

West German University Press – ISSN 2750-0594. Online ISSN 2750-0608

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND TRANSLATION RESEARCH

4 (2024) 1



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Publisher: West German University Press
Bochum/Germany

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The *International Journal of Language and Translation Research* is a REFEREED academic journal published four times a

year both in print and
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(<http://universitaetsverlag.com/en/journals.php> and <http://universitaetsverlag.com/en/ijltr.php>).

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Ruhr University Bochum, P. O. Box
“West German University Press, Bochum”,
Universitaetsst. 150, 44801 Bochum,
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email: ijltr@universitaetsverlag.com

ISSN 2750-0594. Online ISSN 2750-0608

ISBN 978-3-89966-485-0

Order and subscription:
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Problems of Translation in the English-Kiswahili Religious Translated Texts

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Citation

Amos, N. (2024). Problems of Translation in the English-Kiswahili Religious Translated Texts. *International Journal of Language and Translation Research*, 4(1), pp. 5-17. <http://doi.org/10.22034/IJLTR.2023.177151>

Abstract

Available online

Keywords:

Translation problems, translation procedures, over-translation, under-translation and mistranslation

Translation is an art that demands translators to be proficient in both languages they are working with, encompassing linguistic components as well as cultural norms and practices. The current study investigated the translation difficulties and their underlying reasons in religious texts. The examples were derived from an English religious source that was translated into Kiswahili. The study utilized a qualitative approach to explain and provide specific examples and reasons for the existing translation issues in religious texts. The case study design was improved to thoroughly investigate the findings. The documentary was utilized for data collection, and thematic analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data. Linguistic variations, including language use, tenses, semantics, and morphology, led to overtranslation, undertranslation, and mistranslation in the translated text. The translator did not follow translation methods, such as revising and test-retesting the translation text, to determine the equivalent effects between the source and target texts. The translated text deviated significantly from the source material, resulting in the omission of crucial information. The results cause translation effects for leaders, including misleading readers, distorting religious content, and creating conflicts of interest. Translators should follow strict translation procedures and guidelines to avoid translation issues and their consequences.

مشکلات ترجمه متون مذهبی انگلیسی-کیسواالی

ترجمه هنری است که مستلزم آن است که مترجم در هر دو زبان کاری از نظر جنبه های زبانی و فرهنگ ها، هنجارها و آداب و رسوم مهارت داشته باشد. پژوهش حاضر به بررسی مشکلات ترجمه و علل آن در متن دینی پرداخته است. نمونه ها از متن دینی انگلیسی ترجمه شده به کیسواحیلی درک شدند. این پژوهش از رویکرد کیفی برای تبیین و ارائه مثال ها و دلیل های تفصیلی درباره مشکلات موجود ترجمه در متون دینی استفاده کرده است. طرح مطالعه موردی برای مطالعه جامع یافته ها افزایش یافت. برای جمع آوری داده ها از اسناد و برای تحلیل داده های کیفی از روش تحلیل موضوعی استفاده شد. یافته ها نشان داد که تفاوت های زبانی مانند کاربرد زبان، زمان ها، معناشناسی و صرف شناسی باعث شده است که متن ترجمه شده به ترجمه بیش از حد، ترجمه نادرست و ترجمه نادرست منجر شود. همچنین مشخص شد که مترجم به روش های ترجمه از جمله ویرایش و آزمایش مجدد متن ترجمه پایبند نیست تا تأثیرات معادل ماساژ بین متون مبدأ و متن مقصد را تعیین کند. این در رشته ای آشکار شد که ماساژ متن ترجمه شده آن به طور کامل از متن منبع به حذف اطلاعات مهم از متن مبدأ منحرف شد. این نتایج منجر به اثرات ترجمه برای رهبر مانند گمراه کردن خوانندگان، تحریف محتوای مذهبی و تضاد منافع می شود. توصیه می شود مترجمان از رویه ها و قواعد ترجمه دقیق پیروی کنند تا از مشکلات ترجمه و آثار آن در امان بمانند.

واژگان کلیدی: مشکلات ترجمه، مراحل ترجمه، ترجمه بیش از حد، ترجمه نادرست

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P-ISSN: 2750-0594
E-ISSN: 2750-0608

Introduction

The necessity for translation can be traced back to the Bible tale of the Tower of Babel. The Tower of Babel collapsed because the people were unable to communicate effectively due to speaking different languages (Holy Bible 1997, Genesis 11: 1-9). The occurrence led to people speaking multiple languages, causing confusion and a lack of understanding between individuals in terms of words and expressions (Malangwa, 2005). Munday (2001) asserts that the emergence of the linguistic approach to translation studies in the 1950s and 1960s was prompted by changes in the English language and advancements in linguistics. The evolution of language and societal developments led to the emergence of several languages, necessitating the role of translators for improved communication. This marked the inception of translation and its global expansion (Mwansonko et al, 2006 and Sofer 2006). The solution for bridging the language barrier between dominant and marginalized languages in this situation was achieved by translation, cultural adaptation, and international training. Batibo (1989) states that translation first involved transferring text from sophisticated languages such as Greek and Latin into less polished languages like English and French. The process of translation occurred during three distinct periods of civilization known as Judeo-Christian and Islamic. Each period was marked by unique translation activities. According to Sofer (2006), the first period, known as the Christian age, saw languages such as Latin, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek coming together to form Christian civilization and altering Judaic civilization. The second period began with the emergence of Islam in the 7th century and reached its peak in the 12th and 13th centuries, notably in Toledo, Spain. Christian, Muslim, and Jewish scholars and translators from various regions of Europe and the Middle East collaborated to translate Greek and Arabic classics into different languages and cultures, paving the way for the Renaissance and the modern world. In the current era, major civilizations are constantly changing, and translation plays a crucial role in enabling communication. The Bible Agencies (1999) outlined six principles and procedures for translating religious texts during different civilization periods. The first principle emphasizes the importance of accuracy in translation without altering the original meaning. The second principle focuses on conveying the emotions and attitudes present in the original text. The translation should maintain the original text's variety, such as literary forms like poetry, prophetic narrative, and exhortation. It should accurately present the historical and cultural contexts. The translation must avoid distortion by contemporary political, ideological, social, cultural, or theological agendas. It may be necessary to restructure the text to enhance comprehension, such as adjusting word order.

Despite the purposes, principles, and history of translation, there are still hurdles and problems in translating religious texts, such as overtranslation, undertranslation, and mistranslation. Such issues in the target language text lead to a lack of equivalency, so impacting the message received by the readers.

The current paper analyzes the causes of translation problems in religious texts and their effects when translating from English to Kiswahili. It references Biblical Inasema, translated in the third period of the 20th century, according to Sofer (2006), highlighting the importance of accurate communication in translation.

Main Objective

The study aimed to analyze problems and its effects of religious text translation from English to Kiswahili using the translation of *Biblia Inasema*.

Specific Objectives

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

- To identify the texts which are over translated, under translated and mistranslated in English-Kiswahili religious translation,
- To examine the causes of overtranslation, under translation and mistranslation.

Significance of the Study

The study aims to raise awareness among translators and readers of religious texts regarding the differences between the original text and the translated text. The variant will allow translators to reconsider how to address and reduce different issues while translating religious materials. The study aims to encourage religious text translators and academics to recognize the significance of employing various translation theories and methods to ensure the equal meaning effects between the source text and target text.

Literature Review

Translating religious writings requires translators to possess skills and expertise in both languages being translated. Musebele (2007) examined how translation practices influenced the evolution of written Zulu language by the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1959. The study revealed that linguistic disparities, particularly in metaphors and changes in orthography, morphology, and lexicon, resulted in translation challenges. James (2001) analyzed the Scott Bible translation and found that the linguistic techniques used in presenting biblical passages in the Scott language, such as using coda, show how lexical items, morphology, syntax, and discourse style affect the equivalence of meaning. The study revealed that the translation methods did not effectively address the performative nature of Biblical composition. Floor (2007) states that inconsistencies in translation might arise from biblical terminology like as sacrifice, holiness, and salvation, as well as unfamiliar concepts or phrases in the target language. Matthew et al. (2002) states that unfamiliar major Biblical terminology related to Jewish and Christian cultural traditions can lead pastors, leaders, and Bible interpreters to understand the text differently. This may result in the alteration of the meaning of Biblical terminology. The Biblical phrase with multiple meanings can cause confusion and dictate interpretation if not carefully managed during the translation process.

Accurate translation of certain religious terms is crucial for effectively communicating the Christian message. Incorrect selection of equivalents can lead to mistranslation and distortion of communications due to incorrect timing choices. The audience may lack familiarity with the geography and culture of the Bible (Matthews, et al, 2002). Gutt (2000) argues that the intricate nature of communication and the variations among languages lead to ineffective translation of religious materials. Sharififar (2007) noted that cultural heterogeneity and semiotic variance in translating create challenges. Simon (1995) emphasizes the importance of understanding the culture in which words like 'snow' or 'Holy Ghost' originated and the society they are intended for in order to translate them accurately. Religious translators must be proficient in both languages used for translation.

Methodology

The study utilized a case study design, analyzing the Bridgeway Bible Commentary by Don Fleming as the source text and its translated version "Biblia Inasema Ufafanuzi wa Biblia Kuanzia mwanzo had Ufunuo" as the case study. The study focused on the translation of the four Gospels: Matthew, John, Mark, and Luke. A qualitative technique was employed to gather in-depth

information on the translated sentences exhibiting various issues. The data were obtained using a documentary approach where the writer developed guideline questions to identify undertranslated, overtranslated, and mistranslated lines.

Findings

This section aims to identify strings that have been over-translated, under-translated, or mistranslated throughout the translation process. The analysis concentrated on reviewing the translated text by comparing the intended meaning of the source text with the intended meaning of the target text. The study will now present the findings of each subtheme in the following subsections.

Overtranslated Strings

The findings revealed that the following string was overtranslated in Kiswahili Biblia Ina Sema, compared with the original text called Bridge Way Bible Commentary.

SL: All priest would be required for duty during feast of the Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles, which together would account for the remaining four weeks of the year pg 405

TL: Majuma manne ya mwaka yaliyobakia yalichukuliwa na sikukuu za Pasaka, Pentekoste na Viband, nyakati wanaume wote wa Israel walikuwa mahali maalum pa ibada. Katika sikukuu kama hizo makuhani wote walitakiwa kazini. pg 408

In the above presented extract, the italicized string shows the overtranslated text *nyakati wanaume wote wa Israel walikuwa mahali maalum pa ibada*. This information does not exist in the original text. The same issues emerged in the following string extracted from page 452 in the source text translated as follows;

SL: Also they had used different methods of reckoning. Matthew, Mark and Luke usually count the hours from 6 a.m and 6 p.m, but John seems to reckon differently .pg 452

TL: Pia waliweza kutumia njia mbalimbali za kuhesabu saa, Mathayo, Marko na Luka kwa kawaida walihesabu saa sawa sawa na kanuni ya Kiswahili ambayo pia ni knuni ya Kiarabu na Kiebrania , lakini Yohana alifuata kanunia nyingine .pg 522.

In the string above the message had diverged from that of the source text due to the information added. The same observation was made in the following text where the translator added some of the information in Kiswahili translated texts;

ST: *While the faith of the three apostles on the mountain was being strengthened, the faith of the other nine apostles on the plains below was failing pg 493*

TL: *Wakati Imani ya Petro, Yohana, na Yakobo ilipojengwa na kuimarishwa mlimani Yesu aliogeuka sura, Imani ya mitume wengine tisa waliobaki chini ilipungia.*

Another Overtranslation was found in p. 495 of the tagert language translated texts as follows:

ST: *The Jewish leader tried to arrest Jesus, because they knew that he told this parable against them (p. 429).*

TL: *Makuhani wakuu, walimu wa sheria na wazee walifahamu ya kwamba mfano huo unawahus (p. 495).*

Under Translations

The findings from the study revealed that there were number of strings which have been under translated during translation process. This was evidence with the presence of deletion of some of the important words or phrase in target text as compared to source text. The following string were found featuring the under translation characteristics.

ST: *Living in the world of unbelievers, Jesus could be very frustrated at their refusal to accept him pg 409.*

TL: *Yesu aliishi katika ulimwengu wa watu wasioamini. (P. 473).*

In the string the phrase ‘Jesus could be very frustrated at their refusal to accept him’ in the source language text, the translator omitted part of the information. This cause loss of meaning in the target language. The information in target language were overgeneralized about the information on Jesus’s life and actually it is given less information. The actual sense in source text shows possibility of Jesus to become unhappy due to living in the world of unbelievers where he might have come with negative attitudes from them. Furthermore of under translation was found in page 410 as present in the string bellow;

ST: *....asking God to keep him from being hurt (p. 410).*

SL: *....alimwomba Mungu amsaidie.*

In the above string, the translated text in incomplete because the part of the string was untranslated in the target language. Which is ‘from being hurt’. Similar problem found in page 456 as it reads.

ST” *... and few days later they received the Holy spirit as Jesus had promised them (p. 456).*

SL:na baadaye kidogi walipokea upako.

The same undertranslation was identified in page 444:

ST: Two of the men worked well and made profit, but the third was lazy and did nothing

SL: Wawili walifanya kazi na watatu walikuwa wavivu (p. 513).

In the identified string above, *well and did nothing* were not translated in the source text. This tendency of omitting part of the information in the texts causes serious problem to the reader of the target text since they come up with different teaching and understanding.

Mistranslation

The study also examined the mistranslated text in the *Bibilia inasema* as were compared to the source text. The findings show there were number of strings were mistranslated. Some of them are presented below;

ST: However, he did not expect Jesus to come to his house pg 418

SL: Lakini hakumwomba Yesu aingie katika nyumba yake pg484'

The word he did not expect was mistranslated as '*hakumuomba*'. This is contrary to source text statement that features the features of exclamatory sentence but this sounds as statement sentence.

The same problem revealed in page 456 that;

ST: From Jesus resurrection to his ascension was about six weeks.... 456

SL: Kuanzia kufufuka kwa Yesu mpaka kuondoka ulikuwa muda wa majuma sita pg 526

Causes of translation problems in religious texts

Several variables can prevent translators from conveying an equivalent message in their translated text. One of such challenges is being influenced by linguistic issues or ineptitude. The linguist's incompetence affected the translator's ability to apply certain grammatical rules in the Kiswahili language. The following statement demonstrates incorrect usage of the past continuous tense.

ST: Mary's Son of praise reflects her total submission and deep gratitude to God of what he was doing through her (p. 406).

TL: Wimbo wa sifa wa Mariam unadhihilisha jinsi alivyojikabidhi kwa Mungu kwa shukurani juu ya mambo makubwa aliyotaka kuyafanya kwa njia yake (p. 469).

ST: *While the faith of the three apostle on the mountain was being strengthened, the faith of the nine apostle on the plain below was failing. (p. 427).*

SL: *Wakati Imani ya Petro, Yohan an Yakobo ilipojengwa na kuimarishwa mlimani Yesu alipogeuka sura imni y mitume wengine fisa waliobaki chini ilipungua. (p. 493).*

SL: *Also they used different methods of reckoning, Matthow, Mark and Luke usually count the hours from 6 am and 6 pm, but John seems to reckon differently. (p. 452).*

TL: *Pia waliweza kutumia njia mbalimbali za kuhesabu saa Mathayo, Marko and Luka kwa kawaida walihesabu saa sawa swa na kanuni za Kiswahili ambayo pia ni kanuni ya Kiarabu na Kiebrania, lakini Yohana alifuata kanuni nyingine(p. 522).*

The use of future past perfect continuous tense was confused with past perfect tense in the target text. The same tense case was identified in the*Aliyotaka kuyafanya....* This statement shows future expectation thus lacking the equivalent of ... *he was ddoing..... aliyokuwa anafanya....* The past continuous tense, also addition al of adjective words like.... *mambo makubwa....*

ST: *Mathew 25 records three stories or pictures from Jesus, all of them illustrate the teaching he had just given (p. 429).*

TT: *Katika Mathayo 25 twasoma mfano unaoonesha Yesu ambayo yote mafundisho aliyoyatoa katika fungu la 24 yaani Yesu angeondoka duniani kwa muda usiojulikana na baadaye angerudi tena (p. 499).*

In addition any translated text needs to be retested and being proof read by another expert in translation before printing. In the current texts the data show that the translated text did not pass that process. There are massive given evidence that it seems the tester or the translator did not edit or rework on polishing the translated texts. For example the following statement prove this challenge as the translated sentences consist of some linguistics problems.

ST: *Living in the world of unbelievers, Jesus ould be very frustrated at their refusal to accept him*

TT: *Yesu aliishi katika ulimwengu wa watu wasioamini*

ST: *Two of the men worked well and made profit, but the third was lazy and did nothing*

TT: *Wawili walifanya kazi na watatu walikuwa wavivu.*

The Kiswahili translated text lacks specific information from the source text which causes the translated texts to sound too generalized living a side the key word like *the men*, and *made profit*.

The same problems happened in the following statement

ST: The Jewish leader tried to *arrest Jesus*, but they knew that he told this parable against them

SL: Makuhani wakuu, walimu wa sheria na wazee walifahamu y kwamba mfano huu ulikuwa unawahusu....

The lexical '*arrest*' which carries the main theme, semantic and presents the intention of the Jewish against Jesus were mistranslated as '*walifahamu*' which is quite different in semantic presentation

Discussion

Translating religious texts is challenging due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter. Every individual naturally cherishes and protects their religious beliefs to maintain its authenticity and teachings. Translator's inaccurate translation of some concepts can lead to confusion among religious readers. Translators must be meticulous while translating writings to preserve the religious source text accurately. Hervey and Higgins (2002) stated that the source language must be structured by placing words into grammatical forms based on the structures and conventions of the target language, and by using lexical items from the target language. In this case, the word 'ascension' was translated as 'kuondoka', resulting in a mistranslation that led to a misinterpretation of the intended message by Kiswahili readers of religious texts. TuKI (2014) stated that the correct equivalent translation for ascension is 'kupaa'. The term "kuondoka" is related to leaving, departure, or going away in a general sense, whereas "kupaa" specifically refers to the process of flying, similar to how "ascension" conveys meanings such as rise, mounting, or ascent. Newmark (1991) emphasized that the most prevalent syntactical error occurs when the translator disregards the unique characteristics of their language's grammar. The translator altered the message by omitting translations for some parts of the sentences. The sentence that Jesus had promised them was not translated at all in the Kiswahili translation. This event results in a significant disparity between the two religious scriptures in terms of substance and structure. Deleting crucial information can impact the reader's comprehension of the entire message. Religious translators are essential for ensuring that the target text effectively conveys the same impact as the source text to readers in a different socio-cultural setting. Basil Hatim and Mason (1990) emphasize that the translator's duty as a reader involves creating a model of the intended meaning of the source text and assessing how it will likely affect the intended audience.

The inclusion of superfluous details in the target text led to the Kiswahili text not matching the original message accurately. Deviating significantly from religious text translation principles violates the guidelines set by Bible translation agencies in 1999. These agencies emphasize the importance of accurately translating biblical terms for effective communication. The translator plays a crucial role in decoding and recoding the message. Nida (1964) argues that translation should prioritize replicating a message in the receptor's language that closely resembles the natural counterpart of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and second in terms of style. The translator included additional material in the target text during translation, resulting in the translated texts seeming different, unethical, and leading to a misinterpretation of moral ideas among Swahili readers. For instance, the sentence 'All priests would be required for duty'. The target text did not translate certain phrases and instead included additional explanations, such as 'majuma manne ya mwaka yaliyobakia yalichukuliwa...'. This could potentially lead to a misinterpretation of the word of God, causing conflicts within Christianity due to varying perspectives on receiving, understanding, and believing in God's good news.

After reading and analyzing each translated sentence thoroughly at the cohesive level, it was seen that the naturalness level was not maintained during the transition phase. Translators did not verify if the translation is coherent, logical, and sounds natural. To achieve naturalness, one must use common grammatical structures, idioms, phrases, and words typical of the stylistic context. The translator encountered difficulties in assessing the relative importance of different messages and in summarizing or condensing the material obtained. The translator for this case must be proficient, quick-witted, and collaborative with other translators. Agliz (2005) stresses that grammatical equivalence, redundancy, and paragraphing are crucial critical components to consider when aiming to create a precise and suitable translation. To ensure high-quality translated text and efficient production, all translation procedures must be followed diligently.

Linguistic incompetence leads some translators to incorrectly transpose or mistranslate lexical items with close synonyms but slight differences in usage. For instance, the word "recalling," meaning remembering or reminding, was translated as "kukumbusha," which refers to remembering or reminding. The correct term in Kiswahili is 'kukumbuka'. The word "Holy Spirit" was observed to be translated as 'upoko' instead of 'anointing', while the term "ascension" was rendered as 'kuondoka' instead of 'kupaa'. The term 'kuondoka' pertains to actions such as leaving or departing on a semantic level. Each text must be translated in accordance with the context,

culture, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics of the target language. The translator had to conform to the religious context, ensuring the right selection of words and their meanings in respect to language usage. In addition, the word 'show' was rendered as 'maonesho', whereas in the religious context, especially in the New Testament, the word's meaning was 'kujioneshwa', as opposed to exhibits. On page 424 of the translated book, the word "town" was translated as "Kijiji." Translators have had issues with using singular and plural forms, as demonstrated in the following statement. Rashidora (20220) points out that translating Islamic religious books from Arabic to English has challenges like lexical, semantic, structural, and grammatical issues. Translating Uzbek religious materials is even more challenging.

The findings indicate incorrect usage of singular and plural forms of words and the merging of several lexical semantic meanings into a single meaning. The lexical stories and visuals were translated as "mifano." The translator mistakenly used the term 'mifano' to refer to both stories and pictures in the target text, which were originally intended as teaching aids to provide instances. The word "mifano" was suitable in the original text which stated, 'Matthew 25 contains three parables from Jesus...' The translator experienced problems in selecting the appropriate vocabulary items due to differing interpretations of Kiswahili linguistics. The translator relied on grammatical equivalence, redundancy, and paragraphing approaches to address linguistic challenges and ensure correct and appropriate Kiswahili translation. The final translation exhibits overtranslation, undertranslation, and overlapping translation due to the translator's linguistic inexperience, particularly in Kiswahili linguistics. Mohamed (2019) argues that translators must understand the meanings and interpretations of words in order to accurately convey foreign concepts. Translators must thoroughly understand and proficiently master the languages of the recipients before starting translation work. Each language has a unique syntax that determines the level and placement of words in phrases or applications. For instance, the word 'hadithi' is translated from English as 'tales'. Kiswahili does not have plural forms based on subject-verb agreement, morphological norms, and syntactic principles in Kiswahili linguistics.

Another linguistic issue arose during the translation of an English acronym used to denote time. The abbreviations 'am' and 'pm' were not translated into Kiswahili but were altered using borrowing translation procedures, creating new phrases that do not have equivalents in Kiswahili. The term "mchana" is identical to "am" and "pm." The translator appears to have a good

understanding of Kiswahili but lacks the essential skill of effectively demonstrating how terminology can be utilized in a different language. In Kiswahili, time is denoted by the words *asubuhi*, *mchana*, *alasisi*, and *adhuhuri*, which correspond to 'am' in English, whereas *jioni* or *usiku* represent the English time term 'pm'.

Another cause of the translation errors was the absence of test-retest reliability of the translated material, in addition to language variances. The translated text included extra details and omitted crucial facts. If the translated material has been subjected to all effective translation techniques, the translator could repair any mistakes or errors created throughout the translation process. To ensure the accuracy and quality of the translated material, the translated version should be retested through back translation or proofread by the original translator or sent to another experienced translator in the religious field. For instance The word "tried to arrest Jesus," which conveys the main message of the Jewish leaders' intention to apprehend Jesus, was not translated. If the translated content had undergone the test-retest procedure or proofreading process, all these mistakes would have been identified. Translation is a professional discipline that requires more than just the ability to speak or write Kiswahili. To operate as a professional Kiswahili translator, one must possess specific skills and knowledge. To be a qualified Kiswahili translator, one must possess a strong proficiency in Kiswahili and expertise in areas such as syntax, morphology, semantics, stylistics, pragmatics, and philosophy. Training is necessary to develop the information and skills required for translating various types of texts.

Conclusion

Translation involves creating a new text based on the original source texts. Translators must evaluate translation theories, methodologies, procedures, and text kinds to address translation challenges while observing the equivalent relationship between two texts. The translation will adhere to standards to ensure it has the same effects as the target text, minimizing overttranslation, undertranslation, and mistranslation that could influence the readers' understanding of religious materials.

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