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Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Future of Vernacular Scripture Translation in Pioneer Evangelism

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how Artificial Intelligence (AI) can strengthen vernacular Scripture translation and enhance pioneer evangelism. Recognizing the significant language barriers faced by many unreached people groups, the research evaluates whether AI-enabled tools can accelerate Bible translation while maintaining accuracy, cultural sensitivity, and theological integrity. Guided by Edgar Ellison's five-step qualitative research design, the study reviews existing scholarship, explores current AI use among translators, and analyses interviews with practitioners applying AI in real translation contexts. The findings reveal that AI can substantially reduce the time and cost of drafting vernacular Scriptures, provide exegetical support, and improve consistency across translations. However, the study also identifies critical limitations, including inadequate support for minority languages, cultural and linguistic nuances that AI cannot yet fully grasp, theological complexities that require human judgment, and risks of algorithmic bias. Consequently, the study argues that while AI offers promising opportunities to enhance evangelism and translation efficiency, human expertise, contextual knowledge, and spiritual discernment remain indispensable. It concludes by recommending the responsible integration of AI, greater involvement of mother-tongue speakers, and robust oversight to ensure translations remain accurate, culturally grounded, and aligned with core gospel values.

Keywords: *Vernacular Bible, Artificial Intelligence, Pioneer Evangelism, Christian Mission*

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Vernacular scriptures remain one of the most vital tools for pioneering evangelism. For the Gospel to speedily reach thousands of unreached people groups, the Bible must be translated into their languages. Translating the Bible into the vernacular is no easy task. According to missions involved in Bible translation, achieving vernacular Bible translation remains a significant challenge. This process requires specialised expertise and is prohibitively costly, making scriptures inaccessible to many. The Ethnologue states that 7.45 billion people speak the world's 7,396 known languages.[1] Many of these languages lack scriptures. Over 3,000 language groups have little or no access to Scripture, with around 2,000 having no verse of Scripture in the language they understand best.

For decades, scientists have endeavoured to develop artificial intelligence tools to improve workplace efficiency and our lives. Today, AI is being utilised in healthcare, finance, transportation, and communication. Scientists have created computer programs to perform tasks that previously required human intelligence. AI technology, argued Cole Stryker and Eda Kavlakoglu, enables computers and machines to simulate human intelligence to solve complex problems.[2] Such skills include decision-making, problem-solving, and speech recognition. Until recently, popular imagination associated Artificial Intelligence (AI) with science fiction novels or Hollywood blockbusters. However, the rapid rise of generative AI means that a once-distant future is becoming our everyday reality. We use AI tools on YouTube, Google, Facebook, and other social media platforms. AI tools have become vital in accelerating Bible translation. This study examines the extent to which AI technology might improve vernacular Bible translation and its use in pioneering evangelism.

Despite advances in these technologies, a few Bible translators are using AI in their work. At the same time, many Gospel workers seem stuck in age-old practices of spreading the Gospel. Nelson Musonda contends that the most suitable use of AI is to enhance human capabilities and streamline operations across various industries, not precluding the gospel work.[3] However, as Joel Matthew observed, "Having the word of God in your own heart language is very meaningful…"[4] According to the Wycliffe Global Alliance, over 1,000 languages spoken by 100 million people still await God's word in their languages.[5] Their only access to Scripture is in another language, making deep truths of God's Word difficult, if not impossible, to understand.[6] Such groups have been classified as unreached people because the absence of scriptures in their mother tongue hampers evangelism; therefore, they need mission engagement. How might Gospel workers, especially Bible translators, capitalise on the enthusiasm for AI tools to fulfil the evangelism mission?

To address this, the study first discusses the need to explore the usage of AI tools in translation and evangelism. Second, it underscores the importance of vernacular scriptures in pioneering gospel outreach and establishes the study's premises. Then it provides a relevant survey of scholarship to illustrate the need for pioneer evangelism driven by a scarcity of scriptures, the challenges faced

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[1] Ethnologue, "Ethnologue: Languages of the World," accessed January 5, 2025, (https://www.ethnologue.com/).

[2] Cole Stryker and Eda Kavlakoglu, "What is artificial intelligence (AI)?" IBM updated 16 August 2024, https://www.ibm.com/topics/ artificial intelligence (accessed 8 December 2024).

[3] Nelson Musonda, "6 Healthy Ways to Use AI for Evangelism,"March 20, 2023, (https://www.delmethod.com/blog/ai-for-evangelism) (accessed November 15, 2024)

[4] Joel Matthew, in Johan McKeown, "How AI is helping to translate the Bible into rare languages," (St. Louis, Mo., July 18, 2023), [https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/254821/how-ai-is-helping-to-translate-the-bible-into-rare-languages]

[5] Wycliffe Global Alliance, "Global Scripture Access," last modified September 11, 2023, (https://www.wycliffe.sg/post/2023-global-scripture-access) (accessed August 12, 2024).

[6] "Global Bible Translation - Missio Nexus," last modified 2024, (https://missionexus.org/global-bible-translation-2024/) (accessed May 23, 2025).

in vernacular Bible translation, and the potential aid offered by AI technologies. Third, it highlighted findings showing the extent of AI application in pioneer evangelism. It also discusses the advantages and limitations of using AI in indigenous-language settings, as applied to vernacular Bible translation projects and evangelism. The study also proposed possible solutions to the challenges encountered with AI technology. Finally, it offers recommendations for Gospel workers on the value of exploring, using, and developing AI tools for missions.

2.0 VERNACULAR SCRIPTURES FOR PIONEER EVANGELISM

2.1 The importance of translation and Bible translation.

Human language diversity and the impulse to communicate across different cultures have made translation essential since ancient times. Language differences create barriers that hinder the exchange of ideas and beliefs between groups. Translation activities have helped people overcome these obstacles to reading and understanding scriptures written in a different culture, time and context. Aloo Mojola observed that most people worldwide read or hear a translation of the Bible.[7] This means that Bibles are often written in a language the recipients cannot speak or understand unless translated. For the Gospel to be read and applied appropriately, it must be understood in a language one understands. As Lesslie Newbegin argued, "it has to be communicated in the language of those to whom it is addressed and has to be clothed in the symbols that are meaningful to them."[8] Translation of Scriptures underscores the significance of embedding Christian practice within the shared culture of an ordinary person's daily life.

Walls contends that the Christian faith is premised on the divine act of translation, which is, "the word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1.14).[9] He writes, "The first divine act of translation into humanity gives rise to a constant succession of new translations. Christian diversity is the necessary product of the incarnation. The twin imperatives of relevance and intelligibility drive translation." [10] Walls further argues that any confidence in the translatability of the Bible rests on that prior act of translation, of "the word into flesh."[11] The domestication of the Bible, facilitated through a translator's mediation, has transcended the boundaries of time and space, language and culture, and ancient political, economic, historical, and religious contexts, extending into our present-day situation.

The historical impact of the vernacular Bible and its indigenised message is significant. Mojola [12] observed that the Septuagint facilitated the Hellenization of the Hebrew Bible. From the 3rd to the 8th century CE, the Bible in Coptic dialects became deeply embedded in the life of the Coptic faith and culture. Similarly, the Bible in Ge'ez, translated between the 4th and 5th centuries CE, was foundational to the Christianized Ethiopian culture. The process and product of Bible translation in various languages continue to contribute to the evangelisation of communities, the consolidation of faith, and the transmission of cultural values.

2.2 The relevance of mother-tongue Bibles in outreach

To evangelise the unreached in Africa, it is of utmost importance to render the Bible into African languages. The scriptures ought to be vernacularised, domesticated, and indeed incarnated in African cultures. African scholars,

[7] Aloo O Mojola, "Bible Translation and Gender, Challenges and Opportunities – With Specific Reference to Sub-Saharan Africa," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 39, no. 1 (2018): 2.

[8] Lesslie Newbegin, *The gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1989), 41.

[9] Andrew Walls. *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of the Faith (*Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, *1996),* 27.

[10] Mojola, "Bible Translation and gender", 2. and Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement,* 27–28.

[11] Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian,* 26.

[12] Aloo O. Mojola, "African Biblical Hermeneutics in a State of Flux – Towards Refocusing Its Trajectory." *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43, no. 1 (2022), 3 a2507. (https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v43i1.2507).

including Kwesi Dickson, have highlighted "the pivotal significance of Scripture translation into the mother tongue as indispensable for relevant theological formation."[13] Reading the Bible in the vernacular, and thus in context, is the ground for domesticating the Gospel and, therefore, for in-depth local theologising. He aptly writes, "The faith can be meaningful only when Christ is encountered as speaking and acting authentically, when he is heard in the African languages, when culture shapes the human voice that answers the voice of Christ".[14] For Dickson, the mother-tongue text is a prerequisite for domesticating the Christian Gospel in the lives and cultures of African peoples, and this is necessary for constructing relevant African theologies.

When gospel workers use vernacular scriptures in outreach, they remove significant barriers caused by language differences. The Church Mission Society (CMS) experienced a people movement in their evangelism among the Luo of Western Kenya between 1910 and 1918. As a pioneer (CMS) missionary, J. J. Willis noted, "The most powerful weapon the missionary holds in his armoury is the Bible in the vernacular, and that the sooner some portion of it, in his tongue, can be put in the hands of the hearer, the quicker and the more rewarding will be the results".[15] CMS's evangelistic materials included the translated Gospel of Mark and various Luo primers, which conveyed the essence of the Christian faith in Dholuo, using local idioms and proverbs to help people better understand.

By the end of 1908, Willis had translated Mark's Gospel into Dholuo, in typewritten form.[16] In 1909, during his visit to Maseno, Weatherhead noticed the use of a translated, typewritten Gospel of St. Mark and several hymns during school community gatherings.[17] By mid-1910, they printed 1,000 copies.[18] Pleydell pointed at the eagerness of the Luo to buy and read the available Christian literature:

> When the mass movement began in 1914, the demand for books was so great that editions of 5,000 or 10,000 were quickly sold out. When new editions arrived, my office was besieged by readers anxious to buy gospels and Luo primers. In 1915, Mrs Pleydell sold 2125 gospels; in 1917, she sold 7215. People often walked thirty to forty miles for the Book that was now so precious to them. … They read it so often that they could recite whole passages by heart."[19]

For Willis, "… translation of the message was of the essence, and this message should be conveyed intelligibly "from the standpoint not of the teacher, but of the taught.[20] Evangelism using vernacular Scriptures not only appeals to recipients but also has the potential to turn them into active promoters of the Gospel. This helped accelerate its spread.

2.3 Bible Translation Theories

Over time, Bible translation has benefited from advances in translation approaches, the rendering of a text from one language into another. Scholars have advanced a broad spectrum of translation theories, including literal, relevance, interpretive, functionalist, descriptive, text-linguistic, comparative, professional, literary-rhetorical, and intercultural approaches. The most influential theories among Bible translators include the Linguistic Approach (Formal Equivalence), Equivalence Theory (Dynamic/Functional Equivalence), the Functional Approach *(Skopos* Theory), and Complexity Theory. As AI becomes integrated into translation workflows, these theories help clarify what machines can (and cannot) do, and where human judgment remains indispensable.

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[13] Kwesi Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, Maryknoll, (New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 5.
[14] Dickson, *Theology in Africa, 5*.
[15] J. J. Willis, "Reflection in 1949 Uganda Revisited". Acc.120 F2 3.9.49. (CMSA 1949), 59.
[16] Willis, Report of Uganda Bible Committee, (CMSA, A7/06) (1908), 3.
[17] HTC. Weatherhead, "Pioneer Missionary Work in Kavirondo", in *Uganda Notes* March (CMSA 1909), 47.
[18] Luganda Translation Committee Minutes, 11 July 1910. CMSA A7.08. (1910), 3.
[19] A E. Pleydell, "The Mass Movement in Kavirondo" CMS Gleaner, October 1, (CMSA, 1919), 132-133.
[20] Willis, "Reflection in 1949", 30.

Most translators are familiar with the linguistic approach, also known as the formal equivalence or literal equivalence theory of translation. In this method, translation centres on the word. Here, the literal translation converts the original text into the receptor language, word-for-word, with or without preserving the original sense. It, according to Robert P. Martin, "… attempts to say 'what' the original text says by retaining 'how' it says it… even when the receptor language expression does not always allow."[21] In translating phrase-for-phrase, poetry-for-poetry, sentence-for-sentence, or concept-for-concept, this theory draws the reader as close as possible to the source-language context. Proponents of this approach argue that it is the best way to help the reader better understand the biblical world. AI models excel at pattern matching, making them naturally inclined toward formal equivalence. They can replicate structural patterns, flag inconsistencies, and maintain lexical fidelity. However, they lack the cultural and theological discernment needed when literal rendering distorts meaning. Where there are no equivalent words, Boaheng observes, it is rare to achieve absolute formal equivalence between two words.[22] However, concedes that some biblical texts may call for dynamic equivalence, while others may require a literal translation.[23] Thus, translators substitute words with the closest equivalent from their context.

The equivalence theory, dynamic and functional equivalence, evolved in response to the challenges in the literal approach. Eugene Albert Nida developed the dynamic equivalence theory of Bible translation, grounded in his understanding of translation as a form of communication. Dynamic equivalence means "the closest natural equivalent to the source-language message."[24] For Nida, the quality of a translation is one in which the message of the original text has been so transported into the receptor language that the response of the receptor is essentially like that of the original receptors.[25] Nida argued that any message can be communicated in any language when expressed in the most appropriate and natural form, because humans share fundamental experiences that make communication possible. [26] Building on this assumption, he shifted translation practice from a word-for-word approach to a thought-for-thought model that centres the receptor audience. In this view, translation aims to convey the *meaning* of the original text rather than preserve its exact form. As Boaheng notes, this approach frees "the translator from any obligation to retain the form of the source text." [27] The dynamic equivalence model has proven especially valuable in rendering complex theological concepts that would otherwise be difficult to communicate. Because dynamic equivalence requires contextual understanding and sensitivity to receptor culture, AI can assist by providing draft suggestions but cannot reliably determine the most natural or culturally resonant expression. Machines approximate meaning statistically rather than interpretively, so human intervention is required to validate appropriateness and nuance.

The development of the functional approach (*Skopos* theory) followed. The inadequacies of the dynamic equivalence notion led to the emergence of two new theories that direct attention from the source to the target text. The descriptive translations in the target culture, and the *Skopos* theory. The functionalist approach capitalised on insights from action theory, communication theory and cultural theory, among others, to forge a theory that viewed translation as a "code-switching

[21] Robert P. Martin, *Accuracy of Translation and the New International Version* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust 1989), 8.

[22] Isaac Boaheng. *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators* (Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2022), 91.

[23] Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue, 93.*

[24] Eugene Albert Nida and Charles Russell Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 136.

[25] Eugene A. Nida, "Principles of Correspondence." *The Translation Studies Reader*, Edited by Lawrence Venuti. London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 200.

[26] Nida, "Principles of Correspondence, 200.

[27] Boaheng. *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue*, 93.

operation." [28] This approach, according to Boaheng, [29] shifts attention from words and meaning to the intended function of translation in its societal context of production.

Katharina Reiss and Hans J. Vermeer, influenced by Justa Holz-Mäntärri and Christiane Nord, developed the *Skopos* Theory, proposing that any translation is a goal-oriented task. The approach assumed that any translating action has a *Skopos* (purpose), the reason for translation. [30] The purpose determines translation in *Skopos* theory, thus its advantage. It is a way to move translation theory beyond linguistic levels toward the communicative purpose. At the beginning of the translation activity, *Skopos* theory does not specify a form or style, unlike dynamic equivalence theories. It is the receptors' needs that determine the type of translation: whether foreignising or domesticating, idiomatic or literal, or gender-neutral. So, *Skopos* theory, as Mojola and Wendland observed, "underlines the importance of the translation's function within the *target-language* setting for determining the manner and style of translation." [31] For its leaning towards the receptor rather than the source, the *Skopos* theory, notes Boaheng, predisposes translators to interfering with the authors' original intention.[32] Thus, it is not suitable for literary texts that involve highly stylistic and expressive language that is unmatched in equivalence. Besides, this approach promotes cultural relativism, which could distort the biblical message. Another argument against the *Skopos* theory is that not all actions have a purpose, so it does not apply to certain texts. AI tools cannot independently infer or prioritise purpose; they produce text based on probability rather than intentionality. Human translators must therefore guide the model by clearly defining task objectives, providing prompts that reflect translation goals, and evaluating whether the output serves the desired theological and missiological functions. A translator, according to Boaheng, should be governed by these concepts:

> (1) contextual consistency has priority over word-for-word correspondence (verbal consistency), (2) dynamic equivalence has priority over formal correspondence, (3) orality of language has priority over the written form, and (4) forms that are used by and acceptable to the receptor community have priority over forms that may be traditionally more prestigious. A literal translation may be suitable for most passages, especially for poetry that emphasises form a lot.[33]

Boaheng identified "the inadequacy of using one translation theory for translating the entire Bible."[34] So, the translator must decide which philosophy best suits the text.

Translation is a complex activity, and so deciding on a single philosophy for a project cannot adequately address its complexity. Prof. Kobus Marais proposed a complexity approach to translation, building on theories developed over time. Marais suggests that translation should address 'meta' issues rather than binary ones, encompassing social-cultural realities and allowing for a rich interplay of causalities, characterised by non-linear interactions. [35] In addressing the challenges of linguistic bias in translation studies, Marais introduces a semiotic theory that accounts for all instances of translation, including non-linguistic ones.[36] He argues that translation is a complex, systemic process that underlies semiosis and produces

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[28] Christine Nord. *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained*, (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 1997), 7.

[29] Isaac Boaheng, Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics and Theology *(MOTBIT)* Vol.7 No.1 (2025), 29.

[30] Mary Snell-Hornby, *The Turns of Translation Studies: New Paradigms or Shifting Viewpoints?* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2006), 54.

[31] Aloo O. Mojola and Ernst R Wendland, "Scripture Translation in the Era of Translation Studies," In *Bible Translation: Frames of Reference*, edited by T. Wilt, pp. 1-25 (Manchester: St. Jerome, 2003), 14.

[32] Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue*, 101.

[33] Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue*, 102

[34] Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue*, 105.

[35] Kobus Marais, *Translation theory and development studies: A complexity theory approach, (*London: Routledge, 2014), 26-43.

[36] Kobus Marais. *A (bio)semiotic theory of translation: The emergence of social-cultural reality*. (New York: Routledge, 2019), 8-25.

semiotic forms.[37] This complexity theory of translation, grounded in semiotics and process philosophy, draws on translation theory. Marais further posits that scholars should analyse the translational aspects of all semiotic phenomena and conceptualise translation through an interdisciplinary lens, integrating perspectives from semiotics, social semiotics, and development studies.[38] Complexity thinking, as Marais notes, acknowledges that judgment may involve a complex array of answers and encourages translators to elevate their observations beyond binary thinking.[39] AI systems are powerful at handling large-scale data patterns. However, they are limited in their ability to navigate the social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions highlighted by complexity theory. Complexity models support a hybrid paradigm in which AI handles computational tasks—pattern detection, harmonisation, and first drafts—while human translators manage socio-cultural interpretation, ethics, and theological coherence.

2.4 Process of Bible translations for evangelism

Translating the Scriptures into a specific language is a complex process. It takes a lot of time and resources. Don Barger estimates that translating and producing a Bible "takes 23 years and costs over a million dollars".[40] For these reasons, foreign missions dominated the Bible translation task for years. Matthew noted a shifting trend today, as more local churches are taking initiatives. The increasing number of indigenous believers, poorer in comparison, is fuelled by the demand for a vernacular scripture, "… Bible in our heart language".[41] Even where non-foreign missionaries are involved, the time remains long and the costs high. According to the Bible Society of Kenya, "a translation takes 12-15 years. This is the international average". However, some projects have taken more than 25 years to complete.[42]

Translators acknowledge four stages in translating the Bible into a language.[43] These are pre-translation planning, drafting, checking and publication of the Bible into new languages. First, there must be a need for translating the Bible. This decision is informed by a sociolinguistic survey that establishes the socio-cultural milieu for the translation of the Bible. The survey will reveal the culture of the receptor community, which, according to Boaheng, determines whether the translation needed would be literal or free.[44]

Second, once the decision to translate is made, drafting begins, in which translators analyse the text in its original context, exegete and re-express its meaning in the receptor language.[45] They then assess the naturalness and clarity of the translation, eliminating any misunderstandings and confusion for readers.[46] In addition, check for accuracy by comparing every bit of your translation with the source text to ensure nothing has been left out, added, or changed.

Third, there is the harmonisation stage, where a team of translators reviews and revises the draft manuscript. Then readers from the community would help reviewers check the text for naturalness, exegetical soundness, proper names, and biblical key terms.[47] Barnwell encourages a team of external reviewers to check the text and determine whether the translation communicates accurately, clearly

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[37] Marias, *A(bio) semiotic theory, 10.*

[38] Marias, *A(bio) semiotic theory, 25.*

[39] Kobus Marais, "Complexity thinking in translation studies: A critical reflection *Translation Matters* 7, no. 2, (2025), 11-12. DOI: https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm7_2a1)

[40] Don Barger, "How AI Assists in Global Bible Translation," *The Gospel Coalition*, (26 February 2024), [https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/ai-bible-translation/] (accessed 12 August 2024).

[41] McKeown, "How AI is helping to translate the Bible". Matthew is an engineer who works mainly in the field of natural language processing was born to Christian parents in India and came to California to obtain his master's degree.

[42] Bible Translation Process - The Bible Society of Kenya". https://biblesociety-kenya.org/

[43] Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue*, 20.

[44] Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue*, 23.

[45] According to UBS standards, there are several verses to be drafted each day, depending on what is referred to as the degree of difficulty of the book.

[46] Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue*, 31.

[47] Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue*,33.

and naturally.[48] The team checks spelling, grammar, archaism (outmoded terminology), dialect use, style, and translation approach, ensuring the translation brief is reflected in the translation.

Fourth, the manuscript is passed on to the translation consultant (TC) to examine the exegesis, translation approach, content, and presentation of supplements. The Consultant would ensure the manuscript conforms to the source text before passing it for publication.

Fifth, before publishing a Bible, the manuscript must be checked for typographical accuracy, consistency and completeness.[49] The Computer-Assisted Publishing (CAP) officer checks for consistent use of key biblical terms, consistent translation of parallel passages in the gospels, consistent formatting, and the selection of supplementary material such as footnotes, illustrations, and maps. The stages involved make Bible translation a complex process. The choices translators make impact the translation.

Bible translators working in pioneer evangelism often engage with languages that lack established orthographies, significantly increasing the complexity of their task. Before translation can begin, they must first develop an orthographic system, creating an alphabet and written conventions for the language. As Delisle and Woodsworth observe, this foundational work also requires the creation of both a literary tradition and a literate community to sustain it.[50] In East Africa, for example, early Christians became the first readers and were known as *asomi* or *wasomi* (readers). These pioneers produced dictionaries, developed grammars, and helped transmit cultural knowledge and values, laying essential groundwork for effective cross-cultural and intercultural communication.

Apart from the time and tedious program involved, the translation costs are enormous. Barger's above assessment of Bible translation as a multi-million-dollar project is supported by the Bible Society of Kenya's (BSK) estimate that translating each verse costs 1,000 KSh, driving the cost of Bible production into the millions of shillings.[51] This undertaking is costly and requires careful planning and clear decision-making.

Lately, several missions have committed to Scripture translation as their primary contribution to world evangelisation. An example is the Wycliffe Global Alliance, whose foundational statement of faith articulated their mission role as Bible translation, which they recognise as only one facet of the overarching *Missio Dei* (mission of God). Further, they identify their involvement in the Alliance as their participation in God's mission.[52] Consequently, Bible translation is currently taking place in 3,526 languages, categorised as 'with at least some Scripture' and 'Initial work in progress', in 173 countries.

So, missions involved in vernacular Bible translation must address these challenges to enable greater sustainability in pioneer evangelism. In response, the mission explored ways of reducing translation time and costs. In 1999, SIL International and Wycliffe International initiated Vision 2025. This vision embodied their trust in God to accomplish the impossible and initiated a Bible translation project for every people group in need by 2025.[53] The Vision 2025 proponents acknowledged the difficulty of translating the Bible into about 3,000 (±10 %) languages. Unless they adopt significant attitudinal changes, working harder will not count. So, they prioritised an initiative that impacts 1.26 billion people, committing to "strengthening present

[48] Katharine Barnwell, *Bible Translation: An Introductory Course in Translation Principles*. Third edition. (Texas: SIL International, 1999), 192.

[49] Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue*, 35.

[50] J. Delisle & J. Woodsworth, '*Translators through history*'. (John Benjamins Publishing Company. Amsterdam, Netherlands, 1995).

[51] "Bible Translation Process - The Bible Society of Kenya". https://biblesociety-kenya.org/

[52] Wycliffe Global Alliance, previously known as Wycliffe International, is a group of independent Wycliffe Bible Translators from other countries, including the UK. (2022). *A Missional Leadership History: The Journey of Wycliffe Bible Translators to the Wycliffe Global Alliance*.

[53] Wycliffe Bible Translators International (1999):5.

partnerships, forming additional strategic partnerships, and working together to develop creative approaches appropriate to each context."[54] As a result, over 700 languages have had full Bibles translated in the last 20 years.

2.5 Using AI tools in the translation

Since the public launch of ChatGPT in November 2022, access to AI tools has expanded significantly. New promising tools, such as Google's Gemini and Meta's Llama, have emerged. These tools claim proficiency in approximately 100 major languages. The creators of these AI bots are now focusing on the world's 7,000 minority and Indigenous languages. Ray Dai noted that the AI-based Large Language Model (LLM) afforded language practitioners access to analyse an enormous amount of data. [55] Mike Priest stated that people using large language models (LLMs) in statistical analyses and through trial and error have become increasingly adept at recognising patterns and can now generate new content. [56]

Tanasescu explores the intersection of Digital Humanism (DH) and translation studies, emphasising the potential of technology to enhance the complexity of translation processes. Tanasescu argues that neither digital humanism nor translation studies alone possesses the perfect tools to address complexity fully. [57] However, when combined, they come closer to achieving this objective.[58] Tanasescu advocates for an expanded scholarly community that actively promotes new digital methods and tools. This approach is crucial for addressing the complex nature of translation, as critical reflection can achieve ontological complexity but can only theorise descriptive complexity.

Tanasescu suggests that digital humanism may benefit from incorporating translation studies under its umbrella. While digital humanism contributes computational expertise and a collaborative mindset, translation studies offer valuable perspectives for addressing "colonial digital humanism." This interdisciplinary approach can enhance both the ontologies and methodologies of these fields, leading to greater ontological and descriptive complexity. [59]

To accelerate progress in the remaining work, the Mission-Nexus group suggested using "unprecedented advances in technology, innovation, and collaboration among the global church are accelerating the pace of Bible translation like never before."[60] Could the Bible translators have overlooked the pace of technological progress, especially in AI? With the current uptake of AI tools, gospel workers must now ask not only how, but also if, AI can enhance scripture translation and pioneer evangelism.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study sought to evaluate whether AI technology can enhance evangelism by examining both its current use and its potential to advance evangelistic practice. It employed a qualitative approach, following Edgar Ellison's[61] five-step design: (1) central research issue, (2) review of previous research, (3)

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54 Wycliffe Global Alliance presentations of global Scripture access statistics are compiled annually from data provided through ProgressBible by Alliance organisations, SIL International, United Bible Societies and many other partners. Data are current as of 1 September 2024 and are based on the most recently available information on first-language *users in SIL's Ethnologue (2024).*

[55] Ray Dai, "AI: Evaluating the Rewards and Risks" AI and Digital Mission, *Mission Round Table. Vol. 19 No. 3* (September–December 2024*), 4. (accessed 6 April 2025)*

[56] Mike Priest, "Large Language Models Explained," Boost.ai, last updated 20 February 2024, https:// boost.ai/blog/llms-large-language-models/ (accessed 8 August 2024). "What Are AI Applications?" Google Cloud, https://cloud.google.com/discover/ai-applications (accessed 8 August 2024).

[57] Raluca Tanasescu, "Complexity and the Place of Translation in Digital Humanities: Post-Disciplinary Communities of Practice in the Translation Studies Network," in *Exploring the Implications of Complexity Thinking for Translation Studies*, ed. Kobus Marais and Reine Meylaerts (London: Routledge, 2021), 30-72.

[58] Tanasescu, "Complexity and the Place of Translation", 32.

[59] Tanasescu, "Complexity and the Place of Translation", 36.

[60] Status of Bible Translation – (2024) (https://missionexus.org/global-bible-translation-2024/).

[61] Edgar Ellison, *Introduction to Missiological Research Design* (William Carey Library, 2011).

research methods, (4) findings and discussion, and (5) conclusions and recommendations. However, this article differs from Ellison's Step 4 by including discussion, interpretation of the findings and integrating them with existing theory, as typically done in Step 5.

Data for this study were collected through interviews, archival materials, and published sources. Thirteen participants were interviewed, including Bible translators, translation consultants, and Gospel workers actively using AI for evangelism in pioneer contexts. These individuals represented both practitioners and theorists in Bible translation and pioneer evangelism, as well as those engaged in AI tool development, application, and scholarly discourse over the past decade. The interviews followed a structured framework to ensure consistency and comparability across responses.[62] Additional insights were drawn from the researcher's personal involvement in mission work and from the expanding body of literature on AI use in translation and evangelism.

The collected data were verified, coded, categorised, and modelled to ensure accuracy and relevance.[63] This comprehensive approach enabled a thorough analysis of the potential impact of AI on evangelism.

4.0 DISCUSING THE STUDY FINDINGS

The findings of this study elucidate the emerging landscape of AI adoption within Bible translation and pioneer evangelism. Although AI technologies are in early stages of development in this field, their uptake among translators and Gospel workers is growing steadily. Interviews with practitioners, consultants, and mission workers reveal both the promise and the complexity of integrating AI into translation workflows. These experiences provide insight into the practical benefits, technical and theological challenges, and broader missiological implications of AI-assisted translation.

This section presents the major themes that emerged from the data, examining the extent of AI usage, the effectiveness of current tools, the limitations and risks identified by practitioners, and the unique obstacles encountered when applying AI to vernacular Scripture translation. The discussion integrates these findings with existing scholarship to offer a comprehensive understanding of how AI is reshaping, and at times complicating, the task of making Scripture accessible in pioneering mission contexts.

4.1 The extent of AI usage in translation

Etienne Ondoa of the Cameroon Association for Bible Translation and Literacy (CABTAL) employed AI in translation.[64] Ondoa claimed to have used AI tools to generate an entire Old Testament text based on readily available data. He stated that he used AI to generate draft zero from which translators can produce the first draft of the Bible.

Elly Gudo[65] explained how SIL integrates AI and Machine learning into language software for Bible translation, Scripture Forge.[66] Gudo points to using Scripture Forge software to draft and edit translation texts collaboratively with translation teams.[67] This software has an array of AI tools, which include Machine Translation (MT), allowing translators to begin most of their work from a draft rather than from scratch. The use of SIL translation software, Paratext, enhanced with Aide-Mémoire, which depends on LLMs for contextual support and

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[62] Hamza Alshenqeeti, "Interviewing as a Data Collection Method: A Critical Review." English Linguistics Research 3, no, 1. (2014), 39.

[63] Neringa Kalpokaite, and Ivana Radivojevic. "Demystifying Qualitative Data Analysis for Novice Qualitative Researchers." *The Qualitative Report* 24(13), (2019), 48-55.

[64] Etienne Ondoa, in *Isaac Forchie and Jim Killam.* "AI, Bible translation and the Global Gathering". *Wycliffe Global Alliance* (2024). https://www.wycliffe.net/ai-bible-translation-and-the-global-gathering/. During the Global Gathering of Bible Translators in Johannesburg on 4 November 2024.

[65] Elly Gudo, 2025. Interview by the author, 29 May 2025. Gudo is a Bible Translation Consultant, Wycliffe Africa / BTL.

[66] SIL International, Scripture Forge. 2017. https://software.sil.org/scriptureforge/.

[67] Gudo, May 2025. Interview.

consistency. Drew Maust [68] concluded that AI-assisted drafting is accelerating the Bible translation process, especially in the drafting and review phases. While it's too early to measure long-term impacts on completion, the trajectory is promising. These results support broader experimentation and scaling of AI tools like Scripture Forge, Fluent, and Codex in translation work.

Boaheng recommends using AI tools in the publication stage. By using the ParaText software, translators can check for "consistent use of key biblical terms, consistent translation of parallel passages in the gospels, consistent formatting, and selecting supplementary material such as footnotes, illustrations and maps".[69]

Adriaan Adams observed that ministers found immense value in using AI to translate Scriptures, accelerating evangelism and facilitating theological education.[70]

Ondoa acknowledged the challenge posed by AI in translating the New Testament, noting that the AI database for the New Testament and related theological material had not yet been fully developed.[71] Additionally, AI tools have been instrumental in developing supplementary materials, including glossaries, concordances, lectionaries, footnotes, pictures, maps, section heads, and book introductions.

Matthew and Hermjakob observed that available tools, such as the Greek Room's software, are ineffective at translating Scripture due to the technical complexity of Bible translation. Although large language models (LLMs) can enhance their data sourcing and perform a variety of tasks, they cannot generate new information independently. Emily M. Bender and her co-authors describe LLMs as systems that randomly piece together sequences of linguistic forms from their extensive training data based on probabilistic information, without any reference to meaning. They refer to this as a 'stochastic parrot.'[72] AI programs are finders who mimic and cannot engage in needed conversation. There are theological conundrums translators face that require human judgment.

Martin [73] cautions missionaries to think through the theological implications of their translation work in the context. Such is the translator's dilemma, Mojola comments on, when translating the name or names of God (the biblical God) into any language. Should they domesticate and use the vernacular names of God as employed locally? Or foreignise and borrow one of the lingua franca names of God from the neighbouring dominant languages? [74] Such interpretive choices, argued Mojola, are influenced by one's values, belief systems, ideological orientation, and vocation, and are surely beyond the reach of the present AI programmes. Translation must transcend simply rendering individual words and phrases. As Mojola explains, "it involves penetrating the underlying cultural world and experiencing its life world, feelings, rhythms and emotions, as well as its values." [75] All these moves AI tools cannot achieve. At least not yet.

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[68] Drew Maust, *"Are AI Drafts Really Faster?"* ETEN Innovation Lab, February 26, 2026, https://www.etenlab.org/post/are-ai-drafts-really-faster. Maust *is a Translation consultant, Francophone Africa Editor, Journal of Translation,* SIL Global.

[69] Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue*, 35.

[70] Adriaan Adams, the Executive Director of Focus Team Leadership Training, told church leaders during the 13th Africa Evangelical Association (AEA) General Assembly in Nairobi on May 21, 2025. https://www.christiandaily.com/news/ai-can-deepen-fast-track-ministry-engagement-but-it-is-not-the-holy-spirit-tech-expert-tells-african-leaders.

[71] Ondoa, in Forchie and Killam. "AI, Bible translation"

[72] Emily M. Bender, Timnit Gebru, Angelina McMillan-Major, and Shmargaret Shmitchell. On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots: Can Language Models Be Too Big? *In Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency (FAccT '21),* March 3–10, 2021, Virtual Event, Canada. (ACM, New York, NY, USA, 2021), 16-7. https://doi.org/10.1145/3442188.3445922.

[73] Martin P., "Artificial Intelligence and the Mission of God: Biblical and Theological Reflections for Cross-cultural Witness," *AI and Digital Mission, Mission Round Table* 19, no. 3 (September–December 2024), 4-19, accessed August 8, 2024.

[74] Aloo Mojola, "The Power of Bible Translation," *Priscilla Papers Bible Translation* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2019): [https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/power-bible-translation/].

[75] Mojola, 'Bible translation and gender, 3.

4.2 AI Translation of vernacular scriptures in multiple languages

Mark Tabladillo used Natural Language Processing (NLP) AI to translate sermons and religious texts into multiple languages and dialects in cross-cultural ministry.[76] With NLP, the same translators can translate the Bible into multiple languages for evangelisation. He highlights its ease in breaking communication barriers.[77] Using this software, translators create an initial draft based on earlier translated scriptures.

Using AI tools to translate scriptures into already written languages seems straightforward. AI cannot translate languages it has not been trained in. Gudo stated that AI is good at translating Greek into major languages such as English and French.[78] Computers have access to major languages with developed software that translators can use, such as English. Scholars in English departments have often aligned themselves with cultural studies, where, as Kirschenbaum noted, "computers and objects of digital material culture become the centrepiece of analysis." [79] For Tanasescu, a significant flaw of AI tools is that many prominent Digital Humanities projects are conducted predominantly in English, limiting accessibility and inclusivity for non-English speakers.

In minority languages, using AI tools to translate Scriptures will require extensive software development. According to Perlin, the Bots "learned" their first 100 languages because there was already enough online to gorge on.[80] Gudo observed that AI is not yet helpful for undocumented minority languages.[81] Further, Matthew and Hermjakob observed a notable absence of software for languages with only a few thousand speakers.[82]

Perlin argues that conducting comprehensive language documentation is challenging and expensive. This requires years of effort to locate, familiarise with, and record various speakers who can naturally demonstrate the full range of a language's capabilities.[83] She argues that thoroughly examining a single, nuanced aspect of grammar, such as tone usage or clause chaining, can be a significant achievement.[84] In addition to the often-overlooked skills of creating dictionaries, transcribing, and archiving. Williamson-Lee agrees, noting that AI language models form associations between words, which can sometimes be problematic, such as equating 'he' with 'she' and 'brilliant' with 'lovely.' These models, influenced by societal biases, can perpetuate existing sexism and racism.[85] Established AI tools are vulnerable to semantic analysis. Tanasescu was surprised to find out that "… topic modelling and tf-idf (term frequency-inverse document frequency), can be applied to monolingual contexts only, and that there is only one way in which such a task could be carried out effectively: word embedding using the Facebook-developed tool called fasTText."[86]

Computers must learn from native speakers to develop the language contextually and effectively.[87] Recognising this challenge, SIL used AI in oral cultures to convert spoken language into text for written translation through

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[76] Mark Tabladillo, "How AI is Reshaping Missions," Missio Nexus, 5 September 2023, https://missionexus.org/how-ai-is-reshaping- missions/ (accessed 24 September 2024).

[77] Mark Tabladillo, "How AI is Reshaping Missions,"

[78] Gudo. 2025, Interview.

[79] Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, "What is Digital Humanities and What's it Doing in English Departments?" in *Defining Digital Humanities: A Reader*, ed. Melissa Terras, Julianne Nyhan, and Edward Vanhoutte (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 6.

[80] Ross Perlin, "AI Won't Protect Endangered Languages; Combinations of characters on a screen mean nothing without agency and intention." (November 14, 2024) https://www.thedial.world/articles/news/issue-22/artificial-intelligence-llm-endangered-languages (Accessed June 20, 2025).

[81] Gudo, 2025. Interview.

[82] McKeown, "How AI is helping to translate the Bible into rare languages."

[83] Perlin, "AI Won't Protect Endangered Languages."

[84] Perlin, "AI Won't Protect Endangered Languages."

[85] J. Williamson-Lee, *how machines inherit their creators' biases: AI doesn't have to be conscious to be mindful*, *Medium*, (2018), 1. https://medium. com/coinmonks/ai-doesnt-have-to-be-conscious-to-be-harmful-385d143bd311 (accessed 10 May 2024).

[86] Tanasescu, "Complexity and the Place of Translation", 37.

[87] McKeown, "How AI is helping to translate the Bible"

Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR). However, the challenge for Bible translation remains. Bible translators using AI technology face challenges in finding a tool capable of handling multiple vernacular Scripture translations. The complexity of translation involves various theories that require human judgment.

AI tools tend to be biased towards the source text. Boaheng discourages the use of a single approach, emphasising that each theory contributes meaningfully to the translation process and the analysis of its product. [88] Instead, Boaheng points to the 'purpose-driven approach ' as central to functionalist theory, which includes the *Skopos* theory, Nida's functional equivalence, and text typology.[89]

4.3 Effectiveness of AI tools in translating scriptures

Ondoa claimed that by "Employing AI tools, we can produce a first draft in less than 20 per cent of the time and at half the cost."[90] This was because AI has significantly increased the efficiency of the Bible translation process. [91] Ondoa highlighted that AI tools have ensured accuracy and consistency by scanning drafts, flagging spelling inconsistencies, and ensuring correct word alignment. Ondoa also noted marked improvements in various aspects of the translation process. The significant enhancements in exegetical help to discover meaning, the first draft, and proofreading of the draft."[92]

Gudo also points out that SIL's Scripture Forge has several advantages that make it useful for languages with little existing digital data, even in resource-constrained contexts.[93] Its AI Community Checking tool allows translators to scrutinise the draft texts to identify errors in nuance, culture, or grammar for correction. It also has a feedback mechanism that field translators can use to register their findings. It is accessible on and offline, and on multiple cheaper devices.

Despite the increasing use of AI, human involvement is inevitably central to the task. Baron was concerned about human agency in mission during the 4IR, where human functions and abilities are increasingly taken over by artificial intelligence (AI).[94]

4.4 Transmitting the Gospel message through AI tools

AI tools may become effective in reaching people with the gospel message in today's digital age. Musondo confirmed the use of AI tools to communicate messages to a broader audience, pioneering evangelism. [95] He sees AI tools as another technological innovation that ministers should leverage for the ministry and suggests six beneficial ways to use AI for evangelism. [96] However, ministers who choose to use AI tools must exercise caution to align their use with biblical values. Our society's growing dependence on ranking algorithms has prompted Gospel workers to use them to extend the Gospel. Since AI programs tend to understand the world from the user's perspective, there is a danger in their tendency to use algorithms to convey information, which Sørensen termed "the tailored truth." [97]

Unchecked, they will leave our psychological heuristics and vulnerabilities susceptible to ministers' influence on an unprecedented scale and in unexpected ways.[98] Rather than opening opportunities, these developments may lead people away from

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[88] Boaheng, Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical, 29.
[89] Boaheng. "Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical", 29.
[90] Ondoa, "AI, Bible translation and the Global Gathering".
[91] Ondoa in Isaac Forchie and Jim Killam. "AI, Bible translation and the Global Gathering".
[92] Ondoa, "AI, Bible translation and the Global Gathering".
[93] Gudo, May 2025 interview.
[94] Ernst Baron, 'The questions for post-apartheid South African missiology in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution', *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 76, no. 2, (2020). a6122. https://doi.org/ 10.4102/hts. v76i2.6122.
[95] Musonda. 2023, "6 Healthy Ways to Use AI for Evangelism."
[96] Musonda 6 Healthy Ways to Use AI for Evangelism."
[97] Christian Grund Sørensen, "The Sword of the Cherubim: Do Algorithms Inhibit our Access to the Knowledge of God? Google and Missio Dei in a Digital Age," in *Missio Dei in a Digital Age*, ed. Jonas Kurlberg and Peter M. Phillips (London: SCM, 2020).
[98] Epstein et al., "Suppressing the Search Engine Manipulation Effect (SEME)."

engaging with the Gospel. As Sørensen comments:

> "It is probably safe to assume that tailored information may unwillingly reduce the potential of acquiring new knowledge and inspiration, thereby minimising the potential for a renewed religious reflection. In this sense, algorithms on one hand maximise the potential for acquiring relevant knowledge, and on the other hand make it less likely to enter the heterogenic discourse of faith change." [99]

Leio McLeran is using Bible.ai as an evangelism tool. [100] This significant online platform serves as a source of answers for many, noting that the Bible is not enough if it is not read. McLeran affirms that nothing supersedes the importance of learning directly from God and human others. The application complements these practices by providing support and guidance to individuals as they seek to deepen their relationship with God and apply biblical wisdom in their daily lives.

Since AI uses our personal preferences to generate the algorithms we engage with daily, our digital engagement is influenced by our current beliefs. Algorithms, according to Epstein et al., "… are human inventions, and as such, characteristic human elements, such as intentions, beliefs, and biases, inevitably influence their design and function." [101]

The drive to accelerate pioneer evangelism, coupled with increased ministry resources, may lead to an easy slide into a consumerist mission at the expense of developing lasting relationships. Many gospel workers in a non-Western context, Clark notes, conflict with a type of missionaries who prioritise systems, structures, and technologies instead of deep relationships."[102] A technique-driven approach to ministry may elevate products over discipleship. Clark observes that AI techniques and technology may nudge cross-cultural ministry toward consumerism—a situation in which ministries' strategies are influenced by market-driven approaches that emphasise speed and reproduction. [103] We therefore risk proliferating non-contextual resources whose motivation is to engage with new languages and cultures, without regard for the theological distinctives of the context.

The development of AI technology has influenced how humans access knowledge and interact with the world. However, if relied upon, Cunningham cautions, AI may cripple our rigour of learning and deprive us of real knowledge, a product of our mastery of information. [104] This rise in technological innovation will increasingly be pivotal in how we acquire information and theological knowledge, and in how we conduct evangelism. To this, ministers of the Gospel should be open to the unyielding possibilities this rapid advancement affords.

This study also established how AI technologies are being used in evangelism. AI language models are not neutral, nor are their outcomes. So, mission practitioners and

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[99] Sørensen, "The Sword of the Cherubim." For Sørensen, even though AI algorithms may grant people access to UpToDate information on Christianity, the reception of such information will be devoid of critical engagement with the material, preventing the recipient from making an individual judgment. One can, therefore, not ascertain that the hearer believed the Gospel. (In Artificial Intelligence and the Mission of God: Biblical and Theological Reflections for Cross-cultural Witness" AI and Digital Mission, *Mission Round Table Vol. 19 No. 3),*

[100] Welcome to Bible AI," https://bible.ai/about (2024) (accessed 12 August 2024). Leio McLaren, Founder & CEO of bible.ai… Launched in early 2023, bible.ai pioneered the use of AI in faith with the launch of the first advanced Christian AI.

[101] Robert Epstein, Robert E. Robertson, David Lazer, and Christo Wilson, "Suppressing the Search Engine Manipulation Effect (SEME)," in *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, Vol. 1, Issue CSCW, Article 42 (6 December 2017), 1–22. https://dl.acm.org/ Doi/10.1145/3134677 (accessed 8 October 2024)

[102] Elliot Clark, "Our Missions Approach Is Too Western." TGC, (4 August 2023), https://www. thegospelcoalition.org/article/missions-approach- too-western/ (accessed 24 September 2024).

[103] Elliot Clark, "Our Missions Approach Is Too Western".

[104] Robert Cunningham, "Redeeming Technology, Part 3: Mentality: The Important Distinction Between Information and Knowledge," Christ for Kentucky, (15 December 2023). https://blog. christforky.org/p/redeeming-technology-part-3-mentality (accessed 24 September 2024).

missiologists should ponder: if human beings' functions and abilities are replaced by AI, whose standards, actions, and patterns should be dominant? [105] Given the enormity of the Scripture translation task, agencies' concern ought to be to establish a responsible and solid missiological foundation upon which the evangelism task is carried out. [106]

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Gospel workers committed to using AI technology in scriptural translation for pioneer evangelism must be cognizant of the complexities involved. Translators using AI tools need to achieve the level of in-depth analysis required to balance ontological and descriptive complexity. Ontological complexity, according to Tanasescu, involves diverse components interacting to produce collective behaviours distinct from those of individuals.[107] Descriptive complexity requires multiple methods to describe a phenomenon comprehensively.

Using AI tools in Bible translation presents challenges, particularly for vernacular languages. Many major languages that require translation lack computational tools, hindering progress. This limitation underscores the need for mother-tongue speakers to participate in the AI-driven translation process and leverage their expertise. Mother-tongue translators must remain integral to the translation process, including revision, checking, testing, and final production stages. Although Translation Studies has incorporated AI approaches, including machine-assisted and machine translation, Tanasescu affirms that translation work remains a profoundly humanistic discipline. [108] Therefore, without proper preparation, the effective operation of AI tools across different contexts will be hindered.

The AI tools used in translation are often biased towards the goals of Gospel workers and may not align with the recipients' needs. Gospel workers may be unfamiliar with the target audience's languages and socio-cultural contexts, which can impede the translation process between the source and target texts.

Translators and ministers using AI technology must ensure it is configured to meet the source text's purpose and function. From the analysis of translation theories, it is evident that translation tasks prioritising the purpose and function of texts over the translator's preferences advance translation practice. The AI tools developed and employed should include all major stakeholders' perspectives in the translation decision, making the translation more acceptable and engaging. The challenge lies in narrowing down which tools best suit the task and maximising their benefits. AI technology cannot be effective unless primed by humans. Since in rare languages one cannot avoid original oral users and develop the language, we have a good opportunity to make technology serve us. The learning curve might be steep and intimidating during the acquisition of the necessary skills, but the benefits far outweigh the efforts. The field of AI DH possesses the necessary know-how for fruitful and effective collaboration.

It is possible to expand scholarship and practice in AI methods and tools when discussing the complex nature of translation. Tanasescu argues for a more comprehensive approach, emphasising that digital innovations should involve hands-on coding and exploration of computational methods to complement the humanist's understanding of translation.[109]

To avoid abuses in AI usage for translation, it is essential to ensure cultural and linguistic sensitivity. AI tools must be programmed to account for cultural and

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[105] S. Nandram, *Integrative spirituality in the Fourth Industrial Revolution: From how we do things to why we exist*, Inaugural Speech, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Netherlands (2019).

[106] Franklin, K.J., "A missiology of progress: Assessing advancement in the Bible translation movement", HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 76(1), 2020. a5786. https://doi.org/ 10.4102/ hts. v 76i1.5786.

[107] Tanasescu, "Complexity and the Place of Translation", 31.

[108] Tanasescu, "Complexity and the Place of Translation", 63.

[109] Tanasescu, "Complexity and the Place of Translation", 32.

linguistic nuances to ensure translated content is both accurate and culturally sensitive. This involves incorporating feedback from native speakers and cultural experts to avoid misinterpretations and offensive translations. Human oversight is crucial in editing and ensuring that the translated content accurately conveys the intended message, helping mitigate deficiencies in practitioners' use of AI. Additionally, it is essential to align AI usage with biblical values and ensure that algorithms do not perpetuate harmful biases.

AI tools are not meant to replace human translators but to enhance their capabilities. AI can handle the initial stages of translation, such as generating draft zero. At the same time, human translators refine and ensure the content's accuracy and cultural relevance. AI tools can significantly reduce the time and cost involved in Bible translation, making the process more efficient. However, human involvement remains crucial throughout the process to address theological and contextual implications.

While AI can assist with the technical aspects of translation, the Holy Spirit is involved through the human translators' spiritual discernment. Translators should seek divine guidance and wisdom in their work to ensure that the translations align with the intended spiritual message. Engaging in prayer and reflection throughout the translation process invites the Holy Spirit to guide their decisions and interpretations, ensuring that the translations are not only accurate but also spiritually enriching.

Implementing safeguards is essential to ensure cultural and linguistic sensitivity in AI translations. Developing protocols and establishing a review process involving native speakers and cultural experts can validate translations. Regularly auditing AI algorithms can help identify and mitigate biases. Promoting human-AI collaboration by encouraging a collaborative approach where AI handles initial translations and human translators refine and contextualise the content is crucial. Providing translators with training on effectively using AI tools can enhance their work. Ensuring spiritual integrity by fostering a culture of prayer and spiritual discernment among translators and by encouraging them to seek divine guidance and wisdom in their work is vital. Incorporating regular spiritual reflections and discussions within translation teams can ensure alignment with the Holy Spirit's guidance.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This study affirms that vernacular Scripture translation remains essential for pioneer evangelism, enabling the Gospel to take root within diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. AI technologies offer meaningful support to this mission by reducing drafting time, improving internal consistency, and assisting exegetical work. These gains reveal that AI can significantly accelerate the availability of Scripture for many unreached groups. However, the findings also show that AI cannot replace human translators. Current systems struggle with minority and undocumented languages, lack cultural and theological awareness, and may reproduce embedded biases. Effective translation—especially of sacred texts—requires human discernment, contextual sensitivity, and spiritual insight. AI is, therefore, a valuable tool, but only when guided by mother-tongue speakers, theologians, and culturally informed practitioners.

In evangelism, AI opens new avenues for communication in the digital age, but it also raises ethical and pastoral concerns. Algorithmic "tailored truth," automated content generation, and market-driven ministry models risk undermining deep discipleship and contextual engagement. Responsible integration of AI must therefore be anchored in a robust theological vision that prioritises relationships, wisdom, and the integrity of the Gospel. AI can substantially aid the global Scripture translation task when wisely stewarded. However, its true effectiveness depends on the partnership between technological innovation and human calling. This synergy presents a renewed opportunity for the church to extend God's Word to every people group with accuracy, cultural resonance, and spiritual depth.

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