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**RETHINKING *CHARIS* IN ENGLISH AND YORUBA BIBLE
INTERPRETATIONS:
FROM BIBLICAL EXEGESIS TO TRANSLATION ANALYSIS**

By

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ABSTRACT

The concept of biblical *charis* has been interpreted in most Christian congregational gatherings as gracefulness, kindness, favour, prosperity, freedom, liberality, lawlessness, pleasure and the like, with little or no interest for its implications for good works and moral values in the society. This paper, therefore, explores the translation of *charis* from Greek into English and Yoruba languages with a view to bringing to the fore its socio-religious implications via good works and moral values in the context of South-western region of Nigeria and beyond. The study purposely selected three pericopes that centred on a New Testament word *charis* translated into English as *grace* and Yoruba as *Oore-ofe* as stated in the Gospel according to John 1:14-18; Paul's Epistles to the Ephesians 2:8-10 and to Titus 2:11-14 respectively. These selected passages from New Testament Greek version were analysed as translated into English by *New International Version* (henceforth, NIV) (1987) and *Bibeli Yoruba Atoka* (BYA) (1998) (that is Yoruba Reference Bible) respectively. It employed descriptive research method and subjected selected verses to

exegetical and translation analysis with a view to suggesting novel interpretation of *charis* in Christian congregational teachings and meetings. Based on the exegetical inference, the work has suggested that Bible interpreters as well as Christian ministers should take advantage of the import of *Charis* to interpret the Word of God for the benefits of social values among their listeners. Bible interpreters should emphasise grace as imperative for good works in Christian congregational teachings and meetings to the advantage of global peace and enhancement of effective socio-religious relationships. The work has asserted that both translations of *Charis* in English and Yoruba versions have areas of convergences and divergences. The convergences are mostly on direct lexical equivalence, while the divergences are the results of differences in approaches that were employed by the translators.

Keywords: Yoruba Bible Translation, Translation of *Charis*, Exegetical approach to translation, Grace implications

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The word *charis* connotes graciousness (as in gratifying), of manner or act which can be abstract or concrete, literal, figurative or spiritual. It is an exclusive influence of divinity upon the heart of man, and its reflection in human's life involves an act of gratitude. *Charis* is translated into English as grace, kindness, acceptable, benefit, favour, gift, grace(ious), joy, liberality, pleasure, thanks and thanksworthiness. Xa/risma **charisma** suggests a (divine) gratuity such as deliverance from danger or passion. Specifically, it is a spiritual endowment either subjectively or objectively. While its subjectiveness connotes religious qualifications, miraculous faculty because of gift from God is the objective nature. And by extension, xarito/w **charitoo** simply

means to grace, which is to be endued with special honor. In other words, it suggests “to be made accepted” or “to be highly favoured”. A primary verb from xai/rw **chairo** implies being “cheerful.” Cheerful suggests “to be calmly”, “happy” or “well-off”; impersonally, especially as salutation (on meeting or parting) and “be well”. Some synonyms of chaio are farewell, be glad, God speed, greeting, hall, joy (-fully), rejoice and so on.¹

ca,rij is used in non-Christian writings to refer to both “generosity” and “gratitude,” and also to “gracefulness” and “beauty” — thus to free, “uncoerced”, cheerfully bestowed openness towards one another, and thus in relationship to God both “salvation” granted by him and human “thanks.” Aristotle (*Rh.* ii.7.1385a) emphasises the gratuitous nature of **ca,rij** in contrast to reward. Paul received special *grace* with his apostolic commission. The grace is identical with his gospel since his calling and his reception of the gospel were one and the same.²

The word *Charis* means delights. It is a state of causing or accompanying joy. It is joyous being or “charm,” the element of delight in the beautiful, the favour shown by fortune, that is what is pleasing in it. In a psychological point of view, *cháris* means “sympathy” or “kindness,” with a reference to the pleasure that is caused. In certain expressions, the idea of “thanks” is brought out, and *cháris* with the genitive has the sense of “for the sake of,” “out of consideration for.” Aeschylus uses *cháris* for the “favor” of the gods. In Hellenism, *cháris* becomes a fixed term for the “favour” shown by rulers, with such nuances as “gracious disposition” or “gracious gift.” In another development, Hellenism stresses the power in and of

¹ *Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary*. Biblesoft, Inc. and International Bible Translators, Inc.2006), NT:5485

² *Exegetical dictionary of the New Testament @ P C Study Bible 5*, 2007.

cháris. This power, which comes from the word above, appears in the divine man and expresses itself in magic.³

Charis has diverse uses. It means that which bestows or occasions pleasure, delight, or causes favorable regard; it is applied, for example, to beauty, or gracefulness of person. On the part of the bestower, the friendly disposition from which the kindly act proceeds, graciousness, loving-kindness, goodwill generally, e. g., Acts 7:10; especially with reference to the divine favor or "grace," e. g., Acts 14:26; in this respect there is stress on its freeness and universality, its spontaneous character, as in the case of God's redemptive mercy, and the pleasure or joy He designs for the recipient.⁴ From the foregoing, the concept of biblical *charis* is being interpreted in most Christian congregational gatherings as graciousness, loving-kindness, favour, prosperity, freedom, liberality, lawlessness, pleasure and the like, with little or no interest on its implications for good works and moral values in the society. This paper, therefore, explores the translation of *charis* from Greek into English and Yoruba languages with a view to bringing to the fore its socio-religious implications via good works and moral values in the context of South-western region of Nigeria and beyond.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed descriptive research method and subjected purposely selected three pericope that centred on a New Testament word *charis* translated into English as *grace* and Yoruba as *Oore-ofe* in the Gospel according to John 1:14-18; Paul's Epistles to the Ephesians 2:8-10 and to Titus 2:11-14 respectively. These selected passages from New Testament Greek were analysed

³ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (kittel's 1 vol. @ P C Study Bible 5, 2007).

⁴ *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985. @ P C Study Bible 5, 2007).

and translated into English by *New International Version* (henceforth, NIV) (1987) and *Bibeli Yoruba Atoka* (BYA) (1998) (that is Yoruba Reference Bible) respectively. It subjected the selected verses to exegetical and translation analysis with a view to suggesting novel interpretation of *charis* in Christian congregational teachings and meetings.

BACKGROUND TO THE SELECTED BOOKS

It is imperative to present a background information on each of the books of the New Testament selected. Biblical authors wrote at a time and in a specific culture, language, style, and diction, which is entirely different from that of the contemporary readers. The meaning of a text can be known by an attempt to dig into the mind of the original author, rather than reading into the text of the Bible or any other passage. The background information is important in all the New Testament books. Some crucial factors that influenced the theology of both the writer and the readers of the gospel are therefore considered to achieve meaningful exegetical functions of the passage. This explains why the background information to the books of John, Ephesians, and Titus are germane to exegetical and translation analysis.

Background to the Gospel of Saint John

The actual date of the writing of the Gospel according to Saint John was not specific. There are two different proposed dates. The traditional view suggested the period about the end of the first century i.e. C. A.D. 85. They opined that John's writing of the Gospel should be within the

neighbourhood of his age at that time. This view is also supported by the fact that this Gospel was written to complement the texts of the synoptic gospels. Contemporary dating suggestion was that it was between 50s and 70.⁵

There are other individuals that bore the name of John in the Bible such as John the Baptist, John the brother of James (Matt. 4:21-22; 10:2; Mk 3:17; Lk 5:1-10) and the author is not directly referred to by the name John in this Gospel. Evidence has shown that the author of the gospel is Apostle John, “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (13:23; 19: 26; 20:2; 21:7,20,24). Early scholars like Irenaeus and Tertullian confirmed Apostle John as the author of this Gospel. The real purpose of the evangelist in composing his Gospel is clearly stated in John 20:30-31. It is to point out that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Therefore, the author’s focus is evangelism.⁶

It is clearly shown that evangelism is the purpose of John’s Gospel. John wrote to meet the spiritual needs of the Church so as to believe that Christ is the Son of God and refute the heresies about John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. The book is spiritual; it deals with spiritual things. More importantly, the book aims to witness to the world that Jesus is the Son of God so that people may believe in Him and have eternal life through Him (John, 20:31).

Background to the Epistle to the Ephesians

The Apostle Paul is the author of the Epistle to Ephesians. This is because he introduced himself as the author (1:1; 3:1; 3:7, 4:1, 6:19-20). Some critics have taken the absence of the usual personal greetings and the verbal affection which were stated in the Epistle to the Colossians, among other reasons, as grounds for doubting the authorship of this Epistle by Apostle Paul. However, this was probably a circular letter, intended for other churches in addition to the saints

⁵ *The NIV Study Bible*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987), 1559.

⁶ *Ibid*

at Ephesus. Paul may have written it about the same time as that of Colossians, C.A.D. 60, while he was in prison in Rome (see 3:1; 4:1; 6:20).⁷

The purpose of the letter is to proclaim God's plan through Jesus Christ, which is *to bring all creation together; everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head* (1:10). This unity has already been achieved in the Church; here the new humanity already exists. Whereas the old humanity was composed of Jews and Gentiles, the new humanity is composed of all who through Christ have become the people of God (see especially 2:17-22). The oneness of God's people is seen in the Church, which is the Body of Christ (1:23); it is the sacred Temple, in which God lives through the Holy Spirit (2:21-22); and it is the bride of Christ (5:25-32). Those who through God's grace have been saved (2:8-10) must live as God's people. In the second half of the letter, apostle Paul exhorts his readers to live in such a way as to prove that they are God's children, loving one another as Christ loved them. As children of God, they are expected to be like their Father, God himself (5:1).⁸

The epistle to the Ephesians gives us unparalleled insights into the daily living of a New Testament church through the teaching and exemplification of transparency, joy, good relationships, sincerity, reputation, service, humility, leadership, performance, accountability, and reconciliation, working with non-believers, encouragement, generosity, timely fulfilment of obligations, and the proper use of wealth. ⁹ The epistle shows that the heart and mind of the Apostle to the Gentiles. It is Paul's most accomplished rhetorical work. The book is a combination of spiritual teachings ranging from grace to love. It is truly a letter; it is only one half of a conversation. Many of the logical antecedents and circumstances behind Paul's

⁷ *The NIV Study Bible*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987), 1755.

⁸ "Introduction to John" *UBS New Testament Handbook Series*, (United Bible Societies, 1961-1997).

⁹ Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), xviii–xxi.

responses have been lost. This is a good example of the truth that the epistles of the New Testament were originally written as correspondence to specific needs, not independent of theological dissertations.¹⁰

Background to the Epistle to Titus

The epistle to Titus is often described as one of the pastoral letters along with the two letters to Timothy. The purpose of this epistle is to inform Titus, a young pastor in Crete, on “personal authorisation and guidance in meeting opposition (1:5; 2:1, 7-8,15; 3:9), instruction about faith and conduct, and warning about false teacher. Paul sent the letters with Zenas and Apollos, who were on a journey that took them through Crete (3:13). He left Titus to encourage and disciple the converts in Crete.”¹¹ This would help Titus to establish the Church that Paul planted and organised in Crete as well as to inform Titus of the expected steps necessary to foster better relationship.

There is no clear scholarly consensus as to when these letters were written... it may have been written at the end of the second century; it was discovered by Muratori in 1740 A.D., and it includes these three letters in the list of letters written by Paul. This means that these three letters may already have been known to the Christian communities at least by the middle of the second century.¹² “Paul possibly wrote from Corinth, ... The letter was written after the release of his first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28), probably between A.D 63 and 65 – or possibly later if he

¹⁰Bob Utley, *Paul's Letters to a Troubled Church: I and II Corinthians* (Texas: Baptist College, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012) @ <http://www.biblelessonsintl.com> accessed on 16/02/20

¹¹ “Introduction to John” *UBS New Testament Handbook Series*, (United Bible Societies, 1961-1997).

¹² *The NIV Study Bible*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987), 1755.

wrote after his assumed trip to Spain.”¹³ Having considered the background of the New Testament books to be examined, it is relevant to do an exegetical analysis of selected periscope wherein *charis* is both employed and deployed.

EXEGESIS OF SELECTED BIBLICAL TEXTS

ca,rin (in John 1:16) is noun accusative feminine singular from **ca,rij**, while **ca,ritoj** (in John 1: 14 &16) is noun genitive feminine singular from **ca,rij**. **ca,rij** is noun nominative feminine singular from **ca,rij**, while **ca,riti**, (in Eph. 2:8) is noun dative feminine singular common from **ca,rij**, and **ca,rij** is noun nominative feminine singular from **ca,rij** (Titus 2:11). All these expressions of **ca,rij** are in feminine form to depict the productive nature of grace.

These are formed from “charis” which means graciousness, attractiveness, favor, grace, gracious care or help and goodwill. It also implies credit that brings (God's) favor. Grace (Divine) or favor in fixed formulas at the beginning and end of Paul's letters underscores practical application of goodwill, a sign of favour, gracious deed or gift, benefaction of exceptional effects produced by divine grace, thanks, gratitude or be grateful.¹⁴

In Jesus Christ, grace and truth reach their fullness; the fullness is available to mankind. We are saved by grace (Eph 2:8-9), but we also live by grace (1 Cor 15:10) and depend on God's grace in all that we do. We can receive one grace after another, for "He giveth more grace" (James 4:6). In John 1:17, John hinted that a whole new order had come to replace the Mosaic system. Jesus Christ is the fullness of grace and truth (John 1:16-17). Grace is God's favour and kindness bestowed on those who do not deserve it and cannot earn it. If God dealt with us only according to truth, none of us would survive; but He deals with us based on grace *and* truth. Jesus Christ, in His life, death, and resurrection, met all the demands of the Law. Now, God is

¹³ Ibid.,

¹⁴ Bible works version 7

free to share fullness of grace with those who put their trust in Christ. Grace without truth would be deceptive, and truth without grace would be condemning.¹⁵

The expression *kai. tou/to ouvk evx u`mw/n(qeou/ to. dw/ron* (it (grace) is the gift of God Eph.2:8). **dw/ron** here is noun nominative neuter singular common from **dw/ron** meaning gift, or sacrificial gift, offering. By implication, the grace, favour, or mercy of God is a sacrificial gift and freewill offering from God. Hence, anyone who receives this gift should be careful in handling it. It is a sacrifice from God. Even, the gift or grace of salvation worth guarding carefully.

Likewise, *ouvk evx e;rgwn (i[na mh, tij kauch,shtai* means not by works so that no one can boast (Eph.2:9). The **kauch,shtai**, in this expression, is verb subjunctive aorist middle 3rd person singular from **kauca,omai**, which means to boast, glory, or pride oneself. Thus, grace is bestowed and not a reward for anything done. Therefore, no one should be proud of God's gifts or grace, especially, the grace of salvation and spiritual gifts. The notion of *ktisque,ntej evn Cristw/| Vlhsou/ evpi. e;rgoij avgaqoi/j* (created in Christ Jesus for good works in Eph. 2:10) is central to work of grace. The expression **ktisque,ntej** is verb participle aorist passive nominative masculine plural from **kti,zw** and it means *create*. **e;rgoij** is noun dative neuter plural common from **e;rgon** meaning work, deed, action, manifestation, practical proof, and practice. By implication, endowment of Divine grace calls for practical use for the purpose of accountability. The results of the effective usage of divine grace and gifts should be made manifest by 'the practice'.

In Titus 2:11, *For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men* means a declaration of God unending kindness to the entire human race. Grace announces the

¹⁵ *The Biblical Illustrator (New Testament) Commentary, @ P C Study Bible 5, 2007.*

birth and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ which is the greatest gift of God to humankind. In the practical parlance, not every man has received this gift of salvation even though the light of this grace of salvation is shining unto all men. The metaphor of shining in this context is not really understood by many as a symbol of the universality of salvation through grace. Adam Clarke asserts that “And as the light and heat of the sun are denied to no nation nor individual, so the grace of the Lord Jesus, this also shines out upon all; and God designs that all mankind shall be as equally benefited by it in reference to their souls, as they are in respect to their bodies by the sun that shines in the firmament of heaven.”¹⁶

He notes that some people are yet to embrace the illumination of the gospel and calls for the salvation of all through the grace of preaching the gospel to all. Adam Clarke further explains that: “Wherever the Gospel comes, it brings salvation, it offers deliverance from all sin to every soul that hears or reads it. As freely as the sun dispenses his genial influences on every inhabitant of the earth, so freely does Jesus Christ dispense the merits and blessings of his passion and death to every soul of man.”¹⁷

In Titus 2: 11-14, Apostle Paul highlighted three indispensable realities of the grace of God. The realities include redemption, reformation, and reward. When we are lost and helpless in our perversions, Jesus through grace paid the price on the cross and set us free. Hence, Grace redeems us (vv. 11, 14a). Grace also reforms us through a change of character, fashion, desire, and taste. The grace of God teaches us to be disciplined and it bring glories to God. Therefore, grace reforms us through God’s possession and sanctification for the ultimate purpose of making Christians enviable examples of Jesus Christ. (vv. 12, 14b) and “a special people for God's own

¹⁶ Adam Clarke's Commentary, (Electronic Database, Biblesoft, Inc. 2006 @ P C Study Bible 5, 2007).

¹⁷ Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. 2006@ P C Study Bible 5, 2007).

possession” (Deut 14:2; 26:18). The reward of grace is culminated in the return of Christ when the believers will see Him as He is. Then, the reward of Grace will assume its finality (v. 13)¹⁸.

INFERENCES FROM THE EXEGESIS

The Gospel to Saint John chapter 1:14 -18 forms a part of the prologue that present the deity of Jesus. The seemingly unknown God is revealed in a human bodily form with a clear indication that is familiar to both Jew and Greek. John presents Jesus Christ as God in the true sense of human comprehension. It is established that the John writes this book for the world to know that Jesus is the Messiah and everybody that believes in Him has life (Jn. 20:31-32). This knowledge of God in the human form is made available by grace; hence, it can be inferred that grace is fundamental to the revelation knowledge of Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

John 1: 14 discusses grace and truth as the source of spiritual certainty. It considers grace as the necessity of spirituality for the understanding of spiritual matters. It presents Jesus Christ and the salvation that can be found only in Jesus Christ to be the partakers of God’s blessings on spiritual issues. One can infer that grace is central to our salvation and spiritual communication, companionship and fellowship. The expression of grace determines the justification in the presence of God; hence, grace becomes the panacea to heretical teaching and unending indoctrination about justification.

Verse 16 of Saint John’s Gospel emphasises the significance of the fullness of God’s grace. The inference is that the fullness of grace has dealt with the consequences of transgressing the Mosaic Law in its entirety. That is why Paul asserts that there is no condemnation to everyone who is in Christ Jesus and that they are free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:1-2). Through adequate understanding and interpretation of grace, we can infer that grace is a

¹⁸ *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Chariot Victor Publishing, and imprint of Cook Communication Ministries, 1989@ P C Study Bible 5, 2007).

liberation for every human being from the condemnation of the sin and the enslavement of death. Grace also sets people free from satanic bondage and religious profanity; thereby, ushering them into spiritual freedom.

In Ephesians 2:8 and Titus 2:11, *Charis* is noun genitive feminine singular. Likewise, in verse 14-16, *Charis* is conceived as noun accusative feminine singular. In the three cases above, *Charis* as presented in feminine form clearly underscores the productive feature and ability of grace. This implies that grace is productive. The inference is that both John and Paul desire that every department, section, association as well as individual needs to be productive in the church. The efficiency of grace should be brought to the fore in Christian ministries. In the same inferential situation of grace for productivity, it becomes obvious that grace invites every believer to effective Christian service. Grace is employed as an opportunity to serve; hence, grace should not only be seen as an unmerited favour, but also as a response to an invitation to service. It is only in this sense that the fullness and benefits of grace can be appropriated.

Paul emphasises the exclusiveness of grace based on manner and action (Eph. 2:8-9). The word *Charis* implies graciousness in terms of manner or act in diverse perspectives as practically demonstrated through “chairo” that is being cheerful. The understanding of this expression calls Christians to give attention to cheerfulness and sincere relationship with the brethren. It is inferred that Christians should be open, plain, and sincere to themselves and others in their social relations. This can make the reality of grace to be evident through Christian action in thanksgiving and gratitude.

One can also infer that, from the above interpretation, *Charis* implies a form of patron-client system; it is a situation whereby a receiver of valuable gift expresses his thankfulness, appreciation, and gratitude to higher person (i.e., the giver). This explains the reason why grace

is seen as the outpouring of God's free gift on humanity. It is obvious that this calls for a corresponding action from the receivers. We can infer that grace is not a one-way phenomenon; thus, God extends his salvation-privilege to the entire human race, this grace calls on the clients to appropriate His gift.

From the understanding of grace as a sacrificial gift or offering in Ephesians 2:8, one sees a call for sacrifice. It is inferred that benefactors of this gift should handle and use it judiciously. Grace is bestowed because of another person's sacrifice. It is not by our own making or working (Eph. 2:9). Contemporary Christians are therefore admonished to be conscious of this reality and be clothed with respect and humility. Grace therefore equals humility, and the effectiveness of sacrificial grace is embedded in humility and gentility. The sacrificial grace redeemed and restored humanity back to God. Since we are created in Christ Jesus for good work (Eph. 2:10), it is inferred that grace moves Christian to humbly and goodly works out of the redemption and restoration of the world as demonstrated in Christ Jesus.

Paul, in Titus 2:1 avows the universality of grace. The appearance of grace is not for a specific group or kind of people. It is for the entire humankind. It is not culturally bias or ethnocentrically rigid. Rather, grace pronounces kindness to all people. It shows that grace accords the church an exclusive opportunity to correct ethnical, cultural, and ideological differences among the nations of the world. Therefore, through the injection of grace, the church should correct the ungodly culture and thereby encouraging and promoting the good ones.

Contemporary Christians are therefore admonished to be conscious of the workings of grace and employ them for effective Christian services. Grace equals sacrifice, productivity, service and humility. It is only in this sense that the fullness and benefits of grace can be appropriated to the betterment of human society. Having done the exegetical study of the

selected pericope, it is relevant to do a comparative translation analysis of the selected verses wherein *charis* is employed / deployed.

COMPARATIVE TRANSLATION ANALYSIS OF SELECTED VERSES

Many Biblical scholars such as Cicero, Martin Luther, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Catherine Winkworth, Lefevre d'Etaples, John Dryden, Samuel Johnson, Eugene A. Nida, Alexander Frazer Tytler, Ajayi Crowder, among others have contributed to Bible translation and translating. They have engaged themselves in understanding both the immediate language and culture of the Bible and that of the target community involved. Eugene Nida (in Watt, 2005:28) argued that "Words only have meanings in terms of the culture of which they are a part. Language is a part of culture. Therefore, we have to understand the culture(s)...is we're going to understand what the [biblical] writers were trying to say." In other words, while culture is the totality of a people, language is an intrinsic part of the culture and translation negotiate between the culture of societies through the medium of language. Bible translators therefore need to be sensitive to the dynamism of a biblical text in translation. Wendland (2015) expatiates Nida's dynamic equivalence, Venuti's foreignizing theory and Gutt's relevance theory to a "situation-sensitive" approach (Wendland 2015:101). The situation-sensitive relevance extends functional equivalence to the target community such that the translation attempts to "reproduce the distinctive function-marking forms of the original text by using corresponding forms in the target-language that are linguistically natural and appropriate for the genre concerned (e.g., narrative, lyric, prophetic, etc. discourse)" (Wendland 2018:98). This suggests that a relevant Bible translation should not only be sensitive to the source text's culture and society but should also take note of

“the primary target group envisaged and the principal use that is intended for the version under preparation” (Wendland 2015:100). A translation is therefore relevant when it functions in both the source and target domains in meaning and form.

This segment, therefore, underscores a comparative analysis of the translation of selected verses from the original NT as well as the English (New International Version NIV) and Yoruba (Bibeli Yoruba Atoka 1980, 1998 BYA) versions respectively.

Gospel of John 1:14-18

Five verses are purposely selected from the Gospel according to St John chapter 1, verses 14 and 18. The Greek presentations as well as English and Yoruba translations are as follows:

Greek: BGT: John 1:14 Kai. o` lo,goj sa.rx evge,neto kai. evskh,nwsen evn h`mi/n(kai. evqeasa,meqa th.n do,xan auvtou/(do,xan w`j monogenou/j para. patro,j(plh,rhj ca,rtoj kai. avlhqei,aj

English-NIV: John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, *full of grace* and truth.

Yoruba-BYA: John 1:14 Oro naa si di ara, oun si n ba wa be, awa si n wo ogo re, ogo bi ti omo bibi kansoso lati odo Baba wa, *o kun fun oore-ofe* ati otito.

Greek: BGT:John 1:15 Ἰωάννης μαρτυρεῖ περὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ κέκραγεν λέγων· οὗτος ἦν ὃν εἶπον· ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν, ὅτι πρῶτός μου ἦν.

English-NIV: John 1:15 John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' "

Yoruba-BYA: Johanu 1:15 (Johanu si jeri re, o si kigbe, pe, “ Eyi ni eni ti mo soro re pe, ‘Eni ti nbo lehin mi, o po jumi lo: nitori o wa si waju mi.’”)

Greek BGT: John 1:16 ο[ti evk tou/ plhrw,matoj auvtou/ h`mei/j pa,ntej evla,bomen kai. ca,rin avnti. ca,ritoj\

English-NIV: John 1:16 From the fullness of his grace we have all received *one blessing after another*.

Yoruba-BYA: Johanu 1:16 Nitori ninu ekun re ni gbogbo wa si ti **gba, ati oore-ofe kun oore-ofe**.

Greek BGT: John 1:17 ὅτι ὁ νόμος διὰ Μωϋσέως ἐδόθη, ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐγένετο.

English-NIV: John 1:17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Yoruba-BYA: Johanu 1:17 Nitori pe nipase Mose ni a ti fi ofin funni, sugbon oore-ofe ati otito ti pase Jesu Kristi wa.

Greek: BGT: John 1:18 Θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε· μονογενὴς θεὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο.

English-NIV: John 1:18 No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

Yoruba BYA: Johanu 1:18 Ko si eni ti o ri Olorun ri : Omo bibi kansoso, ti nbe ni ookan aya
Baba, oun naa ni o fi i han

Comments/Observations

The translation of Charis in John 1:14 implies a word for word rendition in both English and Yoruba¹⁹:

plh/rh\$	xa/rito	ka	a)lhqei/
full	\$	i\	a\$.
pleérees	of grac e	an d	truth.
	cháritos	kaí	aleetheía s
O kun	fun oore-ofe	ati	otito

There is congruence in the translation of English (NIV) and Yoruba (BYA) from Greek. Both translations show that they are direct translations from Greek. This agrees with the principle of relevance. It reveals the interpretation of the source text in its original context. Likewise, both translations communicate the intention of the Spirit in the target context. The fact that the translators are able to retain both the direct lexicons and sentential structures makes the target texts to interpretively resemble the source text.

On the other hand, the translation of John 1:16 reveals different translation approaches in two version. The expressions below bring out this difference.

¹⁹ With the exception of Yoruba interlinear translation, the Greek word-for-word translation and transliteration in this section are adapted from Barbara and Kurt Aland, eds. *Interlinear Transliterated Bible. New Testament: Nestle-Aland Greek-English New Testament. Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th Revised Edition): Biblosft @ P C Study Bible 5, 2007.

h(meí=\$	pa/nte\$	e)la/bomen	kai\	xa/rin	a)nti\	xa/rito\$:
we	all	have received,	and	grace	for	grace.
heemeís	pántes	elábomen	kaí	chárin	antí	cháritos

awa gbogbo gba ati oore-ofe fun oore-ofe

It is relevant that both translations have to restructure the syntactic arrangement in the target language in order for the expressions to conform with the structural norms of English and Yoruba as well as making sense to the readership. Aside this, the translations into English (NIV) and Yoruba (BYA) show that where NIV uses ‘**one blessing after another**’; BYA uses ‘**oore-ofe kun oore-ofe**’ (**grace upon grace**). There is dissimilarity in the translation to English (NIV) and Yoruba (BYA) from Greek. While the Yoruba is literal, the English translation is between free and dynamic translation. This means that the Yoruba expression is directly translated from Greek source while the English employs a transformative approach to ensure its relevance in the target context.

Epistle to Ephesians 2: 8-10

The underneath verses are purposefully selected from Pauline epistles. Mainly in the Epistle to the Ephesians chapter 2, verse 8 to 10; and in the Epistle to Titus chapter 2 verse 11-14. Their Greek presentations as well as English and Yoruba translations are as follows:

Greek-BGT: Ephesians 2:8. Τῇ γὰρ χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι διὰ πίστεως· καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν, θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον·

English-NIV: Ephesians 2:8. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—

Yoruba-BYA: Efesu 2:8 Nitori oore-ofe ni a fi gba yin la nipa igbagbo ; ati eyiyi ki i se ti eyin tikarayin : ebun olorun ni;

Greek-BGT: Ephesians 2:9 οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων, ἵνα μή τις καυχῆσται.

English-NIV: Ephesians 2:9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

Yoruba-BYA: Efesu 2:9 Ki se nipa ise, ki eniken ma ba sogo

Greek GBT: Ephesians 2:10 αὐτοῦ γάρ ἐσμεν ποίημα, κτισθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς οἷς προητοίμασεν ὁ θεός, ἵνα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν.

English-NIV: Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Yoruba-BYA: Efesu 2:10 Nitori awa ni ise owo re ti ati da ninu Kristi Jesu fun ise rere, ti Olorun ti pese tele, ki awa le ma rin ninu won.

Comments/Observations

There is congruence in the translation of the underneath clause to both English (NIV) and Yoruba (BYA) from Greek.

Th=	ga	xa/rit	e)st	sesw sme/	dia\	pi/stew
	\r	i/	e	noi		\$:
by	Fo	grac	are	ye saved	throu	faith;
Teé	r	e	este	sesoosménoui	gh	
	gár	chárit			diá	písteoos
		í				

Nipa nitori oore-ofe a fi yin gbala nipa igbagbo

It is obvious that the **Th ga\r xa/riti/ e)ste sesw|sme/noi dia\ pi/stew\$:** underwent structural negotiation in the two target languages. This makes the expressions understandably relevant to the target audience. However, both translations show that they are direct translations from Greek.

Epistle to Titus 2:11-14

Greek-BGT : Titus 2:11 Ἐπεφάνη γὰρ ἡ χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ σωτήριος πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις

English-NIV: Titus 2:11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.

Yoruba-BYA: Titus 2 :11 Nitori oore-ofe Olorun ti farahan fun igbala gbogbo eniyan

Greek-BGT: Titus 2:12 παιδεύουσα ἡμᾶς, ἵνα ἀρνησάμενοι τὴν ἀσέβειαν καὶ τὰς κοσμικὰς ἐπιθυμίας σωφρόνως καὶ δικαίως καὶ εὐσεβῶς ζήσωμεν ἐν τῷ νῦν αἰῶνι,

English-NIV: Titus 2:12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,

Yoruba-BYA: Titus 2 :12 O nko wa pe, ki a se aiwa-bi-olorun ati ifekufe aye, ki a si ma wa ni airekoja, ni ododo, ati ni iwa-bi-Olorun ni aye isinsinyii;

Greek-BGT: Titus 2:13 προσδεχόμενοι τὴν μακαρίαν ἐλπίδα καὶ ἐπιφάνειαν τῆς δόξης τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,

English-NIV: Titus 2:13 while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

Yoruba-BYA: Titus 2: 13: Ki a ma wo ona fun ireti ti o ni ibukun ati ifarahan ogo Olorun wa ti o tobi ati ti Olugbala wa Jesu Kristi

Greek-BGT: Titus 2:14 ὃς ἔδωκεν ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, ἵνα λυτρώσῃται ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἀνομίας καὶ καθάρσῃ ἑαυτῷ λαὸν περιούσιον, ζηλωτὴν καλῶν ἔργων.

English-NIV: Titus 2:14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Yoruba-BYA: Titus 2 :14: Eni ti o fi ara re fun wa. Lati ra wa pada kuro ninu ese gbogbo, ati ki o si le we awon eniyan kan mo fun ara re, fun ini oun tikalara re awon onitara si ise rere

Comments/observations

There are apparent divergences in the translation from Greek to both English (NIV) and Yoruba (BYA). This is as a result of the differences in both Greek and English and Yoruba syntactic norms.

Epefa/nh	g	h	xa/r	to	qeou	swth/rio\$	pa=si	a)nqrw/poi\$
hath appeared	a	(	i\$	u	=	that	n	men,
Epefānee	\r	t	gra	=	God	bringeth	to all	anthrópois
	F	h	ce	of	Theo	salvation	pásin	
	o	e	chár	to	ú	sooteérios		
	r	h	is	ú				
	g	e						
	á	e						
	r							

While it is possible for the verbal representation of (Epefa/nh (hath appeared) to start the clause at the subject position meaningfully in English, it is uncommon in Yoruba unless in cases like imperative mood. Hence, the whole expression would have to be rearranged in conformity to target language structural norms. However, the lexical translation reveals its literalness in the two target contexts. Therefore, *for the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men* is translated into Yoruba as *Nitori oore-ofe Olorun ti farahan fun igbala gbogbo eniyan* (Titus 2:11). Both transformations from English (NIV) and Yoruba (BYA) show that they are direct translations.

FINDINGS

It is observed that there are some similarities and differences in the translation from Greek in selected verses from NIV Bible and BYA respectively. Both *New International Version* and *Bibeli Yoruba Atoka* are concerned with more direct translation approach rather than indirect translation one. It is observed that their choices are targeted towards contextual relevance. Both versions appeared to be exclusively from the original source text. They both show greater reflections of similarities than dissimilarities because the analysis greatly revealed direct translation in both contexts.

Three of the four verses of the selected pericopes that reflect charis (grace) in the original Greek texts in the gospel and epistles are similar in the translation approach. There is congruence in the translation of John 1:14; Eph. 2:8; and Titus 2:11. There is a dissimilarity in John 1:16 where NIV adopted specific elements of an indirect approach with a view to achieving a contextual relevance which seems not to be necessary as the BYA avowed and the Greek expression **ca,rin avnti. ca,ritoj** (charin anti charitos), translated into English-NIV as: *one blessing after another* is translated into Yoruba-BM as: **oore-ofe kun oore ofe.**

Exegetically, in **ca,rin avnti. ca,ritoj** (charin anti charitos), there is **ca,rin** (charin) which is a noun accusative feminine singular common from **ca,rij** meaning graciousness, attractiveness, favour, grace, gracious care or help and goodwill. In this context, it therefore means productive grace. On the other hand, **avnti** (anti) is a preposition genitive from **avnti**, which suggests “instead of”, “in place of”, “for”, “as”, after or upon. Inferring from this context, after or upon is more appropriate. In the same vein, **ca,ritoj** (charitos) is a noun genitive feminine singular common from **ca,rij** meaning graciousness, attractiveness, favour, grace, gracious care or help, goodwill. Thus, it connotes (productive) grace in this context.

Hence, **ca,rin avnti. ca,ritoj** (charin anti charitos) means grace upon grace or grace after grace. While NIV presents the rendition as *one blessing after another*, the BM translates it as *oore-ofe kun oore ofe*, which literally it implies **grace (heaps) upon grace**. The Yoruba translation suggests an unending production of grace. This makes the Yoruba-BM translation closer to the original Greek text than NIV. The NIV might technically adopt *blessing after/upon blessings* to bring to fore the feminine productive nature of **ca,rin** and **ca,ritoj** (charin anti charitos)

This suggests that BYA is relevantly closer to the source text than NIV. Also, Yoruba Translation is a translation from the source text (Greek). It is assumed that, NIV might technically translate **euvpro,sdektōj** (euprósdektos) to mean favour based on inferential meaning that ‘one could only be accepted when he/she is favoured. Yoruba BYA proved to be translated using literal translation approach; since, it attempts to reflect the exact words in the target language as close to the original language as possible. It keeps interpretations at minimum leaving it up to the reader to interpret any passages that may be ambiguous. Where the original is ambiguous, he attempts to reflect the ambiguity. Also, where the passage presents a difficult

interpretation, the translator presents the same thing. Since free translation closely represents an already exegesised text in form of translation, the literal translation retains the complexity and ambiguity of the Bible original text without substituting figurative expressions and cultural nuances in the target text. Hence, exegetical choices are embedded in the literal translation unlike translations like Message Bible and Good News where exegetical judgments are already being made.²⁰

New International Version uses ‘dynamic-equivalent’ approach for its translation. Dynamic equivalent translation focuses on equivalent effects by reflecting the source text intention. This means that the target audience experience the same effect as source audience. This explains the transference of the thought into the target language rather than transcoding (just the words). In other words, the translator attempts to reflect the meaning of the passage by not given priority to actual wordings or word order. Unlike the literal translation which is geared towards word-for-word, free translation is thought-for-thought translation and reader-centered translation. It basically attempts to translate the meaning with little or no regard for lexical or grammatical representation. It aims at simplifying linguistic ambiguities and complexities.

It is essential for the translator to have an overview of the structure of the Gospel of John, and its literary characteristics, before he begins translation. But even prior to these considerations, the translator should be conscious of the fact that he is translating a Gospel and not simply a biography of Jesus of Nazareth. This is because the events of the life of Jesus are important in the translation of the Synoptic Gospels and no less important in the translation of the Gospel of John. However, for the writer of this Gospel, there is an inseparable relation between event and interpretation and so he combines narrative and discourse in a way that may

²⁰Schneiders, *The Revelation Text*, 183 in Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, “The Function of Scripture in the Liberation Struggle: A Critical Feminist Hermeneutics and liberation Theology,” in *Bread, Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1984), 43-63.

seem odd to the modern reader. For John, it is the Spirit that gives life and the mere presentation of the deeds of Jesus without the significance given to them by the Spirit would be regarded as meaningless.²¹ It is, therefore, important for both the Gospel translator and the interpreter to be conscious of the intention of the Spirit of God in translation. This is because it is the fulfilment of the gospel's intention that represents its relevancy.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study has investigated the translation of *charis* from the original Greek language into English and Yoruba languages respectively. It has observed and explored a comparative analysis of the translation and an exegetical examination of the selected verses from the original New Testament as well as the English and Yoruba versions of each of the selected books of the New Testament: John (Gospel of St John) and epistles to Ephesians and Titus. It is inferred that grace equals sacrifice, productivity, service and humility. Based on the findings, the work has recommended that Bible interpreters as well as Christian ministers should take advantage of the import of *Charis* to interpret the Word of God for the benefits of social values among their listeners; Bible interpreters should emphasise grace as imperative for good works in Christian congregational teachings and meetings for the promotion of global peace and enhancement of effective socio-religious relationships.

This study has concluded that, both translations of *Charis* into English and Yoruba versions proved to have areas of convergences and divergences. The similarities are mostly on direct lexical equivalence, while the differences are as a result of different approaches that are employed by the translators. For instance, in John 1:16, translations from English (NIV) and Yoruba (BYA) show this discrepancy: BYA uses '**oore-ofe kun oore-ofe**' (**grace upon grace**)

²¹ "Introduction to John" *UBS New Testament Handbook Series*, (United Bible Societies, 1961-1997).

while NIV uses ‘**one blessing after another**’ This difference is traceable to the literal approach employed by BYA and dynamic approach used by the NIV respectively. The understanding of certain biblical expressions such as grace is germane to the goodness of humankind. Bible interpreters as well as Christian ministers are enjoined to take advantage of the knowledge of *Charis* to interpret the Word of God to the benefits of their listeners in all circumstances. This should be done through a paradigm shift from subtle manipulation of grace as a form of theoretical and philosophical liberalism, materialism, and individualism to the understanding of grace as a medium of redemption, reformation and eschatological realities which only can activate and sustain an unending stream of God’s blessings in our contemporary world.

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