

# **CROSSING LANGUAGE BARRIERS: A QUEST FOR QUALITY THROUGH PROFESSIONAL TRAINING IN ENGLISH- KISWAHILI SERMON INTERPRETATION IN TANZANIAN CHURCHES**

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## **Abstract**

This study focuses on the quality assessment of English-Kiswahili sermon interpreting in Tanzania's church settings, specifically evaluating the adherence to sense consistency in English-Kiswahili sermon interpreting. The study employed homogenous purposive sampling technique in selecting two Pentecostal churches in Dar es Salaam where observations were made and videos were recorded during guest preachers' sermons with Kiswahili interpreters. The study concludes that sermon interpreters lacked precision, resulting in communication breakdowns between preachers and the audiences. The paper recommends professional training of interpreters to provide quality interpreting services in churches and other social settings in Tanzania.

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## **Introduction:**

This study assesses the quality of English-Kiswahili sermon interpreting in Tanzania's church settings. The importance of sense consistency in English-Kiswahili sermon interpreting cannot be overemphasized as it refers to the interpreting output corresponding in sense with the preacher's message. The study is guided by sense-based theory propounded by Danica Seleskovitch in 1986, which posits that the process of interpreting involves understanding the message from the source text, interpreting it, and then transmitting what is understood to the audience. The interpreter is required to adhere to four pillars, which are command of the native language, command of the source language, command of relevant world and background knowledge, and command of interpreting methodology. The study employed homogenous purposive sampling technique in selecting two Pentecostal churches in Dar es Salaam, where observations were made and videos were recorded during guest preachers' sermons with Kiswahili interpreters. The study concludes that sermon interpreters lacked precision, resulting in communication breakdowns between preachers and the audiences. Therefore, the paper recommends professional training of interpreters to provide quality interpreting services in churches and other social settings in Tanzania.

## **Methodology**

Homogenous purposive sampling technique (see Creswell, 2018) was employed in selecting the two churches which are Dar es Salaam Calvary Revival Church and Amani Christian Centre. The two churches were selected because they regularly invite guest preachers who preach in English with Kiswahili sermon interpreters as bridges. The researcher attended the two church services which involved the guest preachers who preached in English with the aid of Kiswahili sermon interpreters.

The researcher observed whether or not Kiswahili renditions had sense consistency with the original English renditions. During the observation, the researcher took notes of all the cases of nonadherence to sense consistency with the original message.

During the observation, the researcher also recorded the two English-Kiswahili sermon interpreting from the two selected churches. The videos were recorded with the permission of the church leaders but without the knowledge of the guest preachers or the sermon interpreters. Recording videos is a regular practice of the churches researched in order to keep records of Sunday services such as these ones. Therefore, the preachers and the sermon interpreters knew that they were being recorded, but they were not informed that the recording would be used for research purposes. The preachers and the sermon interpreters were asked for their consent to use the recorded videos for research purposes at the end of the two services. The recorded interpreted sermons were then transcribed and analysed descriptively in relation to observation to determine whether or not there was sense consistency between the source language message and the target language message. In data presentation abbreviation and acronyms Inter, P1, P2, P3 and B.T have been used. Inter, represents the sermon interpreter, P1, the first preacher, P2, the second preacher, P3, the third preacher and B.T, back translation.

**Results and Discussion Sense Consistency with the Original Message in English-Kiswahili Sermon Interpreting.**

The issue of sense consistency with the original message requires the interpreting output to correspond in sense with the original message. Sense consistency with the original message can be approached from the point of view of precise meaning, clarity, completeness, and the need to avoid literal interpreting (see Moody, 2011).

### **Precise Meaning**

To provide quality sermon interpreting the interpreter needs to convey the full meaning and transfer all the details, if there is any deviation, then it should be as little as possible (Moody, 2011). Moody further argues that, quality interpreting can be affected when there are distortions, additions, errors, guessing, approximate interpretation, simplification, substitution of notions, deviation from meaning and nonsensical interpretation. Therefore, in order to provide quality sermon interpreting, the sermon interpreters need to be as precise as possible. It was observed during the two sermon interpreting that, there were some instances where the sermon interpreters lacked precision thus led to sense inconsistency. Extract 1 illustrates:

Extract 1: Serm. 1

Poster: You didn't hear any earthquake?

Inter: Mlisikia ule mtikisiko?

P1: I know you heard it, you heard it you felt it

Inter: Bila shaka mlisikia

P1: It was signalling the arrival of the first lady of this ministry (laughing)

Inter: Sasa tunaenda kumpokea mwana mama wa mtumishi wa Mungu huyu

B.T: Now we are going to receive the woman of this servant of God

Extract 1 indicates deviation from the preacher's message especially when the preacher said "It was signalling the arrival of the first lady of this ministry (laughing)". The sermon interpreter interpreted it as "Sasa tunaenda kumpokea mwana mama wa mtumishi wa Mungu huyu". This Kiswahili

interpreting output can be translated into English as “Now we are going to receive the woman of this servant of God”. While the preacher was communicating about the earthquake signalling the arrival of the first lady of the ministry, the sermon interpreter communicated to the audience about receiving the woman of the servant of God. This inconsistency hindered effective communication between the preacher and the audience. To facilitate effective communication, the sermon interpreter could have interpreted “It was signalling the arrival of the first lady of this ministry” as “Lilikuwa likiashiria kuwasili kwa Mama Mchungaji wa huduma hii”.

In sermon 2, there were also some instances of inconsistency which were the result of simplification, substitution of notions and deviation from the preacher’s message. Extract 2 illustrates:

Extract 2: Serm.2

P3: In the book of first Samuel

Inter: Katika kitabu cha Samweli wa kwanza P3: Chapter one

Inter: Sura ya kwanza P3: And chapter two

Inter: Na sura ya pili

P3: He speaks about a woman

Inter: Anaongea kuhusu mwana mke P3: Called Hanna

Inter: Ambaye Mungu anamheshimu

B.T: Who is honoured by God P3: She was married

Inter: Ambae alikuwa ni tasa B.T: Who was barren

In extract 2, the preacher was communicating to the audience about a woman called Hannah by saying “He speaks about a woman called Hannah”. The sermon interpreter interpreted “called Hannah” as “Ambaye Mungu anamheshimu” which can be translated into English as “Who is honoured by God”. Therefore, while the preacher was addressing the audience about “Hannah”, the sermon interpreter communicated to the audience about “honour”. The sermon interpreter substituted two different notions leading to the distortion of the preacher’s message. To effectively facilitate communication, the sermon interpreter could have interpreted “called Hannah” as “aliyeitwa Hannah”. This kind of interpreting rendered the preacher’s message imprecisely consequently hindered effective communication between the preacher and the audience.

In extract 2, the preacher further says, Hannah was married “she was married”. The sermon interpreter interpreted it as “Ambae alikuwa ni tasa” which can be translated into English as “Who was barren”. The sermon interpreter here completely deviated from the preacher’s message. While the preacher addressed the audience about “marriage” the sermon interpreter communicated to the audience about “barrenness”. This lack of precision distorted the preacher’s message and consequently hindered effective communication between the preacher and the audience. To effectively facilitate communication between the preacher and the audience the sermon interpreter could have interpreted “She was married” as “Alikuwa ameolewa”.

The findings illustrate that, imprecise sermon interpreting hindered effective communication between the preachers and the audience. The observation of the two English-Kiswahili sermon interpreting indicates that the sermon interpreters sometimes were not able to comprehend the preachers’ messages. As a result, they ended up producing inconsistent interpreting output in relation to the preachers’ intended message. The observation further indicates that, the sermon interpreters sometimes lacked concentration. As a result, they failed to grasp the preachers’

messages hence they ended up producing inconsistent interpreting outputs. Also the observation indicates that, the inability to produce precise interpreting output was the result of sermon interpreters' poor biblical knowledge.

The findings of this study contradict with sense-based theory which requires the interpreter to properly comprehend the speaker's message before interpreting it into the target language. On that Seleskovitch (1986) and Lederer (1990) affirm that, comprehension of meaning is the first and prerequisite step in the interpreting process which involves combined efforts of interpreters' language knowledge and extra-linguistic knowledge. Therefore, in order to produce precise and consistent interpreting output, the sermon interpreters are required to be able to properly comprehend the preachers' messages. This requires the sermon interpreters to master the four pillars of sense-based theory.

### **Clarity**

Clarity in interpreting can be described as the interpreters' ability to formulate and express their thoughts clearly, so that the essence of the preachers' message does not become impossible to understand (see Pöchhacker, 2004). Therefore, quality interpreting output should be easy to understand, comprehensible and accessible. To do that, the sermon interpreters must be able to communicate the message in simple words or the simplest possible conversational language.

The observation and analysis of the two English-Kiswahili sermon interpreting indicates several cases where the sermon interpreters lacked clarity when interpreting some of the preacher's messages consequently led to communication breakdown between the preachers and the audience.

Extract 3 illustrates:

*Extract 3# Sermon.1*

P3: Do not let your background

Inter: Usiangalie historia yako P3: Put you back on ground

Inter: Ili uje mgongo wako utembe chini

B.T: So that your back rolls down

P3: The fact that you are going through something

Inter: Jinsi ambavyo unaposhindwa kufanya mambo

B.T: Since you are not able to do something P3: It doesn't mean that God has forgotten about you

Inter:

Haimaanishi kwamba Mungu anapinga kila kitu kuhusu wewe

BT: It doesn't mean that God is against everything concerning you

In extract 3, the preacher said to the audience "Do not let your background put you back on the ground". The sermon interpreter interpreted it as "Usiangalie historia yako ili mgongo wako uje utembe chini" which can be translated into English as "Do not look at your history so that your back rolls down". Not only that what the sermon interpreter communicated to the audience is not linguistically clear but also inconsistent with the preacher's message. While the preacher was advising the audience to not let their background ruin their life, the sermon interpreter communicated to the audience not to look at their background so that their back rolls down, which is not clear. In order to facilitate effective communication, the sermon interpreter could have interpreted "Do not let your background put you back on the ground" as "Usiruhusu historia yako

ikurudishe nyuma". Such lack of clarity and inconsistency affected the quality of sermon interpreting and hindered effective communication between the preacher and the audience.

In the same extract, the preacher told the audience "The fact that you are going through something it doesn't mean that God has forgotten about you". The sermon interpreter interpreted it as "jinsi ambavo unaposhindwa kufanya mambo, haimaanishi kwamba Mungu anapinga kila kitu kuhusu wewe". This can be translated into English as "When you are unable to do something it doesn't mean that God is against everything concerning you". This interpreting is not clear but also inconsistent with the preacher's message. While the preacher was communicating to the audience about God not forgetting them despite what they are going through, the sermon interpreter communicated to the audience about God not being against them despite their inability to do some things. To facilitate effective communication between the preacher and the audience, the sermon interpreter could have interpreted "The fact that you are going through something it doesn't mean that God has forgotten about you" as "Ni kweli kwamba unapitia matatizo lakini haimaanishi kwamba Mungu amekusahau". Failure to provide clear and consistent interpretation output led to the breakdown of communication between the preacher and the audience.

There were also several cases in sermon 2 where the sermon interpreter failed to formulate and express their thoughts clearly while interpreting. As a result, they hindered effective communication between the preacher and the audience. Extract 4 illustrates:

Extract 4: Sermon 2 P2: This question

Inter: Swali lake P2: Can only be raised

Inter: Laweza kuinuliwa

P2: By somebody that has done what needs to be done

Inter: Ambaye ana maswali ya kitu gani kimefanyika

B.T: Who has some questions about what has been done P2: By somebody that has done everything properly

Inter: Kwamba je jambo hilo limetendeka vizuri B.T: Whether something has been done properly

In extract 4, the preacher said to the audience "By somebody that has done what needs to be done". The sermon interpreter interpreted it as "Ambaye ana maswali ya kitu gani kimefanyika" which can be translated into English as "Who has some questions about what has been done". Linguistically, what the sermon interpreter was communicating to the audience is not clear and is not consistent with the preacher's message. While the preacher was speaking about a person that has fulfilled his/her responsibility, the sermon interpreter communicated to the audience about a person who has some questions about what has been done. Therefore, there is inconsistency between the preacher's message and the sermon interpreter's message delivered to the audience. In order to facilitate effective communication between the preacher and the audience, the sermon interpreter could have interpreted "By somebody that has done what needs to be done" as "Na mtu ambaye amefanya kile kinachotakiwa kufanyika". This lack of clarity and inconsistency affected the quality of sermon interpreting hence hindered effective communication between the preacher and the audience.

Moreover, the sermon interpreter interpreted "By somebody that has done everything properly" as "Kwamba je jambo hilo limetendeka vizuri" which can be translated into English as "Whether something has been done properly". Not only that what the sermon interpreter communicated to



the audience is linguistically not clear but also inconsistent with the preacher's message. While the preacher was addressing the audience about a person that has done something properly, the sermon interpreter communicated to the audience about whether something has been done properly. In order to produce a consistent interpreting output, the sermon interpreter could have interpreted "By somebody that has done everything properly" as "Na mtu ambaye amefanya kila kitu vizuri/kwa usahihi". Lack of clarity as indicated in this case affected the quality of sermon interpreting and consequently hindered effective communication between the preacher and the audience.

The observation and analysis of the two English-Kiswahili sermon interpreting indicate that one of the reasons for lack of clarity was lack of concentration of the sermon interpreters. Lack of concentration resulted into sermon interpreters failing to capture some of the preachers' words thus leading to the production of some unclear and inconsistent Kiswahili interpreting output. These unclear Kiswahili utterances affected the quality of sermon interpreting hence hindered effective communication between the preachers and the audience. The observation also indicates that sermon interpreters poor command of the of the source language also led to unclear interpreting as the sermon interpreters ended up using words which were not the equivalents of the preachers source language words. The findings contradicts with the sensebased theory which requires the interpreter to master both the source and the target language in order to provide quality interpreting output (see Seleskovitch, (1986).

The findings of this study also contradicts with Peremota (2017) who asserts that, unclear language or complicated phrases where the meaning is lost or which become too confusing can affect the quality of sermon interpreting therefore should not be used in sermon interpreting. Peremota (2017) adds that, the sermon interpreter should be able to deduce the level of understanding of the audience and adapt the communication accordingly (culturally and linguistically). As a result, everyone in the audience will be able to understand the message fully. Also in order to provide quality sermon interpreting it is important for the sermon interpreter not only to speak, but also to truly communicate the intended message to the audience.

#### *Literal Interpreting*

In literal interpreting, words are interpreted independently using their most common meanings without considering the context (see Moody, 2011). Moody (2011) further argues that, literal interpreting transfers the primary meanings of all the source language words, into the target language text, and it is normally effective for brief simple neutral sentences. Therefore, to produce quality interpreting, interpreters are required to take a creative approach to truly convey the same full message in a beautiful natural literally target language, while keeping balance and being careful not to distort the message. Failure to take a creative approach to convey the full message in a target language affects the quality of interpreting and consequently hinders effective communication between the speaker and the audience.

During the observation and analysis of the two English-Kiswahili sermon interpreting, some literal interpreting which hindered effective communication between the preachers and the audience were identified. Extract 5 illustrates:

Extract 5: Sermon 1

P2: I have married this man

Inter: Nimemuoa mwanaume huyu

B.T: I have married this man (literal interpreting)

P2: I have married this woman

Inter: Nimeolewa na mke huyu

B.T: I am married to this woman (literal interpreting) P2: But instead of getting love

Inter: Lakini badala ya kupata upendo P2: I am receiving rejection

Inter: Napokea hali ya kukataliwa

In extract 5, the preacher said “I have married this man”, the sermon interpreter interpreted it as “Nimemuoa mwanaume

huyu”. This Kiswahili interpreting output has not taken context into consideration because as per Tanzanian culture, a man marries a woman not otherwise. In order to provide quality interpreting, the sermon interpreter could have interpreted “I

have married this man” as “Nimeolewa na mwanaume huyu” which can be translated into English as “I am married to this man”. Additionally, the preacher in extract 6 said that “I have married this woman”. The sermon interpreter interpreted it as “Nimeolewa na mwanamke huyu” which can be translated into English as “I am married to this woman”. This Kiswahili interpreting output also did not adhere to the context because as per Tanzanian context, a man marries a woman, a woman cannot marry a man. This Kiswahili interpreting output looks unnatural because it has not taken context into consideration. As a result it hindered effective communication between the preacher and the audience.

In sermon 2, there are also cases showing how literal interpreting led to lack of sense consistency with the original message and hindered effective communication between the preacher and the audience. Extract 6 illustrates:

Extract 6: Sermon 2

P3: There is a time in life

Inter: Kuna wakati katika maisha P3: We call it a zero hour

Inter: Tunaita kuwa ni wakati ziro

B.T: We call it a zero hour (literal interpreting)

In extract 6, the preacher said “There is a time in life, we call it a zero hour” the sermon interpreter interpreted it “as “Kuna wakati katika maisha, tunaita wakati ziro”. In this extract, the sermon interpreter interpreted “zero hour” using the dictionary meaning of words without taking context into consideration. Thus, by taking context of the church into consideration, the sermon interpreter could have interpreted “There is a time in life, we call it zero hour” as “Kuna wakati katika maisha ambao ni mgumu na usio na matumaini”.

Therefore, by interpreting the preacher’s words literally, the sermon interpreter affected the quality of sermon interpreting and thus hindered effective communication between the preacher and the audience.

The findings of this study indicates that, literal interpreting affected the quality of sermon interpreting and consequently hindered effective communication between the preachers and the audience. The observation indicates that, the sermon interpreters literal interpreting was the result of the sermon interpreters not taking situational context into consideration while interpreting. On that Lederer (1990) asserts that, interpreters are part of the event at which they interpret, interpreters not only see the participants, but also know who the participants are and in what

capacity they take the floor. She goes on by saying that, being present at the discussions and witnessing the proceedings enables the interpreter to gather sufficient knowledge to interpret appropriately. Therefore, if the sermon interpreter could have used the situational context during sermon interpreting, then he would not have interpreted the preacher's message "I have married this man" as "Nimemuoa mwanaume huyu". Because the situational context could have helped the sermon interpreter to know that the preacher was addressing the Tanzanians not Europeans or Americans. Thus, the appropriate interpreting could have been "Nimeolewa na mwanaume huyu" which can be translated into English as "I am married to this man".

The observation of the two English-Kiswahili sermon interpreting also indicate that, the literal interpreting of the two sermons was a result of sermon interpreters not adhering to verbal context during sermon interpreting. Verbal context requires a speech to be uttered in a continuous stream of words, each word contributing to the meaning of the words around it and being made more specific by these surrounding words (Lederer, 1990). In other words, a verbal context specifies the appropriate meaning. Therefore, the sermon interpreter in extract 7 was required to utilize the surrounding words such as "this question". This could have helped to shape the meaning of the whole utterance "This question can only be raised" which could likely be interpreted as "Swali hili linaweza kuulizwa" and not "swali hili

linaweza kuinuliwa" as interpreted by the sermon interpreter. Therefore, verbal context and situational context must be taken into account during sermon interpreting as they enable the sermon interpreter to deduce the specific meaning intended by the preacher and thus meeting the communicative needs of the audience. Failure to adhere to verbal and situational context of the utterances led to the breakdown of the communication between the preachers and the audience.

#### *Completeness of Rendition*

In order to provide quality interpreting, the message must be conveyed in its entirety (see Peremota 2017). Peremota further asserts that, all that is said should be interpreted comprehensively, preserving the full meaning in great detail. There should be no omissions, gaps, cuts, abridging sentences, or loss of fragments. Also, generalising, simplifying or summarising should be avoided. During the observation and analysis of the two English-Kiswahili sermon interpreting, some instances of omission, generalisation and simplification were identified.

Extract 7 illustrates:

Extract 7: Sermon 1

P2: I don't fornicate, I don't practice witchcraft

Inter: Wala sifanyi kazi ya uchawi

B.T: I don't practice witchcraft

In extract 7, the preacher was addressing the audience about fornicating and witchcraft, by saying "I don't fornicate, I don't

practice witchcraft". The sermon interpreter interpreted it as "Wala sifanyi kazi ya uchawi" which can be translated into English as "I do not practice witchcraft. In this Kiswahili interpreting output, the sermon interpreter omitted fornication and only communicated to the audience about witchcraft. Therefore, the message about fornicating did not reach the audience who do not understand English. Such omission affected the quality of sermon interpreting hence hindered effective communication between the preacher and the audience.



In sermon 2, there were also several cases where a lot of preacher's key messages were omitted thus leading to sense inconsistency. Extract 8 illustrates:

Extract 8: Serm.2

P2: To change your situation

Inter: Hali yako B.T: Your situation P2: I said your life

Inter: Nasema maisha yako

In extract 8, the preacher said "To change your situation". The sermon interpreter interpreted it as "hali yako" which can be translated into English as "your situation". In this Kiswahili interpreting output, the sermon interpreter did not interpret the preacher's words "to change" which are the key words in the preacher's message. This kind of incomplete interpreting led to sense inconsistency between the source language message and the target language message. To facilitate effective communication, the sermon interpreter could have interpreted "To change your situation" as "Kubadili hali yako". As a result of this incomplete interpreting, there was a breakdown of communication between the preacher and the audience.

The observation and analysis of the two English-Kiswahili sermon interpreting indicate that, the instances of incomplete rendition were the result of the high speed of the preachers. As a result, the sermon interpreters omitted some of the preacher's key messages thus leading to sense inconsistency. This affected the quality of sermon interpreting and consequently hindered effective communication between the preachers and the audience. Apart from the high speed of the preachers, incomplete rendition in this study was also the result of the sermon interpreters lack of command of the source language (English), specifically the sermon interpreters lacked command of the vocabulary of the source language. As a result, they ended up skipping the vocabularies they did not understand. This hindered effective communication between the preachers and the audience. Poor command of the vocabulary of the source language goes against the sense-based theory (see Seleskovitch, 1986) which requires the interpreter to have a good command of both the source and the target language in order to provide quality interpreting.

## **Conclusion**

Despite interpreting studies consistently maintaining that sense consistency with the original message is the most important criterion in quality interpreting, the findings of this study indicate that sense consistency with the original message was not consistently adhered to by the sermon interpreters during the two English-Kiswahili sermon interpreting. As a result, there were regular communication breakdown between the preachers and the audience.

Lack of competency in the source and the target language, lack of concentration, non-adherence to situational and verbal context and lack of general knowledge led the sermon interpreters sometimes to deliver, imprecise, unclear, literal, and incomplete messages which were not consistent with the preachers' message. As a result, it affected the quality of sermon interpreting and consequently hindered effective communication between the preachers and the audience.

In order to provide quality sermon interpreting in the church, sermon interpreters require professional training in interpreting. In that regard, Pöchhacker (2015:33) asserts, "Quality interpreting is impacted by interpreters' professional qualifications, skills, ethics and the condition in which they carry their duties". Therefore, professional training equips the interpreters with the required knowledge, skills and ethics relevant in producing quality

interpreting output. This study therefore calls for natural interpreters providing interpreting services in different social settings in Tanzania to get professional training in interpreting. This will enable them to provide quality interpreting services. This study also calls for institutions (such as the church) using interpreters to hire professional interpreters or train their interpreters in order to ensure that quality interpreting services are offered in their institutions.

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