

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

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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

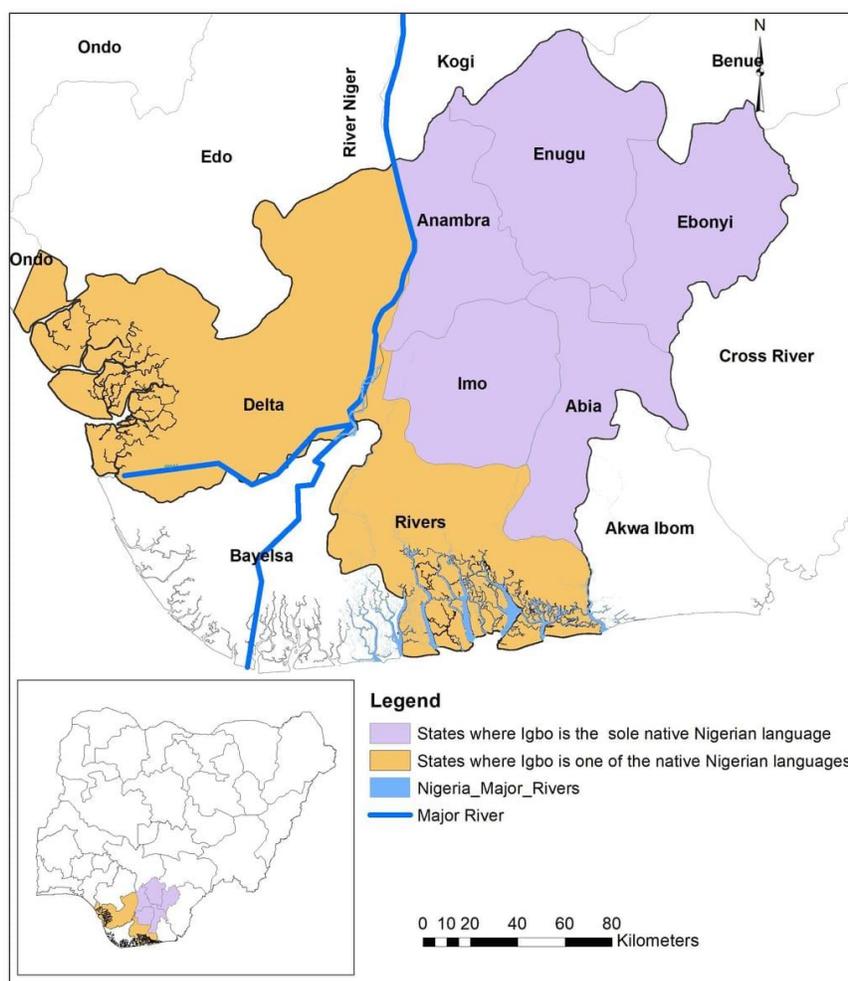
Ụtọ ka na iko “There is more fun with the *iko*” – Igbo women
Gị akwala iko “Do not engage in *iko*” – The Bible

1. Introduction

Alongside Hausa and Yoruba, Igbo is one of the three major native languages spoken in Nigeria. According to the Nigerian National Population Commission, the population of Nigeria is

approximately 182 million¹. The 2017 CIA World Fact Book states that the Igbo make up 18% of the Nigerian population². These statistics place the population of Igbo speakers at approximately 33 million. As a native language, Igbo is spoken in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo States and in parts of Delta and Rivers States of Nigeria (see Figure 1). Although many Igbo people have migrated to different parts of the world where they have formed Igbo communities and use the Igbo language for communication, Igbo is spoken as a native language only in the Nigerian States mentioned above.

Figure 1: Map of Igboland (Oyali 2018)



¹ <http://population.gov.ng/nigerias-population-now-182-million-npc/> (accessed 2 August 2018)

² <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html> (accessed 2 August 2018)

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 (Uchendu 1965). However, in the 1800s, missionaries of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), a society of the Church of England, arrived in Igboland for evangelism. Part of their evangelism activities included translating the Bible from English into Igbo. These missionaries condemned the practice of *iko mbara*. To further demonstrate their disapproval of the institution, used the term *iko* during their process of Bible translation to designate different sexual activities considered sinful in Christianity although *iko* did not have negative associations in the Igbo culture. The decision to use this term is important in that subsequent translations of the Bible into Igbo maintain this ideological use of *iko* for supposedly sinful sexual activities, with wider implications for social practices in Igbo Christian communities until today.

This study thus explores how the appropriation of *iko* in Igbo Bible translation has changed the meaning of the term over time. It is guided by 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, the study first presents Igbo cultural practices that are designated with the term *iko* (5.0). These are then juxtaposed with the different contexts where *iko* is used in Igbo Bible translation (6.0). This comparative approach shows how the use of *iko* in the Bible differs from its use prior to the Christianization of the Igbo. To situate these findings in contemporary contexts, I also share findings drawn from a questionnaire survey administered to Igbo speakers which shows their perception of the concept (7.0). In this way, this paper shows the enduring impact of the first Igbo versions of the Bible and the importance of investigating historical translations of the Bible in contexts of Translation Studies. It also showcases how results from surveys could complement descriptive studies in the exploration of the impact of translated texts in their target languages and cultures. Before expanding further on these points, I first present an overview of the history of Bible translation into Igbo (2.0). I then highlight the concept of semantic elaboration (3.0) and its ideological use as a tool for cultural subversion during missionary Bible translation in Nigeria (4.0), before moving on to its implications in more contemporary Nigeria (Igbo) translation contexts.

2. An Overview of Bible translation into Igbo

To date, there are eight translations of (portions of) the Bible into Igbo. The earliest of these were *Oku Omma nke Owu Matia: The Gospel according to St. Matthew* (1860) and *Ma Oru nke Apostoli: The Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, Galatians, and Ephesians* (1866), published in the Isuama dialect of Igbo. The first translation of the complete New Testament (NT), *Agba Ofu nke Dinwenu-Ayi na Onye-Nzọputa-Ayi Jesu Kristi n'Asusu Ibo* (1900), was published in the Niger or Onitsha dialect. This was followed by *Bible Nsọ: Union Version* (1913, the NT was published in 1908); *Baibụlụ Nsọ* (1988), published by the International Bible Society (IBS); *Baibụl Nsọ: Nhazi Katolik* (2000), by the Roman Catholic Church; *Baibul Nsọ: Ndezigharị Ohuru* (2007), published by the Bible League International; *Baibul Nsọ: Nsugharị Uwa Ohuru nke Akwukwo Nsọ* (2007), by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society; and *Baibul Ofufe-Nro na Omumuihe nke Rhapsody of Realities: Ogbugbandu Ohuru* by Christ Embassy Church. For ease of reference, I use the following terms for the different Bible translations: Isuama Igbo Bible for the translations of portions of the NT into Isuama Igbo (1860/66); Niger Igbo Bible for the first complete NT, done in Niger or Onitsha Igbo (1900); Union Igbo Bible for *Bible Nsọ: Union Version* (1913)³; Igbo Living Bible⁴ for *Baibụlụ Nsọ* (1988); Igbo Catholic Bible for *Baibul Nsọ: Nhazi Katolik* (2000); Igbo Revised Edition⁵ for *Baibul Nsọ: Ndezigharị Ohuru* (2007); Igbo New World Translation⁶ for *Baibul Nsọ: Nsugharị Uwa Ohuru nke Akwukwo Nsọ* (2007); and Igbo Rhapsody Bible for *Baibul Ofufe-Nro na Omumuihe nke Rhapsody of Realities: Ogbugbandu Ohuru* (2015). Table 1 summarizes salient aspects of the different Igbo Bible translations.

³ This translation is called “Union” because it is done into an amalgam, and thus artificial, dialect created from five different dialects of Igbo. Igbo has many dialects some of which are not mutually intelligible. The Union dialect was then created with the hope that it would be intelligible to every Igbo speaker.

⁴ The source text for this translation was the English Living Bible. The simplified language and verses of the Igbo translation were also modelled on the English Living Bible

⁵ This translation is identified as Igbo Revised Edition on the copyright page of the publication. It is presented as a revision of the Union Igbo Bible.

⁶ The Igbo translation was not only published by the same society that published the English New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, the English text was also used as the source text for producing the Igbo version

Table 1: Salient Aspects of Igbo Bible Translation

Bible translation	Year	Source Texts	Dialect	Bible Sections Translated	Institutions
Isumama Igbo Bible	1860/66	King James Bible	Isumama Igbo	Portions of the New Testament	Anglican Church
Niger Igbo Bible	1900	King James Bible	Niger (Onitsha) Igbo	New Testament	Anglican Church
Union Igbo Bible	1913	King James Bible	Union Igbo	Old and New Testaments	Anglican Church
Igbo Living Bible	1988	The Living Bible	Central Igbo	Old and New Testaments	Living Bible International
Igbo Catholic Bible	2000	Unspecified (English-based) Bible	Standard Igbo	Old and New Testaments	Catholic Church
Igbo Revised Edition	2007	King James Bible	Standard Igbo	Old and New Testaments	Bible Society of Nigeria
Igbo New World Translation	2007	New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures	Standard Igbo	Old and New Testaments	Watch Tower Bible and Tracts Society
Igbo Rhapsody Bible	2015	King James Bible	Standard Igbo	New Testament	Christ Embassy Church

In Table 1, there is one translation of portions of the New Testament (Isumama Igbo Bible), two complete translations of the New Testament (Niger Igbo Bible and Igbo Rhapsody Bible), and five complete translations of the Old and New Testaments (Union Igbo Bible, Igbo Living Bible, Igbo Catholic Bible, Igbo Revised Edition and Igbo New World Translation). This shows the sequence in which the various books of the Bible were translated into Igbo, from portions of the New Testament to the complete New Testament before the Old and New Testaments were done. The

New Testament of the Igbo Rhapsody Bible is the most recent translation, which indicates that the translation of the Old Testament is still in progress.

Table 1 also presents the different institutions that produced the translations. The Isuama Igbo Bible, Niger Igbo Bible and Union Igbo Bible were done or supervised by CMS missionaries from Europe or other African countries while the subsequent translations were done by Igbo native speakers with little or no supervision from without. Of the five translations done by Igbo native speakers, two were by non-denominational or inter-denominational societies and three by specific Christian denominations. Despite the different institutions of Bible translations and the periods of publication, their representation of *iko* seems to be unanimous, as espoused shortly.

Table 1 further shows the different source texts from which the different translations were made. Of the eight Igbo Bible translations, five were done from the King James Bible, one from the Living Bible, one from the New World Translation of the Holy Scripture, and one from an unspecified English Bible. The source texts of two of the translations – the Igbo Catholic Bible and the Igbo Revised Edition are quite controversial and need further clarification here. According to Ifenatuora (2000: vii), the Igbo Catholic Bible was made from several sources, namely *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (in Hebrew), Septuagint (in Greek), Vulgate (in Latin), the Revised Standard Version (Catholic Edition) and the Jerusalem Bible (both in English). Interestingly, Ezeogu (2012: 175), who participated in the translation project, reports that “translation from the original languages had been ruled out from the outset, as this would make the project too time-consuming and too expensive”. Secondly, some seminarians who participated in the translation are said to “not have sufficient knowledge of Hebrew and Greek to work from the original Biblical languages” (Ezeogu 2012: 176). Consequently, the present study holds that the translation was probably done from the English based texts mentioned by Ifenatuora (2000), namely the Revised Standard Version (Catholic Edition) and the Jerusalem Bible. Ifenatuora’s (2000) presentation of Hebrew and Greek texts as part of the source texts might be a political move to improve the image and reception of the translation for a translation said to be done from the original Biblical languages would be perceived as being more authentic.

On the Igbo Revised Edition, although Otubelu (1983) and Ogharaerumi (1986) submit that this translation was done from Hebrew and Greek source texts, Oyali (2018: 130) insists that this might

not be the case. For one, the translation is described as “Igbo Revised Edition” on the publication details page of the Bible, which presupposes the existence of an earlier text on which the revision is based. Secondly, Oyali (2018) demonstrates that the major difference between the Union Igbo Bible and the Igbo Revised Edition is in the orthography used in both translations, i.e., while the former was done in the Lepsius orthography⁷, the latter was done in the Onwu orthography⁸, which is the current approved standard. In other words, this paper submits that the Igbo Revised Bible, being a revision of the Union Igbo Bible, was translated from the King James Bible.

It is significant that all the Igbo Bible translations were done from English source texts and not from the original Hebrew or Greek languages. As espoused in the next section, Bible translation generally entails appropriating terms and concepts in the receiving language and culture to represent Biblical concepts. In other words, translating the Bible into English entails using terms and concepts in the English language and culture in the translation. Using English texts as source texts for the Igbo translations then means that the Igbo versions were based on the indigenized forms of the Biblical concepts in English which were necessarily the same as those used in the original Biblical languages. For instance, as presented in Oyali (2018: 59), Biblical Greeks and Romans would normally *recline* at table during meal. However, the King James Bible used “sit at table” (see John 12: 2). The Igbo Bible translations using Igbo equivalents for “sit at table” in the same passage shows their derivation from English source texts and not directly from Biblical Hebrew or Greek. The focus of this study is on how an Igbo concept – that of *iko* – became re-semanticized in Igbo during Bible translation. For this reason, the emphasis of inquiry is on the Igbo concept of *iko* and the English concepts this term is used to represent in the English-Igbo Bible translation. Thus, the study does not investigate the meanings of the said concepts in the original Biblical languages as such discussions would not make any significant contribution to the localized contexts of the discussion of English-Igbo translation in hand during this study.

⁷ This orthography was produced by Richard Lepsius (1863) at the instance of the CMS for use in the missions in Africa.

⁸ This is the current Igbo standard orthography, produced in 1961 by an eleven-man committee headed by Dr S. E. Onwu

3. Semantic elaboration in Bible translation

The concept of language elaboration was developed in the literature on language planning, especially in discussions built around Haugen's ([1966] 1972 and 1983) model. Haugen ([1966] 1972: 252) isolated "four aspects of language development [...] as crucial features in taking the step from 'dialect' to 'language', from 'vernacular' to 'standard'". Bamgbose (2004: 74-75) summarizes the four stages in Haugen's (1966) model thus:

1. *selection of a norm* (one of a number of competing languages, modification of an existing language variety or creation of a new standard),
2. *codification of form* (establishing the selected norm by adopting an appropriate script, devising an orthography and linguistic description),
3. *elaboration of function* (expanding the language to cope with use in wider domains, particularly vocabulary expansion) and
4. *acceptance by the community* (stamp of authority on the selected norm by the government).

Haugen (1983:273) defines elaboration as the "continued implementation of a norm to meet the functions of a modern world". By "implementation", or acceptance in the original version, he means "the activity of a writer, an institution, a government in adopting and attempting to spread the language form that has been selected and codified", and this activity includes "producing books, pamphlets, newspapers, and textbooks in the language" (Haugen 1983: 272). So, language elaboration involves steps taken to spread a (dialect of a) language that has already undergone codification.

Semantic elaboration is the expansion of the meaning of a word when it is used in a new domain (Oyali 2018). It is one of the processes of lexical expansion adopted as a result of the functional elaboration of a language. An outcome of such functional elaboration is the discovery that the language lacks functional equivalent terms (Nida 1964) for concepts in the new domain. To make up for this lexical gap, new words are created in the language or existing words given new meanings in the new domain. Nida's (1964) concept of *dynamic equivalence* suggests several ways

Bible translators could represent strange Biblical concepts in a language by utilizing existing resources in the language, thereby making for an effective indigenization of the Bible in the language and culture. However, Nida's (1964) dynamic equivalence gives the impression that the new ideas introduced in the receiving language and culture had always been a part of the language and culture (Pym 2010: 21). Pym's (2010) concept of *directional equivalence* foregrounds the fact that some new ideas have been introduced into the receiving language and culture during the process of Bible translation, i.e., the use of existing terms in a language to represent strange Biblical concepts effectively adds new meanings to the language and culture⁹. The present study adopts only the concept of semantic elaboration to foreground the semantic changes that have occurred on the Igbo concept of *iko* as a result of its use in Bible translation.

Semantic elaboration induced by Bible translation usually occurs when the Bible is translated for the first time into a language, particularly a language with little or no written form. This was the case with Igbo when the first Bible translations were carried out. According to Neil (1976:287),

[t]he essential strangeness of the Gospel must never be forgotten. When it comes for the first time to a people, it opens up to them a whole new world, and introduces them to concepts which are wholly new and for which no suitable expressions exist in the language which they use.

In the case of Igbo, the speakers had a distinct system of religious beliefs and practices prior to their encounter with Christianity (Oyali 2016). So, translating the Bible into Igbo entails using the language to express ideas in the new religion (Christianity) that were strange and new to the Igbo language and worldview. The translation process resulted in the expansion of the Igbo lexicon through the creation of new terms or use of existing terms with new meanings. For example, to represent the concept of *kingdom* in Igbo, the word *alaeze* was created during Bible translation by combining *ala* "land" with *eze* "king". Thus, *alaeze* literally means "the land of the king". Also, *nsọ* "sacred prohibitions" became semantically extended to also mean *holy* in the Bible translations. In some cases, the new terms or meanings spread beyond their use in the Bible and get integrated into the language. In other instances, they became restricted to Bible reading and

⁹ See Oyali (2018 and 2019 forthcoming) for a detailed exposé of Nida's (1964) concept of dynamic equivalence vis-à-vis Pym's (2010) concept of directional equivalence, and how both concepts contribute to language elaboration.

contexts of the church only. As the analysis below shows, the semantic elaboration of *iko* in the Bible translations spread far beyond the Bible itself. However, beyond the semantic expansion of *iko*, the analysis of the data gathered from the survey also shows that the use of *iko* during Bible translation resulted in the subversion of the very concept in the Igbo culture itself. The next section expatiates on cultural subversion during Bible translation, especially the translations carried out by the missionaries.

4. Cultural subversion in missionary Bible translation

One of the challenges faced by Bible translators is how to negotiate Christian theology as espoused in the Bible with the worldview of the receiving culture, especially where there are conflicts in both worldviews. In such instances, Bible translation sometimes goes beyond being a means of introducing the message of the Bible to the host communities to also being a site for interrogating aspects of their cultural practices as well as imposing Judeo-Christian worldviews on them in order to front the ideology of the Christian missionaries. In the words of Simon (2000:10),

[t]ranslations during the colonial period...were an expression of the cultural power of the colonizer. Missionaries, anthropologists, learned Orientalists chose to translate the texts which corresponded to the image of the subjugated world which they wished to construct. Translations materialized modes of interpretation whose terms were rarely questioned.

In other words, the decision to translate the Bible and not texts on economics or politics was ideological as the Bible expresses an image of the world that the missionaries would want their host communities to imbibe. Furthermore, the meanings given to terms in the Bible translations tend to, over time, become the standard or generally accepted meanings of the terms.

Remarkably, there are instances where the receiving languages have existing functional equivalent terms for some Christian concepts, but these were not used during Bible translation apparently to avoid equating the referents, which are considered idolatrous, with their Christian counterparts. For example, the Igbo *dibịa* was a functional equivalent for “priest” or “prophet”. *Dibịa* is defined in Echeruo (1998:38) as “diviner or spiritualist; one who can intercede (through divination or sacrifice) with the spirit world on behalf of clients; fortune-teller”. Of the eight translations of the

Bible into Igbo, only the Isuama Igbo Bible (1860/66) used *dibija* for “priest”. All the subsequent translations replaced *dibija* with other terms. None of the translations used *dibija* for “prophet”. This non-use of *dibija* in the translations for equivalent Christian concepts lexically distinguished Christian prophets and priests from their Igbo counterparts. Secondly, as more Igbo people convert to Christianity, the terms for non-Christian priests and prophets become demonized as they then became associated with idol worship.

Beyond subverting concepts in the receiving culture, albeit subtly, by lexically differentiating them from their Christian counterparts and demonizing them, the Bible translations also sometimes re-define the meanings of some existing terms and concepts in the receiving languages by using them to represent negative concepts in the Bible. For example, in the Union Shona Bible, the word “drunkard” is translated as *kana anosinwa doro* “someone who drinks beer”. An outcome of this usage is that “some Shona readers of the Bible today...think that being intoxicated by wine is not against the Christian teaching since the Bible (1 Corinthians 5:11) forbids beer (*doro*) not wine consumption” (Togarasei 2009:27). In other words, *doro* has acquired a pejorative connotation as a result of the context in which it is used in the Bible. Another example from the Union Shona Bible is the translation of “banqueting” in 1 Peter 4:3 as *mabira*, a term that refers to “all Shona rituals to appease ancestors” (Togarasei 2009:31, fn.2). Ancestral veneration is central in Shona cosmology and *mabira* are meant for specific purposes like “asking for rainfall (*mukwerekwere*), giving a name (*kagadza rita*), bringing home the spirit of the dead (*kurova guva*)” among many other ceremonies (Togarasei 2009:32). *Mabira* are “associated with beer drinking, meat eating and general feasting. It was the occasion when members of the extended family and indeed the whole tribe came together. Therefore, participation in *mabira* gave one a sense of belonging and indeed identity” (Togarasei 2009:33). Listing *mabira* as one of the vices that should be shunned in 1 Peter 4:3 demonizes all Shona ceremonies associated with *mabira* such that many Shona Christian faithful see participation in *mabira* as participation in idol worship (Togarasei 2009:35). A similar re-definition of an existing cultural concept is done in the use of *iko* in Igbo Bible translation. The next section presents the practices associated with *iko* in Igbo cultural practices. These practices predate the Bible translations and thus show the uses of the term prior to the Bible translations.

5. *Iko* in Igbo cultural practices

The word *iko* is defined in Echeruo (1998:70) as:

¹a friend, usually of the opposite sex, with whom one has a romantic relationship, usually outside marriage; mistress; concubine; ²(in the Ngwa area) a person extending sexual privileges to a partner outside marriage; a man chosen by a spinster to father her children; a sex-mate.

Here, Echeruo (1998) provides two broad meanings of the word *iko*. The first is general and not restricted to any given domain. On the contrary, the second defines the word within specific Igbo cultural practices or institutions. As espoused shortly, the general meaning was apparently an extension of the meaning within the institutions. Focus here then is on the use of *iko* in these cultural practices.

One of the cultural practices is the institution of *iko mbara* practiced in many Igbo communities, e.g., Ngwa, Aguku, Awka, Owerri, among others (Uchendu 1965). In Nsugbe, this institution is called *agiri*. It is an institution that permits a married person, male or female, to have a paramour. It is such that the spouse not only knows about the paramour but also gives their consent to the union, which makes it not a clandestine union. As Uchendu (1965:190) puts it, “*iko* is a generic term for a paramour, and *mbara* may be rendered as ‘public, not clandestine’”.

The closest functional equivalent of *iko mbara* in English is “concubine”. However, there are some differences between concubine and *iko*. The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines concubine as “a woman who, in some societies, lives and has sex with a man she is not married to, and has a lower social rank than his wife or wives”. From this definition, only men can have concubines and only women can be concubines. On the contrary, in the Igbo culture, both men and women can have *iko* and both men and women can be *iko*.

One of the functions of the *iko mbara* institution is purely for sexual pleasure. The institution provides an accepted avenue for sexual satisfaction for widows and widowers. A man who does not satisfy his wife sexually might be pressurized to approve of her having an *iko mbara*. Among the Ngwa, it is believed that unfaithfulness in a wife, here defined as clandestine extra-marital sex, brings sickness or misfortune to her husband (Uchendu 1965:190). To avoid such ill fortunes, the

husband approves of her having a paramour. Besides, many Igbo societies enforce a long period of post-partum taboo whereby a man does not have sex with his wife for a very long period after child-birth. Having an *iko mbara* then provides a solution to the man's sexual desires (Uchendu 1965:193). That notwithstanding, there are instances where the spouse(s) do not approve of an *iko mbara* and the union is not established. Uchendu (1965) reports the case of a man who had three wives out of which two were bearing children. When the man asked for permission to have an *iko mbara*, the wives resisted it because he could not claim sexual starvation as the reason for wanting the union. The argument was that he always had one of the wives available to satisfy his sexual needs.

The other Igbo cultural practice alluded to in Echeruo's definition of *iko* above relates to the Igbo idea of fatherhood. Among the Igbo, a man does not claim a child as his just because he got the mother of the child pregnant. A man can only claim a child as his when he has paid the bridal wealth of the child's mother. If nobody has paid the bridal wealth, the child then belongs to the girl's father. Hence the idea of a "legal" and a "biological" father (Oyali 2007). The legal father is the one who has paid the bridal wealth while the biological father is the one who gets the child's mother pregnant. Among the Igbo, the legal father is not necessarily the biological father.

Besides, Igbo society is largely patrilineal. So, there is a lot of emphasis on having a male child who would perpetuate the man's lineage. Consequently, a man who is unable to get his wife pregnant might agree that she have an *iko* who could then get her pregnant. The child that results from this union belongs to the husband of the woman and not the *iko*. This way the man's lineage is sustained. A man with only female children might also have one of his daughters stay unmarried and, through an *iko*, produce male children for him in order to preserve his lineage.

Furthermore, women generally do not have property inheritance rights among the Igbo. So, having a male child is the assurance the woman has that, at least, her son(s) have a share in their father's property. This is worse in a polygamous home if a woman's co-wives have sons and the woman does not. In such instances, the woman might go as far as paying the bridal wealth of a younger lady who would have sons for her through her husband or through an *iko*.

In sum, the *iko* institution offers sexual and economic benefits, according to localized Igbo cultural practice. For many members of the community, this practice helps to sustain a man's lineage as

well as creating a social space in which both men and women can seek sexual satisfaction. In these contexts, *iko* is not understood as a clandestine union but rather one that is accepted and regulated by the society in which it emerges.

6. The appropriation of *Iko* in Igbo Bible translation

According to Echeruo (1999), the missionaries frowned upon the *iko* institution and only supported sexual activities within a monogamous marriage framework. Any union outside this framework was perceived by these missionaries as being sinful. This negative attitude towards the *iko* institution thus seemed to inform its use to represent illicit sexual practices in the Igbo Bible translations, examples of which are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Concepts Represented with *Iko* in Igbo Bible Translation

Concepts	Representation	Meaning	Bible translations
Concubine	<i>Iko nwaanyi</i>	Female <i>iko</i>	All the translations
Adultery	<i>Ikwa iko</i>	Engaging in <i>iko</i>	All the translations
Fornication	<i>Ikwa iko</i>	Engaging in <i>iko</i>	All the translations
Prostitute	<i>Ndi inyom nke na-akwa iko</i>	Women who engage in <i>iko</i>	Union Igbo Bible

From Table 2, *iko* is used in the Bible translations to represent negative concepts of illicit sexual relations, namely concubine, adultery, fornication and prostitute. As mentioned above, the closest functional equivalent term in English for *iko* is concubine. However, *iko* is slightly different from concubine in that only woman could be concubines and only men can have concubines. In Igbo cultural settings, however men and women could be and have *iko*. Consequently, the term *iko nwaanyi* “female *iko*” clarifies that the referent is female and not male. All the same, the use of *iko* for concubine in the Bible is an instance of *register extension*, i.e., using a term that belongs to a given register to represent a concept in another register (Tamanji 2004:85). *Iko* was used for Igbo cultural practices until Bible translation extended the use to Christian contexts. So, the use in the Bible expands the domains in which the term is used.

Unlike the use of *iko* for concubine, its use to represent adultery, fornication and prostitute entails two other forms of elaboration. Firstly, it involves a semantic extension of *iko* to embrace these concepts. The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines adultery as “sex between a married man or woman and someone he or she is not married to”. In Echeruo (1998:180), adultery is defined as *ügwa*¹⁰ (spelt *ugwa* in Standard Igbo). *Ügwa* is defined as “sexual relations with the wife of a relative” (Echeruo 1998:164). This definition relates to adultery that involves a married woman and her husband’s relative. It does not cover all forms of adultery, e.g., between persons who are not related by marriage. Therefore, the use of *iko* for adultery in the Bible expands the meaning of *iko* to embrace all forms of adultery. The *Cambridge Dictionary* also defines fornication as “the action of having sex with someone who you are not married to”. This definition presents a range of sexual activities beyond the range covered by *iko* in Igbo cultural practices. In other words, sex within the *iko* institution is regulated by societal norms, whereas fornication is open-ended and seen as contravening social norms. As such, the use of *iko* for fornication in the Bible also entails expanding the meaning of the term to cover every form of sexual activity between persons who are not married to each other. This is in contrast to its usage in Igbo cultural practices for a specific range of sexual activities. Lastly, the *Cambridge Dictionary* defines prostitute as “a person who has sex with someone for money”. Again, the *iko* union is not necessarily contracted for financial gains. So, the use of *iko* in the Bible entails the semantic extension of *iko* to cover a person who provides sex in exchange for money.

The other form of elaboration resulting from the use of *iko* in the Bible is *semantic pejoration*, whereby a term that had a positive meaning is given a negative one. The concepts of concubine, adultery, fornication and prostitute are frowned upon in the Christian religion and considered sinful. Thus, with the widespread conversion of Igbo people to Christianity especially at the turn of the 19th century AD, Igbo speakers are increasingly exposed to the re-semanticization of *iko* in the Bible. For instance, while Uchendu (1965:192) reports that Ngwa women “confess to being more indulgent to their *iko* than their husbands”, expressed in the saying *ütö ka n’iko* “there is more fun with the *iko*”, the Bible in Exodus 20 expressly gives the command: *gi akwala iko* “do not engage in *iko* (do not commit adultery)”. Over time, through Bible reading and evangelism,

¹⁰ Echeruo (1998) uses what he calls the New Standard Orthography (NSO), which uses *c*, *ö*, *ü*, and *i* for Standard Igbo *ch*, *o*, *u* and *i* respectively. Thus, in this study, instances where the NSO spelling is different from Standard Igbo are glossed with the Standard Igbo spelling.

the concept of *iko* becomes unpopular among the Igbo. In fact, *iko* becomes associated more with the concepts it is used to represent in the Bible than with its original meaning. Consequently, rather than perceive *iko* as referring to institutions accepted by the society in its localized settings, more Igbo speakers now see it as embodying attributes that should be avoided if one is to be a good Christian. Put simply, *iko* has acquired negative associations as a result of the meanings it has been given in the Bible, the implications of which are far-reaching.

7. A survey of Igbo terms for *concubine*

As one way of exploring the impact of these first Igbo Bible translations, I explored a little further whether Igbo speakers associate the term *iko* with concubinage, the closest equivalent to its meaning in Igbo cultural practices, or not. I present here findings from a survey¹¹ that asked, among other things, for Igbo terms for *concubine* (see Appendix). 186 Igbo native speakers at Nsukka in Enugu State took part in this survey. I chose to carry out this survey in Nsukka in particular as Enugu, where Nsukka is located, is one of the states where Igbo is the sole native language spoken (see Figure 1), which means that Nsukka is in the heart of Igboland. My criteria for selecting the respondents relate to their status as native speakers of Igbo, that is, a) their parents were Igbo, b) they themselves could speak, read and write in Igbo.

Of the 186 respondents, 111 (60%) were women while 75 (40%) were men. Although there were more female participants in the survey than male participants, the difference between the number of members of both sexes does not thwart the result from the survey. Rather, this study took into consideration other constitutions of the participants, which were generational and educational in scope. The survey thus examines the impact of age on the data supplied. As the nature of the questionnaire requires some level of literacy in Igbo and English, the questionnaire was administered to respondents with at least a post-secondary education. The minimum age of the respondents was 16 because that is the minimum age at which a person can officially start post-secondary education in Nigeria. Of the 186 respondents, 96 were within ages 16-25, 53 within 26-35, 25 within 36-45, and 12 above 45. These statistics show that the findings from the survey reflect a range of perceptions from both sexes and from perspectives of different age groups.

¹¹ The survey was conducted as part of a bigger project (see Oyali 2018) and was aimed at exploring the spread of some lexical and conceptual innovations occasioned by Bible translation into Igbo. The present study focuses only on data supplied for the concept of *concubine*.

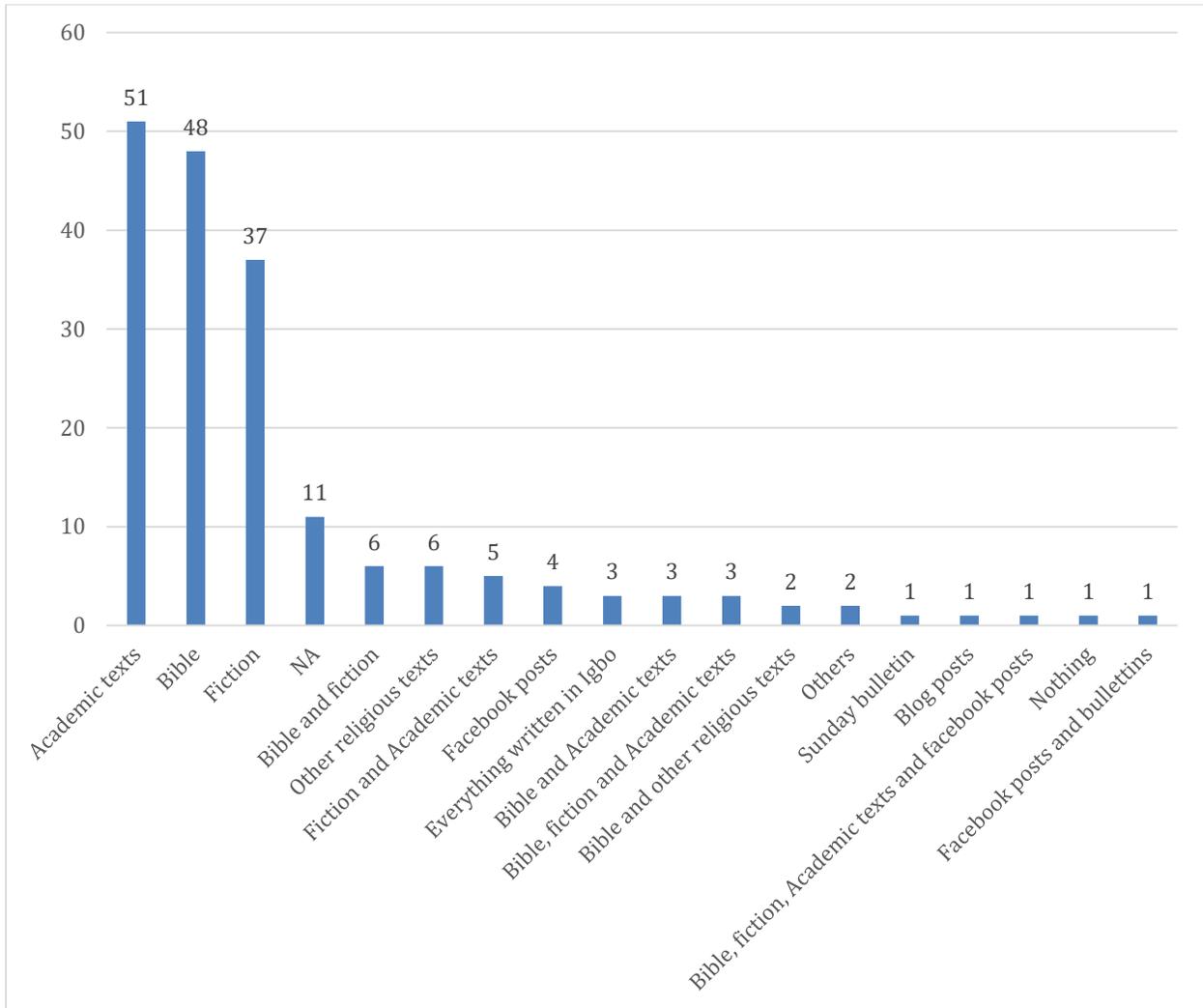
Although the respondents who were above 45 were few, the richness of their responses added interesting qualitative dimensions to the data, as will be discussed further.

Regarding their religions, 184 of the respondents said that they were Christian, one claimed to be an adherent of Judaism and one did not specify his religion. This suggests that their response must have been influenced by their identification with the Christian religion. What is more, these Christian respondents represent different denominations: 79 Catholic, 62 Pentecostal, 32 Anglican, 3 Presbyterian, 3 Jehovah's Witnesses, 1 Greek Orthodox, 1 Methodist, 1 Evangelical Church of West Africa, 1 Latter-Day Saints and 1 unspecified Other.

I also asked for the highest level at which the respondents learnt or studied Igbo in a formal setting. 104 respondents (56%) studied Igbo at the secondary school level, 49 (26%) at the post-secondary school level, 16 (9%) never studied Igbo in a formal setting, 11 (6%) at the primary school level and 6 (3%) did not provide any response to the question. This suggests that their use of Igbo must have been greatly influenced by Standard Igbo, which is taught and spread through the educational institutions. The first attempts at creating a literary standard variety of Igbo moreover was carried out by Christian missionaries through Bible translation and the current Standard Igbo, in a way, was derived from the dialects used in the Bible translations (Oyali 2018). In other words, the respondents were not only Christian who had been exposed to the language of the Bible but were also taught Standard Igbo which in itself had been greatly influenced by the language of the Bible.

The respondents were asked what kinds of texts they read in Igbo. Figure 2 presents their responses.

Figure 2: Written Materials Read in Igbo



From Figure 2, academic texts top the list with 51 tokens, followed by the Bible (48 tokens) and fiction (37 tokens). This further supports the earlier statement that the respondents have been exposed to Standard Igbo, this time through academic texts and fiction. They have also been exposed to the Igbo in the Bible. Put simply, the Igbo spoken by the respondents would be influenced by the school system and the church. Interestingly, apart from those who stated that they read academic texts, fiction and the Bible alone, almost all the remaining respondents reported that they read a combination of these with other materials, which gives some indication of the key place and high status of these three materials in their lives and linguistic usages.

In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to supply at least two Igbo terms for concubine, each term accorded equal value irrespective of whether it was mentioned first or second. Table 3 presents the terms supplied by the respondents. Only terms supplied by more than one person are presented.

Table 3: Igbo Terms for *Concubine* Supplied by the Respondents

Terms for concubine	Meaning	Tokens
<i>Enyi nwaanyi</i>	Female friend/lover	48
<i>Iko</i>	Paramour	21
<i>Enyi</i>	Friend/lover	8
<i>Nwunye di</i>	Co-wife	6
<i>Oyi</i>	Friend/lover	6
<i>Inyom</i>	Woman	6
<i>Oyi di</i>	Husband's lover	5
<i>Agiri</i>	Paramour	3
<i>Akwuna</i>	Prostitute	3
<i>Nwa ulo</i>	Bastard	3
<i>Ashawo</i>	Prostitute	2
<i>Nwaanyi anughị anụ</i>	A woman who is not married	2
<i>Nwaanyi oyi</i>	Female lover	2
<i>Ndi inyom</i>	Women	2
<i>Nwaanyi iko</i>	A woman who is a paramour	2

From Table 3, the term with the highest number of tokens is *enyi nwaanyi* with 48 tokens (26%) followed by *iko* with 21 tokens (11%). *Enyi nwaanyi* is a compound term formed from *enyi* “friend or lover” and *nwaanyi* “woman or female”, thereby meaning “female lover”. It is the popular Igbo term for girlfriend. This suggests that the word “concubine” is associated with girlfriend than with an institutionalized union between a married man and a woman he is not married to. *Enyi nwaanyi* is not used in the Bible translations for *concubine*, which also suggests that the use of *iko nwaanyi* in the Bible for concubine apparently did not spread beyond the Bible.

The age range of the respondents who supplied *enyi nwaanyi* and *iko* for concubine (Figure 7.14) shows some interesting dynamics.

Figure 3: Age Range of Respondents who Supplied *Enyi Nwaanyi* and *Iko*

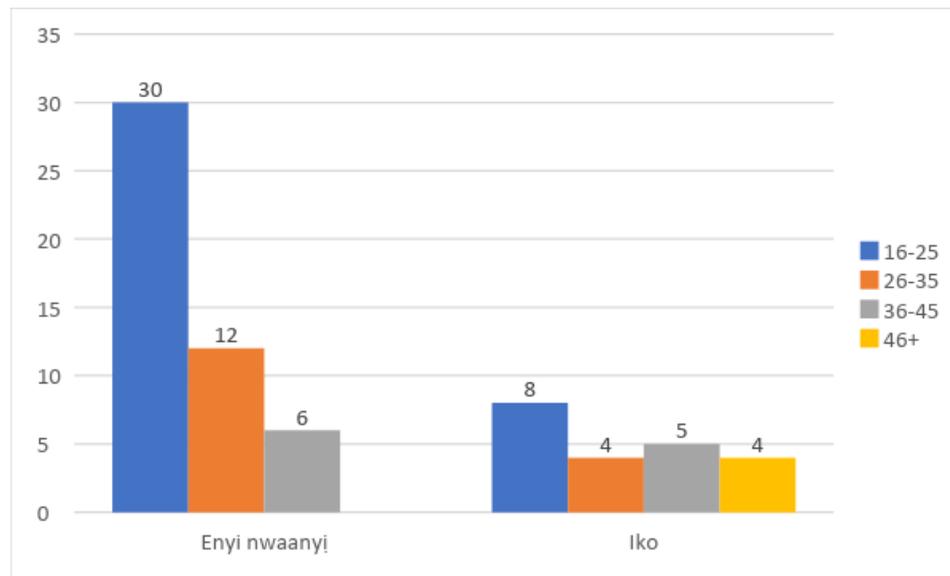


Figure 3 shows that, on the one hand, 30 of the respondents who supplied *enyi nwaanyi* were within 16-25 years, 12 within 26-35 years, and 6 within 35-45 years. No respondents over 45 years supplied *enyi nwaanyi* as the Igbo word for *concubine*. However, 8 of the respondents who supplied *iko* were within 16-25 years, 4 within 26-35, 5 within 36-45, and 4 above 45. Table 4 presents these figures in percentages in relation to the total number of respondents in each age range.

Table 4: Percentage of *Enyi Nwaanyi* and *Iko* according to Age Range

Age Range	Total Respondents by Age Range	Number that Supplied <i>Enyi Nwaanyi</i>	%	Number that Supplied <i>Iko</i>	%
16-25	96	30	31%	8	8%
26-35	53	12	23%	4	8%
36-45	25	6	24%	5	20%
46+	12	0	0%	4	33%

Table 4 shows that *enyi nwaanyi* was supplied by 31% of respondents within the 16-25 years age range while *iko* was supplied by only 8% of respondents in this age range. 12% of respondents within the 26-35 age bracket supplied *enyi nwaanyi* while only 8% of the same population supplied *iko*. There is not much difference between the population of respondents within 36-45 who supplied *enyi nwaanyi* and those who supplied *iko*. Conversely, for respondents aged above 45, 0% supplied *enyi nwaanyi* while 33% supplied *iko*. In other words, the older the respondents, the more likely that they would use *iko* and not *enyi nwaanyi* for concubine. On the contrary, the younger the respondents, the more likely that they would use *enyi nwaanyi* and not *iko* for concubine. This pattern is significant because it shows the conceptualization of concubine emerging differently along generational lines. The younger generation of Igbo speakers thus seemed to understand concubinage as a form of “girlfriendship”. It is not incidental that no respondent above 45 supplied *enyi nwaanyi*. It is rather an indication that this generation of Igbo speakers understands that a concubine is not just a girlfriend or a woman who has sex with a man, but a woman in a formal union regulated by the society in which it is practiced. The terms supplied by respondents who are above 45 are *agiri* “paramour” (2 tokens), *iko* “paramour” (4 tokens), and *nwunye di* “co-wife” (literally “husband’s wife”, 2 tokens). The first two terms – *agiri* and *iko* – are the terms for the practice of concubinage among Igbo people. The third term refers to a co-wife in a polygamous marriage. This is significant because it suggests the gradual loss of the meaning of *iko* among members of the younger generation. It is remarkable that very few respondents within the 16-25 and 26-35 age ranges supplied *iko*, despite the fact that it is the key word in the compound *iko nwaanyi* used in the Bible translations for concubine. The implication of this is that the use of *iko nwaanyi* in the Bible for concubine is apparently restricted to Bible readings and thus, from these findings, not used by these participants beyond that. Secondly, it suggests the dwindling understanding of *iko* as referring to concubinage, especially with the use of the term in the Bible to refer to “all sexual relationships outside the framework of a monogamous marriage – polygamy, adultery, fornication, prostitution, and rape” (Echeruo 1999:296).

What is more, the practice of *iko mbara* is apparently dwindling within Igbo communities as more Igbo people have over time converted to Christianity and so perceive it as a sinful practice. Thus, on the one hand, the pejorative meaning given to *iko* in its use in the Igbo Bible translations in representations of not only concubine but also fornication, adultery and prostitute could be read as influencing the people’s perception of the practice of *iko mbara*. On the other hand, the use of the

word *iko* for these four concepts all of which have to do with sexual relationships outside marriage has changed the meaning of the word from a paramour within some regulated contexts to any form of sexual relationship outside marriage.

8. Reflection and conclusion

According to Simon (2000:11), translations are a veritable “site for investigating intercultural contact” as they would seem to be “the impressionable surface which preserves the intricate tracings of contact”. She also adds that in post/colonial settings, translations “report on areas of interchange between colonizer and colonized; they also reveal the nature of the interaction”. In other words, translations between languages are a form of language contact and a study of these translations would reveal the forms of the impact the cultures in contact have on each other. Incidentally, most linguistic studies of the contact between English and Igbo, for example, tend to focus on the impact of Igbo on English and the emergence of Igbo English (e.g., Igboanusì 2002). Very little attention has been paid to the impact of English on Igbo, especially as reflected in translations from English into Igbo. This study contributes towards filling this gap in research in translations in Nigeria, in particular in the case of translations carried out by the missionaries from their language of power (in this case study, English) into the local languages – and communities – in which they proselytized their faith and ideologies (in this case, Igbo).

This study is then a step towards investigating the nature of one of the many changes Bible translation during colonial times has made to Igbo language and culture. The analysis above has shown that, prior to its use in the Igbo Bible, *iko* referred to a sexual union between persons who are not married to each other, regulated within its localized contexts. The union is thus recognized and regulated by the society in which the practice emerged. It is not clandestine and did not, before the arrival of Christian missionaries, have negative associations. Its use in the Bible therefore entails three forms of semantic elaboration. First, the range of registers in which it is used has been extended, i.e., from Igbo cultural practices to the new (Christian) religious domain. Second, its meaning has been extended beyond referring to the sexual union regulated by the Igbo society to any form of sex outside a monogamous marriage framework. Third, its use to designate negative concepts has affected its erstwhile more positive perception as a “practical” way of regulating sexual satisfaction and localized norms of patrilineal birth lines. The concept has become

reconfigured, and thus perceived as a negative concept. These semantic changes on the concept of *iko* have spread into Igbo to the extent of “official” inclusion in Igbo dictionary entries for *iko* – as seen in Echeruo’s (1998) definition presented above. In other words, the ideological move of the Christian missionaries in re-defining *iko* during Bible translation has not only changed the meaning of the word but also engendered its spread within Igbo language fields of knowledge.

At this point, it is pertinent to acknowledge the impact of writing on this phenomenon of change. Igbo was largely an oral language prior to the arrival of the missionaries on Igbo soil. Bible translation was one of the earliest activities that necessitated the creation of a written form for the language. This historical juncture is significant because writing preserves the communicated idea in more static formats – e.g. in books – in ways different to oral communication whose preservation relies on temporal contexts of collective or individual memories of its articulation. Writing thus gives more “static” permanence to the information transmitted. In relation to the concept of *iko*, the meaning of the term in Igbo cultural practices is largely restricted to parts of Igboland that have the institution. However, Bible translation makes the use in the Bible accessible to all parts of Igboland. In effect, children born into Christian homes and exposed to Christianity – who are in the majority – would, on the one hand, be exposed to the meaning of the term in the Igbo Bible, and, on the other hand, perceive the cultural practices as being against their religion. An indication of the reality and impact of the written forms of the meanings of *iko* in the missionary translations is how subsequent Bible translations carried out by Igbo native speakers retain the ideological use of *iko* as first carried out by the first missionaries. The meaning of *iko* in Igbo cultural practices is however transmitted largely orally and mainly within communities where this institution is practiced.

Methodologically, this study has demonstrated how questionnaire survey of localized groups of participants can be used to complement descriptive linguistic analysis in studies of the impact of translation on the receiving language and culture in specific localized ideological contexts. The survey done in this study presents an indication of how the semantic elaboration and subversion of the concept of *iko* during Bible translation has spread among Igbo speakers. It also shows a gradual shift in perceptions of *iko* along generational lines.

In conclusion, this study brings to the fore the impact of Bible translation by the missionaries on the Igbo language and culture. The study highlights the historical context of Bible translation in Nigeria and how the conflicting Christian and Igbo worldviews on matters of sex were negotiated by the early Christian missionaries and later sustained by native Igbo Christians through further Bible translations. The re-semanticization of *iko* by the Christian missionaries reflects the attitude of the missionaries towards cultural practices in their host communities which they perceived as conflicting with their Christian beliefs. This study thus demonstrates the power dynamics between the missionaries and their converts to Christianity. The missionaries' bid to dissuade their converts from the Igbo institution of *iko* resulted in their redefining the concept during Bible translation. Over time, this ideological re-semanticization of an Igbo cultural concept within a specific religious (Christian) context spread into the Igbo language beyond its limited Christian beginnings. Today, the new meanings given to the concept of *iko* has not only gained wide acceptance among Igbo speakers as well as dictionary entries, they have also affected the attitude of the Igbo towards their age-long institution for maintaining patrilineal birth lines and regulating sexual satisfaction.

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Appendix: Questionnaire

Hello,

Many thanks for taking out time to fill out this questionnaire. The project is part of my on-going doctoral research at the Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies, University of Bayreuth on Bible translations and language elaboration. Findings from this survey would be treated with the utmost confidentiality it deserves.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Tick the option that best describes you and, where required, provide precise answers to the questions.

A. Personal profile

1. State of Origin: Abia
 Anambra
 Delta
 Ebonyi
 Enugu
 Imo
 Rivers
2. Local Government Area: _____
3. Town/village/city: _____
4. Age range: 16-25
 26-35
 35-45
 46+

5. Sex: Female
 Male
6. Profession: Student
 Unemployed
 Civil servant
 Academic
 Farmer
 Business man/woman
 Other _____

B. Religion

1. Your religion: Traditional Igbo
 Christianity
 Islam
 Atheist/agnostic
 Others _____
2. If Christian, which denomination?
 Catholic
 Anglican
 Jehovah's Witnesses
 Pentecostal
 Others (please specify)
3. You attend church services/mass/ meetings in
 English
 Igbo
 English and Igbo
 Others (specify)

C. Proficiency in Igbo

1. At what level did you stop formally learning/studying Igbo?
 I never learnt/studied Igbo

- Primary
- Secondary
- Post-secondary

2. How well can you read in Igbo?

- I cannot read in Igbo
- Below average
- Average
- Above average
- Very well

3. What do you read often in Igbo?

- Facebook posts
- Bible
- Other religious texts (specify) _____
- Fiction
- Academic set texts
- Others (specify)

D. How are the following called in Igbo? Feel free to provide more than one response

1. A piece of material, especially cloth, that hangs across a window or opening to make a room or part of a room dark or private

i. _____

ii. _____

2. The person that inherits a property or position, like a throne, from another person when the second person dies

i. _____

ii. _____

3. The person that sees some event happen, for instance, a crime or an accident and is called to testify

i. _____

ii. _____

4. A strong belief in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual conviction
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____
5. A short, simple story that teaches or explains an idea, especially a moral or religious idea, like those told by Jesus Christ in the Bible
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____
6. The act of making something new
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____
7. An unusual and logically unexplainable happening that is thought to have been caused by God because it does not follow the usual laws of nature
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____
8. A follower or pupil of a teacher, leader, or philosopher
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____
9. A building devoted to the worship of a sacred or holy being
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____
10. A person who has never had sex before
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____
11. A person who has special powers to tell people about things that will happen in the future
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____
12. A building for Christian religious activities:
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____

13. A table or flat-topped block used for making offerings or sacrifices to a deity

i. _____

ii. _____

14. (In Christian and Jewish belief) the supreme spirit of evil

i. _____

ii. _____

15. The place where sinners are sent after death to be punished forever

i. _____

ii. _____

16. A tenth of a person's income given to the Church

i. _____

ii. _____

17. The spiritual part of a person that continues to exist in some form even after their body has died

i. _____

ii. _____

18. A Christian ceremony in which a person has water sprinkled on their head, or is immersed into a pool of water

i. _____

ii. _____

19. The place good people go to after death to be rewarded for their good deeds

i. _____

ii. _____

20. The day of the week God rested after creation

i. _____

ii. _____

E. What are the Igbo word(s) for the following? Also feel free to provide more than one response

	English	Igbo	Other Igbo words	Context of usage
1.	Beast			
2.	Kingdom			

3.	Witness			
4.	Parables			
5.	Conversion			
6.	Saint			
7.	Angel			
8.	Apostle			
9.	Eternity			
10.	Sacred			
11.	Messiah			
12.	Sacrilege			
13.	Creation			
14.	Church			
15.	Baptism			
16.	Taboo			
17.	Harlot			
18.	Gospel			
19.	Priest			
20.	Demon			
21.	Holiness			
22.	Concubine			
23.	Sabbath			
24.	Scripture			
25.	Altar			
26.	Temple			
27.	Salvation			
28.	Snow			
29.	Synagogue			
30.	Righteousness			
31.	Wilderness			
32.	Prophet			

33.	Unclean spirit			
34.	Summer and winter			
35.	Christianity			
36.	Religion			
37.	Repentance			
38.	Gentile			
39.	Confession			