



## **Distortion of Meaning in Consecutive Interpreting: Case of Sermons in Selected Multicultural Churches in Maseru**

**Makhetsi Makha**

Lecturer, National University of Lesotho, Lesotho

**Lehlohonolo Phafoli \***

Senior Lecturer, National University of Lesotho, Lesotho

### **Abstract**

The paper looks at the distortion of meaning in the consecutive interpreting of Sesotho to English and English to Sesotho in some multicultural churches' sermons in the town of Maseru in Lesotho. The paper sets out to provide the general background of interpreting in the context of Pentecostal churches where distortion of meaning affects the effective communication of the Gospel. The paper relates various examples of distortions through omissions, additions and inaccurate use of target words taking into consideration the lexical items and contextual use of target language as against source language. The analysis indicates the implications brought about by these inaccurate interpreting which leads to misinterpretation of the conveyed message. The paper goes on to display some of the contributing factors towards improper interpreting. Towards the end there are recommendations which could be taken as possible solutions for overcoming some of the problems encountered during consecutive interpreting.

**Keywords:** distortion, consecutive interpreting, sermons, pentecostal churches

### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper examines the distortion of meaning in short consecutive interpreting of the sermons from the selected multicultural churches in the urban areas of Maseru district in Lesotho. The argument is that distortion of meaning in interpreting is evident through omissions, additions and misinterpretation of the original message. This is observed through the use of the lexical items and contextual use during consecutive interpreting. The paper has selected some examples which are analysed based on Gile's effort interpreting models. Assumptions on what could be the causes of distortion have been highlighted based on the given examples. In conclusion, recommendations for effective interpreting are tabled with a view of improving the interpreting process in different quarters of life.

## Background of the study

Lesotho is a sovereign state found within the Republic of South Africa, with a population of close to 2 million. It received Christianity in 1833 with the arrival of Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, which were followed by Roma Catholic Church missionaries in 1862 and Anglican church missionaries in 1875 afterwards different missionaries from different denominations arrived up until to-date. Currently there are many Pentecostal Churches with a 'born again' concept where sermons are preached in different areas in Lesotho, in most cases the sermons are communicated in Sesotho and English or English and Sesotho through consecutive interpreting.

According to Ruchatz (2009, p. 1), interpreting is the oral conveyance of the spoken message from one language into another. That is, the speaker utters his or her message in one language, and someone known as an interpreter, expresses the same message in another language. The interpreter is the mediator or communication facilitator between people who speak different languages. Interpreters work with the spoken words, orally conveying a message in one language into another language.

There are different modes of interpreting namely; simultaneous, summary, consecutive and sight interpreting occur in different ways. This paper focuses on consecutive interpreting, which is a mode of communication facilitation where the interpreter waits for the speaker to say a complete idea in one language and pauses before he or she renders it in another language. Mohlomi (2010 p. 2) adds that consecutive interpreting is organized in such a way that the interpreter's renditions do not overlap with the speaker's delivery of their message. In this process there is only one person who speaks at the time in this mode of interpreting. This mode of interpreting is divided into short and long consecutive interpreting. In short consecutive, the speaker divides his message into small chunks that the interpreter can comprehend without necessarily taking notes, while in the long consecutive interpreting, the speaker renders a long message during which the interpreter is taking notes prior to interpreting.

One of the basic requirements for good interpreting is accuracy, which is the core element in interpreting process, based on its demanding nature. Accuracy in interpreting refers to the interpreter's ability to render the source message into the target language without any omissions, additions or distortions of the intended message of the original speaker. Accurate interpreting leads to safe and effective communication which the listener relies on for the correct information. It is therefore very important that the interpreter renders the speaker's message accurately to the listener. When the interpreter fails to render the intended message of the speaker, the message gets distorted. That is the intended meaning or message is missed and fails to be communicated to the audience through distorted lexical items and contextual use.

## Interpreting context in multicultural churches in Lesotho

In Lesotho, interpreting in multicultural churches is usually between Sesotho and English, which are the two official languages in Lesotho. The prominent mode of interpreting is consecutive which is practised in hospitals, clinics, courts of law and in religious institutions such as multicultural churches where people from different linguistic

backgrounds come into contact. In these multicultural churches, especially Pentecostal churches of born again, Christians congregants come from different nationalities, linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds. For instance, we have followers from different continents like Asia, Europe and Africa who have come to Lesotho for various reasons such as business opportunities, school, work and even to establish church ministries. As such it is imperative that for effective communication among the congregants, there should be an intervention of a church interpreter who facilitates communication in religious oral settings. Interpreting is done because in these churches most of the pastors are not Basotho but need to deliver the Gospel to their congregants. Consequently, their renditions are often crowded with different elements that lead to the distortions of the intended meaning.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In Lesotho, Mohlomi (2010) and Thuube (2012) dealt with different aspects in interpreting. Mohlomi (2010) discusses various interpreter coping strategies employed by the Leon Commission interpreters', while Thuube (2012) explores verbal and non-verbal discourse strategies between non- Sesotho speaking doctors and Basotho patients in Lesotho hospitals. The current study is going to fill the gap in church interpreting in Lesotho.

In some parts of the world, in particular Kenya, scholars such as Biamah (2013), Downie (2013), Musyoka (2013) and Odhiambo et al (2013) have done imperative research in church interpreting. Biamah (2013) explores factors that necessitate interpretation of sermons in churches in Gishu country, Kenya. Musyoka (2013) discusses problems of interpreting in the interpretation of Kamba to English church sermons in Machakos town Pentecostal churches. Odhiambo et al (2013) focuses on the impact of consecutive interpreting of church sermons between English and Kamba in Machakos town, Kenya while Downie (2013) examines the expectations of interpreters in church. The above scholars differ with the researchers' study because it is not going to explore factors that necessitate interpretation of sermons nor discuss problems of church interpreting or the impact of consecutive of church sermons. Rather it is going to examine elements that led to the distortion of meaning in the interpreting of the sermons of the selected multicultural churches in Maseru. The study's interest is also in the interpreting of Sesotho and English sermons, while the above studies concentrated on various languages in Kenya.

However, several scholars such as Jacobsen (2004), Svongoro (2015), Napier (2014), Pym (2008). and Zhang et al (2015) dealt with the above mentioned elements in various area in interpreting.

Jacobsen (2004) deals with additions in court interpreting, where Danish court interpreters fail to adhere to guidelines regarding the use of additions in interpreting. Svongoro (2015) analyses the impact of additions in Shona and English consecutively interpreted rape trials in Zimbabwe court rooms. Napier (2004) evaluates factors influencing interpreter's omissions in sign language interpreting. Pym (2008) evaluates risks of omissions in simultaneous interpreting and Zhang et al (2015) studies omissions

in bi-directional English Chinese interpretations and their coping strategies. Unlike Svongoro (2015) who analyses the impact of additions in Shona and English interpreted rape trials, the current study examines different elements that contribute to the distortion of meaning in the interpreting of the sermons of the selected multicultural churches. The study also differs with Napier's (2004) study in that, his focus was on omission while in the current study, omission is one of the elements that are going to be discussed: it is not the core of the study.

Zhang et al (2015), Jacobsen (2004) and Pym (2008) studies formed the ground work for the current study in that, the researchers were able to understand how meaning distortion affects the interpreted message. In other words, their studies are fruitful in that they yield information for the current study.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

Data was collected from sermon audios of the 3 selected multicultural churches in Maseru. Sermons from these churches were chosen because they practice consecutive interpreting where researchers observed distortion during the interpreting process. Even though data was collected from three churches, the audios were 20 as a result researcher could not transcribe all of them, twelve audios were used. The audios consisted of four Digital Versatile Discs, DVD's, which run for an hour each, eight were audio recordings that run for thirty to forty minutes each. Some of these audios are in Sesotho vs English while others are in English vs Sesotho interpretations. Researchers listened to twelve audios which were transcribed. 30 excerpts were extracted, however, only few of them are used in the paper. Audio clips were obtained from some members of the Pentecostal churches for born again Christians who agreed to the work with the researchers for the study.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In the analysis of the data, the paper employs Gile's effort interpreting models. According to Kriston (2012 p. 2) the effort models of interpreting were designed by Gile (1992) in order to help interpreters in understanding the difficulties and efforts involved in the interpreting task and also strategies needed to overcome those difficulties. Interpreting is challenging in that the interpreter works in real time. Kriston (2012) adds by stating that, "interpretation is a complex task that requires the association of many factors, (such as good memory, comprehension and notetaking skills)".

The effort models of interpreting are constructed or based upon five types of efforts which are; the listening and analysis effort, note taking effort, the memory effort, the comprehension effort, production effort and the coordination effort.

The listening effort requires the interpreter to carefully listen to the speaker's content because he/ she will be required to render it in the target language. After that, the interpreter must analyse and comprehend or understand the message, while also storing the message in his/her memory for a short time before his/her time to interpret the message comes. Lastly, the interpreter must produce the source language message in the target language.

Gile (2001 p. 2) postulates that short term memory helps in storing information just received until it is noted. This will help the interpreter not to forget or miss some parts of the speaker's message when the time comes for him/her to render the message.

The paper employs the listening and analysis effort, comprehension, short term memory effort, and the production effort. Through omissions, additions and misinterpretation it would be determined that interpreters had a problem of listening, comprehension, memory effort and as a result the product turned to be lacking and not effectively communicated to the audience. Absence of some words, addition of unnecessary lexical items and inaccurate replacements are a result of lack of comprehension hence inaccurate product that misguide the audience.

### **Meaning of distortion**

Distortion of meaning in interpreting comes as a result of elements such as omissions, additions and misinterpretation of the original message.

Omission, refers to the leaving out of certain information of the original message in the target text. According to Boose (2015 p. 6), omission in translation means dropping a word or words from the source language text while translating. In this paper therefore, omission is understood to mean dropping, deleting or leaving out individual words, sentences or segments of sentences from the source message while interpreting. The words may be left out consciously or unconsciously.

Additions in interpreting refer to excess information that the interpreter adds in his or her renditions. Sometimes the added information can distort the intended meaning of the original speaker's message. Aminzad (2015 p. 2) adds that text with additions can simply be subjected to distortion.

According to Taylor (2012 p. 1), misinterpretation is to interpret, explain or understand something incorrectly. Misinterpretation also includes narrating the speaker's message inaccurately into the target language. In interpreting, the interpreter has to accurately render the source message into the target language. This means that the source message should be equivalent to the target message both in terms of the intended meaning and effect. However, sometimes the interpreter may fail to correctly interpret part or the whole message of the speaker, and in such cases, it is said that the interpreter has misinterpreted the speaker's intended meaning as illustrated by the following excerpts.

### **ANALYSIS**

Analysis will focus on the three concepts of distortion namely omission, additions and misinterpretations where examples on each will be analysed based on the Gile's effort interpreting models. This model employs the listening and analysis effort, comprehension, short term memory effort, and the production effort. As the product has been transcribed, the written version is the one to be discussed indicating how the concepts are reflected in the given texts.

The bolded letters **E** and **I**, used in the excerpts which are analysed in this paper, represent **E**vangelist and **I**nterpreter respectively, while the bolded words and sentences

or sentence segments are illustrations of the elements that led to distortion of meaning in short consecutive interpreting of the sermons of the selected multicultural churches in Maseru. Where there are people's in the excerpts, alphabetical letters **x**, **y** and **z** will be used to replace such names

### Additions

The following excerpts, (1 and 2), show additions that led to the distortion of the intended meaning of the preacher's message.

1. **E:** You know these politicians, when they want us to vote for them, they quote the scriptures

**I:** O'a tseba bapolutiki ba **ha ba re qekella**, ba batla re ba khethe, ba qotsa lentsoe la Molimo.

2. **E:** These days the youth is full of worldly doctrines

**I:** Matsatsing ana bacha ba tletse ka thuto tsa lefats'e **joaloka li-dance tsa mefuta**

In excerpt (1) above, the preacher says, "you know these politicians, when they want us to vote for them, they quote the scriptures", which is translated in Sesotho as, *u'a ba tseba bapolutiki ba ha ba batla re ba khethe, ba qotsa lentsoe la Molimo*. The interpreter accurately interpreted the segment, however, he added more information, *ha ba re qhekella* (when they deceive us) which the speaker did not say.

Excerpt (2) also shows the information which the interpreter added. The speaker says, "these days the youth are full of worldly doctrines", but the interpreter added more information when rendering that in the target language. He added, *joalo ka li-dance tsa mefuta* (like different dances).

It could be assumed that in both excerpts, (1 and 2), the interpreter added the information because of his background knowledge. In excerpt (1) the interpreter knows that it is believed politicians tricked people, while in excerpt (2), the interpreter knows that youth or young people love dances. However, that should not have been said because the interpreter is just a channel through which the preacher reaches the target audience.

This section has illustrated that additions, omissions and misinterpretations distorted the meaning of the sermons of the selected multicultural churches. Gile (1992) model of interpreting was applied to analyse the above elements.

### Omissions

The excerpts from (3 to 5), below, illustrates this phenomenon in interpreting:

3. **E:** ...le Sesotho se ea cho hore mosali **o tšoara thipa ka bohaleng**

**I:** ... even Sesotho says a woman **(pause) ehhehh (pause) amen.**

4. **E:** Botsa motho ea pel'a hao na o bolela efankheli **kapa oa checha**

**I:** Ask someone next to you if they preach the gospel.

5. E: I would like to greet ntate X and his committee, **I can see they are not around, maybe they are busy with preparations.**

I: Ke lumelisa ntate X le komiti ea hae...

The bolded words in excerpts (3 to 5) above, illustrate the segments of the information which the interpreter left out in his interpretations

The excerpt, in (3) above, the preacher said *mosali o tsoara thipa ka bohaleng*, which originates from Sesotho proverb that says '*ma-ngoana o ts'oara thipa ka bohaleng* (a woman can handle very tough situations). The pause suggests that the interpreter struggled to interpret the proverb. Both the literal and the contextual meanings of the proverb were not rendered in the target language. Omitting the proverb denied the target audience the information which they ought to have heard. The comprehension effort, which one of the efforts in Gile's model of interpreting, requires the interpreter to understand the source language and be able to say the same message in the target language. Even though the interpreter is the native speaker of Sesotho, he did not know how to render the message. The production effort was also not applied. This effort requires the interpreter to be able to produce the message in the target language. In excerpt (3) above, the interpreter only interpreted *mosali* (woman) and failed to produce the rest of the proverb.

In excerpt (4) the interpreter omitted *kapa 'oa checha*. This term may have more than one meaning. Firstly, it can mean "going backward", however in this context, this segment is in the form of a question posted to the congregation regarding whether they preach or withdraw from preaching the gospel. The conclusion that can be drawn is that, the interpreter was unable to hear the last segment. Immediately after the preacher spoke, congregants who understand Sesotho started asking one another hence the interpreter missed the last segment and the listening effort was affected.

The bolded information in excerpt (5), which reads, "I can see they are not around, maybe they are busy with the preparations", was also omitted. The segment should have been interpreted in Sesotho as, *ke ea bona ha ba eo ka mona, mohlomong ba sa pathahane ka litokiso*. The chunk was a bit longer than others, therefore, it may have posed a challenge to the interpreter's memory. The memory effort requires the interpreter to be able to remember the speaker's message. In this case, the interpreter may have also forgotten what the speaker said.

Regarding the omission of information, Baker (1992 p. 40) states that if the meaning conveyed by a certain expression is not vital to the development or the intended meaning...it does not harm to omit such an expression. Interpreters sometimes omit even the vital parts of the speaker's message just like in the excerpts above. This results in the distortion of meaning.

### Misinterpretations

Excerpts (7 to, 9) below, illustrate instances where the interpreters misinterpreted the preachers' messages:

7. E: and they end up colonising us

I: *joalo hona ke mokhoa oa bokomonisi.*

8. E: *Moilimo o ile a mponts'a pono e ts'osang*

I: God showed me a great vision

9. E: *ke ile ka bona likhohlo tse kholo tse ts'osang.*

I: I saw some great (pause)hills that surprised me.

In excerpts (7 to 9) above, the interpreter incorrectly rendered concepts in the source message, some of which have their equivalents in the target language. In excerpt (7), the interpreter failed to correctly interpret the preacher's words that said "...and they end up colonising us", which in Sesotho means *'me ba re beha tlas'a puso ea bokolone*. He misinterpreted them as ... *joale hona ke mokhoa oa bokomonisi*, which back-translates into "now this is a communism style". The assumption is that the interpreter encountered a problem in interpreting the word "colonisation" (*bokolono*) and ended up misinterpreting it as "communism" (*bokomonisi*), which means *bokomonisi* in Sesotho.

In excerpt (8 and 9), the sentence segments *e tšosang* and *tse tšosang* both meaning "frightening" or "scaring", the difference being that *e tšosang* refers to one entity while *tse tšosang* suggests many things, seem to have posed a problem to the interpreter. They were misinterpreted as great and surprise respectively.

In excerpt (9), the Sesotho term *likhohlo*, which means "valleys", was misinterpreted as "hills", *maralla* in Sesotho. The interpreter could not at the time find the appropriate Sesotho word to render correctly the source language word.

The comprehension effort states that the interpreter must comprehend or understand the message first before rendering it in the target language. This is because one cannot interpret what one failed to understand. The interpreters' renditions above suggest that what the speaker said was not understood.

### Assumptions for distortion of meaning

The previous section analysed elements contributing to the distortion of meaning in short consecutive interpreting of the selected multicultural churches in Maseru. This section on one hand, discusses reasons why the mentioned elements in the previous section occur in interpreting. Data analysed in this section suggests that the reasons are, lack of proficiency in both the source and target languages and unfamiliarity with interpreting ethical principles.

### Lack of proficiency in source and target languages

The first reason is lack of proficiency in source and target languages. Lack of proficiency is an individual's shortcomings when it comes to the use of a particular language. In interpreting, lack of proficiency, either in source or target language affects the interpreter's interpreting performance. According to Pratiwi (2000 p. 130), lack of language proficiency affects the interpreter's comprehension and this lead to failure to faithfully render the message in the target language. The culture of both the source and



target languages are very crucial in interpreting. This is because, the interpreter must express the message in the target language in a way that conforms to the culture of the target language. However, the interpreter may encounter problems in interpreting some culture bound words. According to Baker (1992 p. 21) this may happen when the source language expresses a concept which is totally unknown in the target culture. Excerpt (10) below illustrates the phenomenon of culture bound words and expression in interpreting.

The following excerpts (10 to 13) give evidence that in multicultural churches in question, the interpreters did not have language proficiency.

10. E: *E re hei uena **lekoala***

I: Say you who are **stubborn**.

11 E: *E re **makoala** ha kene ntlong ea Molimo*

I: **Those who are not violent** will not enter in this place.

12. E: *Ke ile ka bona **likhohlo tse kholo tse tšosang**.*

I: I saw some **great hills** that surprised me.

13. E: *...le Sesotho se ea cho hore mosali o ts'oara thipa ka bohaleng.*

I: even Sesotho says a woman (pause) eh h h h h (pause) amen

In excerpt (10 and 11), the interpreter failed to interpret the word *lekoala/makoala* "coward" accurately. In excerpt (10), he interpreted it as "stubborn" which refers to *manganga* in Sesotho, while in excerpt (11) it was interpreted as "those who are not violent", which when back-translated means *ba sa sebelising likhoka*.

in excerpt (12), he interpreted *likhohlo tse kholo tse tšosang*, as great hills that surprised me. In this context, *tšosang* refers to something that is "frightening" or "scary".

In excerpt (13) above, the interpreter failed to interpret the preacher's message which says *mosali o tšoara thipa ka bohaleng*, which originates from Sesotho proverb that says, '*ma ngoana o tšoara thipa ka bohaleng*. This is a culture bound expression which does not have its equivalent in the target language. The interpreter may have found it problematic to interpret the proverb. The production effort is very important because it the final stage where the interpreter must deliver the message in the target language. However, the production effort was not applied by the interpreter because he did not interpret the proverb.

The conclusion that can be drawn is that, the interpreters' English proficiency was lacking. The words and segments in the above excerpts seemed to have posed a problem as they were not interpreted correctly. An interpreter must have knowledge and understanding of both the language he/she is interpreting from and the language he/she is interpreting into. Failure to understand any of the two languages will result in inaccurate interpreting that distort the intended meaning.

## Unfamiliarity with code of ethics in interpreting

Another assumption for distortion could be unfamiliarity with code of ethics in interpreting. According to McGilvray (2012, p. 4) code of ethics refers to the values and principles guiding decisions interpreting professions make in practice. Code of ethics emphasis the principle of fidelity and accuracy in interpreting According to Kolawole et al (2008 p. 2) fidelity means the quality of being accurate, reliable and exact. The following excerpts (14 to 19) illustrates lack of fidelity and accuracy in interpreting.

14     **E...** and they end up colonising us

**I...** *joalo hona ke mokhoa oa bokomonisi.*

15     **E:** Let us then turn to the book of Mark

**I:** Halleluyah

16     **E:** May you receive your blessings today!

**I:** Amen!

17     **E** I thank 'me' **Y** **for allowing the women leadership to welcome us...**

**I:** *Ke leboha 'me' Y le komiti ea boetapele ha ba re memetse ho tla mona*

18     **E:** I also thank 'me' **Z...for seeing it fit for us to come here and share the gospel**

19     **I:** *Ke rata ho leboha le 'me' Z, o sebelitse ka thata ho bona hore re ea fihla sebakeng sena.*

In excerpt (14) the speaker's is talking about "colonisation" (*bokolone*), while the interpreter interpreted it as "communism" (*bokomunisi*). The interpreter may at the time failed to comprehend both colonisation and communism

In excerpts (15 and 16). Above, the interpreter used the words that are normally said by born again Christians, which are; amen and hallelujah instead of interpreting "let us turn to the book of Mark" and "may you receive your blessings today". Which means, *ha re phetle lengolo la Mareka* and *kajeno ha u ke u fumane litlhohonolofatso tsa hao* respectively.

In excerpt (18), the preacher is thanking Mrs **X** for allowing the woman leadership of that particular church to welcome her, the interpreter, instead of saying, *ke leboha 'me' X ha a lumeletse boetapele ba bo 'me' ho re amohela*, she says, *ke leboha 'me' X le komiti ea hae ha ba re lumelletse ho tla mona*. When it is back translated, the interpreter said, I thank 'me' **X** and her committee for allowing us to come here.

In the last excerpt, which is (19), the preacher is also thanking Mrs **Z** for seeing it fit for them visit the church in question, the interpreter however interpreted that by saying, *ke rata ho leboha 'me' Z, o sebelitse ka thata ho bona hore re ea fihla sebakeng sena*. However, what the preacher said is, *ke rata ho leboha 'me' Z ha a bone ho lokeleha hore re etele sebakeng sena*. The researcherS learned that the interpreter was part of the organising committee for that particular meeting, therefore, she had background information which led to her rendering the preacher's message inaccurately. According to Gile's (1992)

comprehension effort, the interpreter's role is to render the message in the target language. In the above excerpts, the production effort seems to not have been applied by the interpreters.

The above section has illustrated various reasons why elements that lead to distortion of meaning occurs. The reasons discussed above are, lack of proficiency in both source and target languages, lack of proficiency in both cultures and lastly unfamiliarity with interpreting ethical principles.

## CONCLUSION

The paper has examined distortion of meaning in short consecutive interpreting of the selected multicultural churches in Maseru. This paper discovered that elements that led to the distortion of meaning in short consecutive interpreting are; misinterpretations, omissions and additions. The paper revealed that sometimes interpreters render the speaker's message inaccurately in the target language. Sometimes they add the speaker's message, that is more information is added to the source text. And lastly, sometimes they reduce the contents of the source language message through omission of some words. The study argued that, these elements results in the distortion of the intended meaning of the speech.

The paper recommends that for efficient interpreting one should be knowledgeable about the cultural background of both source and target language. Secondly it is worth for interpreters to be familiar with the code of ethics in interpreting.

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