

Factors That Necessitate Interpretation of Sermons in Churches in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya

Jane Jepkoech Sing'oei Biamah

Department of Kiswahili and Other African Languages,
Moi University, P.O. Box 3900, Eldoret, Kenya.

Abstract

The study investigated the factors that make the use of interpreters during preaching in churches necessary in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The theory of functional equivalent interpretation, propounded by Eugene Nida in the year 1970, was used in the study. The theory analyses the challenges encountered in the process of interpretation. It also advocates for an interpretation that conveys the meaning of discourse rather than its structure. In the study, data was collected from 10 randomly sampled churches. Six congregants, one preacher and one interpreter were randomly selected from each of the sampled churches to respond to the research questionnaires and interviews. The other methods used to collect data were participant observation and tape recording. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study concluded that interpretation in the churches is motivated by the church policies, preachers' preferences for English, audience's incompetence in the source languages, among other factors. To achieve effective communication of sermon messages, it is recommended that churches select and use interpreters who are highly capable of using a variety of methods of interpretation. Preachers and interpreters may benefit from the study in understanding the need for interpretation of the messages they intend to pass across to their congregations. The work is also important to the world of scholarship as it informs the need for a curriculum base for courses on interpretation for specific purposes.

Keywords: factors, necessitate sermon interpretation, churches, Uasin Gishu County, Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

Interpretation is a crucial element of communication which takes place amongst people and their varied languages. This process is an ideal bridge among a bilingual people. Interpretation therefore can be defined as a skill that is used to communicate words and the meanings of those words, from the source language. Interpreters therefore have a major task of passing the meaning, purpose and feelings of the speaker of the source language. The main objective here is to enable the listener of the target language to get the speaker's message in a manner that is as close as it would have been if it were to be delivered in the source language. Many a time people perceive that word for word interpretation is more suited in preserving the message of the original speaker. It has, however, emerged that whenever this method is used the message is always distorted, towards the end of the interpretation (Wikipedia, 2007). This method considers only the arrangements or appearance of the words as they appear in the source language, as opposed to the meaning of the whole sentence, this paper has discussed more interpretation method that emerged during this research and how best suited they are in preserving the message during preaching.

For interpretation to succeed, it is mandatory that the interpreter understands the topic that is being discussed, for him to be able to change that information from the source language to the target language. The interpreter has to consider the culture

of the people of both languages; he has to be physically present at the place where the interpretation is taking place. This is because the interpreter has to maintain that close contact, look at the speaker of the source language and listen keenly, in order to pass the same message to the listener. After giving the definition and explanation of what interpretation is, it is appropriate to explore the historical background of the same, and its relation to the Christian religion more so because this paper is based on Christian religion.

The Origin of Interpretation

The origin of translation has been researched adequately. This paper perceives that the activities of interpretation started earlier than translation, only that this has not been documented. This is an indication that historians have dwelt more on translation, although interpretation was in use even before the science of writing was discovered. It emerges that interpretation and translation are procedures that are used to accomplish communication between speakers of different languages. There are some explanations that try to give the answer as to when and why one language. It is almost evident that the origins for the use of interpretation started out of the reason and fact that there were many languages, and many speakers of the many languages, who did not understand one another (Iser, 2000; Jean, 1995; Gaiba, 1998; Wills, 1999). However, the specific time of the origin of

many languages is a paradox that needs historians to untangle.

Olgeirda and Achenbach (2004) aver that interpretation was in place and use 3000 years before Christ. They give an example during that time in history when the Egyptians used the word "hieroglyphic," which by then meant interpretation. The presence of this word at that time of history can only mean that interpretation was in use 3,000 years before the birth of Christ. The first Bible was neither written in English nor Kiswahili. The Old Testament of the Bible was written in Hebrew language, while the New Testament Bible was written in Greek. This means that interpreters were being used in order to communicate the preacher's message from the Hebrew and the Greek language to other languages like English. The development of interpretation went hand in hand with that of translation. By the year 1,480, many protestant churches continued to put more pressure on the development of Bible translation into other languages. This enabled interpretation to spread over to many areas.

By the 19th century, missionaries from European countries had visited East Africa in order to spread Christian religion. Their first endeavour was to learn and to use Kiswahili language so that they could communicate well with the locals. Ludwig Krapf was the first missionary who started missionary work on August 1846. He was able to learn the Kiswahili language because the Africans who cooperated well with him. Kane (1980) and Mbaabu (1991) claim that these Africans assisted Kraft in his interpretation and translation work. Krapf's achievements included translating the Bible from English language to Kiswahili languages; writing the first Kiswahili dictionary and writing a book on Kiswahili grammar. His efforts were very important to the field of interpretation and in connection with the English and the Kiswahili languages.

In the year 1864, Bishop Edward Steer arrived in Zanzibar. He was accompanied by his friend Tozer. Steer realized that the Kiswahili language, together with other languages spoken by the locals, were important assets in the spread of the Christian religion. Steer and his friend were assisted by African interpreters in the spread of the good news. Upon the arrival of these missionaries, the interpretation that involved English and Kiswahili languages took root. Steer was able to write several famous Kiswahili books which were later on translated into English. Examples of his books are *Swahili Tales* which was published in London in 1869 and 1889; also *A Handbook of the Swahili language as spoken at Zanzibar*, which was published in London in the year 1870 (Ibrahim, 2006). These books contributed to a great extend in building the competence of interpreters in Kiswahili and English at that time.

Missionaries also contributed to the spread of Kiswahili in their effort to spread the gospel of the Bible, especially in other areas where other languages were being used. Later on in the colonial era, the leaders of that era made an effort to standardize Kiswahili. The dialect spoken in Zanzibar was selected for standardization, but the use of this dialect incorporated a wide variety of vocabulary from other dialects, which also included the use of other books and the dictionary written earlier by Krapf (Mbaabu, 1991). It is clear that the origin of interpretation, which spread greatly during the missionary era, made a great contributed towards the growth of Kiswahili as a language. Mbaabu (1985) has contributed that any language that has grown through writings and publications, becomes easier for interpretation to be conducted in it, as opposed to a language that was translated into Kiswahili by the early missionaries assisted the interpreters who preached in Kiswahili because it was easy for them to make references.

The Bible Society of Kenya and that of Tanzania encountered many challenges in their effort to translate the Bible. One of the challenges that were encountered was based on how to translate a total of 3,500 names of people and places. They therefore had to paraphrase or create new names in order to beat this challenge. Other names like 'Jehovah' and 'Jesus' had to be adapted. The presence of a vocabulary that is used in the religious register in the Bible is a great boost to the interpreters who have to interpret many words from the source language to the target language and especially in the context of difficult words.

These explanations show clearly that there is no proof or clear date in what has been documented to show the origin of interpretation. Much has been written about translation as opposed to interpretation. It is worth noting that interpretation is also done in many other contexts all over the world. Before any interpreter starts their work, they undergo training in relation to their field of work. Upon employment, this exposure enables the interpreters to perform their work better, regardless of whatever the field. This is more evident especially in overseas.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Communication becomes successful when the audience and the speaker understand each others' language. If this understanding is lacking, the need of an interpreter arises. The interpreter should be in a position to understand the speaker's and the audience's languages for the communication process to be complete. Interpretation is done in various discourses which include religious fields, the law, in administrative issues, among others for the purpose of completing communication process. In the religious context, the interpreter's responsibility is to

make sure that the preacher's message reaches the faithful as intended.

The method and use of interpretation that is chosen by the interpreter has a direct effect on the way he transmits the speaker's message from the source language, to the audience. Thus, the method and style of interpretation that the interpreter chooses will determine the success or failure of the intended communication and message (Nida & Tabor, 1969; Gumperz, 1971). It has been perceived that the use of different styles of interpretation, such as interpretation in turns, interpretation of word for word, does affect communication. This perception was one of the reasons that compelled the author to carry out the research in Uasin Gishu County in an effort to find out the methods of interpretation that are used by preachers and interpreters in order to complete the communication process.

Earlier researchers like Okeiga (1998) and Ali (1981) have dealt with interpretation in the context of the law courts and news bulletins, but much has not been done as concerns interpretation in the religious field. This background gives this paper the basis to critique examine the necessity of interpreters when passing the sermon messages from source language to the target language in the context of the church.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted in only one county in Kenya. As such, the findings on the necessity of interpreters in achieving communication through interpretation in churches as discussed in this paper may not speak of the cases in other areas. Nevertheless, the study provides a framework for undertaking similar studies in other areas as well as contributing useful references for general studies in the field of interpretation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was conducted in Uasin Gishu County and focused on the Christian religion only. Sampling was done randomly. Initially, the author intended to select five churches in which preaching was done by way of interpretation from English to Kiswahili, and other five whereby preaching was done through interpretation from Kiswahili language to English. However, when she went into the field, she realized that churches that conducted preaching through interpretation based this on interpretation of English towards Kiswahili, only. Therefore, in all the churches where the author conducted the research, interpretation was done from English to Kiswahili. In some of the sermons not researched on, preaching was conducted using purely one language, either English or Kiswahili. Therefore, there was no need for interpretation. In other churches, more than two services were conducted, but in each service a specific language was used to conduct the preaching.

Therefore, the sample of ten churches represented the larger number of churches that used interpretation as a means to transmit the sermon. From this, research was conducted in the following churches: Deliverance, City Harvest, International Vision Centre, Pentecostal Assemblies of God, and Christian Outreach church, Happy Church, Lost Glory Restoration Church, Winners Chapel, Eldoret Valley Baptist, and Gracious Mission. In each church, the author chose one preacher, one interpreters and six faithful as respondents. The age of the respondents did not matter. What mattered was that the faithful knew how to read and write either in English language or Kiswahili language. In total, there were 80 respondents; 10 preachers, 10 interpreters and 60 faithful. All the faithful could read and write in English and Kiswahili languages.

This research involved the use of questionnaires, tape recorder, question and answer method for data collection. The author also directly took part in the research by attending in person some of the sermons. She listened in on the preaching that she researched on. The main aim of taking part in the sermons was to collect data that could not be captured through tape recording and the filling of the questionnaires. The author therefore listened, watched and reflected on all the occurrences and took short notes that could lead to further oral questions, all meant to come up with more data that could help meet the research objectives.

The data gathered was analyzed using a descriptive method, whereby the relation between the results and the objectives was shown. The description showed the situations by giving real examples. The recorded information and data was analyzed by first extracting examples that could justify the null hypothesis of the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Causes of Interpretation in the Churches

The preaching in which the research was conducted was in the English language which was then interpreted into Kiswahili. The author's expectation was that most people who live in towns are competent in Kiswahili language, especially after considering that Kiswahili is a national language. It was however realized that interpretation was still needed in some of the churches since there were a number of people who did not understand the English language. The author therefore set out to find out the situations that necessitated interpretation in these churches.

About 70 percent of the 60 faithful claimed that a section of the faithful always benefited if the message was passed in a language they understood, they would get the message in the preaching straight away from the preacher. Likewise, the section that

understood Kiswahili language well would get the preacher’s message from the interpreter. The faithful therefore supported the idea of using two languages during preaching so that the congregants can get the full benefit from such preaching. These results support the section of the functional comparative theory, that the audience gets the message from the preacher as from the interpreter. Half of the 10 interpreters supported the idea of interpretation. They claimed that it is through interpretation that they exercised their talents as interpreters and as evangelists and preachers. This is because when they repeatedly went through the same procedure of interpretation, they got used to doing the work. They therefore got the experience and courage to be preachers at later days.

Out of the preachers interviewed, 70% had more competence in English than in Kiswahili. They therefore preached in the English language, and then the interpreters would transmit their message to the target faithful through interpretation. Thirty percent of the ten preachers who were interviewed said that interpreters were used for the purpose of reaching the faithful who did not understand the English language. An example of this target group was the elderly people who never had the chance of going to formal schools where they could learn the English language. The preachers also claimed that they did not want to assume that every visitor who attended their sermon could understand the English language. The preachers also understood that most of the faithful had competence in English language, but could not just throw away the skilled interpreters as yet. This is because any time there was the possibility of having a visitor especially the elderly who understood the Kiswahili language only.

Twenty percent of the ten preachers who were interviewed gave different reasons: that they used the English language during preaching as an effort to make their preaching skills better, since they had hopes of preaching in foreign countries. They reiterated that they could preach in Kiswahili language quite efficiently, and that they were aware that their faithful could understand the Kiswahili well. This reason seemed to have more weight, because efficiency in a language is always made better through its usage. Therefore, this category of preachers continued to gain from the interpreters work because they got a chance to better their skills in the spoken English language.

Forty percent of the 10 preachers interviewed talked of church policies that considered the use of interpretation during preaching. They claimed that through interpretation all the faithful were exposed to the chance of taking part in the message delivery process. This meant that it was compulsory for interpretation to take place even though

communication would be accomplished without interpretation.

These results show that the preferences and objectives of the preacher and the interpreter, and the church policy form part of the situations that prompt the need for interpretation in the churches. However, some of the churches were not affected by these factors and situations. These churches included those that held separate sermons to be presented either purely in English or Kiswahili, and they did not constitute any part of the research.

Situations about Preaching through Interpretation

The research showed that there are clear situations that are evident during interpretational preaching in the churches. The interpretation was done using the Kiswahili language while the original preaching was conducted using the English language. In this context of preaching through interpretation, it was clear that communication could be completed through the way it would be represented in the interpretation process. It can also fail to be complete, depending on how the interpretation has been conducted. Most of the interpreters in the sermons attended during this research made successful communication during their interpretation. However, in the section that follows, we have shown the many ways on how interpretation can be the very hindrance to the communication that it is meant to accomplish.

Many of the respondents stated that interpretation makes successful communication, especially among people who do not understand the preacher’s language. Table 1 shows that 10% of the 60 faithful who were respondents, said that interpreters pass the messages without distorting it. This shows that 90% of the faithful had the perception that there are communicational hindrances that are always evident during interpretation.

Likewise, 80% of the 10 preachers interviewed had the opinion that quite often the interpreters do not pass the message as it was presented during preaching. Only 40% of the 10 interpreters interviewed accepted that they presented an unclear message during interpretation. Other interpreters claimed that they always passed the correct message during their interpretation. When these two results were compared, it was clear that the communication can be hindered during interpretation.

Table 1: Opinion about Situations of Preaching Interpretation

Respondents	Those who agreed that communication is hindered by interpretation	Those who said communication is not hindered by interpretation
Faithful (60)	90%	10%
Preachers (10)	80%	20%
Interpreters (10)	40%	60%

This table shows that interpretation can contribute towards the success or failure of communication. The section that follows analyses the research results on hindrances and causes of failed communication during interpretational preaching in the churches.

Elements that Identify Interpreters

The main aim of interpretation is to make successful the process of communication. Participatory research and the use of questionnaires showed that interpreters differ depending on their ability either to succeed or fail in their interpretation. The elements that were considered to identify the interpreters included their experience in the job in terms of years; their experience in the use of the source language and the target language; their knowledge in the cultures of the faithful, and their level of education. The churches where the research was conducted included Deliverance Church: City Harvest; International Vision Centre; Pentecostal Assemblies of God; Christian Outreach Church; Happy Church; Lost Glory Restoration Centre; Winners Chapel; Eldoret Valley Baptist, and Gracious Mission. The results from these churches have been coded A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I and J respectively.

The interpreter in church B was described by 90% of the faithful in that church as being able to convey the preacher's message to the faithful. This interpreter had an experience of fifteen years in the job. He also had knowledge in theology and the Bible and had been to school up to Form Four level. It therefore shows that he had competence in source language and the target language. He understood well the faithful cultures and was always very keen whenever the preacher was speaking. Seventy percent of the faithful in church A, 60% each in churches H and C, 50% in church D, 40% each in churches G and J, 30% each in churches I and F and 20% in church E all commended their interpreter for not distorting the message. The interpreters in the churches A, H, C, D, G, J, I, F and E had their experience of 9 years, 6 years, 5 years, 3 years, 4 years, 3 years two months, 2 years and 4 years respectively.

In the event that the faithful were able to realize their interpreter's ability is an indication that the faithful understood both English and Kiswahili languages. It was also noted that 40% of the faithful in church J and 20% of faithful in church B were not sure whether their interpreters maintained the message or it was distorted. It was the author's assessment that the group of faithful who could not associate the failure of their interpreters to failure of their "interpreters" message were not competent in the English language. They therefore could not tell whether the interpreters gave them the right message or not

The following table shows the relationship between the interpreter's ability to maintain message and his experience based on the years that he has served as an interpreter. The interpreters' ability to maintain or distort message was arrived at by questioning 6 faithful of each church where research was done. The interpreters who were explained by a majority of the faithful as not able to maintain the message were more than those mentioned by a fewer number of the faithful as being able to maintain the message. However, it was evident in this research that the experience in terms of years that an interpreter had done his job was not a guarantee for him to be able to maintain the message during interpretation.

The interpreter in church D had an experience of 3 years and yet he was rated at 50% as being able to maintain message. On the other hand, the interpreter in church E had an experience of 4 years and was rated at 20%. Also interpreters in church I would have been expected to have the lowest ability because he had the least period of experience only two months. Contrary to this expectation, he was ahead of the interpreter in church E who had a 4 years experience. These results therefore prove that interpreter's experience in terms of years is not directly related to how such an interpreter can maintain the preacher's message during preaching through interpretation. Churches B, A, H and C have shown a different situation. The interpreters in these churches have shown a high ability to maintain preachers' messages out of their experience. The one who had a higher experience in terms of years had higher percentage in maintaining the message as compared to the one who had experience of fewer years.

The element of competence in the use of source language and target language was also brought up in this research. The interpreter who could speak well in both the English and the Kiswahili languages succeeded in maintaining the preachers message, but not all interpreters had been to school up to form four. The interpreter with the lowest level of education had been up to form two while the highest had gone up to form four. Their levels of education could also to some extent determine their ability to maintain the preachers' messages during interpretation. Where an interpreter missed to interpret certain English word into Kiswahili, it was assumed that he probably simply forgot the ideal synonym in the target language. And because time could not allow them to remember, they would always repeat those words as they were in the source language without interpreting on the said words. The element of the interpreter's experience in terms of the number of years on the job and their experiences and competence in both source and target languages came out prominently as the ones to determine the level at which the interpreter was able to maintain the

preacher's message during preaching. But probably other factors contributed towards this; therefore, these elements cannot be taken as 100% correct.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The need for interpretation is brought about by facts that include the fact that sometimes the preacher may not understand the language of the faithful; the need for the interpreters to perfect their art; other preachers want to perfect their competence in the English language so they use the language frequently thus necessitating the need of the interpreter. It is also a policy in some of the churches for interpretation to be done. All these factors put together make the interpreters work necessary. The discussion in this paper shows clearly that the main purpose of the interpreters is not just to represent the preacher or the faithful. His main purpose is to present the message in a way that is going to make the communication process complete. So the interpreter is like a bridge of communication between the two sides. It is therefore his obligation to make sure that the choice of method and grammar used (words and sentences) is most ideal to pass the message. The interpreter can therefore use more than one method in as long as his intentions have been performed.

In accordance with situations of interpretation that have been evidenced in the research, we conclude that the aim of an interpreter in his communication is to produce results that are resolvable with what the preacher says. For communication to be complete, certain conditions have to be perfect. These are: competence in language and cultures of the faithful; proper communication gadget and systems calmness on the part of the faithful, and creativity on the part of the interpreter.

Apart from these, it is also clear that some of the situations that contribute to incomplete communication during interpretation can be avoided. Some hindrances caused by natural conditions of the interpreter or preacher cannot be avoided, for example fast speakers. But others like level of competence on the part of the interpreter on initial and target language, as well as the faithful, can be avoided. This can be done using an interpreter who has a high competence and insisting on calmness during service. Some of these situations affect interpretation and preaching at the same time. In this paper, therefore, the use of more than one method of interpretation is recommended. This will assist in reducing and removing some of the hindrances of communication. This article did not intend to look into the use of body language during interpretation. However, its importance has emerged as an effort to better communication. Some of the body language signs used by the preachers were not repeated by the interpreter. Sometimes, the interpreter would use the same sign as used by the preacher in source language

and the same as used by interpreter in target language. Such a research would be important in bringing out the place and importance of body and sign language during communication.

REFERENCES

- Ali, C. (1981). Problems of translating from English into Kiswahili. Unpublished MA Thesis, Nairobi: University of Nairobi, Kenya.
- Gaiba, F. (1998). Origin of Simultaneous Interpretation. The Nuremberg Trial. Ottawa: Ottawa University Press.
- Gumperz, C. (1971). Language in Social Groups. Stanford: Stanford University.
- Ibrahim, M. (2006). Literature Policy of Riling System and its Impacts on language. Retrieved from <http://www.sis.gov/Publications//1652/1653/1654.PDF>
- Iser, W. (2000). The Range of Interpretation. New York: Colombia University.
- Jean, D. (1995). Translator Through History. Philadelphia: John Benjamin's Publishers.
- Kane, J. (1980). Life and Work on the Mission Field. U.S.A: Baker Book House.
- Mbaabu, I. (1985a). Kiswahili Lugha ya Taifa. Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau.
- _____(1985b). New Horizon in Kiswahili. Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau.
- _____(1991). Historia ya Usanifishai wa Kiswahili. Nairobi: Longman Kenya Ltd.
- Nida, E. A. & Tabor, (1969). The Theory and Practice of Translation. Leiden: Brill.
- Olgierda, F., & Achenbach, H. (2004). Education Interpreting. Interpreting for the Community. Retrieved from <http://www.irg.wfc.edu/Community->
- Okeiga, N. I. O. (1998). Sajili ya Kisheria Katika Mahakama, Kenya: Vizuizi, Athari na Visaidizi Kwa Matumizi Zaidi ya Kiswahili. Unpublished M.Phil Thesis, Eldoret: Moi University.
- Wikipedia, (2007). Interpreting. Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interpreting>. (29/10/2007).
- Wills, W. (1999). Translating and Interpreting in the 20th Century. Amsterdam: John Benjamin's Publishing.