

Bible Translation as an Index of Ikwerre Nationalism

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This paper builds on the premise that, from a linguistic perspective, Ikwerre is a dialect of Igbo, a language spoken in South-Eastern Nigeria. However, the Ikwerre people reject the Igbo identity and prefer to be seen as a distinct people with a distinct language. Thus, despite the existence of eight Bible translations in Igbo, produced between 1860 and 2015, the Ikwerre people insist on having the Bible translated into Ikwerre. Consequently, two translations of the New Testament were published in Ikwerre in 2005 and 2010. This paper investigates some of the strategies adopted to make the Ikwerre Bible translations different from the Igbo translations. Specifically, it compares the Ikwerre translations with the Igbo translations. The unit of comparison is the choice of terms for selected Biblical concepts. A corpus was created of terms for key Biblical concepts in the two Ikwerre translations and in the Union Igbo Bible, the most popular Igbo Bible. Concepts studied are those for which there is relative uniformity in the choice of terms in the various Igbo translations. The terms used in the Ikwerre translations were compared with those used in the Union Igbo Bible to see how different they are. Findings indicate that for many of the concepts, the Ikwerre translations did not use the same terms used in the Union Igbo Bible but instead used dialectal terms or novel terms created from existing Ikwerre words. In cases where they used the same terms as the Union Igbo Bible, many of the terms had their spellings changed to reflect their pronunciation in Ikwerre. The paper concludes that Bible translation into Ikwerre was not only an effort to indigenize the message of Christianity to the Ikwerre but also a political move to reinforce the clamor for Ikwerre to be recognized as a distinct ethnic group.