

PULPIT INTERPRETING IN IGBO LAND

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Abstract

Interpreting, as a subfield of translation, is a bi-directional communicative activity involving the source-language speaker and the interpreter for the benefit of a target audience. This underscores the interpreter's role as a mediator between a speaker and the intended audience, whether in a conference, meeting, judicial proceeding, business transaction, or sermon. As a professional requirement, the interpreter must possess bilingual competence in both the Source Language (SL) and the Target Language (TL). For instance, an interpreter may work from English into Igbo. In addition, the interpreter must be familiar with the terminology and doctrinal expressions relevant to the subject matter of the discourse. Before the First World War, interpreting was largely regarded as a product of contact bilingualism. However, since World War II, extensive research has been conducted by psychologists, linguists, professional interpreters, interpreting trainers, and students of interpreting studies. This study examines some of these research findings and scholarly contributions with particular relevance to pulpit interpreting in Igboland, both in theory and practice. The study adopts the Interpretive Theory developed by Danica Seleskovich and Marian Lederer as its theoretical framework and Daniel Gile's Effort Model as its methodological framework. It aims to acquaint pulpit interpreters in Igboland with the skills and competencies necessary for enhanced performance and recommends the introduction and expansion of interpreting studies in Nigerian universities and theological institutions. Daniel Gile's Effort Model as methodology. The paper aims to acquaint pulpit interpreters in Igbo Land with necessary skills and competencies for enhanced performance and recommends interpreting studies in Nigerian universities and theological institutions.

KEY WORDS: Interpreting, Igbo Land, Pulpit interpreting, interpreting models, and interpreting typologies.

Introduction

Pulpit or religious interpreting is that aspect of community interpreting activity that focuses on the bi-directional processing of a religious oral discourse and communicating the same through the medium of an interpreter to the target audience of the oral text, usually called the congregation. The congregation could be a church service congregation, a gospel crusade audience, a sunday school or bible-study class, etc.

Pulpit interpreting responds to the simultaneous mode of interpreting where the interpreter stands side-by-side with the source speaker, uses an overhead phone in the interpreter's stand, or sits in the midst of the target audience (usually foreigners) and whispers the interpreting activity to the target audience. Pulpit interpreting is not just a religious or a religio-social activity. It is a theological activity involving the exegesis and the hermeneutics of the canonical text, *The Bible*, which is the first-order text of Christian theology, whether written or oral. The duty of the pulpit interpreter is not to interpret the biblical text but to carry across the utterance of the source speaker, usually called a sermon (homily) or teachings, into the language of the target audience. This accounts for why the pulpit interpreter must exercise both competence and performance in biblical textuality in terms of terminology and expressiveness, apart from the various linguistic forms as used in *The Bible* both in the language he/she is working from and the one he/she is working into.

The pulpit text, which is the Christian theological text in its oral form, is thematically polyvalent and multidisciplinary, ranging from biblical themes or subject-matters such as love, obedience, righteousness, divinity, sacrifice, worship, etc., to biblical characters such as Enoch, Isaiah, Adam, Abel, Paul, etc., and biblical locations such as Israel, Egypt, Gethsemane, Calvary, Eden, etc. The pulpit interpreter should be able also to demonstrate skill in handling indigenous Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic colorations in the Bible such as: *ephphatha*, *talitha cumi*, *raca*, *cubit*, and other measuring units in the Bible. Theological terms are inclusive: trinity, homily, sacrament, catechism, canonical, etc.

Because the pulpit discourse is multidisciplinary, the source speaker may choose to use military orders to illustrate the biblical doctrine of obedience. For example: the pulpit interpreter should be able to re-express terms like

major, sergeant, drill, parade, court-martial with requisite automatism. The paper considers both the modes and the typologies of interpreting studies (IS) and makes recommendations for effective pulpit interpreter training in Igbo Land in particular universities, theological, and secular institutions in Igbo Land and in Nigeria as a whole seeing that pulpit interpreting is a virile tool for effective gospel communication.

Theoretical Framework

Early researchers into interpreting as a branch of translation studies were psychologists, notably cognitive psychologists, psycholinguists, and neuro-psychologists, who were only interested in the mental inter-relationships and co-ordinations of the interpreter. According to Gile (41-64):

A third point was that psychologists were interested in the pressure on attentional resources during simultaneous interpreting and were aware of the need to allocate capacity to different tasks and to use 'strategies' to cope with the load when it became heavy.

This simply refers to the fact that psychologists and neuro-scientists made research efforts to capture, define, and relate simultaneous interpreting within the frame of bilingual efforts and the management of the inherent complex mental exercises and the challenge of automatic code-switching as intellectual sporting activities, all of which could be seen as the interpreting load of the interpreter.

However, we have chosen the Interpretive Theory (IT) as the theoretical framework for this study. According to Salama-Carr (112-114), the Interpreting Theory (IT) was a research venture by practicing interpreters and professors of the same in *École Supérieure d'Interprètes et de Traducteurs (ESIT) Paris*. Proponents of this theory include: Danica Seleskovitch, Marian Lederer, Jean Delisle, and others. IT is the promotion of sense (meaning) over and above the theory of interpreting as "instantaneous translation." This is a linguistic approach to scientific research on interpreting, seeing interpreting as an out-of-language to language parallelism that emphasises linguistic *cum* verbal relations. Professors of ESIT who propounded this approach were linguists such as Roman Jakobson, Georges Mounin, Jean Darbelnet, Jean-Paul Vinay, John Cunnison Catford, and Eugene Nida. The linguists succeeded the psychologists and neuro-scientists in researching into interpreting. Gile (40-45) writes as follows on the sense theory of interpreting:

Its basic tenet is that translation and interpreting are based on meaning (*le sens*) as opposed to language; that they proceed by 'extracting' the meaning from the source text or utterance, deliberately getting rid of the linguistic form of the original, and eventually reproducing a target text or utterance on the basis of the 'deverbalised' message.

Deverbalisation is the center-point of the Interpretive Theory. In deverbalisation, the interpreter obtains meaning from what is said, being unconscious of the concatenation of words in the source utterance (comprehension) and re-expressing the same in the language of his target audience and culture. This is the interplay of implicitness and explicitness of utterance which call to play both the real-world knowledge (cognitive baggage) of the interpreter and the knowledge which he/she obtains through his/her on-the-spot contact with the utterance to be interpreted or reformulated (cognitive context). Interpreting re-expression or reformulation is the output of the process from listening and through deverbalisation.

Methodology

This study adopts the Effort Model of interpreting by Daniel Gile (40-45). Drawing inspiration from cognitive theory of psychology, Gile approaches his Effort model through adaptation to the two modes of interpreting: simultaneous and consecutive mods, respectively.

The Simultaneous Model

The simultaneous model has a three-step effort:

- A. Listening and Analysis Effort:** This step targets the interpreter's understanding of the source utterance.
- B. Production Effort:** The thrust of this effort is the reinvention of the same source utterance in the pure language of the target audience.
- C. Short-Term Memory Effort:** This third step explains what happens in-between the reception of the source utterance within the auditory system of the interpreter and the re-expression of the same utterance in the target language.

The Consecutive Model

In the consecutive model of interpreting, Gile recommends:

- A. Listening and Analysis Effort** for the comprehension of the utterance.
- B. Note Production Effort** and the Short-Term Memory Effort which help in the retention and dissemination of written information.
- C. Note Reading Effort** is a Long-Term Memory Effort for the recall and the re-expression of the utterance.

The Igbo People

Igbo is the native language of the Igbo people. Aremo (7) has this to say about the Igbo language:

For quite some time now, however, linguistics scholars working on the genetic classification of African languages have claimed that Igbo, Yoruba, Agatu, Bini etc, and many other West African languages (e.g. Ewe, Twi) are in fact members of the same subfamily, which they have called the Kwa subfamily, of a Niger-Congo family of African languages.

Uya (49) supports this claim in these words: The Igbo, Edo, Yoruba, Nupe, Fon, Akan, Kuru and Kpele belong to the Kwa sub-group of the Niger-Congo with the Bantu providing the dominant group.

What the above two writers are trying to prove is not a case of intelligibility but of common features and a possibility of dominance as between the Hausa and surrounding languages. Igbo like Hausa and Yoruba, is a major language in Nigeria.

Between Pulpit Interpreting and Theology

The central role of Pulpit Interpreting is communication. According to ochonogor, Njoku and Olise (46 to 66) *Communication is a social interaction between two or more people with the intent of exchanging ideas, opinions, messages or information.*

The “intent” of communication is its message whether idea, opinion or information. Message in this context means subject matter, theme or communicative goal: what the messenger wants to pass across to the receiver. The communicative role of translation is a product of bilingualism or multilingualism. Since nations are multilingual/bilingual, translation proper becomes an interlingual instrument of communication and integration. Thus, interpreting, like translation calls into play divergent competences. According to Akakuru (95):

Translation is often erroneously reduced to the “product”, that is, to a series of stock definitions (especially those of Vinay et Darbelnet) instead of circumscribing it as “productions”, that is, as a dynamic activity which calls into play diverse but convergent competences.

These diverse but convergent competences would include semantics, linguistics, terminology, pragmatics, stylistics and translation skills.

Theology and Oral Theological Texts

According to Fiorenza (178) Theology is the critical delineation, reflection and evaluation of the “rhetoric of God” or how scriptures, traditions and believers in a given religious faith speak about their God.

Texts, whether written or oral, which are derived from scriptures and traditions, culminating into how adherents in a particular religion talk about their God, are theological texts. This underscores the nucleus position of scriptures as the source of both theology and tradition. Scriptures are sacred texts or canonical/canonized texts that form basis of faith, character formation and development, vertical and horizontal relationships, all of which culminate in the hope of life after death. The following text from Bhagavad Gita in Prabha and Isherwood (7) is illustrative to the above claims:

Let the scriptures be your guide, therefore, in deciding what you must do and what you must abstain from. First learn the path of action, as the scriptures teach it. Then act accordingly.

This reveals that the sacred text, scripture, is a first order text that lends itself to the production of a second order text, called theological text, through critical delineation, reflection and evaluation. The study of the foregoing, its methods of study, arguments, deductions, theories, concepts and phenomena are in their sum total, referred to and regarded as theology.

Modes of Interpreting

Modes of conference interpretation refer to the *How* of rendering the source utterance in the target language in relation to the time lag in between the two products of communication, otherwise known as delivery possibilities. According to Verhoef and Blaauw (201 to 222):

More recent literature generally distinguishes two working modes: consecutive and simultaneous (cf. Reiccardi, et al., 1998:3; Jones, 1998: 7, Hsieh, 2003:284; pöchhaker, 2004/2007:18). While it is acknowledged that the *consecutive* working mode refers rendering the target text after the source text and *simultaneous* interpreting refers to rendering the target text as the source text is being presented, it is clear that each of these modes includes a variety of delivery possibilities.

Verhoef and Blaauw acknowledge that the consecutive type of interpreting has existed in longer time space than the simultaneous mode. Again, the consecutive mode by its nature allows the interpreter to hesitate in outputting the target interpreted message. Hence, the interpreter can note down the source utterance before re-expressing it to the target audience.

Conversely, Verhoef and Blaauw (201 to 222) observe that:

The simultaneous mode, characterized by ‘speaking while listening’ (Setton, 2001:1), implies simultaneity of a multitude of psycholinguistic tasks to be dealt with by the interpreter. Simultaneous interpreting is demanding and complex task such as listening, comprehension, information retention, retrieval, production and monitoring.

The above submission reveals that the burden of conference interpreting weighs the more on the interpreter when the simultaneous mode of interpreting is adopted. This is mainly because of the complexities arising from linguistic, communicative and literary blend of discourse. Sometimes, the simultaneous interpreter may have to do some sort of editing of the source statement: to know what to throw away, what to retain or revise before production within a time space of seconds. This is mentally cumbersome. Depending on the length of a statement or statements, the simultaneous interpreter may do a gist interpreting, which is a summary type of interpreting in which the interpreter selects the essentials in the source statement and reproduces only those, based on his or her understanding of the source statement.

This is because as Ajiboye (10) puts it, to understand a text means to retain the essential elements of the passage. This understanding would lead to a proper analysis of the passage; *comprendre un texte veut dire garder les essentiels du passage. Cette compréhension mènerait à une juste analyse du texte*. This goes to say that comprehension and retention are central to the role of the simultaneous conference interpreter.

Benefits of Consecutive and Simultaneous Modes of Interpreting

The consecutive mode of conference interpreting allows the source speaker an uninterrupted free flow of thoughts, ideas and a communicative production of the same, while the interpreter has an ample time to jot down the speech of the source speaker, review and criticize his jottings before re-expression.

The simultaneous mode of interpreting restricts the source speaker to unelaborated speech codes, thereby making his speech easily understandable to both the interpreter and his audience.

Consecutive mode of interpreting can make room for the source speaker to finish his delivery before time, hand over to the interpreter and leave the conference arena, just as a medical doctor can discuss the hospital bill, medication and prescriptions for a foreign patient with a community interpreter and leave the hospital, probably for other assignments, while the community interpreter is left to do his or her job. Contrastively, simultaneous interpreting is a bi-directional communicative activity between the source speaker and the interpreter, for the benefit of the audience.

In the consecutive mode of conference interpreting, the target audience engages in passive participation in most of the time because of the long time usage by the source speaker which may not allow any incursion by a member of the target audience with a question to ask through the interpreter. The opposite is the case in the simultaneous mode where each duration of speech of both the source speaker and interpreter is brief. Imagine a situation where a match commissioner or a match coordinator who presides a match technical meeting makes a statement that is unacceptable to any of the teams, whether the home team or the away team. The briefness of the talk interchange enables any member of the team to speak without delay on the matter that is on the front burner of the technical meeting without delay. This is active participation in a meeting.

Typologies of Interpreting

According to Gile (40 - 45), *interpreting is the oral translation of oral discourse as opposed to the oral translation of written texts*. Merlini and Favoron (205-229) recognize two canonical types of interpreting, notably: conference interpreting and *ad hoc* interpreting which is also known as community interpreting. It is notable that whereas conference interpreting happens within the milieu of international discourse such as meetings, conferences, deliberations etc, *ad hoc* or community interpreting plays out in discursive situations other than the international situation. Verhoef and Blaauw (201-222) see interpreting as a language mediation, different from a written re-invention of a written text, demanding immediate re-expression of an oral text, without delay. Verhoef and Blaauw state also as follows:

This language mediation ranges from typical expedition-type contacts (explorations, warfare, etc.) through transactional mediation (trade, diplomacy, etc.) to administrative-type mediation (e.g. law and justice, religious services, etc.).

Religious services summarize what is hereby referred to as Pulpit Interpreting or theological interpreting. Pulpit interpreting because according to Iluno (336), writing on the term Pulpit wrote as follows:

It refers to a raised platform where the preacher stands to deliver the sermon in the church. It is usually designed to be higher than the pews, so that everyone present in the church would see and hear the preacher. The platform is surrounded with panels or boards. Pulpit is described in *Christianity: The Complete Guide*, as 'a raised stand or wood from which sermons are preached, often with a flight of steps leading up to it. Some Anglican churches still have a three-decker

pulpit, with a reading desk, a stall and the preacher's stand one on top of the other. Many pulpits have a tester, a sounding board, above them.

Pulpit therefore symbolizes the discourse pronounced by the preacher as he delivers his sermon. The language mediation between the preacher and his congregation becomes what is known and referred to as pulpit interpreting. The same is also referred to as theological interpreting meaning the oral re-expression of any discourse pronounced by the priest within the sphere of his ministerial offices, whether as sermons, teachings, addresses, declarations, prayers, banns, notices, etc., or any of such utterances as pronounced, announced or read by his accredited agent, acting within the premise of the priestly ministerial office.

Pulpit Interpreting in Igbo Land

The Sight Translation Mode

The commonest and dominant form of pulpit interpreting in Igbo Land is what Gile (40) refers to as *sight translation or translation-at-sight*. Interpreting is the oral translation of oral discourse, as opposed to the oral translation of written texts. The latter is known as sight translation or translation at sight. The Igbo land is a major tribe in the nation of Nigeria, apart from the Hausa and the Yoruba tribes, respectively. Nigeria was colonized by the British colonial administrators, who made English Language to become the language of administration, commerce, politics and literacy education. Hence, Igbo Christian theologians receive their theological education in English Language, do their studies in English, and carry out their theological researches in English. Therefore, they write their sermon notes in English but because of illiteracy, poor and varying levels of competence in English among members of his congregations, the preacher would have to deliver his sermon in Igbo, using the sight translation mode of interpreting.

Oral Self-translation

This is the type about which Schleiermacher (43-63) wrote:

Indeed, we must sometimes translate our own utterances after a certain time had passed, would we truly make them our own again. This ability is employed not only to transplant to foreign soil the scientific and rhetorical accomplishments of a given tongue, thus enlarging the sphere of their influence; it also enters into business transactions between different individual peoples and in diplomatic relations between independent governing bodies, each of which by custom speaks only its own language when addressing the others.

Our own utterances as stated above refers to oral statements made in monolingual transactions of business, diplomatic relations, etc, but interpreted by the same speaker in the process of talk exchange, to his audience and interlocutor, for the purpose of proper understanding and removal of ambiguity or betrayals in the comprehension of his discourse by his audience or interlocutor. Grutman (17-20) avers that auto-translation or self-translation (written, as the terms imply directly) or oral translation (interpreting, as implied by Schleiermacher) is a bilingual locutionary activity which is carried out by bilingual/multilingual communicators. Translation scholars themselves have paid little attention to the phenomenon, perhaps because they thought it to be more akin to bilingualism than to translation proper. Indeed, historically speaking, auto-translators have often been writers who did not just master, but chose to create in more than one language.

However the interconnection between translation proper and interpreting, whether as bilingualism, self-translation, or otherwise is also upheld in Schleiermacher (43-63) as follows:

The interpreter plies his trade in the area of business, while the translator proper works above all in the areas of science and art. If these definitions appear arbitrary, interpretation being commonly understood to refer more to oral translation and translation proper to the written sort, may we be forgiven for choosing to use them thus out of convenience in the present instance, particularly as the two terms are not all distant from one another.

The common ground that forms the basis on which translation operates whether as translation proper, auto-translation, oral translation or Self Oral Translation, is bilingualism. Bilingualism is what Agbedo (5) describes as: a common human condition that makes it possible for an individual to function at some level, in more than one or two languages, the key word being "more than one."

Self oral translation therefore becomes a bilingual phenomenon in which the speaker otherwise called the producer of discourse re-expresses his speech by himself, in another code, without the intermediary of an interpreter at one stage or another (whether initial, median or terminal stage) of the same discourse, whether in part or in whole. Dominantly pulpit self oral translation in Igbo land is an aspect of community type of interpreting. Here, the characteristic feature is language passage, as illustrated in Simpson (102):

The same of course goes for the community translators and interpreters, like Mrs Bola Sebastian who practised her art in the service of the Lagos State Government. The ease and mastery demonstrated in passing from English into the Nigerian language, Yoruba, and from the Nigerian language to English, was hardly translated into relevant remuneration or appointment.

Our concern in the above statement is that the distinguishing characteristic of self oral translation is not just the passage from language A to language B but the return to language A: English—Igbo—English. This is the case in Igbo language because of the status of English language as *lingua franca* in Nigeria. The preacher who received his education in English, does his biblical and theological researches in English, while preaching whether in English or Igbo, will of need make the language movement: English—Igbo—English to ensure a better comprehension of his sermon, declaration, announcement, etc, by every literacy class of his mixed congregation. This return to language A from B marks the difference between the language mediation role of an interpreter and the practice of self oral interpreting.

Sample of illustrative discursive cases where an Igbo preacher may self-interpret his sermon:

(i) Jesus was tried and sentenced for treasonable felony. = *Ekpere Jesus ikpe, ma makwa ya ya-bu ikpe dika onye na acho ikwatu ochichi obodo.*

(ii) Agape love is the God type of love. It does not seek its own selfish interest. = *Ihunanya nke Chineke bu udiri ihunanya nke n'adigh acho odi-mma nke onwe.*

(iii) People who take hard drugs destroy the internal organs of their bodies = *Ndi na anu ogwu-ike na ala akuku ime ahu ha di iche-iche n'iyi.*

(iv) Homosexuality and lesbianism are taboos before God. = *Nwoke ikwasa nwoke ibe-ya iko, nakwa nwanji ikwasa nwanji ibe-ya iko bu aru n'ihu Chineke.*

(v) Christians should conduct themselves as pilgrims in this ephemeral world = *Ndi nke Kraist kwesiri ina ebi ndu ha dika ndi no na njem, n'ime uwa nkea, nke na agafe-agafe.*

Igbo land preachers adopt oral self translation while preaching when there is a term in the statement. Terms being words which are peculiar to people of a particular profession, not common to the man on the street, especially those with a low level of education. In our examples (i) to (v), the following are terms and would need to be orally self interpreted by the preacher: (i) treasonable felony (ii) hard drugs and internal organs (iv) homosexuality and lesbianism (v) pilgrims. Agape (Gk) is a technical word being a Greek word, whereas ephemeral is an English word with a French root *ephemere*, meaning: passing, transient, unstable, etc. The preacher would have to interpret the whole sentence where each of such words occurs in his sermon as a translation unit, either to convey equal understanding to people of varying educational and literacy standards in his congregation or for the purpose of emphasis, as the statement is repeated in another language through the interpreting process by the preacher. Oral self interpreting occurs on Igbo land pulpits mostly when the preacher is preaching in English and re-expresses a statement in Igbo language and returns to English. Igbo preachers in Igbo land do also Code-Switch into English without interpreting the code-switched statement into Igbo.

Simultaneous Pulpit Interpreting in Igbo Land

By this, we mean a phenomenon by which bilingual mediation takes place simultaneously within the pulpit arena of preaching, teaching, praying, etc, through the intermediary role of an interpreter who engages in a near parallel comprehension of a theological oral discourse delivered in either English, French, Efik, Hausa, or any other language and a re-expression of the same in Igbo language. This phenomenon is common place in city-wide crusades, community crusades, local church crusades and revival meetings where the preacher is a non-Igbo preacher or an international preacher who may not have a good command of the Igbo language, although he may be an Igbo indigene.

Such interpreters are usually untrained and unskilled, *ad hoc* in every sense of the word. They are usually graduates and holders of post-graduate degrees who made good grades in Igbo language in the West African School Certificate Examination. Some of them are Igbo language teachers who hold degree certificates in Igbo/Linguistics, National Certificate in Education (Igbo/Linguistics), civil servants and businessmen who have a good grade in Igbo language at the O' Level. Although they are fluent and eloquent readers of the Igbo Bible, they cannot engage in terminological research, term creation, linguistic and extra-linguistic researches to improve themselves on the job because they are unprofessional, unskilled and *ad hoc*.

Recommendations

The first step in interpreting as a communicative activity is comprehension before the second step which is re-expression. Communication is a product of language while linguistics studies language in details. Therefore, the pulpit *ad hoc* interpreter ought to be trained in all branches of linguistics: syntax, pragmatics, semantics, lexis and phonology. He also needs to be trained in theology, stylistics, communication, rudiments and practice of interpreting, both simultaneous and consecutive modes.

To this end, pulpit interpreting ought to be incorporated in the curriculum of theological colleges in Igbo land. Both the theological colleges and departments of translation studies in Igbo land universities should be organizing trainings, seminars and conferences for pulpit interpreters. Churches and good spirited church members should

encourage pulpit interpreters financially to procure books, various study materials and also pay for *ad hoc* trainings.

Conclusion

Pulpit interpreting in Igboland, Nigeria, as a subfield of translation studies, constitutes an aspect of community interpreting. It is a bilingual communicative activity that focuses on mediating between oral discourse delivered from the pulpit and the Igbo-speaking audience. Most Igbo preachers employ the sight translation mode, largely because of the status of English as a lingua franca and the primary language of instruction in educational and theological institutions.

Consequently, English serves as the language of most biblical and theological research, while preachers often re-verballyize their sermon notes into Igbo to facilitate effective grassroots communication of their messages. Another common practice is oral self-translation. Owing to the dominant status of English, a preacher delivering a sermon in Igbo may occasionally code-switch into English. Communication is enhanced when such English expressions are immediately re-expressed in Igbo before the preacher continues the sermon in the source language. This process enables the audience to maintain full comprehension of the message.

Furthermore, when non-Igbo or international guest preachers minister in Igboland, host congregations often rely on *ad hoc* and untrained interpreters who stand alongside the preacher to facilitate communication between the speaker and the audience. These interpreters mediate the transmission of the sermon, thereby ensuring effective pulpit communication and interaction.

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