



Dynamicism in Yoruba Translation of the Quran

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Dynamicism, Qur'an, Translation, Yoruba, Language

Received : 20 June

Revised : 15 July

Accepted: 19 August

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ABSTRACT

The appearance of a published complete translation of the Qur'an into Yoruba language was a recent occurrence phenomenon compared to the early contact of Islam with Yorubaland. This has been attributed to the fact that the early Imams and Arabic and Islamic teachers concentrated on the teaching of Arabic Language. This article discussed the activities of the Qur'an translators and examined the impact of that on the target audience. A number of grey areas in the Yoruba translations are brought to the fore for possible adjustment. The article employed historical and analytical methods in gathering information from primary and secondary sources. The translation of the Qur'an into Yoruba language remains a major intellectual contribution of the Yoruba Muslim scholars to the dissemination of Islamic teachings. However, the translators are yet to take cognizance of the conditions and prerequisites of translating the Qur'an. This has led to adverse effects on most of the translations of the Qur'an into Yoruba. The article has also brought to focus some improvements in translation of the Qur'an including the nature of the contributions, their merits and demerits. The study proposes a template for improvement so that subsequent translations will not only address contemporary needs but also benefit from an extensive circulation of the Quranic message

INTRODUCTION

The advent of translations of the Qur'ān is not a new phenomenon; it started right from the time of the prophethood of Muhammad (SAW) himself. The impact of the Qur'an as a pivot of guidance to Muslims and to those who care to study it cannot be ignored. As a result, the translation of the Qur'an into various languages is considered by the Muslims a rewarding effort. The translation of the Qur'an is also an avenue for mutual understanding between the Muslims and the speakers of the target language. Yoruba Muslim scholars had left no stone unturned to convey the message of the Qur'an to the speakers of the language.

Considering the number and quality of the translations of the Qur'an into Yoruba, one can safely submit that the translation of the Qur'an among the Yorubas is still evolving. Thus, there is need for a rigorous study of these translations with a view to identifying the accomplishments and shortcomings. This exercise provides a credible platform for improvement of existing translations and the emergence of more accurate ones. Through historical and analytical approaches, this paper broadly examines the merits and demerits of Yoruba translations of the Qur'an. This is preceded by a discussion on the concept and history of translation, historical background of the translation of the Qur'an, the Yorubas and their language, the translation of the Qur'an to Yoruba. However, the main focus of the paper remains a critical assessment of the translated Qur'an into Yoruba.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Yoruba and Yorubaland

Yoruba is a term used to describe a group of people with a common cultural, social, and linguistic identity in West Africa. These people are found mainly in the South West of the present Federal Republic of Nigeria. Perhaps, this term was applied to them by their connection with Yacrab bin Qahtān as reported by Sulṭān Muhammad Bello. Abūbakre R.D, (nd) P. 2

The Yoruba recognized Oduduwa, Odudua or Oodua the son of Lamurudu as their common ancestor. The Yoruba currently inhabit Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti, Kwara, Lagos, part Kogi and Edo states of Nigeria, some other ethnic groups such as: Itshekiri in Delta and Igala in Kogi are related to the Yoruba. Yoruba are also found in large numbers in the Republic of Benin and Togo in West Africa. The Yoruba in Diaspora are found in the Caribbean and South America, in countries such as Cuba and Brazil. Majority of Sierra Leoneans are believed to have Yoruba origin. Abūbakre R.D, (nd). The Yoruba speaking people in other places outside Nigeria are known by different names. They were called Anago or Negroe in the Republic of Benin and Brazil while in Sierra Leone, they are known as Aku, in Cuba they are call Lucumi. Abūbakre R.D, (nd). The Oyo Empire founded by the progenies of Odudua was once one of the greatest empires in West Africa. The Kingdom of Dahomey and Ashanti were all paying tribute to the Oyo Empire at the zenith of its glory, especially when the Dahomey Empire was defeated by the Yoruba army in 1698.

Oyo involved itself in internal crisis in the nineteenth century when the power and hegemony of Alafin was challenged by other Yoruba states like Ketu, Ijebu and Egba, likewise, the revolt of Afonja. These crises brought about the fall and total collapse of the Yoruba Oyo Empire. Gbadamosi T.G.O., (1978). The Yoruba are considered as the most urban people in Nigeria and the whole of Africa. It is this urban life of the Yoruba people that made the settlement of immigrants among them possible and easy as it attracted visitors from outside their boundaries. Sanusi M.Z., (1987) pp.31-37.

Archaeologists have found evidence from their excavations of a place called Iwo Eleru near Akure in Ondo state of Nigeria, which shows that human race had settled in that area by the eleventh or tenth centuries. CE. But it is not clear whether the evidence has to do with all or some of the present Yoruba race. Abubakre R, D., (nd) p. 277. The Yoruba must have existed and lived in their present Yoruba land for some thousands of years. It is also yet to be known the original Yoruba spoken among the present Yoruba people.

Likewise, the advent of their language, Yoruba is not known whether it was created due to contact and interaction with other languages or due to other reasons. Adam A., (1960). Historians are of the view that the Yoruba have probably occupied their present homeland in Nigeria for as long as about a thousand years. Gbadamosi T.G.O., (1978) p. 2.

The present Yoruba people are a combination of different groups such as: the immigrants, the Negroes, the Nupes and the Pigmies who were the aborigines met and dominated by other groups. The immigrant race came from the northern part of Africa to the west or southwardly to their present place according to the suggestion of the historians. Adam A., (1960). The immigrant group is believed to be of Arab origin, an offshoot of Yacrab Ibn Qahtān. Though, the Yacrab in question may be Yacrab Ibn Qahtān the founder of the earliest Arab kingdom or another Yacrab from the off springs of the first Yacrab. Adam A., (1960).

Defining Translation

Translation is believed to have historically evolved after the appearance of written literature. It is regarded as the communication of the meaning of source language texts by means of equivalent target language texts. (Namit 1992; Cohen 1986). The word 'translation' is said to have been derived from the Latin word *trans-fero* or *tratum* which means: "to carry across or to bring across" which could be carried out through metaphrase, literal or word for word translation or through paraphrase or "saying it in other words" approaches. The former is also referred to as formal equivalence and the latter as dynamic equivalence. (Kasperek, 1983). These two methods are believed to be indispensable in the art of translation of any work and so translators had to put this in mind in order to make a judicious blending of the two types of translations in the two languages involved. According to Roger Bacon, if translation would be a successful one, the translator must know the source and the target languages as well as the science he intends to translate. This is an unfulfilled condition in which most of the translators found themselves. (Goldstone, 2006).

Attributes of Translation

According to experts, translation has two distinct attributes of fidelity and transparency, therefore, it should be faithful or beautiful, it is faithful if it accurately renders the meaning of the original text without distortion and transparent if it favours the target language and the audience more than the source language and the subject matter, as Eugene Nida stated that functional and formal equivalence that are equal to paraphrasing and metaphrasing respectfully was invented to translate the Bible and that this method could also be adopted for any other translation.

The two methods may be combined by a translator as he may also choose any of the two at any time or place in his translation whenever circumstances dictate. The competence of the translator in using any given translation system is important, but the general error is that an incompetent translator may go for false equivalence thereby misconstruing the original message (Kasperek, 1983). For the translation of scripture, a competent translator must fulfil the following conditions: mastery of the source and target languages, being familiar to the subject matter of the source, knowing the relationship and otherwise of both languages, and knowing when to paraphrase and when to metaphrase.

METHODOLOGY

Development of Translation in Islamic Disciplines

Translation of materials into Arabic is said to have expanded after the creation of Arabic scripts in the 5th century C. E. It came into prominence with the advent of Islam when translation of political and diplomatic materials from Persian, Greek, Chinese and Indian languages occurred. Thereafter, translation of classical works followed. Al-Qayrawan, al-Azhar and an-Nizaymiyyah served as centers of translation. Then the translation of Arabic works into Latin and other related European languages followed.

Translation in Islamic history reached its pinnacle during the Abbasid era due to the love for knowledge of other nations most especially the Greek, Roman and Indian philosophies. In this respect, the role of Abu Jafar al- Mansur is significant. Works translated into Arabic language during this time cover the fields of medicine, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy and chemistry (De Bellaigine). According to Abikan (2011), non-Muslim translators of the Qur'an especially Jews and Christians wanted to achieve different objectives. While some were interested in distorting the message, because they had no belief in the Qur'an, others went into translation for mere love for translation but not the text of the Qur'an itself. Muslims also believe in the non-translatibility of the Qur'an like the first group based on their belief in Q:17:88.

٨٨ ظَهِيرًا لِبَعْضٍ بَعْضُهُمْ كَانَ وَلَوْ بِمِثْلِهِ يَأْتُونَ لَا الْقُرْآنَ هَذَا بِمِثْلٍ يَأْتُوا أَنْ عَلَى وَالْجِنُّ الْإِنْسُ اجْتَمَعَتْ لَنْ قُل

88. Say: If men and jinn should combine together to bring the like of this Quran, they could not bring the like of it, though some of them were aiders of others.

It is their belief also that the Qur'an would not fulfil its universality according to Q: 4:174 and 3: 138

١٧٤ مُبِينًا نُورًا إِلَيْكُمْ وَأَنْزَلْنَا رَبِّكُمْ مِنْ بَرِّهُنَّ جَاءَكُمْ فَذَٰلِكَ نَاسٌ يَأْتِيهَا

174. O people! surely there has come to you manifest proof from your Lord and We have sent to you clear light.

Except through the translation of its meaning to other languages. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was ordered in Q:5:67 to convey the Qur'an to all mankind and this would be impossible without the translation of its meanings.

يَهْدِي لِآلِهَةٍ إِنْ نَاسٌ مِنْ يَعْبُدُكَ وَاللَّهُ رِسَالَتَهُ بَلَّغَتْ فَمَا تَفْعَلْ أَمْ وَإِنْ رَبِّكَ مِنْ إِلَيْكَ أَنْزَلَ مَا يَلْعَقُ الرَّسُولُ يَأْتِيهَا ﴿٦٧﴾
٦٧ الْكُفْرِينَ الْفَوْمَ

67. O Messenger! deliver what has been revealed to you from your Lord; and if you do it not, then you have not delivered His message, and Allah will protect you from the people; surely Allah will not guide the unbelieving people.

All these proofs are logical and based on that, they laid down conditions for translating the Qur'an which include proper understanding of the Qur'an, its expressions and methods. Secondly, the translator must have mastered both source and target languages along with their method of expression. The Arabic text must also be attached with the translation of its meaning, while the issue of mastering both source and target languages includes the ability to paraphrase and metaphrase whenever necessary.

The Qur'an and its Translation

It was reported that Salman al-Farisi (the Persian), a companion of the Prophet Muhammad translated the first chapter of the Qur'an into the Persian language (An- Nawawi, nd: 380). Assuming the information being authentic, he might be the first or the second Muslim to have translated the Qur'an into a foreign language as the verbal translation was done by an unknown translator who translated for an-Najashi (Negus), the king of Abyssinia hosted the Muslim emigrants in his palace due to the persecution by Makkans. The first complete translation of the Qur'an into a foreign language is said to have been executed in Sindhi language in 884 C. E. in Alwar Sindhi by the order of Abdullah Ibn Umar Ibn Abdul Azeez on the request of the Hindu Raja Mehruk (Monthly crescent.com).

The Latin translation of the Qur'an was achieved by a group of oriental scholars in the 13th Century led by Robert of Ketton (1110-1160) which was titled: "Lex Muhamet pseudo prophete" which means "Law of Muhammad, the False Prophet" and in 1142 Peter, the venerable persuaded Robert to join a team he formed to translate Arabic works into Latin for evangelical purposes among the Muslims. Thomas E. Burma stated that from 15th century to the present, scholarly opinion has condemned the Quranic translation of Peter and his team as a loose and misleading effort. Juande Segovia said that Robert of Ketton took the work with liberty, as Surah 114 was expanded, explicit items from the Arabic text were often left out and implicit items were added apart from numerous other changes. Ludovico Merracci, Hadrian Reland and George Sale also criticized the work and said: the translation in question deserves not the name of translation (Bloom et al, 2002). In the 12th century, Mark Toledo a Spanish physician 1193-

1216 who attended Toledo School of Translators also produced one of the earliest translations of the Qur'an into Latin. "

The Advent of Translation Into Yoruba and its Impact

Scholars believe that the advent of the act of translation in any society is always attributed to the advent of literacy which is also believed to generally emerge from religious activities. The case is also the same among the Yoruba people where literacy and translation were introduced with the advent of Islam and later on Christianity. The tradition of oral religious poetry at the beginning of their existence had deep impact on the approach of the Yoruba to learning and knowledge acquisition to the extent that translation was first done orally. Apart from the Qur'an, there was scarcely any tangible translated work into Yoruba by the speakers of this language among the Christians and Muslims (Husain, 2011). Besides the Hausa language, the closest language to Arabic in Nigeria is Yoruba language, many colloquial words of the Yoruba are traceable to Arabic origin, i.e. the word: "husband", which is called *Baql* Arabic, is called: *Bale* in Yoruba; the word "reason" is called: *Sabab* in Arabic, and *sababi* in Yoruba; "necessity" which is *darurah* Arabic, is called *laluri* in Yoruba; "equal" is *Sawaw* in Arabic, and *sawāwu* in Yoruba; "sound health" means *al-Ācfiyah* in Arabic, is called *alafia* in Yoruba; "secrecy" means *as-Sirr* in Arabic, is called *Asiri* in Yoruba; "to move hastily" is called *takashkasha* in colloquial Arabic, is called *ta kasakasa* in colloquial Yoruba; sky means *Samā'* in Arabic, is also called *sanma* in Yoruba; "fire" is *an-Nār* in Arabic and *Ina* in Yoruba and so on.

Developmental Stages of the Qur'anic Translation in Yorubaland

The translation of the Qur'an into Yoruba is one of the greatest services of the Yoruba Muslim scholars to the development of the language and to the proper understanding of Islam among the speakers of the language. The nature of Islam and the Qur'an which lays emphasis on Arabic language had made the translation of the Qur'an into Yoruba unattractive to Muslim scholars at the early period of Islam in Yorubaland. Another possible reason for the delay in the appearance of the Yoruba translation of the Qur'an is attached to the inability of the Yoruba Muslim scholars to develop their own Yoruba alphabets with which they would have executed the work and which the Christian Missionary group headed by Samuel Ajayi Crowder was able to do to translate the Bible into Yoruba.

The earliest Yoruba translations of the Qur'an include the work of Rev. M. S. Cole (1924) which was printed and distributed by the Christian Mission Society of Lagos. This translation was likely aimed at easing the process of evangelism among the Yoruba Muslims at that time. The merit of this work is the challenge it posed for the Muslims which led to the production of another translation of the Qur'an. This translation could not survive the test of the time, as it may only exist today in the articles of scholars and on the shelves of some scholars and institutions. Though it was not known whether the translation was distributed free of charge, it was certain that it could not achieve its purpose first because the Muslim rejected it and the Muslim Community was discouraged from reading it. The demerit of this translation include the fact that the translator removed the Arabic text and so it is difficult to know validity or otherwise of the translation. It is also capable of misleading the innocent and uninformed reader since the

Arabic text was missing. The Muslim on their own part do not consider it as a correct interpretation or translation of the Qur'an and this created enmity between the Muslims and the translator because they thought he was trying to distort their spiritual document.

It is also clear that the translation was invalid as the translator lacked adequate knowledge of the source language. At the same time, he was not an expert in the target language likewise he was ignorant of the subject matter of the Qur'an therefore; the translation lacks fidelity and transparency. This type of translation has not achieved any success as it had the tendency of creating discord among the Christians and the Muslims. The merit of this translation is that it prompted the Yoruba Muslims scholars to think about having their own translation of the Qur'an into their language.

The second attempt was made by A. K. Akinlade who named his translation: *Itumo al-Kuran Li Ede Yoruba (The Meaning of the Qur'an in Yoruba Language)*; Printed by Caxton Press West Africa Ltd. Ibadan (1965). According to Abikan (2011), the work faced a lot of criticisms from the legal, language and translation approach points of view. The merit of this translation is that it is an improvement upon the work of Cole and was another attempt to render the Qur'an into Yoruba, though the motive of the translator is unknown.

The demerit of this translation is like the first one being an individual effort which did not undergo the scrutiny of an external assessor. Apart from this, the Arabic text is not included. It is also obvious that the translator was neither an expert in the source nor the target languages. Above all he was not a specialist in Islamic Studies. Again, this translation lacked fidelity and transparency needed in this type of translation. The validity of this translation is therefore doubtful. The translator has benefitted from the work of Cole and followed his method extensively. The merit of this translation is that it also prompted the Yoruba Muslims scholars to think about having their own translation of the Qur'an into their language.

The third translation of the Qur'an into Yoruba language was executed by Alhaji Usama Kuta which was printed at Iwo but the publisher and the date of publication were omitted and the translation contains 452 pages and is titled: *Odidi Kurani ni Ede Yoruba: (Complete Qur'an in Yoruba language)*. The merit of this translation is that it is an improvement upon the first and second translations mentioned earlier. The audiences of this translation were the Muslims unlike the other two. But the validity of this work is doubtful as the translator failed to add the Arabic text which is the original document, likewise the translator though was a Muslim and he may have the knowledge of the subject matter of the Qur'an, he was neither an expert in Arabic the source language nor Yoruba the target language. It has also been criticized based on inaccuracy of some words and expressions and it also lacks the fidelity and transparency needed for this type of work. This work like the other two mentioned earlier is no more in circulation therefore it seems that it could not achieve its aims and could not serve the target audience.

The other translation was executed by the Muslim Council of Nigeria, Lagos at the instance of his eminence Sir Ahmadu Bello. The Council set up a committee that includes Lawal Augusto, I.S. Akani, and H.Y. Dindiey among others. The committee started the translation in 1962 under the supervision of Sir Ahmadu Bello and Ustaz Kamilu Sharif. When the translation was complete it was handed over to another committee of scholars which include Abdul Lateef Ahmad, Abdul Wahab Sanusi, Khidr Mustapha and Iyasa Ade Bello among others. This second committee finished its task in 1972 after which the work was also given to another committee for final scrutiny and general assessment in 1973. The committee includes erudite Yoruba Muslim scholars such as; Kamaludin al-Adabi, Burhanudin Sanusi Alaka, Adam Abduliah al-Ilori, Abdul Rahman Salahudin al-Adabi, Muhammad Rajee Sulaiman and Musa Ali Ajetunmobi al-Adabi.

According to Adam Abdullah al-Ilori, the secretary of the third committee, the objective of this translation was to be of help for better understanding of the message of the Qur'an among the Nigerians, to spread and consolidate Islam and its understanding among the Muslim communities.

Among the merit of this work is the fact that it was executed by a group of different categories of Yoruba Muslim Scholars; also it includes the Arabic texts and its execution took a long period of time, 1962-1973 which means that it underwent a thorough scrutiny and assessment of the Yoruba Muslim scholars of the time. This translation has been printed more than three times. The only demerit of it is that the Yoruba sound signs are not utilized to ease its reading. (Muslim Council of Nigeria, nd). Another translation of the Qur'an that surfaced in 1997 titled: *Al-Kurani Alaponle (Itumo si Ede Yoruba)* 'which means (The Noble Qur'an (The Meaning in Yoruba Language), the translator, Yasir Anjola Abdul Qadir is a professor of Islamic Studies from the University of Ilorin, Nigeria.

The work was published in 1997 by Sebotimo Publications, Ijebu Ode, Nigeria. According to the translator, the reason behind this work is the request of his readers who have read his translation of chapter one of the Qur'an earlier in 1985. The merit of this translation includes putting of the Yoruba sound signs on the words. The translator has also gained experience from the translations of others before him.

Other individual efforts to translate the Qur'an into Yoruba include: *Al-Qur'an to tobi- EEsu Meta pelu Itumo: (The Glorious Qur'an- Three Hizbs with Meaning)*, translated by Abdul Azeez Laola. The work is no more in circulation, Abikan (2011) posited that the translation is full of errors due to the incompetency of the translator, the translator also failed to add the Arabic text of the Qur'an though he added the transliteration. It seems that the translator's objective was to assist readers who lack ability to read the Qur'an in Arabic language.

Al-Kuran Alaponle Eesukan ti a tu si Ede Yoruba, means: (the Glorious Qur'an - One Hizb Translated into Yoruba) by Solih Bamidele and was published by al-Balagh Publication, Lagos, Nigeria. The Arabic text of the Qur'an is added along with its transliteration. According to Akorede (2006) there was another translation of the Qur'an into Yoruba by Abdul Salam Bolaji Akewukewe, which is no more in circulation. Al-Kurani Ologo Julu Eesu Merin: means (The Glorious Qur'an Four Hizbs) is the title of another translation of the Qur'an by Ishaq Ahmad published by Abbas Printing Co., Lagos, 2004.

According to the translator, the work is an attempt to produce a translation of the Qur'an that would give correct Islamic faith to the Yoruba speakers with the belief that most of the previous translations lack this fact. The translator has also benefited from the experiences of the previous translators and tried to build upon it. The merits of the translation include introduction for each chapter and explanation of important words while the demerit is the failure to include the Yoruba tonal signs.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Assessment of Yoruba Translations of the Qur'ān

As we have said earlier in the statement of Kasparet that the issue of spill over is believed to be one of the benefits of translation, this exactly is the case here as some of Arabic lexical items have gained frequency of occurrence in Yoruba language through the translation of the Qur'an into Yoruba as a target language. The knowledge of Arabic became no more necessary for the understanding of the basic meaning of the Qur'an while those who care to know its message got that opportunity which led to mutual understanding that lessened tension, religious prejudices and ambiguity among the Yoruba of other faiths and the Muslims. The little understanding of Islam gained from the translation of the Qur'an into Yoruba encourages some Yoruba Muslims to make effort to learn Arabic Language in order to have first hand information about the message of the Qur'an.

The interest in the searching for the truth was enhanced and the Yoruba translation of the Qur'an became tool of dialogue between common Christians and the Muslims in Yorubaland. The translated Qur'an is used along with the translated Bible by Muslim evangelists in holding faith debates and dialogues with their Christian counterparts.

It has been observed that since the emergence of the Yoruba translation of the Quran, religious violence, persecution and discrimination are no more frequent in the Yoruba speaking areas of Nigeria.

It has been made as condition for any translator of any important document to master both languages (the source and target languages along with the first-hand information about the subject matter of such document. It is observed that only two of all the translations of the Qur'an into Yoruba could fulfil these conditions. Apart from the fact that some of the translators do not understand the source language, all of them have taken the Yoruba language for granted as none of them is a specialist in the language, though they are speakers of it. Some of the translators even have no knowledge of Islam which is the

subject matter of the Qur'an. The purpose of translation and objectives are not also clear to some of the translators. For instance, the secretary of the more authentic of those translations Adam Abdullah said that the aim of that translation was to be of help for better understanding of the message of the Qur'an among the Nigerians as if Yoruba is spoken by all the Nigerians. He also said the aim is to consolidate Islam and its understanding among the Muslim communities.

The interest of the target audience was not also properly taken into consideration as it is known that most of the Yoruba people do not like reading important documents in their local language and the tonal sign that could be of help and encourage them to read is left out by the majority of the translators. Most of the translations including the recent ones did not enjoy any scrutiny and assessment.

If the targeted audience for the translation of the Qur'an into Yoruba are the speakers of the language generally, then the non-Muslim speakers have not been taken into consideration by the Muslim translators, knowing that the inclusion of the Arabic text would scare them (the none Muslims) away. Be that as it may, the Yoruba translation of the Qur'an has promoted mutual understanding, peace and harmony among the adherents of different religions in Yorubaland.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article has shed light on the history of the Yoruba people, their language; ethimology and evolution of the act of translation in particular into other languages. The discussion on the translation of the Qur'an into Yoruba has showed that various efforts were made to standardize the translation of the Qur'an into Yoruba. The non- Muslims are believed to be the pioneers of this effort. The Muslims were able to face the challenge of this course. Though there is room for improvement, the translation of the Qur'an into Yoruba has played a vital role to guarantee mutual understanding among the Yoruba people, Muslims and adherents of other faiths. The level of peace and harmony enjoyed by the people of Yorubaland in the area of religion in recent time could be traced to the effect of this translation.

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