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INTERPRETER TRAINING AND SERMON APPROPRIATION IN MULTILINGUAL WORSHIP: THE CASE OF FULA- AND ENGLISH-SPEAKING FAITHFUL IN THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH OF NGAOUNDÉRE-JOLIE SOIR (CAMEROON).

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Abstract: In Ngaoundéré, the number of faithful to the Apostolic Church keeps on increasing thus, the linguistic community also expand itself. However, the problem which lays the foundation of this paper remains the appropriation of the messages passed during sermons. This paper falls within the scientific field of applied linguistics, and more specifically the translation of European languages into African languages in a context of appropriation of the evangelical message in the Apostolic Church of Cameroon in Ngaoundéré. The objective of the present study focuses on assessing the translation strategies put in place by Church leaders in order to reach Christians who do not master the vehicular language. After a thorough observation and interview with the actors of translation/interpretation within the Church, we found out that until now, the Church's interpreters have practised it informally and without training. Using the theoretical resources of translation and/or interpretation (Van Hoof, 1962) to assess the reality of translation/ interpretation in the Apostolic Church, we were able to figure out that, interpreters/translators face multiple challenges in exercising their duties, some are: the cognitive overload, improvisation in the translation of message or lack of training. To this end, we recommend that Church leaders must set up training programs for their translators.

Key words: Apostolic Church, Biblical message, Gospel, Interpretation, Translation.

Résumé : À Ngaoundéré, le nombre de fidèles de l'Église apostolique ne cesse d'augmenter, ce qui entraîne également l'expansion de la communauté linguistique. Cependant, le problème qui est au cœur de cet article reste celui de l'appropriation des messages transmis lors des sermons. Cet article s'inscrit dans le domaine scientifique de la linguistique appliquée, et plus précisément dans celui de la traduction des langues européennes vers les langues africaines, dans le contexte de l'appropriation du message évangélique au sein de l'Église apostolique du Cameroun à Ngaoundéré. L'objectif de la présente étude est d'évaluer les stratégies de traduction mises en place par les responsables de l'Église afin d'atteindre les chrétiens qui ne maîtrisent pas la langue véhiculaire. Après une observation approfondie et des entretiens avec les acteurs de la traduction et de l'interprétation au sein de l'Église, nous avons constaté que, jusqu'à présent, les interprètes de l'Église exerçaient leur activité de manière informelle et sans formation. En nous appuyant sur les fondements théoriques de la traduction et/ou de l'interprétation (Van Hoof, 1962) pour analyser la réalité de la traduction et de l'interprétation au sein de l'Église apostolique, nous avons pu constater que les interprètes et les traducteurs sont confrontés à de multiples défis dans l'exercice de leurs fonctions, parmi lesquels : la surcharge cognitive, l'improvisation dans la traduction des messages ou le manque de formation. À cet effet, nous recommandons aux responsables de l'Église de mettre en place des programmes de formation destinés à leurs traducteurs.

Mots clés : Église Apostolique, Évangile, Interprétation, Message biblique, Traduction.

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Introduction

In multilingual churches, the oral translation and interpretation are very important to make sure that the communication is truly effective between the preachers and the faithful. The growth of the linguistic community and diversity in the churches in general and especially the Apostolic church of Cameroon, the demand of translators/interpreters has also significantly increased due to the need for accurate and accessible information during church services. According to Tipett (1987), the preachers who do not speak the local language want their message to be transmitted correctly and clearly. Knowing that the transmission of sermons or religious messages in other languages, requires to have not only linguistic competences, but also to be able to transmit the meaning and the spiritual impact intended by the preacher.

We also note, as Harriet Hill and Margaret Hill (2011) argue, that the faithful are more receptive to understanding and appropriating the biblical message or teachings when communication occurs in a language with which they are familiar.

In multilingual countries like in Cameroon, the multilingualism contributes to define the sociolinguistic characteristics of more than 250 languages that coexist together besides the two official languages that are French and English (Ntedondjeu, 2022). Consequently, most of the churches have integrated translation and interpretation practices to fill the gap or to break down the linguistic barriers that could possibly impede the transmission of the message or sermon and to also allow or facilitate the full participation of every faithful. The available studies on church interpretation process were mostly focused on the role of interpreters, the challenges faced in religious/biblical translation or on the role of choosing a specific language for evangelisation. However, a little attention was given to the choice of competent interpreters or translators and the extent to which they can effectively perform in fulfilling the expectations of the preachers or church leaders. Therefore, this gap justifies our study as it puts emphasis on the selection and performance of the translators and interpreters in the Apostolic Church of Ngaoundéré.

The Apostolic Church of Ngaoundéré is a privileged area for our study, due to its relevant context of linguistic and cultural diversity of Ngaoundéré. Over the years, the evangelization campaigns and the growth of the church, have attracted faithful of various academic level of education, ethnic and linguistic groups, this includes farmers, breeders, students, housewives, civil servants and so on. Even though French is used as the main language of communication in the city and for preaching, a significant number of churches make use of

interpretation in English and Fulfuldé (which is considered as the lingua franca in the Adamawa region), so that the faithful can fully understand the meaning of sermons or teachings. In order to address this need of interpretation or translation, the church has developed techniques to carry full and summary interpretations during the various church services or church programs. Nevertheless, after thorough observations and getting testimonies of church leaders and church members, the results reveal the mixed reactions regarding the effectiveness and impact of these interpretations. While some faithful do appreciate the work and services performed by interpreters, others report having difficulties to get the translated message or they feel that certain key nuances or information of the sermon are not conveyed during the process of interpreting (Hamadou, 2022). Thus, the previous mentioned concerns, raise major questions about the competence, the training, the selection and the performance of the church interpreters and translators. The main problem of our study is therefore the clear gap between the church's efforts to provide a multilingual accessibility of messages and sermons and the frequent or continuous dissatisfaction of some faithful of the church.

In contrast to this, the main objective of our study is to study and analyse the criteria used for the selection of interpreters and translators at the Apostolic Church of Ngaoundéré and to also assess the effectiveness of their performance in transmitting sermons, teachings or biblical messages, to the English speaking and the Fula-speaking faithful of the church.

The study has four main goals. First, it looks at how church leaders choose translators and interpreters. Second, it considers how much the church values the work of interpreters. Third, it checks whether the interpreted messages are accurate compared to the original sermons. Finally, it explores the training and skills interpreters gain before or during their service. Following these objectives, the main research question is: How are translators and interpreters selected at the Apostolic Church of Ngaoundéré, and to which extent can we say that they fulfill their duties in transmitting messages in their multilingual communities? From this main question, we decline four other specific questions: From this main question emerge the following subsidiary questions: What criteria are used to select these artists? Do they succeed in satisfying the audience? Are they faithful in transmitting the biblical message? Have they undergone any significant training?

For this study, we used the theoretical resources of translation and interpretation studies, particularly the principles developed by Van Hoof (1962), which highlights the fidelity into transferring the meaning between the source and the targeted languages, while considering the context of communication. The research also draws on the importance of meeting the communicative needs of the faithful.

As for the methodological framework of the study, we adopted the qualitative approach. This includes a direct observation, interview and data were collected from translators, interpreters, church leaders and faithful of the Apostolic Church of Ngaoundéré. Using this approach, it was possible to explore both the church practices and get the faithful perceptions regarding the interpretation services provided by the church. Therefore, our study is organized as follows: firstly, we present the types of translation used in the Apostolic church; secondly discuss the choice of interpreters; and finally we talk about the training of interpreters; we will conclude by proposing recommendations to improve the translation and interpretation practices within multilingual churches.

1. Types of translation used in the Apostolic Church

The Apostolic Church, depending on circumstances and objectives, adopts various strategies for translating biblical messages. Three types of translation have been identified in sermons. These are sentence-by-sentence translation (that uses the literal translation technique the most), simultaneous translation, and translation in summary or whispered form (Harriet Hill and Margaret Hill, 2011: 95-96).

1.1- The sentence-by-sentence translation

The sentence-by-sentence translation is the most recommended for interpreting studies and it is used by many multilingual churches. In the Apostolic Church, this technique is frequently used during church services and evangelisation campaigns. In this technique, the speaker or preacher usually delivers a sentence or idea and then he takes a pause to allow the interpreter to interpret in the other targeted language. This falls in line with what Danica Seleskovitch (1978) argues in her "Théorie du sens" as she says that an interpreter has to wait for one full idea before reformulating. The preacher and the interpreter normally stand side by side to create a certain partnership that facilitates the communication. For some interviewers, this type of translation takes quite a long time. If the message or teaching takes 30 minutes, it will take an hour for the whole sermon.

For a sentence-by-sentence translation to be effective, the interpreter or translator has to preserve the meaning and spiritual impact of the sermon, as intended by the preacher. Since in this case, the interpreter works with rather short sentences, the risk of forgetting an important information is reduced, thus allowing the faithful to listen to the message or sermon with ease. With this technique, the interpreter of Pentecostal and Apostolic churches have the ability to convey during their interpretation, the emotions, tone and emphasis just as the preacher.

However, despite the notable advantages, the sentence-by-sentence translation presents challenges for the interpreters. The interpreter has to listen and understand the intended

meaning of a preacher, retain the message and must accurately reproduce it in Fulfuldé or English. To be able to perform this, the linguistic competence of the interpreter is at stake (Danica Seleskovitch & Marianne Lederer 2001). Furthermore, the constant pauses may break the natural flow of the message, so the interpreter is always confronted to significant cognitive demands in between the comprehension and reformulation.

A notable remark from the interviewees we got is the amount of time it takes for a complete message to be preached. Every statement has to be delivered twice: first by the preacher and then by the interpreter, which makes the duration of the church service longer. For instance, a sermon that can normally last 30 minutes may take approximately an hour or more, when the sermon is interpreted sentence-by-sentence. However, many Apostolic Churches in Ngaoundéré still use this technique. Consequently, the sentence-by-sentence translation remains a major tool for evangelization and preaching in multilingual Apostolic churches.

1.2- Simultaneous interpretation

In the simultaneous interpretation, the interpreter translates what the speaker says as he or she speaks (Danica Seleskovitch 1978). This technique needs practices as it is the most difficult. Usually, this technique is used for major events like seminars, crusades, conventions, etc. where other sister churches are present. In our context, the simultaneous interpretation is a mode of interpreting in which the interpreter delivers the preacher's message into Fulfuldé or English while the preacher is still speaking. Both the preacher and the interpreter are communicating at the same time (simultaneously), that is the reason for the complexity of this mode. As Pöchhacker (2016) argues, the simultaneous interpretation requires a high level of linguistic competence, concentration and cognitive flexibility to be able to understand and reformulate the message within a very short time span. This technique is therefore considered as the most challenging for interpreter (Pöchhacker, 2016).

In the Apostolic Church of Ngaoundéré, this mode of interpreting is used for major events, as it enables the message to be communicated efficiently without significantly extending the duration of every event. Furthermore, Gile (2009) highlights that the simultaneous interpreting is particularly suitable for conferences, because the speakers can maintain a natural flow while ensuring that the message is directly conveyed into the targeted language.

According to Setton and Dawrant (2016), professional simultaneous interpreters have advanced listening skills, anticipation and high ability of retention. In the Apostolic church, these skills are also important to have for interpreters, as they must faithfully transmit the sermons, without altering the meaning intended by the original preacher. In specific situations, when the number of people requiring interpretation is quite small, the interpreter can use the

technique of *chuchotage*. Here, the interpreter directly speaks in a low voice to the listener, while the speaker is still speaking.

1.3 – Interpretation in summary form

Sometimes, the sermon or other information is followed by a summary in Fulfulde (more often) and in English (on rare occasions), either by the speaker himself or by the interpreter. This is the form most often used in the Apostolic Church, as it saves time and energy.

The interpretation in summary form is a technique of oral translation in which the interpreter produced a condensed version of the main ideas after the sermon or preaching has been delivered or completed (Danica Seleskovitch & Marianne Lederer 2001). Here, the interpreter listens carefully to the entire message, identifies the main ideas and communicates them into the targeted language. Within the Apostolic Church of Ngaoundéré, this is the form most often used in the Apostolic Church, as it saves time and energy. It is frequently used after sermons and church announcements particularly in Fulfuldé and in English on some occasions.

The interpretation in summary form requires less physical and mental efforts, compared to the two previous mentioned techniques. In the Apostolic church, this may be used for long services or evangelical campaigns.

However, despite its numerous advantages, the interpretation in summary has several limitations. The drawback, according to one interpreter who agreed to answer our questionnaires, is that speakers of the language of translation are at a disadvantage compared to those who understand the whole sermon. What's more, not everyone can produce a summary of the main points. From our understanding of their sayings, the condensed nature of summaries may often result in unequal access to the complete message. Furthermore, Jones (2014) argues that a summary involves the selection and omission of some information, which can affect the accuracy of the transmitted information.

2- The choice of interpreters

During the observation, we noticed that some interpreters are informed of their task during the service. The kindest and most rigorous liturgists do inform in the sacristy about fifteen minutes before the actual start of the service. It is therefore forbidden for a person chosen to refuse. The reasons for this include the priesthood and the smaller number of interpreters who have done the work to date. We note that this rarely produces good results.

The leaders of the Apostolic Church should select interpreters and train them so that they are well prepared. Those who wish to do this work should have the following qualities:

- Have a good level of understanding of both languages;

- An acceptable level of oral and written expression in both languages (English and Fulfuldé);
- A lifestyle in keeping with the word of God: interpreters are considered to be preachers in the same way as the main speaker, so they have to carry themselves just as the main speaker (usually a leader/pastor) does.

We must already acknowledge the efforts made by some members of the Council of Elders and deacons, who to date have always fulfilled their duties with self-sacrifice in this process and in the translation techniques used by the Church.

2.1 The Current Practice of Selecting Interpreters

From our observation carried during the church services, it was revealed that interpreters are often chosen a few minutes before or even when the service is ongoing. Sometimes the selected person is informed when the program has already started. The most rigorous liturgists and church leaders usually notify the interpreters in the sacristy before the start of the service. Although this practice shows a certain planning, the time given is still too small for the interpreter to fully prepare him/herself. (Pöchlhammer, 2016) even argues that the effective preparation of an interpreter requires not only linguistic competence, but also a certain familiarity with the subject. In consequence, the spontaneous appointment of interpreters may affect their performance negatively.

Within the Apostolic Church of Ngaoundéré, once an interpreter is designated, refusal is not encouraged, because it is seen as a form of ministry and service to God and the church. Furthermore, the number of interpreters who can perform in English and Fulfuldé is relatively small. As a result, the interpreters are often the same persons. Even though this allows the church to deliver interpretation services, it puts pressure on the interpreters, regardless of their competence, emotional and personal state, and their level of preparation at that time.

The findings also suggest that the interpreters, who are not adequately prepared, may struggle to understand the specialized biblical concepts and even retain longer segments of discourse. This can lead to omission or incomplete transmission of information. Gile (2009) states that the interpreting performance is strongly influenced by a thorough preparation and psychological readiness. Even though the church still functions with this system, it may compromise the quality of the communication between the preacher and the faithful.

2.2 Qualifications and Training of Church Interpreters

Interpreters play a crucial role in multilingual communities, just as it is the case for the Apostolic Church of Ngaoundéré. In choosing interpreters, the church leaders should adopt a selection process for the interpreters, based on their competences, instead of relying on who is

available. In addition, there is a need of training programs that would include public speaking skills, knowing biblical terminology and practical exercises in interpretation. A significant training will improve the accuracy, fluency and professional performance (Setton & Dawrant, 2016).

Another key requirement for the interpreter is to master both the languages in which he or she interprets (French to Fulfuldé or French to English). The interpreter must possess a good level of comprehension in English and Fulfuldé, he or she should understand complex messages in both languages. In addition, they should be competent in oral and written expression in these languages. An effective interpretation is not a simple form of bilingualism, it requires the ability to convey ideas, messages and sermons in a clear way, naturally and accurately. Mikkelsen (2017) states that interpreters must understand the implicit meanings of the preacher and reformulate them appropriately, without changing the intended message of the preacher.

Apart the linguistic competence, the interpreters of the Apostolic Church of Ngaoundéré have to live according to the Christian characters. They also convey the Word of God like pastors do. They have to demonstrate their spiritual values in their lifestyle, conduct and dedication to the service of the Church and Christ. This qualification shows that the ministry does not only rely on technical competences, but also on personal credibility and spiritual commitment.

2.3 The Contribution of Church Leaders and Experienced Interpreters

Even though there are numerous challenges and difficulties related to the interpreters, it is important to take note of the efforts made by the Council of Elders, deacons and other church leaders. Their willingness to have interpretation services provides for the community, regardless of the formal training of the interpreters, shows their dedication to the spread of the Gospel and the growth of the Church.

Many of the experienced interpreters have gained experience over the years. Thanks to their experience, they were able to master several techniques used within the Church, including the sentence-by-sentence interpretation, the simultaneous translation and summary translation. Although the experience acquired informally, it is a value that can be thought to other interpreters. The transmission of knowledge from the experienced interpreters to train future interpreters, will help to preserve the interpretation ministry within the Church.

Therefore, the Church will benefit in the future from a system that is established and structured for training, selecting and evaluating the performance of interpreters. All of this in view of ameliorating the performance of interpreters and reduce the dependence on a small number of individuals that can interpret.

By joining the spiritual commitment to a thorough linguistic training and practical experience, the church will build a strong and rich ministry of interpreters capable of fulfilling the multilingual communication needs. This will allow the church to have effectively expand the Gospel among the diverse linguistic communities of the Apostolic Church of Ngaoundéré.

3- Training interpreters

Once the interpreters have been identified and chosen, they need to be taught the basic principles of translation (Mounin, 1963) and difficult or unfamiliar concepts, in the same way as pastors and Sunday school teachers need to be retrained at the various conventions of the Apostolic Church. The translation sector is perhaps not an emergency for some, since the damage is not visible, like a sound system that wears out due to lack of expertise.

3-1 - Knowing what is important to communicate

In interpreting, it is not possible for an interpreter to exactly say what the speaking is saying, because languages do not function in the same ways. According to Danica Seleskovitch & Marianne Lederer (2001), the language function in different ways, looking at the grammar, syntax and other aspects of every language. What exists or what can be said in French cannot exist and cannot be said in Fulfuldé and the same goes for English. That is also the reason why Danica Seleskovitch (1978) talked about equivalence as she “says the same thing, but differently”.

Furthermore, Danica argues that the brain has its limits. An interpreter has to listen, comprehend, remember and reformulate a message in just seconds, this makes it difficult or even impossible to remember every repetition, every detail pronounced. This is what Seleskovitch calls “deverbalisation”. It is important to know that the culture and context of the faithful may orientate or change the interpretation.

Knowing the audience is a capital requirement for an interpreter. The choice of appropriate words and type of register matters a lot for the comprehension of the message by the faithful. Vinay & Darbelnet (1958) argue that an interpreter, who does not know his audience, will surely deliver a grammatically correct interpreted message, but a pragmatically empty message. This just means that interpreters of the Apostolic Church of Ngaoundéré should take into account to know the background of the community at the risk of failing in communicating the message accurately. Knowing the audience is therefore mandatory, it is not an option for the interpreter.

In addition to interpreting, interpreters have the role of cultural intermediary in between the preacher and the community of faithful. They are the bridge the two languages of

interpretation, they do not just transmit words, but they transmit values. They bring out the implicit meaning of the message to light for the faithful to understand.

3-2- Opportunities to practise

For a good performance result, it is important for the interpreters to be trained. The best way to train interpreters is to have them listen to good examples and then start translating in a non-stressful situation where they can receive feedback on their performance (Marianne Lederer 2001). Here, it is necessary to set up conditions for the future interpreters to work in real life situations of interpretation. Through the creation of programmes and other activities where the interpreters are involved, they will be able to gain more experienced, get skills and get used to the environment.

Additionally, Andrew Gillies (2005) states that there are three major pillars necessary to train interpreters: memory training, shadowing and sight translation. The church leaders must organize sessions of simulations with a restrained group of people, to put the interpreters in conditions of exercising and training. This must be done progressively, without forgetting to implement the three techniques of interpretation (sentence by sentence, simultaneous or summary form of translation).

It is better for new interpreters to make their debut with a small group than at a church service. This is said because they will get used and familiarized themselves with the jargon and expressions in relation with the biblical language. Hence, closeness and contact with the language develops the understanding and the apprehension to better transmit the key message.

Conclusion

This study, which has been based on the theory of translation practised in Christian communities and more specifically in the Apostolic Church, has enabled us to identify the various challenges faced by translators and/or interpreters. These can be divided into three categories: psycholinguistic, behavioral performance and organisational (Church programme). Specifically, these are cognitive overload, improvisation in the translation of message, lack of training for translators, adequate capacity for comprehension and analysis, and the speed of the messengers of the day. The article suggests that Church leaders should train or retrain the talents identified. For some of the interpreters consulted, there is a need to "develop a training programme for church interpreters". For others, a schedule should be drawn up, and the interpreters should be given an outline of the message before the service and shown their appreciation. Speakers should use full, short sentences with simple structures, especially when translating sentence by sentence. Besides, the speakers have a responsibility in helping to

alleviate the work of translators/interpreters, as they should avoid alliterations such as "tell me J-E-S-U-S, who is that?" or teaching that depends on certain puns.

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