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INTERCULTURAL FRAMES OF BIBLE TRANSLATION OWNERSHIP IN DR CONGO

ABSTRACT

This paper offers an intercultural approach to Bible translation ownership in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo). It examines Bible translation ownership models in the current culture in this country, past church cultures, and original or early biblical cultures. After showing the similarities and differences in ownership models between the chosen frames of reference, it suggests a way forward for effective ownership of the Bible translation process in DR Congo, including the holding and protection of copyright by an organisation frame of the target linguistic community.

Keywords: Bible Translation, Ownership, Intercultural Frame, Bible Society of the Democratic Republic of Congo (ABRDC)

1. INTRODUCTION

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo) is a Central African country that occupies a space of 2 345 000 km² and stretches between the 5°2' of Latitude North and 13°15' of Latitude South. In longitude East of Greenwich, it extends from 12°15' to 31°15' (Ndaywel è Nziem 1998). Its neighbouring countries are Congo-Brazzaville to the northwest, Central African Republic in the north, South Sudan in the northeast, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and Tanzania in the east, Zambia in the south and Angola in the southwest. The country houses around 100 million people (de Saint Moulin 2011, p. 16). Each of them speaks at least one of the approximately 220 or 365 languages (cf. Ethnologue or Ndaywel è Nziem 1998, pp. 256–257). Over 90% of the Congolese population are Christians of Roman Catholic, Protestant churches and African Initiated churches. This paper intends to show how the Bible Society of the Democratic Republic of Congo, as an intercultural organisational frame for Bible translation, can effectively own the Bible translation process through capacity building of the target linguistic communities, and fulfil its mission of availing the Bible to each Congolese citizen in their mother tongue. The target audience of the current paper is linguistic communities of DR Congo, especially their intellectual elite, church ministers, and political leaders.



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Ownership is synonymous with authorship, commissioning authority, responsibility, proprietorship, and the copyright holder (Nida & Taber 1969, Nord 1997; Punt 2004, pp. 307-309). However, contestation of the ownership of the Bible gives rise to problems regarding the appropriation of the Bible in Africa (Punt 2004, p. 308). Sometimes, when it is not viewed as a public or cultural public domain, ownership of the Bible is claimed by church affiliations or translation agencies (cf. Punt 2004, pp. 310–313). In practice, the church or the agency – which has invested money and technical support in the translation work – holds the copyright. Ideally, the copyright of a translated biblical text belongs to the organisational frame of the intellectual elite of the target linguistic community (translators), even if they get considerable support from the consortium of the ministering churches and the fora of participating translation agencies. Functional equivalence theory assigns to the same editorial committee (translators) “the authority and responsibility for translation work” (Nida & Taber 1969, p. 188). According to the Skopos theory, however, the ownership of the translated text may be related to the commissioner’s intention and the function that the receiver attributes to the text (Nord 1997, pp. 28, 143).

The Word of God or the Gospel does involve shared ownership, comprising the sender, the messenger, and the receptor. Strictly, the ownership of the Word of God may not be attributed to anyone except God himself, sacred authors, and the people it is targeted at. Jesus, who is the Word of God made flesh (John 1:14) and the ultimate authority of the whole Christian Bible (Loba Mkole 2022), sent out his apostles to preach the Gospel to all *ethne* (nations, or tribes) (Matthew (28:16–20). One could argue that the linguistic community that can share in the ownership of the Word of God might be the one that believes in Jesus and acts accordingly: Repent and believe in the Gospel (Mark 1:15; Matthew 7:23//Luke 7:47–49; Mark 16:16–20; John 14:12; cf. Acts 2:7–11; Philippians 2:11). Constant acts of conversion and faith among the target community members (Standaert 2010, p. 138) represent the decisive expression of their ownership of the Word of God. They would logically propel the community to set up an organisational frame, led by their intellectual elite, to manage the Bible translation process in partnership with translation agencies, church ministers, and political leaders.

To tackle the issue of the Bible translation ownership, the research reported in this paper proceeded by an intercultural approach, which is a constructive dialogue involving three cultural frames of reference, namely contemporary culture, past church culture, and original or early biblical culture (cf. Loba Mkole 2019). This intercultural method allows the researcher to take cognizance of previous and current practices that can inform more balanced handling of the issue at stake. Without delving much into the niceties of power struggles, ambiguities, and ambivalences behind the production process of the Bible (Punt 2012, p. 206), the paper highlights the ownership roles that the intellectual elite, political leaders, and church ministers have been playing in the Scripture production process throughout different cultural frames. As much as the ownership of the early Word of God is shared between God, its sacred authors, and the target linguistic communities, the ownership of the translated Bible is also shared with the intellectual elite (translators), church ministers, and political leaders of the linguistic community concerned. The purpose of describing these roles is to show how they could inspire ABRDC to handle its mission of Bible translation and distribution more effectively within the parameters of shared ownership. Indeed, a shared ownership might arguably arise from the complex nature of the Bible translation endeavour (Wilt 2003a, p. 80; Marais 2014, pp. 15–44; Van der Merwe 2016, p. 10; Naudé 2020, p. 28). Complexity thinking may support the concept of shared ownership, as it allows “multiple and diverse complex systems to

interact in symbiotic, emergent relationships in which reductionistic and exclusionist modes of thinking are jettisoned” (Naudé 2020, p. 28); in fact, “translation provides powerful strategies for discovering and incorporating different values in the complex dialogue between religions, ethnic groups, and communities” (Naudé 2020, p. 28). Nevertheless, the complexity of frames of reference does not legitimately warrant the ownership of the Word of God by its messengers and facilitators, except the person of Jesus in whom the messenger became the message or the Word of God (Van Iersel 1998, p. 116).

In addition to the preliminaries (author’s cultural position and brief literature review), the current study comprises three main sections or steps: Bible translation ownership models in DR Congo (contemporary culture), Bible translation ownership models in past church culture (e.g., Vulgate and King James translations), and Bible translation ownership models in original or early biblical culture (e.g., Samaritan Torah, Jewish TANAKH and the Septuagint). The word translation refers to primary translation (the process of converting concepts or ideas into words and the process of converting words or oral texts into written texts or other social media) and secondary translation (the process of converting one source text into another text) (Loba Mkole 2012, p. 19; Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2020, pp. 3–13).

UBS (United Bible Societies) deals with the issue of ownership through an evaluation tool called Translation Need Assessment (TNA). This form collects and displays the information that determines the degree of ownership of a translation project undertaken by a Bible society and other partners, including the target linguistic community. Other, interrelated elements of TNA include general information about the language, accurate translation needs, language vitality, and use, and regular review (of progress, infrastructure, and ownership in place). In addition, UBS has developed a bold and broad strategy called Translation Road Map, which aims to sustain the momentum of Bible translation projects through technical, social, and political challenges, by coordinating the Bible translation work in partnership with other like-minded organisations (United Bible Societies 2020).

ETEN (Every Tribe Every Nation) views ownership as the most local expression of the church that “owns the vision and responsibility for Bible translation in each community”. Ownership also features among the five interrelated principles of the Common Framework for Bible translation, as established by ETEN. The other four principles are a partnership, accelerated impact, stewardship, and relationship.

2. PRELIMINARIES

2.1 Author’s cultural position

The author of this paper is a son of Benjamin Anyatsi Hangu, son of Loba, son of Hangu, son of Mbopi, son of Androzo-Songolo (village), Baviba sub-county, in Walendu Bindi County, Ituri Province, in DR Congo. He is a Roman Catholic who studied philosophy in Kisangani (DR Congo) and theology/biblical studies in Kinshasa (DR Congo) and Leuven (Belgium), after which he joined UBS/ABRDC in 1997 as a translation consultant. He has facilitated several

translation training workshops, in addition to translation checking sessions in 29 languages,¹ and carrying out 16 translation projects to completion.²

2.2 Brief literature review

The success of a Bible translation project depends directly on four fundamentals: commitment of the church(es) concerned, competencies of the translators, size of the target population and their literacy level, and effective management by the Bible Society (Loba Mkole 1997, p. 227; 2011, pp. 81–82). In DR Congo, the main challenges hampering the harmonious progress of Bible translation projects result from church commitment and the management skills of the Bible translation agency in charge.

Timothy Wilt (2003b, xii) underlines the “importance of a holistic approach to translation viewing the translation project in terms of its community, organisational and sociocultural settings”. Regarding the organisational frame, Wilt (2003a, p. 47) argues that,

Often, *initial* agreements concerning the material and technical support of a project are made between a translation organization and local churches, but for various reasons, some aspects of the agreements are eventually not upheld and inadequate communication concerning the problems impedes or even prevents coordinated efforts to solve them.

A holistic approach and shared ownership might be able to address the gaps of inadequate support and poor communication. This orientation echoes the message that colleagues of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) and The Seed Company (TSC) conveyed during an inter-Bible translation agency forum in Bunia (DR Congo) in September 2015. They highlighted the importance of an holistic approach, partnership, and local ownership for successful Bible translation projects, given the reduction in international grants. This view would require moving from a spirit of competition between the partners, to a spirit of collaboration and resource sharing. Similarly, a consultation with the chief executive officers (CEOs) of Francophone Bible Societies in Kinshasa in 2015 produced agreement on a job description for translation staff, of which the preamble recognises that it is up to the CEOs to implement the translators’ remuneration policy, and ensure that their qualifications and grades are in harmony with the salary grid of the national Bible Society.

Jeremy Punt (2004, p. 307) points out that an essential, though the often neglected, aspect of the use of the Bible in Africa is its ownership and related issues. He argues that

[T]ranslating the Bible in Southern Africa today is subjected to two oppositional drives, one towards maintaining boundaries and perimeters to secure control, and another of challenging both the boundaries and their accompanying controls (Punt 2004, p. 309).

1 Alur (DR Congo), Anuak (Ethiopia), Bilen (Eritrea), Congo-Swahili (DR Congo), Ekegusii (Kenya), Fang (Gabon), Kansoke (Mali), Kanyok (DR Congo), Ketiine (DR Congo), Kifulliru (DR Congo), Kinyarwanda (Rwanda), Kikongo (DR Congo), Kiluba (DR Congo), Kirundi (Burundi), Kisongye (DR Congo), Lari (Congo-Brazzaville), Lendu (DR Congo), Lingala (DR Congo), Malagasy (Madagascar), Mbandja (DR Congo), Mina (Togo), Mitshogho (Gabon), Mono (DR Congo), Ngbandi-Nord (DR Congo), Ngiti/Ndruna (DR Congo), Otetela (DR Congo), Pagabete (DR Congo), Swahili (Tanzania), and Yinzebi (Gabon).

2 Alur (2012), Lendu (2012), Lingala Bible (2000), Ekegusii (2020), Kanyok Bible (2008), Kikongo Bible (2005), Ketiine New Testament (2007), Lari New Testament (2008), Greek-Swahili New Testament Interlinear (Paratext version, 2009), Kiluba Bible (2010), Kirundi Revised Bible (2016), Kisongye Bible (2011), Mbandja Bible (2012), Ngbandi-Nord (2020), Otetela (2020), and Swahili-Congo (2020).

For him, the significance of the Bible in Africa appears particularly remarkable, as it includes religious, spiritual, devotional, and social-cultural matters (Punt 2004, p. 310). If this is the case, communities should be aware of their responsibility to secure their ownership and claiming a more significant financial share, and being fully in charge of translators' wages and office space.

Timothy Wilt and Ernst Wendland (2008, p. 111; see also Wendland 2008, pp. 68–91) explicitly take up this issue of organisational rights and responsibility, and state

Both the organizations sponsoring and publishing a Bible translation and the translators working for these organizations have sets of rights and responsibilities. Lack of clarity concerning these rights and responsibilities has characterized numerous translation projects. As a result, sponsoring organizations can find that their resources are used inefficiently, if not wastefully, and translators can be frustrated if not demoralized.

Wilt and Wendland (2008, p. 111; also Wendland 2008, p. 80) propose a way to ensure the efficient functioning of a Bible translation project and good team morale. They emphasize a “detailed written statement, underlying the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved”, as well as “a contract between the publisher and the organization(s)”. A job contract is one of the initial conditions for ensuring a conducive environment for a constant and desired productivity, yet many translation projects in DR Congo operate without signed job contracts between the translators and their commissioners (usually the local community or translation agency).

Wendland (2008, p. 80) provides more insight, by stating

From a UBS perspective, the HR department has the task of trying to clarify, harmonize, and interrelate the different frames of reference that various employees or member groups operate under within the organization as a whole. This is accomplished by various training courses and associated pedagogical techniques that are intended to increase the communicative proficiency of the people involved in any aspect of their joint corporate endeavour – whether commercial, humanitarian, scholarly, religious, or any other.

This concern, about an effective organisational frame, emerged again during the 2004 UBS World Assembly (Newport Declaration), which recommends that Bible societies own their business process of fulfilling their mission of producing and distributing the Bible with professionalism and business rigour that involves efficiency, transparency, and mutual accountability. Bible translation agencies should position themselves as stewards or facilitators of God's resources to beneficiaries.

The same idea resurfaced at the 2016 World Assembly, of which the Declaration is called *Philadelphia Promises*. Through the *Philadelphia Promises*, UBS stresses the idea of an effective organisational undertaking and commits itself afresh to supporting all aspects of the Bible ministry, as expressed in the preamble:

We pursue our historic objective of achieving the widest possible, effective and meaningful distribution of Holy Scriptures and to help people to interact with the Word of God. We commit ourselves to all aspects of the Bible Lifecycle, including Translation, Publishing, Distribution, Engagement and Advocacy. We affirm Bible Translation as our core task aiming at providing access to the Bible for everyone in their preferred language.

Of the *Philadelphia Promises* (eight in total), numbers 2 and 3 seem to be particularly relevant to the topic of this paper. They respectively underscore the commitment of Bible societies to

strengthen their relations with the church, and to work together in the spirit of equality and respect for local ownership. Such an orientation represents a significant shift in the ownership model, from translation agency ownership or Christian organisation ownership to ownership by the local (linguistic) community. It would be interesting to know how many Bible societies represented at the 2016 World Assembly, or whose CEOs have read the Philadelphia Promises, have managed to share – let alone start implementing – these promises with local communities, including translation staff (cf. Nida & Taber 1969, p. 181; Porter 2018, p. 147). The first challenge to overcome would be the non-existence of efficient mechanisms for communicating the content of Philadelphia Promise to local communities. A second challenge might be establishing an effective ownership or management model within a local community comprising many different church denominations. Still, where there is a will, there is a way.

Every translation theory and practice imply the existence of at least one translator, or a group of translators. Most emphasis is, indeed, on biblical texts, canons, and translation methods (Loba Mkole 2019, p. 176), or the training of translators, while a practical, holistic approach to their well-being and a healthy working environment is missing. The intercultural approach to Bible translation (cf. Loba Mkole 2019) opens a window to considering a Bible translation endeavour in an interculturally holistic way that reflects original or early biblical cultures, church cultures, and contemporary target cultures, in addition to other intercultural frames, such as human resources, countries and translation agencies involved.

An interculturally holistic method also integrates ecological awareness or actions for the benefit of nature. Stephen Pattermore (2019, pp. 237–238) reports that “many new translations into minority languages are currently taking place in some of the most ecologically (and economically) critical locations on the planet”. He underscores that a critical role of the journal *The Bible Translator* is “to support this translation task from both theoretical and practical directions” (Pattermore 2019, p. 238). The value of the Bible as an ultimate book for biodiversity conservation should shape the lifestyles of the translation project stakeholders, the project surroundings, and the translated content.

In short, the authors reviewed in this section stress the need for a holistic approach and community/cultural ownership. They underscore the same idea from different angles: commitment of the church and effective management by the Bible Society (Loba Mkole 1997), improving organisational and sociocultural settings (Wilt 2003a, b), upholding the greater or holistic significance of the Bible in Africa (Punt 2004), signing contracts about the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved (Wilt & Wendland 2008; Wendland 2008), carrying on the mission with efficiency, transparency and mutual accountability (2004 UBS World Assembly), enforcing all aspects of the Bible lifecycle and respecting local ownership (2016 UBS World Assembly), taking more seriously all dimensions of translation, including the translator (Porter 2018), and viewing translation as an intercultural activity involving original or early biblical cultures, church cultures and contemporary cultures (Loba Mkole 2019) within a critical ecological economy (Pattermore 2019).

3. BIBLE TRANSLATION OWNERSHIP IN CONGO (CONTEMPORARY CULTURE)

DR Congo is an intercultural country made up of several ethnic groups (linguistic communities) that share four national languages (Swahili, Lingala, Kikongo, and Tshiluba) in addition to the official language (French). Similarly, the Bible Society of DR Congo, known in French

as *Alliance Biblique de la République Démocratique du Congo* (ABRDC), epitomizes an intercultural organisational frame. Its staff, Bible translation projects, biblical texts, and partners derive from different cultural frames.

3.1 ABRDC translation ownership models

ABRDC was founded in 1954 and became a full UBS member in 1969. It dispatches its operations through five key departments: Management, Translation, Programme, Human Resources, and Finances. It is also involved in specific ministries, such as Faith Comes by Hearing, Literary, HIV Desk, and Trauma Healing, which all are attached to the Programme department. ABRDC has produced around 40 Bibles in 27 languages (including the scriptures in partnership with other translation agencies).

The benefits of this ownership model include the technical ability of a Bible agency to manage and train Bible translators, and the right to distribute the translation products and protect their copyrights. The success of ABRDC in this regard relates to the technical training that the translators get through UBS translation workshops, and facilitation of typesetting, printing, and distributing scriptures in French and national languages. The challenges with this ownership model pertain to a truncated perception of the translation project, its personnel, its products, and its impact on local communities. The latter perceives the Bible translation project as not belonging to them, but to the translation agency in charge, which should provide all necessary support – the community attributes every success or failure to the Bible translation agency. Bibles in minority languages easily get stuck in warehouses, and if the first print sells slowly, the likelihood of a second print run is almost nil. Most people in a linguistic community concerned remain as if they never had a Bible in their language. Translators working in harsh conditions (in most cases without job contracts) blame the translation agency for failing to take care of them. Though relatively well trained, translators in ABRDC are ill equipped regarding the provision and management of facilities such as office space, office furniture, water and electricity, computers and internet connections. As a result, the impact of translation work and its product on the target community is minimal, and the community continues viewing the project as something the translation agency fails or succeeds at. It is worth noting that, in DRC, the Bible Society's warehouses could be 1 000 km from the target community, which complicates its access to the scriptures.

The completion of a Bible in DR Congo takes more than twenty years, as exemplified by the following projects: Alur Bible (1981–2015: 34 years); Lendu Bible (1984–2015: 31 years); Kisongye Bible (1966–2011: 45 years); Kikongo (1984–2005: 21 years, Lingala (1980–2001: 21 years). The approximately 40 Bibles/scriptures ABRDC has produced in 66 years (1954–2020) amount to about 1.5 Bibles/scriptures per year. At this rate, ABRDC may take around 200 years to complete translating the Bible in at least 300 of the remaining languages of the country. Generally, reasons for it taking so long to translate the Bible include civil wars and economic or financial crises. Specific reasons for each case pertain to inappropriate terms of conditions, inadequate equipment, and deficient knowledge of original biblical languages.

ABRDC has knowingly or unknowingly taken on more responsibilities than it can afford regarding Bible translation project management. Currently, ABRDC's strategic plan for 2020–2024 recognizes the following translation projects: New Lingala Bible, Ndruna Bible, Ngbandi-Ngiri New Testament, Mono New Testament, Pagabete New Testament, Topoké Bible, and Banunu-Bobangi Bible. The list is not exhaustive. A shared responsibility between local communities and translation agencies might increase the capacity for managing Bible

ministry projects. The time has come for establishing a solid organizational infrastructure, whereby local communities are in charge of their own projects in partnership with translation agencies, churches, Christian missions, and people of goodwill (*cf.* ABRDC's strategic plan).

3.2 Ownership models of other translation agencies

Translation agencies working in DR Congo include the following: Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) or Verbum Bible, SIL, TSC, ACTB (Association Congolaise de Traduction de la Bible), Biblica and the Word for the World. This study will focus on two: CBF and SIL.

CBF is a biblical federation, not a Bible federation. Its mission is "promoting and developing the Biblical Pastoral Ministry".³ It goes on to state that its

main purpose is not the translation, production, and distribution of the book of the Bible which has been the original purpose of the Bible Societies of Protestant origin. While the CBF collaborates with the Bible Societies, its scope is wider: not just the book, but how to read it responsibly and fruitfully!

On the one hand, CBF is engaged in religious education and training (biblical pastoral training and ongoing formation for collaborators, planning and running Bible courses in small Christian communities, and religious instruction in schools, colleges, and universities). On the other hand, it focuses on biblical studies and hermeneutics (organization of meetings and conferences relating to biblical studies, fostering dialogue between scientific-academic and pastoral-practical Bible work, by positioning the biblical image of the human person in the debates about the values in the society). Through its translation agency (Verbum Bible), CBF has completed Bible translations in all four Congolese national languages: Swahili, Lingala, Kikongo, and Tshiluba. There is still room for Verbum Bible to produce new translations based on original biblical texts, as it used the French *La Bible de Jérusalem* for the previous ones.

CBF (Verbum Bible) works according to a combined Christian organisation and translation agency ownership model, in the sense that a Bible translation project operates with a group of committed missionaries who work with a church-owned translation agency; the latter provides both staff and financial support. The product reaches its target audience through church-owned libraries throughout the country, including grassroots Catholic parishes. Regarding the four national languages, the impact is impressive, as each parish and every Christian, use the same Bible, which is available in the national language they understand. The major challenge lies in areas where the Catholic liturgy uses a local language that does not have national language status. In most cases where Bible translations in local languages are not available, daily or Sunday missals serve as the source texts for reading the Word of God. Consequently, in the scenario of a Catholic mission and translation agency model, the local community does not have any significant share in the ownership of the production process of the Bible they use. A critical question to address in the context of inculturation or an intercultural approach is to see how CBF could carry out its pastoral training and biblical studies at the grassroots level, where Bibles in local and even liturgical languages are not available. One way would be to strengthen the collaboration with national Bible societies and facilitate an interconfessional Bible translation project, where it is needed.

Unfortunately, at grassroots levels of Catholic dioceses and parishes, the Guidelines for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible, signed between the Holy See and UBS

³ All information on CBF is from c-b-f.org

in 1968 and renewed in 1987, is not well known. This document underlines that the members of an ecumenical team are to be highly competent and exhibit four essential characteristics: comparable qualifications, complementary abilities, mutual respect, and capacity to work together. Interestingly, it observes that “members of translation teams have sometimes been assigned tasks without adequate provision to carry through such projects”. Finally, it promotes a shared ownership model through imprint and imprimatur: An interconfessional edition of the scriptures normally bears the imprint of the Bible Society and the imprimatur of the appropriate Roman Catholic ecclesiastical authority. The most appropriate form for such an edition published by Bible societies would be for the Bible Society imprint to occur on the title page and the imprimatur of the appropriate Roman Catholic authority to occur on the back of the title page – this being the normal procedure for books properly authorized by the Roman Catholic Church. In some circumstances a preface with a joint recommendation by ecclesiastical authorities would be sufficient, instead of a formal nihil obstat and imprimatur (Willebrands, Coggan, Duprey & Fick 1989).

In a nutshell, the Catholic Church encourages having an ecumenical translation team of highly competent members working under circumstances of adequate provision and motivated by shared ownership that the Bible society’s imprint and the Catholic Bishop’s imprimatur may confirm. To date, no translation project has enjoyed such cooperation between the Catholic church and the ABRDC: each institution has produced its own Bibles in each of the four national languages. The time has come to join forces to build the capacity of the organizational frames of the linguistic communities, to carry out the translation work and related ministries more efficiently and quickly.

SIL is committed to scholarship in language development, which includes research in translation theory and practice, to promote a greater understanding of translation. SIL “works in partnership with language communities to facilitate the translation of Scripture texts, books, and booklets for educational programs, stories related to culture and folklore, as well as health and community development resources”.⁴

In DR Congo, SIL represents a consortium of other Bible translation agencies, such as Wycliffe Translators, TSC, in some cases, or even ACTB. SIL has completed the Kifuliuru Bible, and is now working on the following New Testament projects: Hunde, Kobo, Nyanga, Mba, Komo, Mangbetu, Budu, Lika, Bali, and Omiti. In other cases, it has worked in partnership with ABRDC to assist the latter to complete and own the copyright of some Bibles, such as Bibles in Alur, Lendu, and Mbandja. Furthermore, SIL is working with ABRDC on the following projects: New Testaments in Ngbandi-Ngiri, Mono, Pagabete, Budja, Ngombe-Nord, Ngombe-Sud and Lobala, and a Ngiti/Ndruna Bible.

Collaboration between SIL and ABRDC shows that joint ownership with a holistic approach is possible, though this partnership may need further enhancement. SIL and ABRDC share resources in the process of supporting the Bible translation projects, and work together on a common platform called ACOTBA-SUBO (Congoese Association of Bible Translation and Literacy – to eradicate ignorance) and CITBAN (a French Acronym for Interconfessional Centre for Bible Translation and Literacy in Ndruna). The latter has embarked on a holistic programme that includes progressive capacity development in fund-raising, production, distribution, literacy, biblical ecology, research, and art.

4 SIL.org

ABRDC and other translation agencies, such as CBF (Verbum Bible) and SIL, still need to initiate or improve their collaboration to build linguistic communities' capacity to own Bible production and distribution processes.

4. BIBLE TRANSLATION OWNERSHIP IN PAST CHURCH CULTURES

The Vulgate and King James Bibles (KJB) represent two cases of Bible translation ownership in past church culture, since each has considerably impacted life in the church.

4.1 Vulgate

Vulgate (from the Latin word *vulgus*, common) refers to the Bible translation that mostly St Jerome (345–420 CE) had carried out following his commissioning by Pope Damasus. Known as a *vir trilinguis*, “triple-tongued man”, Jerome was excellent in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew (Kieffer 1996, p. 681). His work took from 382 to 405 (21 years), but Damasus died in 384, just two years after Jerome had started his assignment, which rendered it difficult for him to carry on. Nevertheless, Jerome moved to Bethlehem in 386 and settled in a monastery near a convent founded by two Roman women (Paula and Eustochium), where he led a life of asceticism and study (Saltet 1910/2003). According to Barrera (1998, p. 355),

Vulgate is not equivalent to translation by Jerome ... It includes translations by Jerome made from the Hebrew text (except for the Psalter), the version of Tob and Jdt, the revision of the gospels and his revision of the Psalter made from Origen's Hexapla.

Barrera (1998, p. 555) continues to explain that

the text of the remaining deuterocanonical books and the NT comprises old revisions of the OL included in the Vulgate. The Hexapla revisions made by Jerome do not form part of the Vulgate (except for the Psalter).

The Vulgate ownership model reflects mission ownership, whereby a single scholar takes up a great deal of the responsibility that the highest authority of their church had commissioned him to assume. It features shared ownership between a highly skilled intellectual and the church authority. Jerome's lifestyle, shaped by asceticism, prayer, and study in a monastery, was conducive to his performance. While translating the Bible, the monastery where he lived in Bethlehem and the support of two benefactors probably met his basic needs.

The overall impact of Jerome's Bible translation work is outstanding. The Vulgate gradually superseded the Bible in old Latin, enjoyed the prestige of being the first book printed by Gutenberg (1454–1456), and was made authoritative by the Council of Trent (1545–1548; 1551–1552; 1562–1563).

Even though it has undergone revisions, today the Vulgate remains the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church, and is copyrighted and distributed by *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*. The most recent edition is the *Nova Vulgata*, as promulgated by Pope Saint John Paul II in 1986.

4.2 King James Version

The King James Version (KJV), also known as the King James Bible, or simply the Authorized Version (AV), is the Bible of the Church of England. It originated from a request made by the bishops of England to King James to have a new translation that is “answerable to the truth of the original”. The king agreed and commissioned the translation. It took around 50 scholars

and seven years (1604–1611) to complete the translation of the Bible under the sponsorship of the king (Lane 1994). Indeed, the king was the church's highest authority and kingdom authority. Besides, the King James originally included all the biblical books as those of the Vulgate, before some of them – found in the Septuagint but not in the Masoretic Text – were excluded at Westminster Confession (1647), in the footsteps of the La Rochelle Confession in 1559 (Loba Mkole 2019, p. 157).

For Lane (1994),

[T]he King James Version was the culmination of 200 turbulent years of Bible translation ... Even though today there are more accurate and contemporary translations of the Bible, the KJV holds a sovereign place in the English-speaking world: it continues to be printed and circulated more widely than any other version" (see also Omanson 2001, p. 449).

Amazingly, even in some countries of Francophone Africa, some missionaries from Great Britain, or their successors, are still using the KJV as the source text for translating the Bible into local languages.

The ownership model of KJV translation displays shared ownership by 50 scholars, the Anglican Church hierarchy, and the country's highest political authority. Most English people supported this national spiritual symbol, because of their loyalty to the king and the Anglican church. As a result, the KJV progressively impacted the English-speaking world and beyond.

5. BIBLE TRANSLATION OWNERSHIP IN ORIGINAL OR EARLY BIBLICAL CULTURES

Original or biblical cultures feature both primary and secondary translations. For example, the Torah in the Hebrew language is a primary translation (conveying ideas into Hebrew words), while the Septuagint is a secondary translation (reproducing Hebrew words into Greek). In other words, a primary translation occurs when a translator converts thoughts into words within the same language; a secondary translation involves transferring words from one language to another (Lambert 1995, p. 110). In this case, a secondary translation is not a second-hand translation. In either primary or secondary translation, the issue of ownership is at stake.

5.1 Torah

The Torah (instruction or teaching) is regarded as the Holy Scripture for Samaritans, Jews, and Christians, through its content and form may differ according to the canon of each faith community. It is accessible through three early sources: Samaritan Torah (the Pentateuch written in ancient Hebrew), Hebrew Bible or TANAKH (Torah/Law, *Nevi'im*/Prophets, and *Ketuvim*/Writings, all written in Assyrian Hebrew or Aramaic), and Septuagint (Greek translation/creation of TANAKH). Using the term Torah instead of Hebrew Bible (Tov 2021) or Jewish Bible (Barrera 1998) sounds more considerate of each of the three faith communities (Samaritanism, Judaism, and Christianity) that abide by the Law of Moses as interpreted within their canons.

The Samaritan Torah is arguably the oldest written version of the Torah in the world, dating back 3 637 years as per the Samaritan calendar (Wasef 2012, p. 271), but the textual evidence pinpoints it being from the Hasmonean period (Tov 2021, p. 82). Discrepancies between the ancient Hebrew Samaritan Torah and the Jewish Hebrew Torah pertain to differences in

letters, words, verses, and chapters. The authorship of both the Samaritan and Jewish Torah is traditionally attributed to Moses, while literary studies have shown that different sections of the Pentateuch encompass diverse types of authorship, as represented by Yahwistic, Elohist, Priestly, and Deuteronomic traditions.

The Jewish/ Hebrew Torah or TANAKH exhibits the traditions mentioned earlier, in addition to different authors of prophetic books and other writings. In the view of William Schniedewind (2004, p. 17), they were “written down largely in the eighth through the sixth century BCE, or, between the days of the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah”. An alternative view considers that they might have originated from the second temple period (516 BCE–70 CE), when the temple scribes (especially the *magihim* or correctors) were entrusted with copying, scrutinizing, and preserving scrolls of the Word of God (cf. Tov 2021, pp. 21–28). The transmission of the TANAKH has mainly depended on the activities of scribes. The first scribes or Masoretes stemmed from Ezra (7:6) under the political leadership of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 8:9; 10:2; 12:6). The scribes were in charge of providing the Masorah or masoret, i.e., “an apparatus of instructions for the writing of the biblical text and its reading” (Tov 2021, p. 72; Widder 2013, p. 50). According to Tov (2021, p. 22), many elements of the Masoretic manuscripts, and even their final form, “were determined in the early Middle Ages, but they continue a much earlier tradition”. This text tradition chiefly originated from the Tiberian scribe Aaron Ben Asher (who died 960 CE), whom an influential Rabbi, Moses Maimonides (1138–1204 CE), had declared authoritative before the publication of the first Rabbinic Bible (1516–1517), and the second one (1524–1525). The latter included the Masorah, medieval commentaries, and Aramaic translations or paraphrases (*targumim*). It then became the standard Masoretic text for four centuries preceding the critical editions (cf. Eisenberg 2004, p. 489; Tov 2021, p. 78; Sipilä 2016, p. 155). The manuscripts representing Masoretic traditions include the Cairo Codex (9th century CE), Aleppo Codex (10th century CE), and Leningrad Codex (11th century CE).

The Septuagint, which dates from around 250 BCE, became an alternative reading of the Hebrew from the second temple period. The first part of the TANAKH would have been translated in Alexandria by Jewish scribes, while the translation of other books took place in Palestine (Tov 2010; 2021). For Greek-speaking Jewish scholars of the second temple period (such as Josephus, Philo, and the author of the Epistle of Aristaeus), the authority of Moses in TANAKH and the Septuagint remains inviolable (cf. Leonhardt-Balzer 2010, p. 637).

In short, the transmission of the Torah has been influential through three sources: the Samaritan Tora, the Hebrew TANAKH, and the Septuagint. This transmission was the work of scribes – biblical scholars of the time. In other words, the scribes owned the process of transmitting the scripture, which remains a property of the faith community. The commissioning authority of the Septuagint translation involved the high political authority (King Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt) and the supreme religious authority of Israel (High Priest Eleazar), to promote Jewish culture in the multicultural or intercultural city of Alexandria.

5.2 Greek Christian Bible

The Greek Christian Bible is not the Septuagint, but the Septuagint plus the Greek New Testament books (cf. Steyn 2010, p. 217; Hogeterp & Denaux 2018, pp. 1.33–1.34). Such a Bible might have been the source of the Old Latin Bible. Nonetheless, manuscripts such as Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and Alexandrinus attest to the collection of both Old Testament and New Testament texts that were used as scriptures in Christian communities at the same time the canons of the Bible were being formed (between the second and the fourth/fifth centuries CE).

The order of the books in Vaticanus (History, Wisdom literature, and Prophets) is closer to the one in the Athanasian Canon. According to Pierre-Maurice Bogaert (2003, pp. 155–156), Vaticanus and Sinaiticus are the earliest copies of the Christian Bible preserved in one volume. He also indicates that Vaticanus and Sinaiticus originated from the same Scriptorium, given that the ornamentation of their colophons (publisher's emblems or imprints) is identical and their writing style very similar. He argues that Vaticanus and Sinaiticus often represent the Egyptian text in agreement with the Coptic and Ethiopic texts. He then concludes that, once the codification was possible, the Christian librarians started providing the two testaments in a single codex (*cf.* Vaticanus and Sinaiticus). Furthermore, Bogaert (2003, p. 156) supports that the production of the Codex Vaticanus intended to deliver to the order Emperor Constantine had placed to Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria for a complete Christian Bible in one volume.

In short, manuscripts such as Vaticanus and Sinaiticus constitute the earliest literary evidence of the first editions of a Christian Bible comprising both Old and New Testament texts. They also display a shared ownership model involving the undertaking of librarian scholars working in the same scriptorium, and the support of the local community through its church and political hierarchy.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary

The present study discussed the issue of Bible translation ownership through an intercultural approach that considered three frames of reference: contemporary target culture, past church culture, and original or early biblical culture. It pointed out three translation ownership models (translation agency ownership, church ownership, and Christian organisation ownership models). Regarding DR Congo as a contemporary frame of reference for Bible translation, the study found that the translation agency ownership model is prominently used in this country, though this is done mainly in partnership with other stakeholders. In the case of the frame of past church cultures, the Vulgate depicts a church ownership model, demonstrated by the commissioning of a highly competent translator by the top Church authority, while the KJV combines church and political ownerships, as the king endorsed an initiative that came from Anglican bishops. Regarding the frame of the early biblical cultures, the transmission of the Samaritan Torah, the Jewish Bible TANAKH, or the Septuagint exhibits the ownership model of the target linguistic community, represented by its intellectual, religious, and political leadership.

6.2 Similarities and differences in translation ownership between intercultural frames

The resemblances between the shared ownership models for availing the Bible in different intercultural frames of reference (original or early biblical culture, past church culture, and current ABRDC) include the willingness and undertaking of a team to provide scripture texts to the target linguistic community. In turn, dissimilarities lie in the following factors: 1) In the case of original or early biblical cultures (Tora, TANAKH, LXX) and past church culture (Vulgate, KJV), the ownership of the process of copying or translating biblical texts was a joint effort between the highly competent biblical scholars, religious authorities and political leadership. As for the ABRDC frame, the ownership of the translation work relates to some church authorities, the translators (who are not necessarily expert scholars), and partnering agencies;

2) Copies of biblical texts from original or early biblical culture and past church culture were being efficiently distributed with the support of high-level religious and political authorities, while, in ABRDC, most translations in local languages move slowly from the warehouses, because the linguistic community intelligentsia, religious authorities, and political leaders are not sufficiently involved.

6.3 The way forward for Bible translation ownership in DR Congo

First, ABRDC would probably become more efficient if it promoted the shared ownership policy with its partners (translators, church authorities, and political leaders of the target linguistic community). Secondly, ABRC and partner translation agencies should accept to play their roles as facilitators, and build the capacity of the target linguistic communities to lead the ownership process, including holding and protecting copyright through their organizational frames, such as CITBAN or ACOTBA-SUBO. This undertaking would echo the shared ownership of the Word of God between God (Jesus) and the target linguistic community, as shown in the Scripture (Matthew 7:23/Luke 7:47-49; Mark 16:16-20; John 14:12; Acts 2:7-11; Philippians 2:11), whereby the messengers or facilitators of the Word of God would not imagine claiming the copyright over it. The ownership of the target linguistic community, through its organizational frame, also features in the processes of producing Bibles in the early biblical and past church cultures. Furthermore, it aligns with the contemporary culture policy advocated by the UBS Philadelphia Promises, the Translation Needs Assessment, and the ETEN Translation Common Framework. Besides, the concept of shared ownership and the emphasis on the target linguistic community finds further support within the postcolonial approach and translation theories, such as functional equivalence, the functionalist approach, frames of reference, and the complexity framework. Thirdly, the way forward should include recruiting highly qualified and committed translators and providing them with high-quality field training, adequate equipment, and a conducive working environment, which could accelerate the translation process in a considerate and effective way. In the fourth place, the way forward should embrace a holistic approach to translation projects, to ensure that its process and products stimulate the development of the linguistic community through scripture engagement programmes, such as fundraising, literacy, the ecological impact of the Bible, research and art, in addition to production and distribution tasks.

Through a quality Bible translation and holistic scripture engagement programme, the linguistic community can support and own the Bible ministry more meaningfully and effectively, as they interact more responsibly with the partner translation agencies or facilitators. The more the management capacity of the linguistic community increases, the more the burden of translation agencies decreases, and the appreciation of their facilitating roles increases.

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