

The Semantic Elaboration and Subversion of *Iko* in Igbo Bible Translation

Uchenna Oyali

University of Abuja, NIGERIA

uoyali@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Before their contact with Christianity in the mid-1800s, several Igbo communities practiced *iko mbara*, an institution where a married person openly had a paramour with the consent of their spouse. This practice was condemned by the Christian missionaries as further reflected in their use of the term during Bible translation. Therefore, this study poses the following questions: What did *iko* mean prior to its use in the Igbo Bible? In what ways is its use in the Bible different from its use prior to the Bible translations? How has its use in the Bible changed the perception of the term among Igbo speakers? What are the implications of these practices in contexts of translation in Nigeria? To provide answers to these questions, I compared the traditional Igbo practices that are designated with the term *iko* with the different contexts where the term is used in Igbo Bible translation. Findings show how *iko* was re-semanticized during Bible translation to now mean any form of sex outside a monogamous marriage framework, which includes *concubine*, *adultery*, *fornication* and *prostitute*. This ideological strategy was apparently aimed at giving *iko* a pejorative meaning, thereby discouraging Igbo Christians from the practice. I also conducted a survey (questionnaire) findings from which show how *iko* is perceived among Igbo speakers. This study contributes to research on the linguistic impact of missionary translations on African languages. Methodologically, it demonstrates how questionnaire survey could complement descriptive analysis in exploring the impact of translations in the receiving language and culture.

Keywords: Bible translation; Igbo language; *iko mbara*; semantic elaboration; ideology in translation; missionary translation practices