Patronage and usage of the MOTHER-TONGUE BIBLES in Kumasi, Ghana

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Full Length Research

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The need for the translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular to enable people read the bible in their mother-tongues started in the third century BC in the ancient city of Alexandria in Egypt. Since the first mother-tongue translation – from Hebrew to Greek – many vernacular translations have been done. As of 2009, Bible Agencies in Ghana have translated the full Bible into 13 and the New Testament into 20 languages. The question is, are the mother-tongue translations of the Bible being used? The study which was conducted in Kumasi, Ghana, in 67 congregations of the Mainline, Ghana Pentecostal, African Indigenous and Charismatic Churches, and some New Religious Movements, in October-November 2009 reveals that 55.5% of the respondents had the Bible in eight mother-tongues in the Kumasi Metropolis; people from ages 41-60, constituting 77.2% of the respondents read the mother-tongue Bibles most; only 12.8% young people read the mother-tongue Bibles; 34.1% of the respondents read the mother-tongue Bibles daily; 32.1% at least thrice a week; and 33.8% once a week, perhaps only on Sundays when they carry the Bibles to their respective churches. Even though this research was limited to Kumasi, it serves as an eye opener as to whether Christians are using the Bible translated into the various Ghanaian languages. This research is significant in that it is the first of its kind in Ghana, and others can build on it.

Key words: Bible translation, mother-tongue Bibles, the Bible in African Christianity, Bible reading communities, usage of mother-tongue Bibles.

INTRODUCTION

The Bible was originally written in the everyday languages of its first readers. Portions were written in Hebrew, others in Aramaic and the rest in Greek. As its message spread, it became necessary to translate for new audiences. Schaaf (2002:3) says that in Africa, Bible translation can be traced back to around 260 BC in the ancient city of Alexandria in Egypt where, the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek, popularly known as the Septuagint (LXX). Thus, the Septuagint – the mother-tongue version of the Hebrew Scriptures - became literature that facilitated the engagement of Hellenistic culture with the Gospel.

Earlier attempts to translate the Bible into Ghanaian languages according to Schaaf dates back to the mid nineteenth century. The Ga, Akuapem-Twi, Fante and Ewe Languages were the first mother-tongues in Ghana into which the Bible was translated. Parts of the Bible were translated into Ga and published for the first time in 1843; the New Testament in 1859; the complete Bible in 1866. The publishing history of the Bible in Akuapem-Twi is as follows: parts were translated and published in 1859; the New Testament in 1863; and the complete Bible in 1871. With the Bible in Fante, parts were translated and published in 1896, and the full Bible in 1948. Part of the Ewe Bible was first published in 1858; the New Testament in 1877; and the complete Bible in 1913 (Schaaf 2002:89 and www.worldscriptures.org, accessed Sept. 24, 2009).

Modern day Bible translation in Ghana is spearheaded by three organizations: Bible Society of Ghana (BSG),
Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT), and International Bible Society (IBS). The BSG which was established in 1966 to translate the Scriptures into the Ghanaian languages and distribute them at affordable prices to Ghanaians, according to its 2008 Annual Report it has translated and published the Bible in eight major Ghanaian languages namely: Ga, Akuapem-Twi, Ewe, Fante, Asante-Twi, Dangme, Nzema and Dagbani. It has also translated and published the New Testament in Eshahie, and has new translations of the New Testament in Ewe and Fante. Currently ongoing projects include the New Ewe Bible, the Eshahie Old Testament, the Dagaare first Bible translation and the revision of the Akuapem-Twi, Asante-Twi and Fante Bibles (The Bible Society of Ghana Home Page, http://www.biblesociety-ghana.org, accessed Sept. 23, 2009). GILLBT which grew out of work started in Ghana in 1962 to "provide alphabets, grammars and reading material in Ghanaian language and to promote mother-tongue literacy in language communities" has completed New Testament translation into 20 languages and three of these have the whole Bible (GILLBT Home Page, http://www.gillbt.org, accessed Nov. 2, 2009). The International Bible Society, published the Living Bible - a paraphrased version of the Bible - in 1971. In Ghana, the IBS has translated the New Testament into Akuapem-Twi, Asante-Twi, Dangme, and the complete Bible into Ewe. According to the Ghana Home Page/Tribes/Languages (http://ghanaweb.com, accessed Dec. 22 2009), there are 67 languages in Ghana. Data from the BSG, GILLBT and IBS show that the complete Bible has been translated into 13 languages in Ghana. This figure might be more because some Bible Agencies have done some translations that people are using on a small scale. The "Ghana Bible Translation Status" (http://www.ethnologue.com, accessed Dec. 22, 2009) has illustrated with a colourful map, the status of Bible translation in Ghana. Figure 1 shows the status of the Bible in Ghana by language groups. The work which lacks statistical figures shows on a map of Ghana areas which have the complete Bible; areas where it is only the New Testament which is in use; areas which have only portions of the Bible as scripture; it also indicates in colour, areas in Ghana which need the translated Bibles, and also areas where there is no need for Bible translation. According to the map, the Guan and Bono speaking areas and some areas in the Northern and Upper West Regions need Bible translation. About a third of the language groups in the Northern, Upper East and West Regions have the New Testament in their languages. A few of the language groups in the Upper West and East Regions have portions of the Bible in their languages. One revelation from the study of the map is that speakers
of Akan – Akuapem-Twi, Asante-Twi, Akyem and Fante - cut across the length and breadth of Ghana. It has been observed that people from almost all the language groups in Ghana live in Kumasi. The Bible has been translated into some local languages. The questions are, do Ghanaian Christians own the mother tongue Bibles? Are they using them? Do they send them to church? Which age groups use the mother tongue Bibles? This study finds answers to these questions, using Kumasi as a case study. Kumasi is chosen because it is said to be the cultural centre of Ghana, and since language is an aspect of culture, then Kumasi is the best place for such a study.

**Bible translation into mother-tongues**

According to Quarthie (2002:7), “the mother-tongue of a person is that person’s native language, the language that one is born into, as it were, and grows up with.” The mother tongue of a person is different from vernacular which is the common language of a region, or group, no matter how naturally such a language and its usage may come. It is a person’s first language as compared to the other languages one might learn later in life, for example, in school. With that understanding, it can rightly be said that every human being, and for that matter a Ghanaian has a mother-tongue which he or she must be proud of. Further to this is the fact that God does speak and understand all the languages of the world, including indigenous Ghanaian and African languages. The Bible attests to this fact (Acts 2:1-11; Rev. 7:9-12). With the understanding that God does understand and speak every language, the early missionaries who came to the then Gold Coast made it a policy to translate the Bible into the mother-tongues of people groups. Smith (1966:54) indicates that, “The Basel Committee insisted that, at all costs, the African was to hear the Gospel, read the Bible, and worship and be taught in his own tongue.” Boahen (1996:144) buttressed the point when he said that W.T. Balmer, a British Methodist missionary in Ghana in the nineteenth century suggested that the study of the mother tongue was an undeniable factor accounting for the success of mission. He wrote, “To my mind, it is a fundamental principle to speak Christ’s message to people in their own tongue, otherwise seeds of future prejudices and misunderstandings are sown.” The Basel and Wesleyan missionaries were saying the same thing – people should encounter the Gospel in their mother tongues. As a result, Johannes Zimmerman translated the Bible into Ga in 1886 and J.G. Christaller did the same for Twi in 1871. Kwesi Dickson was an advocate of the use of the mother tongue in theologizing. According to Dickson (1984:214), majority of the Christian population was not literate in the English language so the issue of mother tongue usage was critical for the theological task in Africa. At the time Dickson wrote, perhaps that was the trend. But now the picture is that most Christians are literate in the English language, and are illiterate in their mother-tongues. They read the Bible in English, think in English; preachers prepare their sermons in English, preach in English and are translated into the mother-tongue. By so doing, the cultural categories that speakers of a mother-tongue need to understand the message of the Bible in their native languages are missing. The point here is not that we should not read the English Bibles, or preach in English. After all English is the lingua franca of Ghana. But the thought patterns in the English are not the same as those of the Ghanaian mother-tongues into which the Bible have been translated. Bediako (2003:15,16) says that the translation of the Scriptures into Greek which influenced the history of the expansion of Christianity is a basis for translating the Bible into the mother-tongues of people groups. Even though translation involves some technicalities, the end-product in Scripture translation in a particular language is the enabling environment it provides for the recognition and response to the Living God, so that people can experience reality. What Bediako means here is that the mother tongue Scriptures make people to hear the wonderful things of God in their own languages as was the experience of the pilgrims who gathered on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:11). In Ghana Kwamena Ekem, Director of the Institute of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics at the Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon has demonstrated through several articles – (2001, 2002, 2003, 2007), commentary in Fante (2009) and a history of Bible Translation in Ghana (2011) - that “The varied mother tongues of Africa have a lot to offer by way of biblical interpretation in Ghanaian/African languages as viable material for interpretation, study Bibles and commentaries” (2007:47). Following Ekem’s proposition I have indicated that demonstrated that the mother-tongue Bibles are resources for African Biblical Studies (see Kuwornu-Adjaottor 2010a: 67-81; 2010b: 62-66; 2011a: 43-61; 2011b: 67-73; 2012: 575-579). Laryea (2001:31) has proposed that a comparative study of Bible in the various vernacular languages is a source for theology in the mother-tongue. If it is possible to study any vernacular text alongside the Greek New Testament or the Hebrew Old Testament, then it is possible to read the mother-tongue Bibles alongside each other to learn things which neither the Greek nor the Hebrew texts can teach. Laryea’s basis for such a proposition is that God’s revelation to humankind cannot be fathomed in its entirety by one language. Sule-Saa (2008:18) reports that the mother-tongue Scriptures has brought about a rippling effect in the Dagomba and Konkomba communities including, the increasing social significance of the church, provision of social services for the betterment of the communities, the emergence of mother-tongue Christianity, indigenous initiative and agency, the development of a sense of personhood and empowerment, the preservation of Konkomba and Dagomba cultures, the transformation of traditional institutions, the promotion and maintenance of
Table 1: Categories of churches and respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Church</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainline/Historic. Example Presbyterian, Methodist, Catholic</td>
<td>2,178</td>
<td>46.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal. Example Church of Pentecost, Apostolic, Christ Apostolic</td>
<td>1,060</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Indigenous. Example, Kristo Asafo, Twelve Apostles, Apostle Continuation</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charismatic. Example, International Central Gospel, Christian Action Faith</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>1,119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Religious Movements. Example, Jehovah’s Witnesses</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4,650</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Non respondents: 2,050; 44.1%

Table 1: Categories of churches and respondents

peace, and the enhancement of Christian-Muslim discourse.

METHODOLOGY
The descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. This was to offer the researcher first hand information with regards to the patronage and usage of the mother-tongue Bibles in the Kumasi Metropolis. Fraenel and Wallen (2003) describe descriptive research as studies in a given state of affairs as fully and carefully as possible. It is used in the observation, description and documentation of aspects of a situation as it occurs naturally. Thus, the study was to present the prevailing situation of the usage of the mother-tongue Bibles in terms of whether they are being used by Christians; which ones are being used, and the number of Christians who have copies and use them; and also which churches in the Kumasi Metropolis use the mother-tongue Bibles?

Population
The population was made up of 67 denominations in Kumasi, which are samples of the four strands of Christianity in Ghana and some New Religious Movements. Omenyo (2002) categorized the four strands of Christianity in Ghana as: the Historic or Mainline, African Indigenous, Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches. Martin (1985:11) defines a New Religious Movement as “any religious group which differs significantly in one or more respects as to belief or practice from those religious groups which are regarded as normative expressions of religion in our total culture.” Kumasi was chosen because it is said to be the cultural city of Ghana, and since language is an aspect of culture, the researcher thought it wise to start such a preliminary survey there.

Sampling and Sampling Procedure
The sample size for the study was 6,700 Bible readers comprising people from ages 10 to 70 and above. The essence of including the age groups is to find out which age groups are reading the mother-tongue Bibles.

Data collection procedure
Questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. It was developed by the researcher. Sixty-seven churches in the Kumasi Metropolis were selected and visited at random by 24 Graduate and 47 Undergraduate students (third and fourth years) of the Department of Religious Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, from early October to early December, 2009. The visits were done over a period of four weeks. 100 members - selected at random - of each of the selected churches were given questionnaire to answer. These were collected the same day after church service. The return rate was 100%. But of the 6,700 people who were given the questionnaire, 4,650 responded. Five Teaching Assistants of the Department of Religious Studies helped in analyzing the questionnaire.

RESULTS
Question 1
Which of the strands of Christianity in Ghana are found in the Kumasi Metropolis?
The purpose of this question was to find out which of the five strands of Christianity are found in the Kumasi Metropolis. As can be seen from Table 1, the Kumasi Metropolis is a home of all the strands of Christianity we have in Ghana: Mainline/Historic, Pentecostal, African Indigenous and Charismatic churches, and New Religious Movements. Of the 67 churches visited and 4,650 people who responded to the questionnaire, 46.8% were from the Mainline, 22.8% from the Pentecostal, 2.7% from the African Indigenous, 24.1% from the Charismatic Churches and 3.6% from the New Religious Movements.

Question 2:
Do Ghanaian Christians in the Kumasi Metropolis have copies of the mother-tongue Bibles?
Question 2 is meant to find out the popularity of the mother-tongue Bibles is Kumasi. Table 2 gives a positive response. 55.5% of the respondents had the Bible in
Table 2: Popularity of the mother-tongue bibles in the churches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother-tongue Bible</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% of respondents having Mother-tongue Bibles during the Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asante-Twi</td>
<td>2,031</td>
<td>43.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akuapem-Twi</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fante</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewe</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ga</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dangme</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dagbani</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fafra</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,561</strong></td>
<td><strong>55.5</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Age group and mother-tongue Bibles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% of Total mother-tongue Bibles during Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>957</td>
<td>37.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>1,020</td>
<td>39.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-70+</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,561</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Number of times of mother-tongue Bible usage in a week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Churches</th>
<th>Frequency: Daily</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Frequency: At least thrice a week</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Frequency: Once a week</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainline</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>645</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>1,009</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>2,178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>1,060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Indigenous</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charismatic</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>1,119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Religious Movements</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,585</strong></td>
<td><strong>34.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,491</strong></td>
<td><strong>32.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,574</strong></td>
<td><strong>33.8</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,650</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

eight mother-tongues. There are 67 languages in Ghana (http://ghanaweb.com, accessed Dec. 22, 2009). Data from the BSG, GILLBT and IBS show that the complete Bible has been translated into 13 languages and the New translated the full Bible and the Testament into 10 Ghanaian languages. GILLBT has completed New Testament translation into 20 languages and three of these have the whole Bible (GILLBT Home Page, http://www.gillbt.org, accessed Nov. 2, 2009). At the time of the survey, respondents had eight Ghanaian language Bibles. The two that were not captured were: the Nzema Bible and Eshahie (Sefwi) New Testament. Ongoing projects include the translation of the Bible into Dagare.

**Question 3:**
Which age brackets use the mother tongue Bibles in the Kumasi Metropolis?
The purpose of this question was to find out whether the youth, or middle-aged, or old people read the mother-tongue Bibles in the Kumasi Metropolis. The survey in Table 3 indicated that the middle-aged (41-50 years) and old people (51-60 years), use the mother-tongue Bibles. The two age brackets constitute 77.2% of the mother-

**Question 4:**
Are the mother-tongue Bibles being read in the Kumasi Metropolis and how often?
This question aimed at finding out the frequency of the mother-tongue Bible readership among Christians in the Kumasi Metropolis. From Table 4 we see that 34.1% of the respondents read the mother-tongue Bibles daily; 32.1% at least thrice a week; and 33.8% once a week, perhaps on Sundays when they carry the Bibles to their respective churches.

**Question 5:**
Do respondents have any comments about the mother-tongue Bibles?
Space was provided on the paper of the questionnaire for respondents to give their comments on the mother-tongue Bible in Ghana. The following are some comments from respondents. Some have been paraphrased and translated into English:

1. "Even though translation of the Bible into the mother-tongues gives a clearer understanding, there are slight differences in the mother-tongue translations, for example the Asante-Twi compared with the English versions."

2. "Since I cannot read the Bible in any other language apart from my mother-tongue, translating the Bible into Asante-Twi is the only means I can hear the word of God."

3. "Translating the Bible into the indigenous languages is a good idea. People should be encouraged to buy copies and read. I am a Ga. I have a Ga Bible myself. Even though at church we use the Asante-Twi Bible, when I go home, I read the text for the church service in Ga. I understand it better in my mother-tongue."

4. "I am a Guan, but since we have no Guan Bible, I read the Asante Twi. I have noticed that if the Bible should be translated into Guan, some expressions will not communicate the meanings as we have in the English versions of the Bible."

5. "I suggest that commentaries and dictionaries be added to the indigenous translations of the Bible."

6. "I am a Fante but since I can read the English versions of the Bible better than the Fante one, I attend a church that uses English rather than Fante."

7. "The Bible itself is very complicated. One problem I have with the Twi Bibles is that, some words are very difficult to understand."

8. "The youth should be trained to use the Bible in the mother-tongues."

9. "I find it difficult to read the Bible in my mother-tongue, that is, Dangme. This is because I didn’t school in my home town, and for that matter did not get the privilege to learn my mother-tongue. I yearn to read the Bible in Dangme."

10. "I wish the Bible has a version in the Awutu language."

11. "Bible translation into the local languages helps to strengthen the use of local languages in Ghana."

12. "The translation of the Bible in my mother-tongue, that Asante Twi needs more improvement."

13. "I prefer the Twi Bible to all others because, I understand it better."

14. "I cannot read the Bible in my mother-tongue well; that is why I don’t read it."

15. "I can read Twi but do not have the Twi Bible because I have not bothered myself to have one since I am conversant with the English Bible, especially the King James Version."

DISCUSSION

Vernacular languages in African theological scholarship

Pobee (1979:30) argues that language in not just syntax and morphology, but the soul of a people. It is the vehicle for assuming culture, supporting the weight of civilization and for helping to shape one’s relationship to reality. Thus, the particular social group in which one is socialized from one’s earliest days confers one’s language on him or her. With this argument, he advocates that African theology must be in the vernacular. Bediako (1995:72) has also raised the question whether African theology can make a significant contribution in the African context without taking African languages more seriously, since most African Christians hear the word of God in their own vernacular languages. Borrowing the words of Pieris (1988:70) that "language is the experience of reality and religion is its expression," I add my voice to the debate and say that since language is a tool in religio-cultural, socio-economic and political spheres, African theologians should consider theologizing in the African languages. For this to be effective, we need the mother-tongue Scriptures — the word of God incarnate in the languages people are born into and with which they grow up. Indeed the incarnation is the paradigm for the mother-tongue Scriptures. In the incarnation God became human and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Walls (1996:27), puts it this way, "In Christ Divinity was translated into humanity as though humanity were a receptor language. "We need the mother-tongue Bibles in Ghanaian Christianity for three reasons. First, God speaks all languages and has always does so. In the Christian faith, therefore, there is no universal lingua franca in which alone God’s word is to be heard. God demonstrated this on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came down (Acts 2). People who gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost heard the wonderful works of God in their mother-tongues.

Second, the fact that God speaks all languages, gives each language a theological significance. Hebrew and Aramaic are not God’s “linguistic favourites.” God could have chosen any of the languages of the world to communicate the Christ-event. God would have chosen Dangme if Jesus were born into Dangme cultures.

Third, Paul’s analogy of the clay pot in 2 Corinthians 4 gives us yet another reason underlying the translation of the Scriptures into the mother-tongues. Senavoe (2002:55) applying Paul’s analogy of the clay pot to language and culture says that, each language or culture is like a pot of clay and is capable of holding the surpassing treasure of God’s revelation. Just as no two human beings or human cultures are the same, so it is that no two pots are the same and no one pot is better than the other in spite of obvious differences. Each and every language is capable of being used to talk about the Christ. She draws another point from the analogy by saying that the fundamental nature of the treasure does not change when placed in a particular pot. It assumes the shape or mould of the pot and, in turn, infinitely enhances the value of the pot. With this analogy one can say in the words of Sanneh (1989) that each language is “capable of transcendent range” and is a valid receptor of theological discourse. Each cultural group therefore, however small, had a claim to hear God’s mighty deeds and to declare them in its mother tongue.

The ideology of bible translation

Bible translation basically means the rendering of the Hebrew and Greek texts into any number of languages.
There are two methodologies of Bible translation – formal equivalence and dynamic or functional equivalence (Comfort, 2000). According to Nida and Taber (1969), the formal equivalence method attempts to render the exact words of the original language into the receptor language. It is a word-for-word translation. Dynamic equivalence is the reproduction in a receptor language – for example Dangme – the message, first in terms of meaning, and second in terms of style of the source language (Hebrew or Greek). Comfort (2000), calls it a thought-for-thought translation. This methodology aims at making readers in the receptor language respond to the message in substantially the same manner as the receptors in the source language. But it can never be identical, for the cultural and historical settings are different. The translators of the Bible into the Ghanaian mother-tongues use one or a combination of these methodologies. That is why some terminologies in the Ghanaian language translations of the Bible are difficult to understand and others are easily understood, and some are direct translations of Hebrew, Greek and English words, which do not fit into the dynamic, pluralistic and religio-cultural context of Ghanaian Christians and Bible readers.

Significance of the mother-tongue bibles and the need for newer translations for Ghanaian christians

In this section I respond to some of the concerns of the respondents during the research in the churches. One of the respondents said “I do not need the translation of the Bible in my mother- tongue because some of the translations I have read are not well translated when compared with the King James Version.” Another remarked, “The translations are good but some portions do not bring out the power and the original meaning of the word of God.” To another person, “Some of the mother-tongue translations are a bit difficult to understand. It is important to note here that, the word of God is one. God spoke to people in certain cultures Jewish and Greek – and they wrote the word of God in their languages, Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Thus, all the versions of the Bible we have today, including the King James Version, are translations of the word of God. In that sense no translation is superior to another. “Translation have target audience groups: children, youth, adults, believers, non-believers, and people with certain needs or from certain social groups or a certain educational level” (Mojola, 2007).

The Bible was translated into the King James Version in 1611, the age of the legendary William Shakespeare, a supreme master of the English Language. No one doubts the fact that the KJV made a much better sense within the socio-linguistic realities of that period. But it is nearly four hundred years (399 years) since that time and much has changed, so the words no longer carry the same meaning, nuances or emotive force. That is why we have other English versions of the Bible. In that sense, we cannot compare the Ghanaian mother-tongue Bibles to the KJV since translation is a generational exercise, and every generation needs a translation in the language of their place and time. We have established the point that the incarnation implies that Christ, the Word has entered into every language and culture. Thus, the Judeo-Christian Scriptures has to be translated and interpreted within the cultural setting of people groups, a process which Sugirtharajah (1998) calls “vernacularization.” According to him, “Vernacular interpretation seeks to overcome the remoteness and strangeness of [the] biblical texts by trying to make links across the cultural divides, by employing the reader’s own cultural resources and social experience to illuminate the biblical narratives.” In other words Bible translation into the mother-tongue is the process whereby the “original texts” are communicated in a way that will meet the needs of receptor audiences, whose world-views are quiet different from those of the original recipients. Such a process says Etem (2007) requires “re-packaging the thought embedded in an ‘original revelation/message’ for speakers of other languages, taking cognizance of relevant theological, linguistic and cultural factors.”

As mentioned earlier, translations serve many ends. Audiences have needs and so long as these needs exist, there will be the demand for a diversity of translations even within a single language group. The task of translating the Bible into a given language is never complete. Language is dynamic and ever changing. Any translation has a time span or limit, after which it becomes archaic and even obsolete, thus creating the need for a new translation or translations. It is for this reason that the Bible Society of Ghana has set up new projects to revise some of the older translations of the Bible. The BSG have published the new Ga Bible in 2006. Her ongoing projects include the new Ewe Bible and the revision of the Akwapem Twi, Asante Twi and Fante Bibles, and the Dagbani and Fante Deuterocanon (Apocrypha) (www.biblesociety-ghana.org, accessed Sept. 23, 2009). It is hoped that these revisions will bring the word of God home to modern readers of the Bible. That is not to say that in the process, the original revelation/message should be compromised. Rather, the dynamic, religiously plural context of the Ghanaian should be taken into consideration, because the compilers and addresses of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures also operated in a pluralistic religious environment (Ekem 2001/2003), thereby providing an important hermeneutical point of departure for African biblical exegetes and translators.

As the BSG and possibly the other Bible agencies – GILIBT and IBS – revise some of the mother-tongue Bibles in Ghana, they should, as a matter of urgency strategize to make the Scriptures available in the other languages in Ghana which do not have the translated Scriptures.

A critical study of the “Ghana Bible Translation Status” – a map of Ghana indicating what has been done so far
as Bible translation into the mother tongues is concerned, and what is yet to be done – shows that, the Guan and Bono speaking areas and some areas in the Northern and Upper West Regions have no Bibles in their mother-tongues. About a third of the language groups in the Northern, Upper East and West Regions have the New Testament in their languages. A few of the language groups in the Upper West and East Regions have portions of the Bible in their language. Having the New Testament or portions of the Bible in these languages is a partial solution to the task of making the Scriptures available in the mother-tongues for people to read and hear the wonderful works of God. These language groups need the full Bible. 

The study of the “Ghana Bible Translation Status” also reveals that speakers of Akan - Akuapem Twi, Asante Twi and Fante - cut across the length and breadth of Ghana. This implies that they carry the Bible in their mother-tongues wherever they go. This has an advantage which the churches can make use of when it comes to church planting. The churches can plant Asante, Akuapem and Fante congregations in towns and cities where these Akan groups are, especially in Northern Ghana. The danger however is that, the indigenous people of the towns where these churches are planted will see the congregations are alien ones, and will not want to worship with them. Thus, the Akan-speaking people who can be located at every part of Ghana should put in an effort to learn the languages of the indigenous people among whom they find themselves. This exhortation goes for all the other language groups.

The study of the churches in Kumasi also indicates that 1,574 (32.8%) of the 4,650 respondents read the mother-tongue Bibles once a week, perhaps during church services. They carry the Bibles to church, open and follow as the reader of the lessons for the day reads from the lectern. To these people I say it is one thing having a Bible and another thing reading it. Perhaps they do not know how to read the Ghanaian language translations of the Bible. The churches should organize literacy classes for such people so that they can read the Bible in their mother tongues. By so doing, such people will come to an appreciable apprehension of the message of the Bible in their own cultural mediums, knowing that God speaks their language, and this will have a lasting effect on them.

Recommendations
As a result of the finding of this study I recommend that:
- Ghanaian Christians, irrespective of their educational background should first see themselves as Ghanaians before becoming Christians. Viewed from this perspective, every Christian must always remember that he or she has a mother-tongue which God also speaks, through the pages of the Ghanaian translations of the Bible.
- It is one thing owning a Bible in one’s mother-tongue and another thing reading it. Those who have the Ghanaian translations of the Bible must make effort to read them. In this regard, the churches have a duty as part of their Christian Education programmers’, to teach people how to read and interpret the Bible in the local languages.
- The Bible agencies in Ghana must do well to translate the Bible into the languages which do not have the Scriptures. In the process, they must take into consideration, the religio-cultural and linguistic contexts of the people groups they translate the Bible for. This does not however mean that they should water down the original message or revelation. They must repack Bible translations to suit the targeted audiences and readers since every generation needs a variety of translations to satisfy varying interests and needs.

CONCLUSION
The incarnation has brought down Christ, the Word of God into every language and culture. God’s revelation to humankind cannot be fathomed in its entirety by one language. The varied mother tongue translations of the Bible offer strong basis for theologizing in Ghana and Africa, because the enterprise of Scripture translation makes use of traditional religious categories and ideas. Thus, study of the Ghanaian mother-tongue Scriptures alongside with the Greek New Testament, the Septuagint and the Hebrew Old Testament can reveal lessons that neither the Greek nor the Hebrew texts can teach. The usage of the mother-tongue Scriptures should be encouraged by both the church and academia. In the mother-tongue Scriptures, we encounter God in our own religio-cultural and linguistic contexts.

REFERENCES
Laryea P (2001). “Letting the Gospel re-shape culture: