

TRANSLATING THE WORD: THE URGENT NEED FOR A CONTEMPORARY URHOB0 LANGUAGE BIBLE VERSION

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Abstract

The Urhobo language, spoken by millions in Nigeria, lacks a modern Bible translation that resonates with its native speakers. The existing translation, done decades ago, contains archaic language and cultural references that hinder comprehension and engagement. This paper aims to do a critical review of the hard copy of the Urhobo Holy Bible (Baibol Ofuanfon na), first published by the Bible Society of Nigeria in 1977, with a view to producing a contemporary version. The Urhobo Bible, which was translated by a team of Urhobo scholars and clergymen, no doubt was one of the most outstanding achievements recorded in the history of Urhobo. Since 1978, when the complete Urhobo Bible came into public glare, it has proved an invaluable resource material to adherents of the Christian faith, especially gospel ministers. However, this work argues that the time has come for a review of the hard copy of the Urhobo Bible following obvious errors in translation, missing verses, wrong spellings, poor punctuation, etc. It's time to have a new version that will take care of these errors as well as changes that have occurred over time in the meaning of some words and expressions found in ancient Urhobo and make it more comprehensible and relevant to today's readers. Besides, the new version should be true to the original King James version with cross references. The need for a modern Urhobo language Bible version is not just a theological imperative but also a cultural and missiological necessity.

Keywords: Urhobo Language, Bible Version, Translation

1. Introduction

The Urhobo language, spoken by approximately 3.5 million people in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, is a vital part of the cultural identity and heritage of the Urhobo people. However, despite its significance, the Urhobo language lacks a modern Bible translation that accurately conveys the message of God's Word in a way that resonates with contemporary Urhobo speakers.

Bible translators, especially those involved with translating the Bible into African Indigenous languages, have become the torchbearers of evangelism and the proliferation of Christian literature in many communities (Losenge, 2023). The current Urhobo Bible translation, which was first published by the Bible Society of Nigeria in 1977, contains some archaic language, spelling errors, missing verses, poor punctuation, etc., that are not familiar to modern Urhobo readers. This old translation hinders the ability of Urhobo Christians to fully comprehend and engage with scripture, limiting their spiritual growth and understanding of God's message. This paper is of the view that a contemporary Urhobo language Bible version is imperative for the spiritual growth and evangelization of the Urhobo people. A modern translation would utilize everyday language, idioms, and metaphors, making scripture more accessible and relatable.

Furthermore, the absence of a contemporary Bible translation has resulted in a reliance on English for biblical studies and worship, potentially eroding the Urhobo language and cultural heritage. This has significant implications for the preservation of Urhobo identity and the spread of Christianity among the Urhobo people.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the need for a modern Urhobo Bible translation that speaks to the hearts and minds of contemporary Urhobo speakers. This new translation would not only enhance biblical understanding but also contribute to language preservation, cultural revitalization and effective evangelization among the Urhobo people. This, in turn, would revitalize worship, enhance biblical understanding and facilitate effective discipleship. Furthermore, a contemporary Urhobo Bible would preserve the language and culture for future generations, demonstrating the relevance and timeless nature of God's word.

The Holy Bible remains the most profound asset and richest source of spiritual nourishment and knowledge for every devout believer. It is of great importance to him both in his private devotions and congregational worship. It is from the Holy Writ that a Christian, and indeed every spiritually-minded person, draws most of his or her spiritual nourishment. Apart from that, as Razumovskaya and Valkova (2023) noted, 'The Bible is an important source of cultural heritage and a means of support and maintaining of the dying or minority languages through its translation.' The Urhobo complete Bible came out in 1978, and since then, an account of that extraordinary accomplishment has been long expected. It is undeniable that it took a great deal of patience and effort by scholars and experts to produce the present copy of the Urhobo Bible. As many Urhobo converts multiplied in the early years of Urhoboland, it became apparent that the new converts were deeply rooted and grounded in their newfound faith. This necessitated the need for an Urhobo Bible.

One of the significant factors that resulted in the failure of early Christian missionary efforts was the lack of a meaningful explanation of the message of the gospel to the people and an absence of the Scriptures in the language that has any meaning to the people (Nabofa, 1997). The spiritual development of any Christian depends mainly upon a thorough understanding of the message of the Scriptures, which ought to be explained in a language that people really understand. It was in this vein that various attempts were made to translate the Holy Bible into Urhobo.

2. Research Questions

To guide the study, the following research questions have been raised:

1. What are the challenges with the current Urhobo Bible translation?
2. How does a contemporary Urhobo language Bible version address the needs of Urhobo adherents?
3. What linguistic and cultural considerations should be taken into account when translating the Bible into contemporary Urhobo?

3. A Brief History of the Urhobo People

The Urhobo are people of the South-South of Nigeria, near the North Western Niger Delta. Urhobo is the largest ethnic group in Delta State, which homogenically occupies a senatorial district (Delta Central), parts of Delta South, Delta North, Bayelsa State and Ondo State. The Urhobo is the major ethnic group in Delta State - one of the thirty-six States of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The Urhobo people are industrious, accommodating, culturally sensitive, and proud of their heritage. The Urhobo speak the Urhobo language – a language in the Niger-Congo group. The Urhobo culture is related to several cultures in the Niger Delta – Isoko are related in language and culture, leading the missionaries to erroneously label the Urhobo and Isoko cultural groups as 'Sobo.' Both tribes strongly rejected this name.

Socio-politically, the Urhobo nation is made up of twenty-four kingdoms: twenty-two in the eight Local Government Areas of Delta Central and two in Delta South, namely Agbarha-otor, Agbarha-ame, Agbarho, Agbon, Arhavwarien, Eghwu (Ewu), Ephron-oto, Evwreni, Mosogar, Idjerhe, Oghara, Ogor, Okparabe, Okere-Urhobo, Okpe, Olomu, Orogun, Oruarivie- Abraka, Udu, Ughelli, Ughievwen, Umiaghwa- Abraka, Ughwerun (Uwheru) and Uvwie. According to the 2006 Nigeria census, there are over three million Urhobo, thus classifying the group among the first ten major ethnic groups in Nigeria.

The word 'Urhobo' refers to a group of people and not a geographical territory. The Urhobo have a social and cultural affinity to the Edo-speaking people of Nigeria (Northcote Thomas, 1910). The Urhobo now live in a territory bounded by latitudes 6° and 15°, 40° and 6°, 25° East in Delta State of Nigeria. The Urhobo occupy Delta Central Senatorial District and form the majority of the population in Warri-south and Patani Local Government Areas in Delta State. Their neighbours are the Isoko to the South East, the Itsekiri to the West, and the Bini to the North East. The Urhobo territory consists of ever-green forests with many oil palm trees, which

provide the lucrative palm produce industry for which the Urhobo have some technological preserve. The territory is covered by a network of streams whose volume of water and flow are directly concerned with the climatic season: wet season (April - October) and dry season (November - March).

In terms of language classification, Elugbe (1986) stipulates that the Edoid languages fall into four primary subgroups: Delta Edoid, South- Western Edoid, North- Central Edoid and Western Edoid. He adds that the South-Western Edoid is further divided into five regional groups: Erhohea (Eruwa), Isoko, Urhobo, Okpe and Uvwie. While Okpe and Uvwie are regarded as part of Urhobo, Eruwa is considered to be part of Isoko ethnic group. The Urhobo language belongs to the Kwa group of languages and its typological relatedness to other languages in the group is illustrated by Greenberg (1963). He sub-divided the Kwa group into Ebira, Edo, Efik, Urhobo, Yoruba, etc.

Records show that the history of the Urhobo generally began in Edo territory supposedly around where the ancient towns of Udo and Benin City are currently located. At the end of the Ogiso dynasty, many Urhobo and Edo groups left Udo in different directions, each at its own pace, in search of more peaceful territories. It was natural that in those compelling circumstances, peace-loving and less powerful - Edo groups had to leave the territory to seek fortunes in less populated but more economically resourceful territories.

The Urhobo people today, as a result of the search for greener pastures, are scattered all over the world as migrants in different nations. In Nigeria, there is hardly a state where you would not find an Urhobo man or woman. Of significant interest to us in this study is the bulk of Urhobo settlers in Bayelsa. The Urhobo Community is the fastest-growing community of migrants in Bayelsa State, surpassing any other group in the State. The Urhobo Community constitutes a significant percentage of the State demographic total, especially in Sagbama Local Government Area of the State. In fact, apart from Delta State, the Urhobo are present in large numbers in Edo, Ondo, Lagos States, etc. (Ekeh 2005).

4. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted in this paper is Nida's Translation Theory of 'Functional Equivalence.' Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory is the earliest translation theory introduced into China, which has had a significant and far-reaching impact on China's translation practice in the past 40 years (Li, 2021). This theory has occupied an unshakable position and has been widely praised and recognized by scholars in the translation field, and has been widely applied to the translation practice of various texts. Nida's translation theory was not achieved overnight; rather, it evolved through decades of unceasing practice and exploration and has been developed through continuous revision and improvement.

The first influential theory put forward was reflected in the Bible, Good News Version. According to Nida's guiding theology, a 'common language' that both ordinary people and high-level and high-culture intellectuals can understand and accept must be used in the translated text. After being published, translated works have become bestsellers, welcomed and affirmed by readers and highly praised by scholars in the translation field. This is the famous 'Dynamic

Equivalence Translation Theory. This theory has been successfully verified in practice. The Dynamic Equivalence Theory is to use the most appropriate and natural equivalent language to reproduce the information of the original text (Tan, 1989). Dynamic equivalence translates texts in a way that sounds natural to the target audience, focusing on capturing the original meaning and emotional effect rather than the exact wording. The most fundamental task of translation is to maximize the most appropriate and natural equivalence of the language of the translated text and the language of the original text so that the language can conform to the language conventions of the target language and be expressed smoothly. When the structure and grammar of a target language vary significantly from that of the source, readers may struggle to understand a translation unless the words have been altered or rearranged. A target audience may not be familiar with the source culture and so will require references to be explained.

In many cases, it is vital to consider not just what is explicitly stated in the source text but also what is implied. Dynamic equivalence empowers a translator to read in between the words and to recreate them in a way that enables the target audience to better appreciate the nuances of the original. This is one of the advantages of the Dynamic Equivalence Theory (Myatt, 2021). When proposing the Dynamic Equivalence Translation Theory, Nida believed that the translator should focus on the meaning and spirit of the original text rather than the formal equivalence of the language structure of the original text. As dynamic equivalence allows a translator greater flexibility of expression, the potential does exist for them to apply personal bias to their outputs. The depth of their linguistic and cultural knowledge will impact the quality of their translations. Should they misunderstand the meanings of any words or aspect of the target culture, they may unintentionally create outputs that do not accurately reflect the sense and intended impact of the source material. It can be seen that the Dynamic Equivalence Translation theory has certain limitations and provides the possibility for further improvement and amendment.

In *From One Language to Another*, published in 1986, Nida mentioned 'functional equivalence' for the first time, which not only retained the essence of Dynamic Equivalence Translation Theory but also made its meaning clearer and more accurate. The functional equivalence theory tends to emphasize fidelity to the language structure of the original language structure of the original language. It holds that in translation, attention should be paid not only to the meaning and spirit of the language but also to the form as much as possible because form also has meaning.

5. Early Translation Efforts of the Urhobo Bible

According to Nabofa (1997), very little is known about the first attempts to translate the Holy Writ into Urhobo. One cannot be certain to know whether any attempt was made during the early missionary era. However, it is a well-known fact that in some parts of Nigeria, evangelized by missionaries, the Holy Bible, prayer books and hymn books were translated into the people's language by the missionaries themselves. For instance, Archdeacon Thomas J. Dennis, assisted by some Igbo interpreters, translated the Bible into the Igbo language. The same thing happened in Isoko. The Reverend Henry Proctor and J.C. Aitken, the pioneer missionaries in Isoko, encouraged the translation of the Bible into Isoko.

Signs of preliminary translation work on Urhobo Bible seem to have started during the era of Cole's missionary activities in the Niger Delta area. Bishop H. Tugwell's letters written from the Rest House at Kokori to the Parochial Committees of St. Luke's Church in Sapele and St. Andrew's Church in Warri (all C.M.S Anglican Churches) on December 16, 1914 explicitly refer to the woeful ignorance of both the teachers and the early Christian converts due mainly to lack of Christian scripture reading materials. (see part of the letter as documented in Nabofa, 1997).

The notes that followed these letters state that two thousand copies of that sheet should be sold at a penny each, allowing a profit on the outlay. Also, in the notes, he gave an order that Watts and the Church Catechism should be translated quickly. In a meeting held at Effurun in 1914, it was resolved that the Agbarho dialect, which was almost widely understood, should be used in all translations. Thus, Tugwell really made a serious effort to ensure that the early Urhobo Christian converts were presented with the message of the Gospel in the language that they understood in order to make for a sound spiritual development. From verified evidence, it was certain that Bishop Herbert Tugwell pioneered the translation of the Scriptures into Urhobo by giving the directives that guided the translators without personally engaging himself in the actual translation

5. The First Urhobo Translation of the Bible

There was a lull in the spate of Tugwell's pioneered translation activities when he left the Delta area. Bishop James Johnson, who later on took charge of other areas, insisted that the Church teachers and Catechists should learn and conduct the church services in Yoruba, a language into which the Scriptures have been fully translated (Eriwwo). Only very few of them were able to meet such demand. For this reason, church services appeared very formless and uninteresting to those who did not understand the Yoruba language. In order to save the situation, Mr Omatsola and a few other Urhobo church teachers, who had a working knowledge of the English language, interpreted directly from English to Urhobo during church services, Sunday Schools and class meetings.

It was at this juncture that the Urhobo felt that the onus lay on them to have the Scriptures translated into their language. The first Urhobo person who made some attempt to translate the Bible into Urhobo was Mr Thomas Emedo of Orogun. He was a C.M.S (Anglican) Church agent. A few years before 1920, he produced a pamphlet known as Obeke. This was the first Urhobo primer, and it contained some stories from both the Old and the New Testaments, which became very popular among early Urhobo Christians. Thomas Emedo also translated some sections of the Book of Common Prayer and about twenty popular songs. These were the most popular sacred books that the early Urhobo Christians used for their worship, and they gave them no small inspiration.

In about 1920, one W.A. Tadaferua, who was at Idjerhe, Jesse was urged by Thomas Emedo to join an Adult Education Class. When Mr Tadaferua moved to Warri that very year, he was appointed an instructor in an Urhobo Bible Class. Together with others, including Ikimi Waghoregbo of Ephro-Otor, Philip Abi Oghenekaro of Owbrode in Udu Kingdom and S. Magi (an Ijaw teacher, who was at Ekiugbo, Ughelli), Mr Tadaferua worked in a translation class which was later set up. According to Eriwwo, this translation class also drew inspiration from

the Urhobo people in Ikale in Yorubaland (Erivwo). In Ikale, Ofodidun actively organized an Urhobo Christian congregation under the supervision of Rev. Canon S.C. Philips (later Bishop Philips, who was then based at Ondo). This group yearned for the Scriptures to be taught and expounded to them in their own mother tongue; thence, they actively encouraged the group at home to be involved with the task of the translation of the Scriptures into Urhobo. Jointly in the Tadeferua class, they translated St. Mark's Gospel. They finished this by 1924. This became the major vernacular reader in the elementary schools of those days (25). The choice to translate St. Mark's Gospel was probably due to its small size and its being the resume of the life and ministry of our Lord, Jesus Christ. It contains all the salient issues discussed in the other Synoptic Gospels. Hence, in 1936, when Agori Iwe, the first Anglican Bishop of Benin Diocese, decided to boost the work of translation in order to avoid duplication, he picked up St. John's Gospel. This was quickly followed by the translation of the same Gospel (St. John) by Rev. Jovi Aganbi of the Baptist Church in Eku. This duplication seemed unwelcome to many Urhobo Christians at that time in light of the urgent need to translate other remaining books. It is not entirely clear why Jovi Aganbi undertook the translation of the same gospel. The two translators could have started to work simultaneously without knowing what the other person was doing judging from the quick succession of the two translations, or perhaps Rev. Agori Iwe's rendering of this Gospel and, therefore, decided to produce his version. Future translators learnt from this mistake and took precautions against the wasteful duplications and dissipated efforts.

5.2 The First Officially Organised Indigenous Translation Efforts

As the Church grew and developed both vertically and horizontally, the yearning of the Urhobo to have more books in the Bible translated into Urhobo became greater. In order to satisfy this yearning and to further enhance the people's spiritual development, Agori Iwe, who was then the only ordained Priest in the C.M.S (Anglican) Church in Urhoboland in 1945, commissioned three Anglican Catechists: Messrs J.A Emofe, Isaac Efedjara and Enajero Arawore to carry on the Urhobo Bible translation work in earnest (27).

Enajero Arawore was made the coordinator of the project. In order to enable him to function more effectively in this new assignment, he was transferred from Uwherun to Ohrerhe in Agbarho. Apart from Ohrerhe in Agbarho, being more centrally located and more easily accessible to where the other members of his team were, the other primary motive was to enable the group, and especially the coordinator, to be more familiar with the Agbarho dialect, which as earlier mentioned, had been selected and accepted as the standard dialect of the Urhobo in 1914, to be the medium of all translations into Urhobo. The assignment was completed within six years, and the New Testament in Urhobo was officially published in 1951. Urhobo Christians were greatly encouraged by this spectacular achievement, and the enthusiasm with which the people received the translation encouraged the translators to take up the more tedious work of the translation of the Old Testament, in addition to reviewing that of the New Testament.

Translation of the Old Testament

To enhance an effective translation process, a collaborative Urhobo Translation Committee was established. However, Venerable Enajero Arawore, the project's chief co-ordinator, remained

unsatisfied with the progress of the translation work. A challenge arose from the Anglican Church's worship protocol, which required reading from the Old Testament and Psalms. Since the Old Testament had not been translated into Urhobo, readers had to improvise by translating directly from English texts, resulting in uneven and unsatisfactory performances. Apart from that, there was no uniformity in the whole process of direct translation. According to Nabofa (1997), in order to overcome all these problems, in 1959, Venerable Enajero Arawore, who was stationed at Uwherun at that time, convened a meeting of all the clergymen of the various Christian denominations in Urhoboland to plan for the translation of the Old Testament. The first and subsequent meetings of these people were held at Ughelli, which was then the seat of Venerable Agori Iwe, who was at that time the Archdeacon of Warri Archdeaconry in the Niger Delta Diocese, Anglican Communion. A joint consultative translation committee of all the Christian denominations in Urhoboland was thus founded. This joint effort was to guard against what happened between Agori Iwe and Jovi Aganbi in 1936 and to expedite the translation through team effort. Another reason for the Urhobo Joint Consultative Translation Committee, according to Enajero Arawore, was to give the translation a national fervour and one acceptable to all (the Christian) denominations in Urhoboland.

The following were the pioneer members of the Joint Consultative Translation Committee:

Anglican Church

1. Rev. J.A.O Emoefe
2. Rev. Unurhieri
3. Rev. J.O. Dafiewhanre
4. Rev. J. Eterhere
5. Rev. Enajero Arawore
6. Rev. Mark Forae
7. Rev. Otubu
8. Rev. W.Tadaferua
9. Rev. P. Akposibruke

African Church

1. Rev. J. Okirhienyefa
2. Mr. Ibuje

Baptist Church

1. Rev. P.E. Onosode
2. Rev. V. Eghaghe
3. Rev. Okerentie
4. Rev. Orikiri
5. Rev. F. Awetefe
6. Rev. Otojareri
7. Rev. P. Ofuoku
8. Rev. Ariemuduigho
9. Rev. Agbaluya
10. Rev. J.E. Ukuoku

Roman Catholic Church

1. Rev. Father Vincent Obudu
2. Rev. Father Paul Okudaje

Salvation Army

1. Captain Uvwo

The following were appointed as the Executive Officers of the committee charged with the responsibility of seeing to its day-to-day affairs:

1. Patron: Rt. Rev. Agori Iwe
2. Chairman: Rev. P.E. Onosode (a post he held until his death in 1976)
3. Deputy Chairman: Ven. J.A.O. Emoefe
4. Treasurer: Rt. Rev. Agori Iwe
5. Secretary and Co-ordinator: Ven. Enajero Arawore

The above persons were chosen for this assignment because of their expertise in Urhobo language and culture and competence in English and biblical languages: Greek and Hebrew.

Translation Procedures

During the translation proper, a number of books were assigned to each translator. The arrangement was that a completed book was to be sent to the Venerable Enajero Arawore, the co-ordinator, for scrutiny and correction, after which it was to be sent to the typist for typing and mimeographing. The mimeographed copies were to be sent to some selected laymen, who, after reading through them, were to make their comments and corrections where necessary and return them to the co-ordinator, who would, in turn, read through them again and pass the draft copies to the typist to effect the necessary corrections on the semi-final draft copies. The co-ordinator closely supervised the typing of these fair copies to ensure that no mistakes were made. In the end, these copies were sent to the translation department of the British and Foreign Bible Society in London for further and final vetting.

The Translation Committee's business during each meeting was not limited to translation work. The questions referred to the committee by the Bible consultants in London and Nigeria were also discussed. They also discussed words that they themselves found difficult to translate. As earlier hinted, when each book had been satisfactorily translated, it was sent to the United Bible Society in London. There, it was typeset and a camera-ready copy was prepared for printing. The aspect of translation work was done in Nigeria and completed in 1972, and in 1976, the galley-proof was sent to Ven. Enajero Arawore for final proof-reading. The Translation Committee met for several days in the house of Chief J.E. Ukueku at Eku to proofread it. The committee co-opted Ven. Professor S.U. Eriwwo, an Anglican Priest, and Rev. Father (Dr) Erhuen, a Roman Catholic Mission Priest, in the final examination of the books. The translation which started in 1951, including the Old Testament and the revision of the New Testament, ended in 1972, a period of thirteen years. Dr. Eugene W. Bunkowske confessed to both G.G Darah and Nabofa in 1976 that it was the longest translation of the Bible into any language he had ever handled so far. It was sent to the press in 1972, and it did not come out until 1977. That is, the whole process lasted about eighteen years. It was a great pleasure to the entire Urhobo people when the Bible was launched on 29th April 1978 at Eku.

6. Methodology and Data Collection

The study employed a qualitative research approach by analyzing the current version of the Urhobo Bible, identifying areas needing updates or improvement. Through informal oral interviews, the researcher gathered insights from stakeholders like Urhobo clergymen, Urhobo language speakers, Urhobo Bible translators, Bible scholars and linguists. Data collection was based on relevant Bible passages with focus language structure and vocabulary, wrongly spelt words, semantics, grammar, phonology, cultural relevance, idiomatic expressions and nuances, incorrect translation, punctuation, omission of Bible verses, etc. A text analysis of the Urhobo Bible was done. In doing this, the investigator obtained a copy of the Urhobo Bible, identified verses or passages with archaic language, cultural and mechanical inaccuracies, and translation issues, and analyzed documented examples.

7. Data Presentation and Discussion

The data will be presented under different subheadings based on the research questions raised in the study.

Research question one: What are the challenges of the current Urhobo Bible translation?

7.1. Biblical Blunders: The Consequences of Erroneous Spellings

Erroneous spellings in the Urhobo Bible have far-reaching consequences, compromising the accuracy and authenticity of sacred texts. These mistakes can alter the meaning and interpretation of biblical passages, leading to confusion among readers. Ultimately, such spelling mistakes undermine the credibility and reliability of the Urhobo Bible as a sacred text.

Some obvious spelling errors in the Urhobo Bible need to be corrected in the next edition. The following are some of the errors discovered in various Bible passages. The list is not exhausted:

2 Chronicles 7:12 (oma, not: ama); 1 Kings 19:4 (ekpuyovwi, not: ekpayovwi); 2 Kings 20:3 (asakiephana, not: asankiephana); Revelation 12:2 (bunu, not: bounu); Revelation 12:12 (ekan, not: eka); Revelation 15:2 (mudia, not: midia); Revelation 16:15 (eṅe, not: eṅo); Revelation 18:8 (bruhwe, not: brubwe); Revelation 22:14 (sa, not: as); Luke 18:2 (oshṛ, not: oshe); Genesis 27:12,13 (ekan, not: eka); Genesis 37:5 (evwerhe, not: evwrhe); Genesis 41:40 (kpotṛ, not: koptṛ); Genesis 41:40 (ke, not: ki); Genesis 49:7 (Ekan, not: Eka); Ezekiel 22:31 (ayen, not: syen); Ezekiel 43:3 (guṛghṛ, not: ghṛghṛ); Psalms 36:5 (odjuvwu, not: udjuvwu); Psalms 71:9 (ṛghwo, not: oghwo); Psalms 74:9 (oka, not: okan); Psalms 90:2 (ma, not: mama); Isaiah 1:15 (yṛnre, not: vṛnre); Isaiah 1:18 (avwanre, not: abwanre); Isaiah 65:24 (nyo, not: myo); Jeremiah 15:16 (ode, not: odo); Daniel 4:33,34 (re, not: ria); Matthew 9:22 (oma, not: omar); Matthew 12:18 (roye, not: rove); Matthew 15:9 (ihwo, not: ihoo); Matthew 16:20 (roye, not: upside down); Matthew 17:10 (rhe, not: rh); Matthew 17:12 (vughee, not: vugbee); Matthew 18:20 (ode, not: odo); Matthew 21:46 (ne, not: me); Matthew 21:31 (kono, not: korho); Matthew 21:6 (hwa, not: haw); Matthew 23:33 (vabṛ, not: nabṛ); Luke 1:5 (aye, not: a ye); Luke 1:13 (ṛmṛshare, not: emṛshare); Luke 10:30 (gborho, not: ghorho); Luke 11:10 (hworo, not: hwori); Luke 12:28 (gbodo gbodo, not: bodo bodo); Luke 12:35 (chobie, not: chovie); 1 Corinthians 15:54 (oma, not: oms); 2 Corinthians 4:13 (vwe, not: vwo); Romans 13:9 (die, not: de); Colossians 1:18 (vwo, not: vbo); Hebrews 5:14 (omiragua, not: omirogua); Hebrews 6:16 (ohwo, not: ohow);. In the heading before Acts 20:7, 'Trosa' should be correctly spelt as 'Troas'.

7.2 Misinterpreted Meanings: A Critical Examination of Urhobo Bible Translation

This section critically analyzes mistranslated biblical passages in the Urhobo Bible, highlighting instances where cultural, linguistic, or contextual misinterpretations have led to distorted meanings. The examination reveals the complexities of translating sacred texts and the need for a nuanced understanding of the source language, target language, and cultural contexts. Below are some instances of mistranslated meanings.

(i) Revelation 13:8 was mistranslated, altering the intended meaning from 'And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship Him...' (= ayen ejobi ri dia vwe akpo na ke cha go) to 'And all that fell upon the earth shall worship Him...' (= ayen ejobi ri sheri vwe akpo na ke cha go). This misinterpretation changes the scope and implications of the verse. The incorrect translation compromises the accuracy and clarity of the Urhobo Bible.

(ii) 1 Thessalonians 4:4 was mistranslated, altering the intended meaning from 'That everyone of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour' (= rere ohwo ɔvuɔvo vwɔ riɛn obo o sun oma rɔye vwɛ ɛfuɔn kugbe ɔghɔ) to 'That everyone of you should know how to marry one wife in sanctification and honour' (= rere ohwo ɔvuɔvo ɔ riɛn obo ra rɔvwɔ aye ɔvo vwɛ ɛfuɔn kugbe ɔghɔ). The phrase 'to possess one's vessel' means to keep control, manage one's body. This is the intended meaning. However, it was wrongly translated as 'to marry one wife'.

(iii) Acts 16:25 is a case of incomplete translation. The phrase '...and sang praises' was omitted in the Urhobo translation. The complete translation should be: 'Ekevuɔvo vwɛ oma rɛ uhervie ason Pɔl kugbe Silas vwɔ nɛ ɛrhovwo, so ine nu kɛ ɔghɛnɛ... .' Similarly, Matthew 27:35 was not completely translated in the Urhobo Bible. '... that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots' was completely omitted in the Urhobo translation. Subsequent editions of the Urhobo Bible should ensure a complete translation is rendered.

(iv) A significant translation error is evident in Matthew 18:17b, where the phrase 'let him be unto you as a heathen man (= a pagan) and a publican' is mistranslated in the Urhobo Bible as 'let him be unto you as an enemy' (= '... gbe jo dia ɔvweghrɛ wɛn bɛdɛ'). This mistranslation distorts the original meaning, conveying a sense of animosity rather than the intended notion of social and religious separation. In other words, the erroneous translation alters the intended meaning, substituting a relationship of hostility (enemy) for one of social and religious exclusion (heathen and publican).

(v) A translation error occurs in John 9:4, where the Urhobo Bible renders the verse as 'We can do the works of Him that sent me' (= 'Avwanre se ru iruo rɛ ohwo ro ji vwe rhe,...') whereas the original text states 'I must work the works of Him that sent Me...'. Again, this inaccurate translation shifts the focus from Jesus' personal responsibility and urgency to accomplish His Father's work (emphasized by 'I must') to a collective ability or possibility (We can), altering the nuances of Jesus' statement.

(vi) A notable mistake is found in Romans 12:10b, where the negative particle 'not' is omitted, resulting in a positive statement (= '... we sivwi oseghe rɛ ɔghɔemuo') instead of the intended negative one (= '... we sivwi oseghe rɛ ɔghɔemuo'). Furthermore, the Urhobo translation fails to employ the requisite grammatical marker for negation, which involves lengthening the final vowel of the last word. Specifically, the word 'ɔghɔemuo' should be rendered as 'ɔghɔemuo' to convey the correct negative meaning. This oversight alters the meaning of the verse, emphasizing the importance of accurate translation and attention to linguistic details.

(vii) A translation discrepancy was observed in Psalms 70:2c, where the phrase 'that desire my hurt' (= '...re guɔnɔ omewan mɛ') is rendered differently from the original text, which conveys a slightly distinct nuance of intentionality and motivation. Specifically, the Urhobo Bible translates this phrase as '...that want to hurt me (= '...re guɔnɔ ovwɛ woma'), which, while similar, subtly shifts the emphasis from the desire or motivation to cause harm to the action of hurting itself.

(viii) A notable omission occurs in the Urhobo translation of Matthew 6:13, where the concluding doxology 'For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever, Amen' is absent. This exclusion inadvertently deprives the Urhobo text of a significant expression of praise and worship, which is present in the original biblical manuscript.

(ix) An apparent translation flaw in the Urhobo Bible is the omission of adjectives qualifying nouns. A case in point is I John 2:1, where the original text describes the recipients as 'My little children' (= *Imitete mę*), conveying a sense of endearment and intimacy. However, the Urhobo Bible translation renders it simply as 'My children' (= *Emọ mę*), thereby losing the emotional nuance and warmth inherent in the original text.

(x) A significant translation error occurs in Proverbs 16:7b of the Urhobo Bible, where the statement '...He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him' is inaccurately rendered as '...He makes even his enemies to be his boyfriend/girlfriend (= *ivwighrę rọye dede na ke rhoma dia ọnse/ọse rọye*). This mistranslation substantially alters the intended meaning, replacing the concept of peaceful co-existence with the notion of a romantic relationship. A corrected translation should convey the original idea of enemies being at peace rather than implying an intimate or romantic connection.

(xi) The Urhobo Bible's translations of cardinal directions are geographically inaccurate. 'West' (Psalms 75:6) is rendered as '*obuko ọnre*,' meaning 'the back of the sun,' while 'east' (Psalms 75:6) is translated as '*obaro ọnre*,' meaning 'the front of the sun.' However, the sun does not have a literal 'back' or 'front'. Similarly, 'north' (Ezekiel 46:9) is translated as '*obọhwere ọnre*,' meaning the left-hand side of the sun, and 'south' as '*oborhe ọnre*, meaning the right-hand side of the sun. Again, the sun does not have a literal 'left' or 'right'. These translations may be based on traditional or cultural understanding, but they do not align with modern geographical conventions. The following terms, which are also known in Urhobo in Urhobo could be used: north (*utu*), south (*ovwọ*).

(xii) A substantial inaccuracy is present in Genesis 21:10, where the expression '...cast this bondwoman and her son...' is inaccurately rendered as '...cast this bondwoman and her son and throw them away...' (= '*...dję aye na vę ọmọ rọye kufia...*'). This incorrect translation is problematic, as the Urhobo word 'kufia' specifically means to throw an object away rather than a person. A more apt translation of the biblical text would be 'let go of the bondwoman and her son', which in Urhobo would be correctly rendered as '*...siobọ nę aye na ọvięn na vę ọmọ rọye kpo* or '*... dję aye na ọvięn na vę ọmọ rọye kpo...*'. This corrected translation conveys the intended meaning of the biblical text, avoiding the inaccurate and potentially misleading connotations of the original translation.

(xiii) A glaring error is made in Matthew 17:2, where the phrase '...His raiment was white as light' is rendered as '...His raiment was white as basin' (= '*... iwun rọye da rhe fon kirę oze*'). This translation is not only inaccurate but also absurd, as there is no logical connection between 'light' and 'basin'. A more accurate translation would utilize the Urhobo term '*urhukpę*', which correctly conveys the meaning of light. Therefore, the corrected translation should read as '*...iwun rọye da rhe fon kirę urhukpę*'), replacing the erroneous 'oze' (basin)

with the appropriate term ‘urhukpe’ (light). This correction is essential to ensure that the biblical text is conveyed accurately and meaningfully in the Urhobo language.

(ix) A notable misinterpretation occurs in 2 Chronicles 8:13, where the phrase ‘solemn feast’ is incorrectly rendered as ‘edewo’ in the Urhobo bible. However, ‘edewo’ actually refers to a ‘market day’ or a day of religious worship’ or ‘a day of abstaining from farm work’, which bears no relation to the concept of a solemn feast. A more accurate translation of ‘solemn feast’ in Urhobo would be ‘edorę re bruru’ which conveys the sense of a sacred or formal celebration. This correction is essential to ensure that the biblical text is conveyed accurately and meaningfully in the Urhobo language, avoiding potential misinterpretation or confusion.

(x) A significant omission was noted in the Urhobo Bible translation of Deuteronomy 33:29, where the phrase ‘your enemies shall be found liars unto you’ was not translated.

7.3 Gaps in the Narrative: Incomplete Renderings in the Urhobo Bible

There are cases of verse numbering inconsistency or verse numbering error. Some of the verses are omitted or merged with other verse numbers, resulting in inconsistent numbering sequences. For instance, Galatians 1:4 is not assigned a separate number; rather, it is merged with verse 3. The same goes for Hebrews 10:16. Verse 16 was merged with verse 15. Similarly, in Revelation 15, verse 1 and verse 2 were lumped together. Besides, there is a mix-up of the verses; verse 2 was translated as verse 1 while what ought to be verse 1 was skipped. You will find the translation of Revelation 15:1, which is just the last verse before Chapter 15. In Revelation 14, there is another serious mix-up; we have two verses ‘15’ – the normal ‘15’ and another abnormal verse ‘15’ after verse ‘20’. This ‘abnormal’ verse ‘15’ ought to be the translation for Revelation 15: 1. What a mix-up! Here are other similar cases of verse numbering error: Hebrews 12:29, Matthew 26:75, etc. Again, Matthew 5: 48 was skipped entirely, with the translation stopping at Matthew 5:47. The second ‘verse 1’ in Genesis 49 should be ‘verse 2’. Deuteronomy 1:42 is not assigned a separate number, rather, it was merged with verse 41. ‘Acts 8:36’ is mistakenly numbered as ‘Acts 8:26’.

7.4 Meaning beyond Words: Semantic Discrepancies in the Urhobo Bible

(i) Translators are often faced with the challenge of lexical gaps, translation compromise or terminological accuracy. The Urhobo word for ‘potash’(= ubiughweri) was inaccurately used in 1 Corinthians 5:6 as a substitute for ‘leaven’ due to a lack of direct equivalent or as a proxy for ‘leaven’, highlighting a challenge in finding precise linguistic equivalents. The use of ‘ubiughweri’ has the potential to alter the intended meaning in this translation.

(ii) In Revelation 14:18, the English word ‘grapes’ was translated as ‘grep.’ This is incorrect! It should be translated as ‘itieni’(plural). The singular form is ‘utieni’.

(iii) In Matthew 2:11, the Urhobo Bible translates ‘frankincense’ and ‘myrrh’ as ‘adjija’ and ‘ugboduma’, respectively. While these terms refer to fragrant plants in Urhobo culture, their connotations and associations differ significantly from the original biblical context. ‘Adjija’ is a plant used in fragrant pomades, and ‘ugboduma’ is a sacred herb with spiritual significance in Urhobo traditional shrines. The use of these terms may lead to misinterpretation, as they

introduce cultural nuances unrelated to the biblical narrative. A more accurate approach might have been to retain the original English terms or borrow them into Urhobo, ensuring a more faithful representation of the biblical text.

(iv) In Isaiah 7:14, the Urhobo Bible's translation of 'virgin' as 'eghene aye' is inaccurate. The phrase 'eghene aye' literarily means 'young woman', which fails to convey the intended meaning of sexual purity and chastity. A more precise translation would utilize the Urhobo term 'omotobe', which specifically denotes a virgin, thereby ensuring a more accurate representation of the biblical text.

(v) In 2 John 1:1,5, the Urhobo Bible's translation of 'lady' as 'omote' (girl) is inaccurate. The term 'lady' conveys a sense of respect, dignity, and politeness, particularly in formal or older English usage. In contrast, 'omote' specifically refers to a 'girl', lacking the honorific connotations of 'lady'. A more accurate translation would utilize one of the Urhobo terms for 'lady', such as 'umukot', 'umukokot', 'ititi', or 'iledi', to convey the intended sense of respect and dignity.

(vi) In Isaiah, 47:7, the Urhobo Bible's translation of 'lady' as 'oni' (mother) is incorrect. The term 'lady' in this context conveys a sense of dignity, respect and nobility, as earlier pointed out, whereas 'oni' specifically means 'mother', introducing a maternal connotation not present in the original text. A more accurate translation would utilize one of the Urhobo terms for 'lady', such as 'umukot', 'umukokot', 'ititi', or 'iledi', to preserve the intended meaning and nuance.

(vii) An inaccurate rendering is found in Psalms 75:6 of the Urhobo Bible, where 'south' is incorrectly rendered as 'aghwa', meaning 'bush/farm'. This substitution introduces a geographical inaccuracy, as 'aghwa' refers to a natural environment or vegetation rather than a cardinal direction. A corrected translation should utilize the appropriate term for 'south', ensuring a more accurate representation of the original text.

(viii) In Isaiah 5:26, the word 'nation' was translated as 'orere' instead of 'egborho' / 'ekuoto'.

7.5 Sound and Sense: Phonological Inconsistencies in the Urhobo Bible

The Urhobo Bible exhibits several phonological inconsistencies that compromise its linguistic accuracy. These inconsistencies, including incorrect vowel lengthening and tone marking, affect the overall sound and sense of the translation. As a result, the Bible's meaning and message are sometimes obscured, undermining its effectiveness as a tool for spiritual guidance and education.

(i) A significant limitation of the Urhobo Bible is the complete absence of tone marking. This omission poses a considerable challenge for readers, particularly when encountering homographs, which are words that are identical in spelling but differ in meaning and tone. For instance, the words 'evwe' (goat) and 'evwe' (kola nut) are distinguished solely by their tones, which are not indicated in the current translation. The inclusion of tone marking is crucial for accurate comprehension and effective communication, as it facilitates and disambiguates

words with multiple meanings. Therefore, future editions of the Urhobo Bible must incorporate tone marking to enhance clarity, precision, and overall readability.

(ii) The Urhobo Bible's orthography deviates from the standard convention for indicating vowel lengthening in the Urhobo language. Instead of doubling the final vowel without a hyphen to denote lengthening, the Bible uses a hyphenated format, e.g. ọbo-o, izobo-o, awanree, ewwata-a, ghwuru-u, etc. To ensure consistency with the established Urhobo writing system, future editions of the Urhobo Bible should correct this anomaly by replacing the hyphenated vowel lengthening with the standard vowel notation, e.g. . ọboo, izoboo, awanree, ewwataa, ghwuruu, etc.

(iii) The Urhobo Bible exhibits a significant anomaly in the rendering of biblical names. In contrast to the typical Urhobo naming convention, where names begin and end with vowel sounds, the Urhobo Bible translates names like Joshua, David, Moses, Peter Joseph, Sarah, Ruth, Mary, Docas etc. as starting with consonant sounds instead of the expected IJoshua, Idevidi, Imosisi, Ipita, Ijosefu, Isera, Iritu, Imeri, Idokasi, etc. Furthermore, the translation of 'Jacob' as 'Jekọp' instead of 'Jekọb' is a glaring error, as it substitutes the phoneme /b/ with /p/. This oversight neglects the distinct phonemic difference between /p/ and /b/ in Urhobo, further highlighting the need for a revised Urhobo Bible that adheres to the language's phonological and orthographic conventions.

Research question two: How does a contemporary Urhobo language Bible version address the needs of Urhobo adherents?

A contemporary Urhobo language Bible version should prioritize linguistic accuracy and cultural relevance to effectively address the needs of Urhobo adherents. This includes correcting wrong spellings, flawless, complete and comprehensible translation, and correcting phonological inconsistencies, such as vowel lengthening and tone marking, to ensure clarity and precision. Additionally, the translation should utilize culturally appropriate terms and expressions to convey biblical concepts and ideas. By doing so, a contemporary Urhobo Bible version can facilitate deeper understanding, engagement, and spiritual growth among Urhobo adherents.

Research question three: What linguistic and cultural considerations should be taken into account when translating the Bible into contemporary Urhobo?

When translating the Bible into contemporary Urhobo, several linguistic and cultural considerations should be taken into account. Linguistically, the translation should:

- i. Accurately represent Urhobo phonology, including correct vowel lengthening and tone marking.
- ii. Utilize standard Urhobo orthography to ensure consistency and clarity
- iii. Employ contextually appropriate vocabulary, avoiding archaic or obsolete terms.

- iv. Consider the nuances of Urhobo grammar and syntax to convey biblical concepts.

Culturally, the translation should:

- i. Be sensitive to Urhobo cultural norms and values to ensure that biblical concepts are conveyed in a relevant and meaningful way.
- ii. Avoid cultural misrepresentations or inaccuracies that could compromise the translation's credibility.
- iii. Take into account the diversity of Urhobo culture and the potential for varying interpretations and understandings.
- iv. Engage with Urhobo language speakers and cultural experts to ensure that the translation is informed by and resonates with the Urhobo community.

By carefully considering these linguistic and cultural factors, a Bible translation into contemporary Urhobo can effectively communicate biblical truths while respecting and honouring the language and culture of the Urhobo people.

8. Conclusion

This study examined the Urhobo Bible translation, highlighting numerous areas that require improvement to enhance its accuracy, clarity, and cultural relevance. The findings revealed a range of errors and inconsistencies, including:

1. Spelling errors that compromise the translation's credibility.
2. Poor use of punctuation marks.
3. Misinterpreted meanings from different Bible passages that altered the intended message.
4. Faulty or misleading translations that distort biblical truths.
5. Verse numbering inconsistencies and errors that disrupt the narrative flow.
6. Merged verses that conflate distinct ideas and teachings.
7. Incomplete translations that omit crucial information.
8. Semantic discrepancies that fail to convey the nuances of biblical language.
9. Omission of qualifying adjectives that alter the meaning and context of biblical passages.
10. Inadequate representation of Urhobo phonology, grammar and vocabulary.

These errors and inconsistencies undermine the effectiveness of the Urhobo Bible translation, potentially leading to confusion, misinterpretation and spiritual misguidance. To address these challenges, this paper emphasizes the importance of careful translation, linguistic and cultural sensitivity, and rigorous editing and proofreading. While a few of these errors have been corrected in the electronic version of the Urhobo Bible, a lot still needs to be done to improve both the hard and soft copies of the Urhobo Bible.

Ultimately, this paper contributes to the ongoing efforts to improve Bible translations for minority languages, ensuring that they have access to accurate, clear, and culturally relevant scriptures that resonate with their unique contexts and experiences.

9. Recommendations

First, a significant flaw in the present Urhobo Bible is the absence of tone marks. Tones have lexical and grammatical functions in Urhobo. The absence of tone marks could make reading sometimes difficult, which will impair comprehension.

Second, there is a need for a concerted effort by language experts and textual critics of translation to conduct a thorough X-ray of the current Urhobo translation of the Bible.

Third, the revised version should faithfully adhere to the original text while providing cross-references to enhance understanding and study. Ideally, this new version should be a bilingual edition, presenting the Urhobo text alongside its English equivalent, facilitating easy comparison and comprehension. This format will enable readers to engage with the scripture in their native language while also referencing the English translation, promoting a deeper appreciation and understanding of God's Word.

Finally, for optimal clarity and comprehension, it is recommended that the standard Urhobo dialect, specifically the Agbarho dialect, be utilized as the basis for the Bible translation. This dialect is widely understood and accepted across the Urhobo-speaking region, making it an ideal choice for a united and accessible translation. The current translation's use of various Urhobo dialects has resulted in comprehension challenges for readers, as dialectal variations can significantly impact the meaning and interpretation of biblical texts. By adopting the standard Agbarho dialect, the translation can ensure greater consistency, accuracy, and readability, ultimately enhancing the spiritual understanding and engagement of Urhobo-speaking readers.

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