

A Historical Survey of Bible Translations in Indigenous Languages of Southern Africa

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ABSTRACT The focus of this paper is on historical survey of Bible translations in indigenous languages of Southern Africa. The translations programme was sponsored by World Bible societies. The role played by missionaries in developing the indigenous languages is significant. The following language and linguistic categories were explored, namely, lexicography, terminology development, translation, interpreting, and editing literature development explored. The significance of indigenous languages appeared to be vital for the dissemination of information to a wider audience. The languages developed into invaluable tools of linguistic hegemony, deculturation, acculturation and reculturation. During the Bible translations exercise, the vital concepts were communication, meaning, writing and relationship between the source-language and target-language.

INTRODUCTION

Missionaries were the first group of people who induced indigenous languages to reading, writing and scientific scrutiny. Missionaries were interested in learning the African languages for the purpose of conveying Christian doctrine and thus converted indigenous people who were the speakers of these languages into Christianity. Missionaries wanted to convey Christianity in a language that was understandable to the converts. In order for the missionaries to achieve their goals, they wrote elementary grammar manuals that introduced people to indigenous languages. The languages they selected and adopted for their missionary work, gained the status of recognition and were developed and used for writing, reading and teaching the Bible as well as other gospel. In the process of their teaching and Christianization, indigenous languages were researched and developed. The Bible became the book on which the orthographies and phonology of the languages were practised.

The missionaries were from various European countries, such as England, Scotland, Ireland France, Germany, Sweden and Norway, and also as far as the United States of America. Various denominations such as, Methodist, Lutherans, Congregationists, Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Presbyterians were represented. These missionaries established mission stations that covered a variety of African indigenous lan-

guages all over Southern Africa. The mission stations had a church building, a priest house, a school and a health facility. Mission stations dealt with issues of the mind, body and soul.

Swanepoel (1979: 47) gave the following assertions about a language:

Each community has its own cultural, physical and other needs. That is why the characteristics of different communities and nations differ. We must remember that the individual expresses his needs by means of his language. Since his needs differ from those of a person of another community, his language also differs too.

Language is a communication tool. The translations and adaptations of the Bible played a major role in the development of languages at various levels. In Southern Africa, Xitsonga is noted in South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Siswati is taught, spoken and read in South Africa and Swaziland, while Southern Sotho is spoken in South Africa and Lesotho. Setswana is spoken, taught and read in Botswana, South Africa, eastern Zimbabwe and southern Zambia. IsiNdebele is spoken in both countries namely, South African and Zimbabwe.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Bruce (1996: 40) contended that a choice of a suitable method for a particular study is determined by the topic and purpose of the study. Badenhorst (2008: 37) stated his view as follows:

Qualitative research is research intended to explore important social phenomena by immersing the investigator in the situation for extended periods. It is intended to produce information on a given setting in its full richness and complexity.

Secondary source refers to something written about a primary source, such as articles and criticisms. The sources of this study are documented materials, such as books, dissertations and articles in journals.

The historical research method is used to survey the translations of the Bible of each selected indigenous language. Historical research questions involve spatial and temporal settings as well as the precise techniques for the study. The approaches used in this study are interpretive, analytic and explorative to each selected indigenous language.

Early Mission Schools

Almost all early mission stations had mission schools. Although missionaries taught elementary reading and writing, along with Christian doctrine, they also help African people with the task of teaching the Gospel and organising services (Kotze 1990). The following institutions were amongst the first mission schools that were established:

In the Cape

In the then Cape Province, a number of institutions were established for formal education. Formal language teaching was emphasized in all institutions for promotion of reading, writing and communication skills. Language appeared to be a functional communication tool in the lives of communities from missionary era to date. The recognition of indigenous languages and the establishment of infrastructures were acknowledged. An early missionary work on language encouraged people to use and learn their own languages. It is the era where the domains of micro linguistics, namely, phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics were scientifically introduced. Looking at the domains from theoretical point of view, they were called theoretical linguistics, but if considered how they were applied, they were known as applied linguistics.

Linguistics is the scientific study of language that is objectively carried out systematically on

the basis of verifiable observations within the framework of theory appropriate to the data. Hence we contend, observe, verify or make generalisations about the language and thereafter test or verify such generalization.

- ♦ Lovedale Institution, was established in 1841
- ♦ St Matthew's in 1855
- ♦ Salem, in 1855
- ♦ Healdtown in 1857
- ♦ Zonnebloem in 1858
- ♦ St Cuthbert's in 1882
- ♦ Mariazell in 1899

In Natal

- ♦ Adams College was established in 1853
- ♦ Inanda Seminary in 1869
- ♦ Mariannhill Mission in 1882
- ♦ St Hilda's in 1907

In Free State

Missionary schools sprang up around the following missionary stations, Morija (in Lesotho), Modderpoort, Moroka Missionary Institution and Stofberggeendinkskool. Initially emphasis was on religious preparation, writing and reading, but later more subjects were added.

In Transvaal

In the then Transvaal, *trans* meaning across and Vaal, the name of the only river in Mpumalanga that flow to the west. The schools that were established are Kilnerton in 1855 near Pretoria, Grace Dieu in 1906 in Polokwane, Lemana in the Letaba Valley near Tzaneen in 1906 and St Peter's in Rosettenville in 1922.

The major aim of the missionaries was to establish schools and gain new converts for their education products. Missionary schools used indigenous languages as media of instruction until the eighth year of schooling. The implication is that the missionaries had to research and develop terminology and orthography to be used in the teaching of indigenous languages.

Missionaries and the Development of Languages

The following indigenous languages were the first to be researched and developed by mis-

sionaries in South Africa. The missionaries established mission stations that were located according to the geographical set-up of indigenous languages.

- ♦ Xitsonga – A Swiss Mission Society established in 1906 at Lemana
- ♦ Sesotho – A Paris Evangelical Missionary Society was established at Morija
- ♦ Sepedi – A Lutheran Church Mission Society was established by the Germans who were promoting the Lutheran doctrine, it was stationed at Botshabelo, South of the Oliphant River. Lepelle is the original name of the river, while in Nguni languages it is called Lubhalule
- ♦ IsiXhosa – A Wesleyan Mission Society was established at Lovedale
- ♦ Setswana – A second Wesleyan Mission Society was established in Mahikeng
- ♦ Tshivenda – A second Lutheran Church Mission Society was established
- ♦ IsiZulu – An American Board Church Mission Society was established in 1853, based in Amanzimtoti (Adams College)

It should be noted that there were no missionary churches for the Siswati and isiNdebele languages; hence they were late in claiming the status enjoyed by other indigenous languages. The Swazi nation enjoyed formal education in the then Eastern Transvaal Province through the efforts of senior traditional leaders of the various clans, namely, Ngomane, Mahlalela, Shongwe and Mkhatjwa. They jointly built the first high school called Inkomazi (a heavy-milky cow). The second high school was Khumbula (to remember), which is an acronym of two traditional communities, namely, Khumalo, Mbuyane and a community pioneer, Masilela. For the Ndebele community two high schools were established by their traditional leaders, namely, Mayisha and Mabusabesala. The traditional leaders were the pioneers of the above-mentioned institutions.

The Bible products went a long way towards standardising indigenous languages, introducing and promoting literacy. What is interesting about this period is that even the elementary form of speech that was done, was relevant for the development of indigenous languages. Mission schools varied in the kind and quality of education they offered. They however, produced people with basic literacy and the elite with higher levels of education.

RESULTS

Translation as a perspective served as fundamental discourse in introducing and developing literary, numeracy and life skills in indigenous languages. It started as a trial-and-error exercise, but was later mastered by the missionaries at the various mission stations. The word, translation, comes from Latin, meaning *translatio*. It is formed by *trans-* and *fero*, meaning “a carrying across.” In Dutch and Afrikaans, it is called *vertaling*. Translation is the communication of the meaning of words, phrases, clauses and concepts from the source-language text to an equivalent target-language. Most European languages appeared to be source-languages, while the indigenous languages were target-languages.

The translation of the Bible encouraged bilingualism and multilingualism in the country. A sound knowledge of grammar and vocabulary was also put into practice. The skills of listing, reading and writing became effective and systematic. The parts of speech such as substantives, qualificatives, descriptives and predcatives were taught. The development of grammar programmes led to the study of functional macro and micro linguistics. Translational literature also became a source of modern literature. It should however be noted that translations served as a point of departure for formal education in South Africa.

In this paper the words, indigenous languages refer to the nine previously marginalized South African languages, namely, IsiZulu, Siswati, IsiXhosa, Sepedi/Northern Sotho, Sesotho, Setswana, isiNdebele, Tshivenda and Xitsonga. The languages developed into invaluable tools for community expression. They were used for socialization, formal education and for production of artefacts. They became tools for deculturation, acculturation and re-acculturation. Each language empowered its speaker to be a worthy member of his or her community. Cross linguistics enrichment was the order of the day. There were linguistic cross-fertilization and spontaneous language development.

Upon settling within a community, the missionaries first learned the local languages through contact with the people and identified informants. Their aims were to communicate effectively with the indigenes, to write in the language and to spread literacy (Maake 1999). The publication of the Bible in indigenous language-

es became an important milestone in the development of these languages. Besides standardizing the orthographies of the languages, contending linguistic variations was given prominence.

Formal language teaching was adopted using various scientific methods. Languages were studied either synchronically or diachronically. Synchronic refers to the study of the state of a language as it is at a particular point in time. Diachronic entails the dynamics of language over a period of time up to the present moment. The classification of words into various categories served as a point of departure for teaching and learning of indigenous languages.

DISCUSSION

IsiXhosa Bible

IsiXhosa language became the second African language to have a completely translated Bible. A group of missionaries who included Ayliff, Shrewsbury, Dugmore, Dohne Barnabas shaw and William Boyce played a significant role in the translation of isiXhosa Bible.

A highly respected linguist who has made prominent contributions to isiXhosa grammatical study is J.W Appleyard. He completed his translation of the whole Bible into isiXhosa. Appleyard was fluent in four European languages, namely, Greek, Hebrew, Dutch and Latin. A completed isiXhosa Bible was published by the British Society.

The Condemnation of Appleyard's Translations

After 1864, complaints in translation arose. The translation that was done by Appleyard was condemned of various denominations and others. There were well-known names among those who attacked, such as Revs J Bennie, J.L Dohne, A Kropf, J.A Chalmers and Tiyo Soga. Appleyard wrote a document to apologize entitled: "An Apology for the African Bible." Most critics' arguments were based on translations from English.

Straining IsiXhosa Idiom

It was said that Appleyard had improperly used an isiXhosa idiom. They said he adhered too closely to Hebrew and Greek. Appleyard fought against, "the Theological interpretation." He feels a translator should adhere to all the

stipulated rules of the source-language to the latter. A committee was formed, which included Appleyard, to rework the basic document. Appleyard and Soga passed on before the committee could function properly. The committee produced a "Revised Version."

Tshivenda Bible

The Berlin Mission, under the leadership of P.E Schweltnus worked hard to translate and publish Tshivenda Bible in 1936. He remained a noted figure for his tremendous efforts in Bible translation and compiling orthography and spelling rules of Tshivenda language. The University of South Africa conferred a doctorate degree in recognition of his service in Bible translations.

Northern Sotho Bible

The first complete Bible was translated and published in 1904. Prominent figures in that project were C Knothe, H Kuschke and G Trumpelman. Schweltnus revised the whole Bible in Northern Sotho. However, it was published after his death.

IsiZulu Bible

Newton Adams, became a leader of the American Board Mission in Natal who spent much of his time in translating isiZulu Bible. He published them in 1846 and 1847. He published extracts from Genesis and Gospels. George Champion translated the Mathews chapter. That translation was revised by Newton Adams. J.C Bryant J.L Dohne and C.W Posselt, translated the Psalms.

In 1865 the whole New Testament was printed at Esidumbini. The American Board Zulu Missionaries contributed towards this project. The complete or entire Bible in IsiZulu was first published in 1883 by the American Bible Society.

Callaway's Translation

Callaway and Colenso worked together, to translate the Bible. Callaway later became Bishop of St Johns. Colenso's translation did not impress Callaway. He was not impressed by Colenso's translations. He continued with his own extensive translation work. His "Prayer Book"

was printed in 1866, the Psalms in 1871 at Springvale Press. The Prophets was translated in 1872, Genesis to Joshua was translated from 1871 – 1875 at St Johns Mission Press, Pondoland. Callaway received financial assistance for translations in isiZulu. He had an isiZulu-speaking committee to assist him, although his translations were extremely good.

Colenso and his Translation

He translated a New Testament entitled, “Izindab’ ezinhle” published by Dent and Co.

Disagreements and the Way Forward

The disagreement amongst missionaries arose. Different versions of parts of the Bible were published from time to time. As a result, much duplication took place. Dohne produced Gospel document and was published in Pietermaritzburg.

Bishop Colenso, who had much influence diligently helped to produce two versions. His translation was exceptional from the translation work of American Board Missionaries. Most of the translations were criticized and the Bishop was accused of interpreting according to his own beliefs.

IsiZulu Orthography and Spelling Rules

The first complete translation of the complete Bible was written without the aspirated sounds, for examples:

- ♦ *Pansi* instead of *phansi*
- ♦ *Kakulu* instead of *kakhulu*
- ♦ *Kutatu* instead of *kuthathu*

The [p'] sound was not differentiated from the [ph], the [k'] from [kh] and the [t'] from [th]. The ejected sounds and the aspirated sounds were written in the same way. The devoiced sound bh [b] was similar to any bilabial implosive sound [b]. Therefore, the changes in as far as the orthography is concerned remained remarkable. Changes worth mentioning were those of 1931 and 1956. The complete isiZulu Bible of today is written in an official orthography and spelling rules and is affectionately known as “*Ibhayibheli Elingwele*”, printed by Hazell Watson and Viney Ltd, England (Doke and Cole 1961).

Southern Sotho Bible

There are many people who contributed towards Southern Sotho Bible. The *Societe des Mission Evangeliques* of Paris employed E Casalis and T Arbousset at Thaba – Bosiu in 1833.

A little catechism was published in the Cape as early as 1837. Casalis and Rolland completed a New Testament.

A complete Southern Sotho Bible was first published and made available in a single volume in 1881. The completion of Southern Sotho Bible served as a source of language development, research, translations, editing and interpretations.

Xitsonga Bible

In 1875 the French – Swiss Mission established the Valdezia Mission in the Northern Transvaal. The missionaries Paul Berthoud, Henri Berthoud and E Creux immediately started learning the Xitsonga language. They focused on the translation of the Bible into Xitsonga.

In 1883, Paul Berthoud published a Xitsonga book which included the Genesis chapter, the Ten Commandments, excerpts from the Gospels and a number of Hymns. He was assisted by E Creux. He received assistance from his brother, Henri and N Jacques. In 1894 a New Testament was published in Xitsonga. This New Testament was published in Switzerland.

E Thomas translated the Old Testament. He started after the publication of the New Testament. A revised edition of the New Testament, which was prepared by Abel de Meuron, appeared in 1917. A revised edition of the whole Bible appeared in 1929. This edition was prepared by R Cuenod and his wife. They were ably assisted by a Xitsonga speaker called Joseph Mawele.

Setswana Bible

A gardener’s apprentice called Robert Moffat (1795 – 1883) from Scotland accepted a missionary call. He worked for the London Missionary Society in 1816. He arrived in South Africa early in 1817. He worked for a while in Namaqualand and finally settled at Kuruman in 1821. Moffat had no method and systematic approach for using Setswana during his early endeavour for translation. He used neither grammar nor vocabulary.

Moffat rode to Cape Town with the manuscript in his pocket in search of a press. Eventually, he was forced to seek help from the Governor and the Government Secretary who positively responded to Moffat's request to use the official printing office.

Moffat had to learn printing. His name appeared among the distinguished scholars. He used the Tlhaping dialect and later another Setswana dialect. Subsequently missionaries revised Moffat's edition of the Tlhaping dialect.

Siswati and Southern Ndebele Bibles

The two indigenous languages that did not feature in missionary activities are Siswati and Southern Ndebele. The two official languages were taken as mutually intelligible Nguni languages, which slightly differ with isiZulu and isiXhosa. However, their orthography and spelling rules are completely different and unique. The survival of the two languages is accredited to the then Homeland Governments and the contribution of traditional leaders. The complete Bibles for Siswati and Southern Ndebele were published in 1995 and 2013 respectively. Kotze (1990) provided translation information on seven indigenous languages only, the most recent information on IsiNdebele and Siswati has recently been added. According to Swanepoel (1979) the order of dates of publication of the whole Bible is as follows:

Setswana (Tlhaping dialect)	1857
IsiXhosa	1859
Southern Sotho	1881
IsiZulu	1883
Northern Sotho	1904
Xitsonga	1906
Tshivenda	1936
Siswati	1995
Southern Ndebele	2013

CONCLUSION

Initially, the work of translating the Bible was done by European missionaries. However, presently it has changed, because each translating commission uses native speakers of the indigenous languages. The close co-operation between the Department of Education and the translating commissions of the Bible Society is vital. This is because the translators need to be careful that the language of the Bible does not clash

with the general development of the indigenous languages. The standardization of the language should be taken into consideration.

Indigenous languages played a vital role in Bible translations. Setswana became the first indigenous language to have a complete Bible in the Southern Africa. This is despite the fact that the missionaries were first exposed to isiXhosa. However, the isiXhosa version became the second Bible translation project.

The translation of the Bible into all indigenous languages has brought a new philosophy of life to the people. It makes people to read the Bible for themselves. It has also promoted formal education and accelerated the degree of literacy, with an aim of reading and understanding the Bible. Religious affiliation also became more intense. In Southern Africa, the Christian outlook on life formed the religious basis of organised educational practice. The communal life of the indigenous people was disrupted and the new life style emerged. The various translations of the Bible in indigenous languages also set the standard of the languages that are spoken and read.

It is apparent to highlight that South Africa is now a multicultural and multilingual country. There are eleven languages that have been granted official status according to section 6 of the country's Constitution. Therefore, languages development is a key role in every sector for communication.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The idea of translating the Bible should be taken seriously by different bodies and experts to produce quality work. African scholars need to be equipped with research capabilities for quality translations. The merits and demerits of the translation exercise also need to be analysed. Finally, the orthography and spelling rules must be updated to suit the contemporary period.

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