

From Words to Action: Translation as a Catalyst to Sustainable Health Development

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Abstract

This study investigates how translation functions not merely as a linguistic exercise but as a transformative tool that facilitates knowledge transfer, cultural inclusion, and equitable access to information. It argues that translation practices can support global initiatives related to climate action, artificial intelligence, social justice, education, and public health (the focus of this study). Through the lenses of the functionalist approach, the research has analysed qualitative, quantitative and mixed data collected from participants and documentary sources involving multilingual dissemination of malaria public health campaigns in Togolese context with reference to French, Ewe and Kabiye. The overall results show that 93.1% agreed on the usefulness of translation in malaria vaccination communication. These results indicate that translation is a facilitating mechanism in multilingual public health communication. It has also found that translation is a powerful transformative tool with regard to public health decisions. Definitely, this study favours a strategic rethinking of translation as a dynamic force that can successfully bridge global-local knowledge and empower communities through inclusive communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is not merely a medium of communication (Ogbemi & Akpoveta, 2008); it is a decisive instrument in shaping thought, facilitating participation, and enabling social transformation (Lewis & Royles, 2018; Skutnabb-Kangas et al., 2016). Alejandro (2024, p. 356) states that “language is a communication tool that plays an important role in social life as a representation of minds and individual and group identity.” Within the framework of the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda, sustainable development is conceptualized as a multidimensional project that integrates environmental protection, public health, social equity, and economic growth. While policy frameworks, scientific research, and technological innovations are central to this project, the communicative mechanisms through which such knowledge and commitments are disseminated remain underexplored.

Translation, as both a linguistic and cultural mediation (Bernal & Grossi, 2022), emerges as a pivotal yet often invisible driver in this process. From the negotiation of international agreements (Iragorri, 2003) to the localization of technical guidelines, translation transforms sustainability discourse into actionable knowledge for diverse audiences. It bridges linguistic

know-hows, ensures inclusivity, and facilitates the circulation of ideas across geopolitical, cultural, and disciplinary boundaries (House, 2015; Pym, 2010). In multilingual contexts, translation enables the integration of local knowledge systems into global debates while ensuring that global sustainability principles are meaningfully adapted to local realities.

This study examines translation not simply as a technical activity but as a form of social action that can catalyze change. Drawing on participants and documentary sources involving multilingual dissemination of malaria public health campaigns in Togolese context with reference to French, Ewe and Kabiye, the study looks at translation in its functions as an enabling instrument for health sustainability. The discussion highlights both the opportunities and the challenges inherent in leveraging translation to move from foreign language policy rhetoric to tangible local outcomes, thereby positioning translation as a driver, not merely a facilitator, of sustainable health development.

1.1. Brief Overview of French, Kabiye and Ewe in Togo

French belongs to the Romance branch of the Indo-European language family. According to Gordon (2005), its speakers are estimated about 274 million all over the world especially in Europe, Africa, America and the Middle East. The presence of French in Togo dates back to many centuries now. After independences, it continued to play the most important role in Togo in comparison to the 44 Togolese local languages (Takassi 1983, p. 31). Consequently, French enjoys a higher status than any other indigenous and foreign languages in the diglossic language situation in Togo (Essizewa, 2012); its knowledge has become a requirement for any social integration. It is used predominantly in formal contexts such as government administration, legislation, education, business transactions, religion, most advertisements, political manifestos and other important documents (Essizewa, 2012, p. 36).

On the other hand, Kabiye is a Gur language within Niger-Congo language family spoken mainly in the northern part of Togo (Bendor-Samuel 1996). It belongs to the Eastern branch of the Grusi (Gurunsi) sub-group. According to Kassan (1996), Kabiye speakers are the second largest ethnic group in Togo after the Ewe. Quoting Roberts (2002), Essizewa (2007) reported that Kabiye language is spoken by more than 800,000 people in Togo. Today, Kabiye is spoken not only in Togo but also in Ghana and in Benin. Linguistically, Kabiye is a noun class language that displays an SVO word order “where the auxiliary comes between the subject and the verb, as in [S Aux V O]. The language has two tones, a high tone (marked by an acute accent), and a low tone (unmarked)” (Collins & Essizewa 2006, p. 192). Nouns and adjectives are morphologically marked according to the class to which they belong. Consequently, plural marking system in Kabiye follows noun class agreement. For adjectives, they are always suffixed according to the class of the noun they modify.

Ewe is a Kwa language spoken as a first language in the southern part of Togo. According to Gbedevi et al. (2021, p. 484), “In Togo Ewe is spoken by 2 million people as a language of communication in Togo. It is the predominant language in the south of the country [...]. It is used as a lingua franca by speakers of different languages.” Ewe displays a Subject – Verb – Object (S-V-O) word order. Ewe tense is not morphologically marked on verbs like in Kabiye. According to Duthie (1996, p. 40) “the verbal phrase is unmarked for tense and aspect.” Ewe does not have any noun class agreement but it displays tonal system with high, mid and low tones. Plurality in Ewe is marked on nouns or on modifying adjectives. As a matter of fact, in Ewe, plurality is marked on the final element of the noun phrase (NP). Ewe and Kabiye have been chosen for the purpose of this study because of their status as national languages that are

used as subjects in the educational system (*Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale*¹, 1975). Though Ewe and Kabiye display tonal system, the transcribed data for this study does not include tones because the standardized use of the two languages does not usually take them into account.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Translation is a multifaceted activity that has been theorized from linguistic, cultural, political, and ethical perspectives (Haghighi & Hemmati, 2018; House, 2015). Historically, it was conceptualized as a technical operation (Molina & Albir, 2002) that deals primarily with the transfer of meaning across languages (Catford, 1965/1978). Over time, however, scholars have shown that translation is also transformative: it reshapes identities, mediates between cultures, and influences power relations (Katan, 1999; Neubert, 1989). This literature review examines how translation has been understood both as a linguistic exercise and as a transformative tool.

2.1. Literature Review on Translation as a Linguistic activity

The linguistic dimension of translation dominated early scholarship, with a strong focus on equivalence, grammar, and semantics. Catford (1965) offered one of the earliest systematic approaches, defining translation as “the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)” (p. 20). Similarly, Nida’s (1964) formal and dynamic equivalence models emphasized the need to preserve meaning while adapting to the target audience’s cultural and linguistic background. In line with various considerations in the field of translation, Nida (1964, p. 42) argues that “in many instances grammatical forms combine both linguistic and extralinguistic elements of meaning, as in such categories as number, mode, person, size, and shape, while grammatical case (e.g. nominative, accusative, dative, etc.) involves primarily the linguistic relationships between symbols.”

Vinay and Darbelnet’s (1958/1995) comparative stylistics further systematized translation procedures – borrowing, calque, modulation, and transposition – positioning translation as a structured linguistic operation. According to Vinay and Darbelnet (1995, p. 4) “it is a vast, but nevertheless structured task, depending on constants already drawn up separately by linguists for each language which now confront each other during the process of translation.” They established a methodological framework so to analyse translation as a systematic linguistic process. On another standpoint, Baker’s (2018) pedagogical framework reinforced this view by presenting translation as a problem-solving exercise that demands precision at word, sentence, and discourse levels. The study reveals that decisions taken at the level of the word or grammatical category during the course of translation are influenced by the perceived function and purpose of both the original text and the translation and have implications for the discourse as a whole.

Although these models remain foundational in translator training, critics argue that they reduce translation to a mechanistic process of linguistic substitution. Lefevere (1992) argue that translation cannot be reduced to linguistic substitution since it is also embedded in power relations and cultural negotiations. Bassnett (2002) observes that such views neglect cultural, ideological, and historical contexts, thereby underestimating the translator’s agency. Illustratively, Bassnett (2002, p. 23) believes that “in the same way that the surgeon, operating

¹ Ministry of National Education

on the heart, cannot neglect the body that surrounds it, so the translator treats the text in isolation from the culture at his peril.” Nonetheless, linguistic competence remains indispensable, particularly in professional contexts where fidelity and clarity are paramount (Munday, 2016). Venuti (1995) critiques the linguistic paradigm for reinforcing the invisibility of the translator and failing to account for the ideological effects of domestication. Consequently, Venuti (1995, p. 203) posits that “translation, then, always involves a process of domestication, an exchange of source-language intelligibilities for target-language ones. But domestication need not mean assimilation, i.e., a conservative reduction of the foreign text to dominant domestic values.”

Hallidayan systemic functional linguistics also influenced translation studies by linking grammar to meaning-making (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). In the same line, Hatim and Mason (1990) emphasized discourse and pragmatics, showing how choices at the linguistic level shape interpretation and coherence in translation. They highlighted the importance of pragmatic equivalence, showing how implicature, politeness strategies, and speech acts affect translation choices. According to them, “identifying the register membership of a text is an essential part of discourse processing; it involves the reader in a reconstruction of context through an analysis of what has taken place (field), who has participated (tenor, and what medium has been selected for relaying the message (mode)” (Hatim & Mason 1990, p. 55). Moreover, pragmatics introduced further nuance to the understanding of translation as a linguistic activity. Similarly, Gutt’s (1991) relevance theory reframed translation as an act of communication, where success depends on balancing explicit and implicit meanings in line with the target audience’s cognitive environment.

Translation as a linguistic activity remains indispensable for understanding how meaning is transferred and negotiated between languages. However, the ever-increasing needs of human beings urge translation field to move toward more interdisciplinary approaches and decision-making actions. Consequently, the literature admits that translation cannot be viewed only as a pure theoretical linguistic activity but a generalizable activity that encompasses equivalence, stylistics, discourse, and pragmatics.

2.2. Review of the Literature on Translation as a Transformative Tool

As translation studies evolved, scholars expanded beyond linguistic formalism to emphasize its transformative power. Postcolonial critics such as Niranjana (1992) argue that translation has historically served as a tool of domination, enabling colonial narratives to overwrite indigenous voices. According to the scholar, “Translation is thus deployed in different kinds of discourses – philosophy, historiography, education, missionary writings, travel-writing – to renew and perpetuate colonial domination” (Niranjana 1992, p. 3). Conversely, it can also function as an act of resistance, giving visibility to marginalized voices (Piller & Zhang, 2007). From this perspective, Folaron (2015, 18) has come to the conclusion that “translation can give global visibility and voice to texts written in restricted, local contexts, and in so doing allow both knowledge to circulate and the values of diverse cultures to engage substantively with more hegemonic ones.”

In Western contexts, Venuti (1995) critiques domesticating translation practices that privilege fluency and invisibility, arguing instead for “foreignization” to preserve cultural difference. Venuti believes that controversy have taken place in translation and translators need to

reconstruct their publications in order to face tangible issues observed in the domain. In the same line, feminist translators like Godard (1990) and Simon (1996) further brought translation into activist field considering it as interventionist practice that faces patriarchal structures by making women's voices and gendered language visible. Indeed, while Simon (1996, p. 8) remarks that "they can use language as cultural intervention, as part of an effort to alter expressions of domination, whether at the level of concepts, of syntax or of terminology," Godard (1990, p. 50) affirms that "Taking her place would be an active participant in the creation of meaning, who advances a conditional analysis."

In applied fields, M. Cronin (2006) connects translation to globalization and sustainability. Indeed, M. Cronin (2006, p. 35) states that "historical involvement with debates around recognition, identification, transfer and transformation that makes translation theory as a body of thought particularly able to take on issues which are vital to the construction of a politics of recognition and reciprocity." Cronin shows that translation enables knowledge transfer in environmental and social development contexts. This positions translation not merely as a tool of communication but as a vehicle for societal transformation. According to the same scholar, "the point here is not to promote a purely instrumentalist view of translation and language or to promote a naive form of technological determinism but to see current developments in the context of a long translatorial involvement with technologies external to the human body" (M. Cronin 2006, pp. 28-29) because "we can see the relationship between translators and new technology in the informational society less as a schismatic break with a venerable craft tradition than as a further stage in the development of an exosomatic dimension to human engagement with translation" (M. Cronin 2006, p. 29). Accordingly, changes in technology and in the organization of economies and societies at national and international level has affected translation and translators. Cronin sees translation as a powerful tool that can impact both the translator and the readers of the translated texts.

Though translation is firstly used as a linguistic exercise, M. Tymoczko (2007) finds that the dichotomy between translation as a linguistic exercise and as a transformative tool is more complementary than oppositional because translation displays an excellent transformative role. In this regard, Tymoczko (2007, p. 242) admits that "how such cultural practices are represented is a significant aspect of the ideological and pragmatic positioning of a translated text and hence an important aspect to be determined in any strategy of cultural translation." This scholar elucidates consequently that every translation involves both technical skill and ideological positioning. Tymoczko believes therefore that even the most linguistically accurate translation reflects choices shaped by culture, power, and ethics. Since culture must be lived, power must be used and ethics must be observed, the study on translation as a driver to sustainable health development appears as a call to translation users to be active.

Technological advancements further complicate this dual role. Machine translation foregrounds the linguistic, privileging speed and accuracy, yet risks flattening cultural nuance (Pym, 2010). Human translators, by contrast, balance the technical with the transformative, negotiating meanings across contexts in ways that machines cannot replicate. Pym concludes that translation paradigm

introduces a human dimension and sees translation from the perspective of the (figurative) translator; it concerns translation as a cultural process rather than a textual product; its focus on hybridity undoes many of the binary oppositions

marking previous translation theory; it relates translation to the demographical movements that are changing the shape of our cultures; it can generally operate within all the critiques ensuing from the uncertainty paradigm (Pym 2010, p. 154)

Finally, Pym believes that if something new has entered the domain of translation, it is probably from the migrations and changes in communication patterns. Indeed, the social and cultural norms that used to set up equivalence theory are no longer there. Consequently, translation might thus offer ways of thinking about the many situations in which translation now operates in the world going from words to concrete actions.

2.3. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The present study is guided by a set of research questions designed to explore how translation operates as a transformative force within the field of public health in Togo. It seeks to understand the extent to which translation contributes to the localization and implementation of the public health campaign in Togolese contexts. The main research question for this study is: “How does translation function as a catalyst for contextualizing and communicating public health campaign across cultures in Togo?” The secondary questions are “What linguistic and cultural challenges emerge when public health concepts are rendered into Togolese local languages” and “How can translation practices promote inclusivity and community participation in sustainable development initiatives.” Together, these questions aim to illuminate the very important, yet often ignored, role of translation in bridging the gap between public health campaign rhetoric and local action, thereby moving from words to concrete, context-sensitive practices.

From these research questions arise some hypotheses. Firstly, I hypothesize that translation serves as a crucial mediator between modern health knowledge discourse and local realities, functioning as a catalyst for meaningful social, cultural, and ideological transformation. Secondly, the study hypothesizes that the process of translating public health campaign messages into Togolese indigenous and local languages is both a challenge and an opportunity because it reveals semantic gaps that require creative adaptation and intercultural negotiation. In addition, it is hypothesized that including public health notions into translation and media communication education strengthens media professionals’ and translators’ capacity to act as agents of change. Collectively, these hypotheses underscore the central claim that translation, far from being a passive linguistic activity, is an active tool for advancing public health development in multilingual and multicultural contexts.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This research has been undertaken from data collection and analysis process. The collected data was analysed through the lenses of the functionalist approach.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

This study used the Functionalist Approach to analyse the data on translation of public health messages. The Functionalist approach was firstly developed in the late 1970s and 1980s in Germany by scholars such as Vermeer (1978), Reiß (1971), and Nord (1997). This approach represents a paradigm shift from the traditional source-text-oriented view of translation to a target-oriented and purpose-driven one. The functionalist approach school of thought is grounded in the belief that translation is an intentional and communicative act that is designed to fulfil a specific function (*Skopos*) in a given sociocultural context.

Skopos theory sees the purpose (*Skopos*) of the overall translational action as the prime principle determining every translation process (Nord 1997, p. 26). According to Reiß and Vermeer (2013, p. 90), the *Skopos* theory claims that “the end justifies the means.” These scholars agree that translation strategies and choices should be determined by the intended purpose and target audience of the translation, not by strict linguistic equivalence. In this sense, translation becomes a situational and pragmatic activity, aligning with the goals of the communicative situation. According to the functionalist approach, every translation must be guided by its intended purpose (*skopos*) in the target culture. The Functionalist perspective aligns strongly with this study because it emphasizes local goal-oriented communication and contextual adaptation.

3.2. Methodology

The study adopted a multi-method data collection strategy to capture both the linguistic and extra-linguistic dimensions of translation as a driver for sustainable health development. The first set of data consisted of translated and source documents used in public health campaign on malaria inoculation in Togo. In September 2025, the Togolese government has introduced its first inoculation against malaria. Indeed, in order to inform the population about the newly public health issues and facilitate people acceptance for children’s vaccination, the government has designed a spot in French that is translated into many local languages such as Ewe, Kabiye, Tem, Ikposso, Moba, Haoussa, Adja, Tamberma linguistically known as Ditamari and Ana linguistically known as Ifè. For the purpose of this study, the source spot in French and two translated spots were used. The two other spots concerned Ewe and Kabiye, the two national languages that the researcher masters very well. The total three oral spots were transcribed in written form for further linguistic and extra-linguistic analysis.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with key stakeholders including 3 translators, 2 healthcare professionals, 4 media communicators, and 10 parents. The purpose of these interviews was to uncover, on the one hand, the decision-making processes, constraints, and intentions that shape translation practices and, on the other hand, the decisions made by parents or guardians so as to let their children being inoculated the vaccine. Questions focused on translations techniques and perceptions of translation effectiveness. To complement qualitative findings, a structured survey was administered to 15 participants exposed to translated spots. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended items assessing comprehension, trust in information, perceived usefulness, and self-reported behavioural change.

4. RESULTS

Before dealing with the analysis of the data, it is important to recall that public health communication in Togolese multilingual contexts depends heavily on effective translation. Indeed, French, the official language, is always used to produce awareness raising messages on health issues such as malaria disease in the present study. These messages can later on be translated into Togolese local languages to reach rural and less-educated populations. The analysis of qualitative, quantitative and interview data was carried out with regard to translation as a mediator of knowledge public health on the one hand and a transformation tool on the other.

4.1. Translation as a Mediator of Knowledge

The analysis of the message in French on malaria that was translated into Ewe and Kabiye, the two Togolese national languages, shows firstly that translation serves as a bridging gap

between the modern medicine discourse and the traditional knowledge of local communities. The following items are illustrative. A special emphasis is put on italicized words or expressions because they constitute the key elements for the analysis.

Item 1

French : *Le paludisme* est une maladie causée par la piqûre des moustiques.

English: *Malaria* is a disease caused by mosquito bites.

Ewe : *Atiketsi* dɔ enye dɔlele si tso na mu ɔu ame gbɔ.

Kabiye : *Pɔtɔ kɔdɔŋ* we mbu yɔ, pɔɔɔ tɛ ñasuu ha ne eyu kɔdɔŋ ŋɔ.

Item 2

French : Le ministère chargé de la santé a introduit dans la *vaccination* de routine le vaccin contre le paludisme.

English: The Ministry of Health has introduced the malaria vaccine into the routine *vaccination* program.

Ewe: Duda nu na fe sikpa lamesenyawo gbɔ tso atiketsi fe *abɔta sisi* fe abɔta sisiwo me si wozāna edziedzi me.

Kabiye : Minisi weyi ɛɔŋna tɔnu daa alafia yɔɔ yɔ, ɛ sɔsa pɔtɔ kɔdɔŋ tɛ *ɔatɔ* ke ɔatɔ ŋɔ pa tu laki naboyu naboyu yɔ tu yɔɔ

In item 1, the French medical concept *paludisme* ‘malaria’ has been translated into Kabiye by *pɔtɔ kɔdɔŋ* and into Ewe by *atiketsi*. In the same line, in item 2, the French concept *vaccination* ‘vaccination or inoculation’ has been translated into Kabiye by *ɔatɔ* and into Ewe by *abɔta sisi*. In the first item, the Kabiye name for malaria is a lexical creation. Indeed, *pɔtɔ kɔdɔŋ* ‘malaria’ is made up of *pɔtɔ* ‘mosquitoes’ and *kɔdɔŋ* ‘illness.’ Literally, *pɔtɔ kɔdɔŋ* can be translated as an illness caused by mosquitoes. This lexical creation calls for the reflexion on the existence of malaria disease among traditional Kabiye speakers. In Kabiye traditional community, when someone has fever that is often accompanied by chills and sweating, headaches, muscle and joint pain, fatigue, and general weakness, that individual suffers from *wisi kɔdɔŋ*. The Kabiye expression *wisi kɔdɔŋ* is made up of two elements *wisi* ‘sun’ and *kɔdɔŋ* ‘illness.’ In severe cases, malaria can lead to anemia, jaundice, confusion, seizures, or difficulty breathing. These severe cases are called in Kabiye *sinau* ‘icterus’ or ‘jaundice.’ From the traditional name, Kabiye knowledge related malaria to an illness caused by the sun. Though it can be inferred according to Kabiye culture that the more one is exposed to sun, the more probable the person can catch *wisi kɔdɔŋ* ‘malaria,’ the use of ‘sun’ in relation to health issues shows that Kabiye culture gives a place to natural and supernatural forces.

In the same line, *paludisme* ‘malaria’ has been translated into Ewe by *atiketsi*. Like in Kabiye, the Ewe translated concept is made up of two free morphemes *atike* ‘medicinal or traditional product used to heal or protect’ and *tsi* ‘water.’ However, in traditional Ewe community, an illness manifested by fever, moderate to severe shaking, profuse sweating, headache, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, and anaemia was called *asrāɔ*. Semantically, the traditional Ewe term for malaria is more related to diarrhoea.

Today, *pɔtɔ kɔdɔŋ* in Kabiye and *atiketsi* in Ewe are used to refer to fever associated with the mosquito’s bite. The analysis of Kabiye and Ewe terms reveals that the speakers of these languages did not have any specific expression for an illness caused by mosquito bites. Consequently, communicators, translators and medical practitioners agreed to use local resources to coin new word and expression that can help bridge the lexical gap between modern medicine and traditional knowledge. This study considers this lexical creation as an ‘event-

based neologism' that appeared with the advent of the modern medicine among the Kabiye and Ewe communities. In multilingual and multicultural contexts such as Togo, translation serves as a bridge between two distinct epistemological worlds: the modern medicine discourse that is grounded in scientific rationality and the existential and cultural knowledge of local communities, which is rooted in observation, oral traditions, and collective belief systems. In the same line, Yoda (2007, p. 91) reports that "les représentations dans les TS sont celles de la médecine occidentale qui sont essentiellement scientifiques et biologiques. Alors que dans la culture mossi et de manière générale dans la culture africaine, les représentations de la santé, de la maladie et du corps accordent une place importante aux forces surnaturelles, malgré la présence de la médecine moderne occidentale²." These two forms of knowledge often conceptualize illness, causation, and treatment differently. Translation mediates between them by creating a shared communicative and cultural space. Here, the translation mediates between scientific terminology and local understanding. Medical communicators (translators, interpreters, journalists, medical practitioners) thus bridge biomedical specificity and local taxonomy. As Venuti (1995, p. 22) puts, "accuracy in translation depends on generating an equivalent effect in the target-language culture." The effect generated by translation can therefore be referred to as the *skopos* 'purpose' that has to persuade the local grassroots to make a decision.

On the other hand, because Ewe and Kabiye lack direct equivalents for technical modern medicine terms, translators, medical communicators rely heavily on borrowing, cultural adaptation and amplification.

Item 3

French : Pour renforcer la *lutte* contre le paludisme.

English: To strengthen the *fight* against malaria.

Ewe: ʒe ne woa *tsitre* atiketsi dɔlele ɲuti.

Kabiye: pɪsaa ne papɪsɪ pa *kandɪyɪ* piya ajama ne pɔtɔ kɔdɔŋ ɛ taa kpasɪ lɛ.

Item 4

French : Ceci est un message du *ministère chargé de la santé* et de ses *partenaires*.

English: This is a message from the *Ministry of Health* and its *partners*.

Ewe: Esia nye gbedeasi tso *dudɔ nu fe* si kpɔ *lāmesɛnyawo* gbɔ xɔ kpekpe denu tso efe hadɔwɔlawo gbɔ.

Kabiye: Tɔm tone tɪlne *minisi* weyi ɛ cɔŋna *tɔnɔɔ daa alafia* yɔɔ yɔ ne ɛ nisi dɔyaa pɔ cɔlɔ.

In the above items, medical communicators used borrowing, cultural adaptation and amplification. Cultural adaptation is observed in item 3 where the French word *lutte* 'fight' is translated into Kabiye by *kandɪyɪ* and into Ewe by *tsitre*. Indeed, as presented above, bad health conditions and particularly epidemic situations in Kabiye traditional community were supposed to originate from supernatural forces. In order to fight that health issue, a ceremony was performed by putting a branch of a special tree across the path leading to the bush. The role of the branch across the path was to block the spirit of illness that was supposed to come from the bush. This ceremony protected the whole community against the disease. In Ewe, *tsitre* means 'to stand up.' Here too, traditional communities used to fight either against slave raiders, or territorial wars, or dynastic wars. In order to overcome, the Ewe soldier had to adopt an

²The representations in [source text] ST are those of Western medicine, which are mainly scientific and biological. Whereas in Mossi culture, and in African culture in general, representations of health, illness, and the body place great importance on supernatural forces, despite the presence of modern Western medicine (My own translation)

appropriate position so as to be alert. With the same regard, malaria as an enemy should be fought in an adequate way. The same technique is observed in Item 2 where ‘inoculation’ is translated into Kabiye by *datw*. The Kabiye term for inoculation means literally ‘scarification.’ In traditional Kabiye community, people were protecting themselves particularly against the biting of snakes by making scars on their hand and feet with a tooth of snake. A powder was then put in these scars to serve as a prevention measure against the poison of any snake. Analogically, needles and syringes that are used today for vaccination are seen as teeth of snakes that were used for scarification. All these examples show cultural adaptation in the translation of malaria messages into Togolese national languages. This translation technique is in line with Nida (2001) who states that biculturalism is more important than bilingualism because words only have meaning in terms of cultures in which they function. The scholar draws therefore the attention of translators and communicators on cultural adaptation in the process of translation (Lefevere, 1992; Bassnett, 2002). Consequently, source and target culture need a close look in order to meet the target readers’ need.

On the other hand, amplification, “the translation technique whereby a target language unit requires more words than the source language to express the same idea” (Vinay & Darbelnet 1995, p. 339), has been observed in the translated Kabiye and Ewe texts. Illustratively, the French word *santé* ‘health’ has been translated into Ewe by *lamesēnyawo* (literally: sound health matters) and into Kabiye by *tɔnɔw daa alafia* (literally: health in the body). The analysis of the Ewe and Kabiye translated forms of the item ‘health’ shows the use of the linguistic amplification technique. Unlike Kabiye that prefers organizing morphemes by isolating them in the construction of words and their occurrence in sentences, Ewe prefers agglutinating its morphemes. As a result, the morphological analysis of the Ewe word for health shows that it is made up of four morphemes *lame-sē-nya-wo* forming three words: *lame* ‘body,’ *sē* ‘good condition’ and *nya-wo* ‘matter/issue-plural marker.’ From the standing point that amplification refers to the use of more words to translate less, it can be concluded that the amplification technique is also used in the translation of medical concepts that do not have their direct equivalent in Togolese indigenous languages.

Borrowing as a technique of translation is considered according to Vinay & Darbelnet (1995, p.340) as “a word or expression borrowed directly from another language, in its form and meaning.” However, this study adopts Poplack (1993)’s definition of borrowing as an “*adaptation* of lexical material to the morphological and syntactic (and usually phonological) patterns of the recipient language” (p. 256). This technique has been observed in Item 4 where the French word *ministère* has been rendered into Kabiye by *minisi*. The analysis of the borrowed word shows that the source item has undergone a phonological change to align with Kabiye syllable structure. Only CV syllable structure is attested in Kabiye language. The borrowing of the concept *ministère* can be justified by the fact that in traditional Kabiye community, the governmental form of social organisation did not exist. All these translation techniques are used with the intention to help local language users change their mind about vaccination and take necessary measure for a sustainable health development.

4.2. Translation as a Transformation Tool

Translation of modern medicine texts especially malaria vaccination campaign into Togolese national languages plays a crucial transformative role. Its impact extends far beyond simple substitution in language and cultural knowledge; it redirects local population’s mind on

accepting modern medicine practices. The results of the survey complemented by the findings from the interviews are the interest of this section. The 15 respondents answered 10 questions on their personal information and on their attitude toward the translated malaria campaign message. Questions based on participants' personal information such as age, permanent residence, occupation, number and age of children, distance between their residence and a healthcare centre were not taken into account in the analysis. The analysis focussed mainly on respondents' opinion on malaria-translated messages into Togolese national languages, their decision from the understanding of this message, and their use of mosquito nets.

As far as respondents' opinion about the translation of French malaria message into Togolese local languages namely Ewe and Kabiye, the results of this question show that 93.1% of respondents agreed that translating malaria vaccination campaigns into the two national languages is beneficial to the grassroots. This result reflects a strong social endorsement of multilingual health communication. This overwhelmingly positive response suggests that translation is perceived not simply as a linguistic activity but as a vital tool for enhancing comprehension, trust, and community participation in public health initiatives. Indeed, high agreement among respondents indicates widespread recognition that language barriers significantly affect health campaign effectiveness (Kodua et al., 2025). Moreover, according to Afolabi et al. (2014, p. 625), "comprehension is one of the essential elements of a truly informed consent."

In multilingual contexts such as Togo, where French is the official language but where national languages such as Ewe and Kabiye are dominant in daily communication, health communication in a single official language often excludes large populations. The respondents' views confirm a central principle in health literacy scholarship: comprehension is a prerequisite for informed decision-making (Kodua et al., 2025). As Sørensen et al. (2012) note, health literacy involves individuals' ability to access, understand, and apply health information. For many Togolese citizens, especially those in rural areas, national languages are the primary medium through which they process complex information. Therefore, translation enhances not only comprehension but also the empowerment required for individuals to make informed health choices.

As far as the decision made, the results indicate that 73.3% of respondents let their children be vaccinated. This result shows a relatively positive attitude toward childhood immunization within the surveyed population. The rate of acceptance is encouraging for public health, as it suggests a high level of trust in vaccination programs and awareness of the importance of immunization in preventing malaria diseases. The high percentage of respondents who vaccinate their children points to a favourable health-seeking behaviour. Vaccination is widely recognized as one of the most effective and cost-efficient public health interventions (World Health Organization, 2020). The respondents' willingness to vaccinate their children reflects awareness of the protective benefits of immunization and likely indicates exposure to health education programs through public health campaigns carried out from translation into Togolese local languages.

Furthermore, this acceptance aligns with global and African region trends showing gradual improvement in vaccine uptake where awareness and access are ensured (Iwu-Jaja et al., 2023). The responses therefore suggest that vaccination is perceived as necessary for safeguarding children's health. The finding may also reflect successful health communication strategies in the community. Where vaccination messages are disseminated consistently, through community health workers, radio broadcasts, or school-based campaigns, parents are more

likely to understand the purpose of immunization and consent to it. In multilingual contexts such as Togo, communication in national languages (Ewe and Kabye) has been shown to improve comprehension and trust. This may partially explain why a large majority of respondents accept childhood vaccination.

Moreover, the decision to vaccinate children is often guided by social norms. When community leaders, teachers, or local health workers advocate immunization, parents are more inclined to follow these recommendations. This aligns with sociocultural models of health behaviour emphasizing the role of collective norms and culturally rooted beliefs in local languages (Nord, 1997).

However, there are good reasons why 26.7% of the respondents did not allow the vaccination of their children. These reasons were obtained from the interviews the researcher had with the informants. While some interviewees were fearing side effects, others do not trust anymore institutions. Indeed, some parents had bad experience with vaccination and have decided not vaccinate anymore their children. Many parents fear that vaccines cause illness, disability, or long-term health problems.

In addition to vaccination, parents were urged to use mosquito net. The following excerpt is the call for the use of mosquito nets and other valuable measures to prevent children from getting attacked by malaria.

Item 5

French : En dehors du vaccin contre le paludisme, continuons d'utiliser les autres moyens de prévention tels que l'utilisation continue des moustiquaires imprégnées d'insecticides et le maintien de la propriété autour de nos maisons.

English: In addition to the malaria vaccine, let's continue to use other preventive measures such as the regular use of insecticide-treated mosquito nets and the preservation of property around our homes.

Ewe: To vovo na atiketsi fe abɔta sisi sia, míayi edzi azã nusiwo mi ten tsɔna xena mɔ na atiketsi dɔlele sia abe mudɔ siwo wode atike fe mɔmlɔ kple miafe afewo fe dzadrafo.

Kabye: ɛɛ ɖi nu se paa pɔtɔ kɔdɔŋ tɛ ɖatɔ tɔnɛ tɔ wɛ kɔyɔ, ɖi taa sɔɔ ŋna ɖi tu kadɔyɔ ɖa yɔɔ yɔ nɛ pɔtɔ kɔdɔŋ yɔ nɛ ɖi hunɔ sɔbɔlay wena pa liy yɛ kɔyɛ yɔ a tɛɛ nɛ ɖi hasɔy ɖɛ tɛ hɔlɔŋ ŋɖi ŋɖi daa nɛ pɛ wɛ ɔɖɔ ɔɖɔ.

Initially, mosquito nets were one of the most important tools used to avoid mosquito biting before the recent introduction of mosquito vaccine. Through the public health campaign, the ministry was inviting the population to intensify the use of insecticide-treated mosquito nets. However, the result of the questionnaire shows that only 53.3% of the respondents use mosquito nets. These insecticide-treated mosquito nets are known to be among the most effective tools for malaria prevention.

The finding reveals substantial gaps in preventive behaviour within the surveyed population. This result has broad implications for public health strategy, malaria control initiatives, and the effectiveness of communication campaigns in Togo. The fact that nearly half of the respondents do not use mosquito nets suggests a critical failure in preventive practice. While mosquito nets have been widely promoted across sub-Saharan Africa and distributed through national programs, research consistently shows that possession does not guarantee usage (Diema et al., 2017). The 46.7% non-use rate indicates that barriers persist at behavioural, social, or logistical levels.

The earlier finding (93.1% agreement on translating malaria campaigns into Togolese national languages) suggests that communication gaps may contribute to the observed behaviour. If malaria-prevention messages are primarily delivered in French or through technical terminology, populations with limited formal schooling may not fully grasp the importance of consistent net use. Studies show that health messages in local languages enhance comprehension and adherence (Andrulis & Brach, 2007).

5. LIMITATIONS

Despite the study's contributions, some limitations need to be acknowledged. First, the relatively small sample size ($n = 15$) limits the statistical power and restricts the generalizability of the findings beyond the participants involved. While the sample allowed for in-depth qualitative insights, it does not support broad population-level inferences. Second, the localized case-study design, centered on a specific sociolinguistic and public health context may also constrain the transferability of the results to other countries, languages, or health systems with different institutional and cultural dynamics. Third, the exploratory nature of the research means that the findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than definitive; they serve primarily to generate hypotheses and inform future large-scale investigations. Finally, the study design does not permit the establishment of causal relationships between translation practices and measurable health outcomes. Although associations were observed between linguistically adapted communication and reported community engagement, causal claims would require longitudinal, experimental, or quasi-experimental approaches with controlled variables. Future research employing larger samples and mixed-method or experimental designs would be necessary to validate and extend the present findings.

6. CONCLUSION

Translation is more than a linguistic task; it is an important instrument to achieve public health development programs. The purpose of this study was to establish the relationship between translation of malaria vaccination message into Togolese national languages (Ewe and Kabiye) and the grassroots' willingness to adhere to the policy of vaccination introduced by the World Health Organisation through the local government. Through the lense of the Functionalist Approach, the study has analysed a multi-method data collected from the translated and source documents used in public health campaign on malaria immunization in Togo. The study has found that the translation into national languages serves as a bridging gap between modern medicine discourse and the traditional knowledge of Togolese local communities. It has also shown that the use of the different translation techniques was intended to help local language users change their mind about vaccination and take necessary measure for a sustainable health development. However, the data also revealed the complexity of behavioral outcomes. The 26.7% refusal rate of vaccination and the 46.7% non-use of mosquito nets demonstrate that comprehension alone does not automatically translate into uniform adherence. These figures indicate that translation functions alongside other powerful determinants, including pre-existing beliefs about illness, levels of institutional trust, accessibility of health services, socio-economic constraints, and community norms. Rather than weakening the argument, these findings reinforce the view that translation is embedded within a constellation of interacting factors that collectively shape health decisions. It can be concluded that translation of modern medicine texts especially malaria vaccination campaign into Togolese national languages has played a crucial transformative role; the impact has extended far beyond simple substitution in

language and cultural knowledge. It has redirected local population's mind on accepting modern medicine practices. The respondents' willingness to vaccinate their children reflects awareness of the protective benefits of immunization carried out by the translation into Togolese local languages.

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