub, where alcoholic drinks are sold; hence the replacement of the word by "tax collectors" and "tax-farmers" in NKJV and BBE respectively. In my own opinion, I think that "tax collector" is the most appropriate expression in this context.

Excerpt 2:

King James Version	New King James Version	Bible in Basic English
Matthew 3 : 4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.	Matthew 3 : 4 And John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.	Matthew 3 : 4 Now John was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather band about him; and his food was locusts and honey.

Comments:
"Raiment" in KJV is an archaic word, which is transposed into "clothed" in NKJV and BBE. I could not find the word "leathern" as used in KJV in any modern English dictionary. Then the expression "leathern girdle" is translated as "leather belt" and "leather band" in NKJV and BBE respectively. Then the word "meat" in KJV is rendered as "food" in the newer versions of the Bible. I think that "leather belt" is the most appropriate expression in this context.

Excerpt 3:

King James Version	New King James Version	Bible in Basic English
Luke 11:37 And as he spake, a certain Pharisee besought him to dine with him: and he went in, and sat down to meat.(KJV)	Luke 11:37 And as He spoke, a certain Pharisee asked Him to dine with him. So He went in and sat down to eat. (NKJV)	Luke 11:37 Now, while he was talking, a Pharisee made a request that he would come to a meal with him; and he went in and took his seat at the meal. (BBE)

Comments:
The word "spake" is an archaic form of "spoke", which is the past tense of the infinitive "to speak". From the perspective of current English, the expression "to meat" sounds bizarre in the sense that it is used as an infinitive translated into current English as "to eat" in NKJV and transposed into "meal" in BBE.

Excerpt 4:

King James Version	New King James Version	Bible in Basic English

Matthew 15:37	Matthew 15:37	Matthew 15:37
And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full. (KJV)	So they all ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left. (NKJV)	And they all took food, and had enough; and they took up of the broken bits, seven baskets full. (BBE)

Comment:

In KJV, the expression "broken meat" scarcely makes any sense in light of current English language usage. Compare the translations "fragments" and "broken bits" in NKJV and BBE respectively. In my own opinion, "fragments" seems to be the most appropriate word.

Excerpt 5:

King James Version	New King James Version	Basic Bible in English
Luke 22:27 For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.	Luke 22:27 For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.	Luke 22:27 For which is greater, the guest who is seated at a meal or the servant who is waiting on him? is it not the guest? but I am among you as a servant.

Comments:

In current English, the expression "for whether is greater" in KJV is now obsolete compared with "for who is greater" and "for which is greater" in NKJV and BBE respectively. It is now obsolete to use certain verb endings such as –eth, est, th, when writing or making utterances as in words like sitthet, serveth, etc. contained in KJV.

Excerpt 6:

King James Version	New King James Version	Basic Bible in English
Matthew 28:19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. (KJV)	Matthew 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (NKJV)	Matthew 28:19 Go then, and make disciples of all the nations, giving them baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (BBE)

Comment:

In the imperative above, "ye" in KJV is the archaic form of "you". The expression "teach all nations" is modulated into "make disciples of all the nations" in both NKJV and BBE. According to modern dictionary definitions (*Oxford* (2010) and *Longman* (2003)), "ghost" now refers to the spirit of a dead person, while "spirit" refers to the "soul" as different from the body.

There are other forms of expressions, which have become archaic and therefore unintelligible to the modern generation of the Christian faithful. These include such words as sayeth, doeth, sitteth, thou, thee, thine, howbeit, peradventure, holden, aforetime, etc.

4.0   RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the sensitive nature of the Bible as a holy and divine book on which the faith of its adherents anchor, I, therefore, strongly recommend as follows:

i.   Only those scholars who agree with and believed in the tenets and teachings of the *Holy Bible* should undertake its translation or revision.

ii.   The translation or revision of the *Holy Bible* should not be done by an individual alone. It should be a collective responsibility of scholars (as in i. above) drawn from different Christian denominations.

iii. Those who translate or revise the *Holy Bible* should strive to convey the meaning of the scriptures faithfully, accurately and impartially.

iv.   The *Holy Bible* should be revised from time to time to ensure that its message is conveyed to people in a plain and direct language, which they understand very well.

5.0   Suggestion for further research

Interested scholars should carry out further research on Bible translation by comparing the versions in the local languages such as Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Nupe, Tiv, Igala, etc. with the Enlish versions such as KJV, NKJV, RSV or BBE with the intention of determining their degree of faithfulness.

CONCLUSION

This paper has highlighted the indispensible role which fidelity and morality play in the translation of a pragmatic text of a sensitive nature, such as the *Holy Bible*. Because of its divine nature, the Bible is a holy book on which the faith of every Christian hinges. Therefore, the paper touched on the need for the application of morality and professional integrity in handling Bible translation or its revision in order to ensure accuracy.

As one can deduce from the discussions above that no translation is perfect or absolute. All translations are subject to perfection. Besides, it is common knowledge that human language, which envelops human ideas, thoughts, message, information, intentions, etc., is dynamic, meaning that it is always active and changing. By implication, therefore, the message, ideas, information could be lost if the language carrying them happens to become unintelligible or incomprehensible. By comparing excerpts taken from some of the versions of the Bible, the paper also discovered that many words and expressions contained in KJV (old English version) are now obsolete and meaningless to modern generation of readers, hence the need for its revision.

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