

Oshiwambo Kinship Terms: A Challenge for Translators in Namibia

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores the challenges of translating Oshiwambo kinship terms into English, emphasizing their importance in intercultural communication and family relationships. Kinship terms in Oshiwambo convey cultural significance and are central to social interactions, but differences in their semantics from English create difficulties for translators, often resulting in communication gaps. To address these issues, the study utilises interviews with Oshiwambo students at the University of Namibia and is based on Vermeer's Skopos Theory, which emphasises considering the translation's purpose. Nida's dynamic equivalence complements this approach, advocating for translations that convey the same meaning and effect as the original. The findings show that traditionally, Aawambo rely on formal equivalence in translation. The paper recommends adopting Nida's dynamic equivalence aligned with Skopos Theory to produce more accurate and culturally appropriate translations of Oshiwambo kinship terms.

KEYWORDS: kinship, translation, Oshiwambo

1. INTRODUCTION

The Aawambo historical roots trace back to the Bantu migrations, which occurred hundreds of years ago, leading these groups to settle in Southern Africa, including the country that is now known as Namibia. The Aawambo people, one of Namibia's largest ethnic communities, predominantly occupy the northern part of the country, specifically in Omusati, Oshana, Oshana, Oshana, and Oshikoto regions (Shikesho, 2019; Uushona 2019). The Aawambo's language is generically referred to as Oshiwambo. Oshiwambo consists of fourteen mutually intelligible dialects, namely; Oshindonga, Oshikwanyama, Otshikwambi, Otshingandjera, Otshikwaluudhi, Otshikolonkadhi, Oshimbaanhu, Oshimbada, Otshiunda, Otshikwanghwanghwa, Oshindombodola, Oshikafima, Oshivale and Oshindongona.

The Aawambo people comprise eight distinct sub-ethnic groups, which Hangula (1998) identifies as the foundational elements of the pre-colonial kingdoms. These kingdoms include *Ombandja*, *Ombalanhu*, *Ondonga*, *Ongandjera*, *Oukwanyama*, *Uukwambi*, *Uukolonkadhi* and *Uukwaluudhi* (Hangula, 1998, p.164;). These kingdoms consist of various sub-tribes, notably the *Aambadja*, *Aambalanhu*, *Aandonga*, *Aangandjera*, *Aakwanyama*, *Aakwambi*, *Aakwaluudhi* and *Aakolonkadhi* among others, each with its unique dialects, customs, and social structures (Mbenzi, 2021). According to Schroeder (2008), the diversification of the Aawambo reflects their adaptive strategies to the region's environmental conditions and socio-political changes over centuries. This diversification is also evident in their kinship. Kinship among the Aawambo people involves social relations constructed through blood (consanguine) and marriage (affinal), as well as social interactions that uphold their social structure and rituals. Additionally, kinship in Aawambo people typically serve to organize social roles, define inheritance, and regulate rituals, including marriage and ceremonies. Kinship terms are essential in structuring social communication, guiding greetings, and establishing social connections, reflecting crucial cultural values like respect and responsibility (Mbenzi, 2021).

The significance of this study lies in the pressing need to address the complexities involved in translating these culturally laden kinship terms into English. As globalization facilitates intercultural interactions, the challenge of accurately conveying the meanings embedded in Oshiwambo kinship terms becomes increasingly paramount. The discrepancies between Oshiwambo and English kinship systems can create significant communication barriers that obscure intercultural understanding.

When translating Oshiwambo words into English, it becomes difficult because a translator is faced with two different cultures that approach kinship differently. There is no direct correspondence between English and Oshiwambo kinship terms. Mafele (2012) argues that if a translator attempts to translate kinship terms by reference to their nearest equivalent in the target language, such translation may be very misleading. This suggests that in translating kinship terms from source language into a target language, a translator needs to tap into the wisdom of the native speakers. The knowledge of the native speakers is likely to lead to the correct translation of kinship terms into English, although this also comes with its challenge of fitting a befitting translation that captures

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the comprehensive meaning of the term. We argue that such problems make intercultural communication difficult and lead to miscommunication between Oshiwambo and non-Oshiwambo speakers.

Drawing on the work of Nida (1964), who emphasized the importance of context in the translation process, this study seeks to uncover the intricacies involved in translating these terms. By employing the Skopos theory, which focuses on the purpose of translation, this research aims to facilitate a deeper comprehension of the cultural and social dynamics at play within the Aawambo kinship system. The study not only highlights the potential pitfalls in translation but also showcases the importance of learning these kinship terms for effective communication and intercultural dialogue.

Through examining the intricacies of the Aawambo kinship system, this research endeavours to contribute to a broader understanding of cultural identity and interpersonal relationships in Namibia. This exploration is vital not just for translators and linguists but also for fostering intercultural respect and understanding in an increasingly interconnected world. Ultimately, the study serves to underscore the richness of Aawambo cultural heritage and the imperative of preserving and acknowledging these cultural markers in the global discourse on language and identity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a paucity of studies on the translations of Oshiwambo kinship terms into English (Loeb, 2018; Estermann, 1979). However, some studies deal with similar subjects elsewhere in Africa. Prinsloo (2014) investigated the lexicographic treatment of kinship terms in the English/Sepedi-Setswana-Sesotho Dictionary. Prinsloo provided only single terms representing phrases and expressions and argued that the translation of Kinship terms from Sotho into English poses a challenge to a lexicographer.

Mafela (2012) examined the translations of Tshivenda Kinship terms into English and concluded that many Tshivenda kinship terms lack the distinction between genders. There is only one kinship term that distinguishes between male and female. Mafela concludes that Tshivenda terms require an explanation to make them clear in English.

The translations of kinship terms in the Oshikwanyama-English Dictionary (2019) is a great contribution to the translation of Oshiwambo kinship terms. It provides a good explanation of kinship terms. However, it does not provide sufficient explanation as there is information that is not included, prompting one to expand the explanation to make the term explicit in the target language. Similarly, Tirronen (1986) in The Ndonga-English Dictionary does not give an adequate explanation of the terms. Although his explanation of the Oshiwambo kinship terms is more comprehensive than the explanations in the Oshikwanyama-English Dictionary, he does not identify that some male and female terms are based on the roles of the people in Oshiwambo culture.

Furthermore, Viljoen, Amakali, and Namuandi (1984) attempted to give the translations of Oshiwambo kinship terms but provided little information on the lemma. In some cases, they only provided one word for a kinship term. This can lead to intercultural miscommunication as a lot of detail is left out about the content of the kinship terms. In addition, Tönjes (1996); Loeb (2018) and Estermann (1979) provided mostly the denotative meaning of Oshiwambo kinship terms and paid little or no attention to the other meanings associated with the terms. Since Oshiwambo consists of many kinship terms, covering affinal kinship terms, consanguineous kinship terms, lineal kinship terms, and collateral kinship terms, it provided very few kinship terms.

On the whole, the lemmatisation and treatment of kinship terms in the three dictionaries present difficulties to the lexicographer. Because in some cases the kinship terms are represented by single words.

Kavari (2001) studied Otjiherero kinship terms and provided comprehensive information on the kinship terms based on the role of the people in Otjiherero lineages. Kavari's study covers a wide spectrum of Otjiherero kinship terms and can be used in this study to dissect the translations of Oshiwambo kinship terms.

2.1. Oshiwambo kinship terms

Kinship terms, which are deeply embedded in the Oshiwambo languages, such as Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama, convey rich meanings that extend beyond mere familial relationships. Siblings, referred to as *aamwameme* (the children of one mother), share a particularly close bond. Children of sisters also address one another as *aamwameme* and regard each other as siblings. A suffix (-*gona*) can be appended to signify that a relative is a cousin rather than a sibling; however, this usage is seen as distancing and may be considered impolite. Additionally, terms that denote birth order: *sheeli* (the first born or oldest), *ntowe* (middle-born), *nkelo* (youngest/last born) are frequently employed as forms of address, used both among relatives and within friendships (Tobias and Turvey, 1954).

Oshiwambo kinship terms are similar in all different dialects. The Oshiwambo kinship terms for a relative or kin are *omukwetu* (*aakwetu* pl.), *omukwazimo* (*aakwenezimo* pl.) or *omupambele* (*aapambele* pl.). A distinction is made between *aakwetu yomekoto* (close relatives), *aakwetu yokoontayi* (distant relatives), and *aakwetu yahaniwa* (fictive relatives) (Tirronen, 1986 & Estermann, 1979). *Aakwetu yomekoto* includes the mother's sisters and brothers, the mother's sisters' children, the daughter's children, and the mother's mother. They are close maternal relatives. *Aakwetu yokoontayi* are also maternal relatives but from a distant line, including distant maternal cousins, distant maternal aunts, distant maternal uncles, distant maternal nephews, and nieces.

The ties with these relatives are distant not only in terms of relations, but they may also be geographically distant. Reunions with distant relatives often only take place in times of events such as weddings and bereavements. In the families, one often hears of

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aakwetu ya kala kOngandjera nenge kUukwambi” (our relatives who live in Ongandjera or Uukwambi). When there is a wedding or bereavement, one often hears on the radio people informing their distant relatives who live far. *Aakwetu yokoondungu* may also be used to describe distant relatives. This phrase means our kinsmen on the periphery. *Aakwetu yahaniwa*, on the other hand, includes those people who belong to one’s clan, but their common ancestor is not known.

Goody (1973) calls this artificial kinship. This kinship is not only established by descent or marriage. This happens when a person (or family) migrates to an area occupied by people who do not belong to his clan or even his traditional authority, “such a person (or family) may establish ties and relationships with people in the vicinity. These ties may become just as strong as if the people were genealogically related” (Goody 1973, p 78). These are the people who might have been incorporated into one’s clan, but their clan membership is questionable. It must be pointed out, however, that the descriptive terms *yahaniwa*, *yonkoontayi*, and/or *yokoondungu* are often left out in conversation because they are construed as derogatory and politically incorrect. The person would, therefore, state that this is *omukwetu* or these *aakwetu*.

According to Tobias and Turvey (1954), the word *omukwawo* or *edimo* and/or *aakwapata* in Oshikwanyama is also used to describe one of the ‘family circle’, viz., cousin or sibling. “The same words may also mean the stomach, as well as the actual kitchen area, in *Oshindonga*” (Kuusi 1974, p. 168). Although the word *aakwetu* refers to a uterine relative, it may also mean friend, fellow, companion, neighbour, or partner (Tirronen 1986, p 170). Furthermore, the word *onku* (strip to be worked at in the field) or *oludhi* (clan) are also used to refer to a lineage. *Oludhi* may also mean race, category, type, gender, and sex (Tirronen 1986, p 17). The word *ehe* (afterbirth) is used to refer to one’s biological child or one’s maternal nieces or nephews. It appears that when one says to another person: *ndyono ehe lyandje*, it means I am the progenitor of that person. Afterbirth is a synonym of placenta. As nouns the difference between afterbirth and placenta is that afterbirth is the placenta and other material expelled via the birth canal following childbirth or parturition in mammals. Afterbirth comes from a female. Since *ehe* comes from a female, it is used when the mother refers to her offspring. The word *ehe* may be used to replace the word *omumwandje* (my child). The word *ehe* may also be used when one is referring to one’s place of birth, for example, when one says: *Ehe lyandje oli li kOshigambo* (*Oshigambo* is my place of birth) (Mbenzi, 2021).

The word *ongudhi* (pillar, support) is used to refer to a senior person in the clan or lineage – *ongudhi yezimo* (Ndamanomhata, 2001). This does not refer to any ordinary seniority, but this is usually a living person to whom members of the clan go for expert advice and generally depend on for many purposes. Often, this person is the oldest in the lineage and is regarded as an apical clansperson. He or she does not have to be affluent. When this person passes on, it may be said: *Ongudhi ya teka po* (the pillar is broken). This word, however, may also refer to the husband or resourceful person in the clan.

2.2. Terms of kinship and consanguinity among Aawambo

In Oshiwambo, the eldest daughter or son is referred to as *osheeli*. The second-born or next-to-youngest child is called *ontowele* (*onhowele*). The third child of four or five children, any child between the second and the second last child among six or more children, is referred to as *omushakati*. The word *omushakati* means ‘the one in the middle. The last born is called *onkelo* (Tönjes, 1996). A husband is called *omusamane*. A married elderly man is called *omushungu*. An elderly woman who has given birth to one or more children is called *omuvalakadhi*. By contrast, a marriageable young man, bachelor or young husband, is referred to as *omushungumati*. A wife or married woman, though she may not have given birth, is called *omukulukadhi*. In the olden times, when polygamy was rife, the main wife was referred to as *munyalombe/omukulukadhi gwambanda* (senior wife), derived from the words *nya* and *elombe*. The latter is an archaic form of the Protowambo word *na*, which means to have. The former means kitchen; hence, *munyalombe* means head of the main kitchen. *Gwokatikegumbo* (the second wife who was in charge of managing and opening (*matula*) *iigandhi*, *mahangu* storage granaries), *mweehaka* (the wife in charge of milk and milk products, and was responsible for distributing milk among the co-wives), *totende* (the wife who cracks nuts for marula oil and cooks for the dogs), *mutyakemo* (the wife who receives guests). Generally, any wife other than *munyalombe* may be referred to as *omukulukadhi gwokehale* (an associate or by-wife). These kinship terms, especially in the context of marriage, express the functional role that the respective wives play in the family as a social unit (Nghishiilenhapo, 1996& Ndeutapo, 2014).

The following sub-sections explain the kinship and consanguinity terms for the various Aawambo ethnic groups. Different types of lineages exist among Aawambo, mother and father’s kinship and affinal kinship. Except for the terms *tate*, *tatekulu* and *meme*, most if not all of these are not gendered.

2.3. Mother’s kinship terms

Kinship terms express the relationship and obligations towards one another. One’s father is called *tate* and one’s mother is called *meme*. The mother’s sister is also called *meme* and all relatives of mother’s generation, regardless of sex are called *meme*. One’s mother’s brother is called *kuku* or *tatekulu* or *meme* (Loeb, 2018). The mother’s brother may be referred to as *meme*, because he is related to one through the mother. She has also the same obligations towards ego as ego’s biological mother, for example, customarily the mother’s brother has the obligations to contribute towards the payment of a fine if ego is fined for an offence (Haacke, et al. 2002). It has to be noted, however, that the word *kuku*, *tatekulu* or *meme* apply to all male relatives of one’s mother of the same generation as one’s mother. One’s brother or sister is called *omumwameme*, the stem – *mwa*- refers to the relation while

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meme refers to mother, thus showing matrilineality. *Omumwameme* may also refer to all maternal cousins. In today's language, it may also be used to refer to paternal cousins. One's mother's brother's child is called *gwaantsezi* (male cross-cousin) or *gwontsiyi* (female cross-cousin) (Amkongo, 2019).

The word *ntsezi* means bull because it is believed that your *ntsezi* can marry as cross-cousin marriage is allowed. According to Tirronen (1986), *gwaantsezi* is the son of one's mother's brother or one's father's sister, while *gwontsiyi* is the daughter of one's mother's brother or one's father's sister. One's mother's father is called *kuku* or *tatekulu*, and one's mother's mother is called *kuku* or *meekulu*. One's sister's child is called *omumwandjegona* (little son or daughter), just as their children may refer to one's mother's sister as *memegona* (little mother). The morpheme – *gona* means little. Many Aawambo, however, do not like the morpheme – *gona* because it does not demonstrate full kinship. In Oshikwanyama, for example, the diminutive morpheme is avoided at all costs, and the mother's sister is simply referred to as *meme omumwaina wameme* (my mother who is a sister of my mother) (Loeb, 2018).

As a male, one's sister's child is called *omutekulu* (regardless of the sex). Similarly, one's daughter's son or daughter is called *omutekulu*. This word may also be used to refer to one sister's child and all the children of one's parallel and cross cousins. The etymology of the stem – *tekulu*, is not well known, but it is speculated to have come from the verb stem *tekula*, which means to rear, care for, tend, or bring up. This may be ascribed to the mutual and reciprocal obligations that exist between a grandparent and *omutekulu*, between the mother's brother and *omutekulu*. The *omutekulu* is expected to be cared for by the mother's brother or the mother's grandparent. *Omutekulu* is expected to reciprocate when the *tatekulu* and *meekulu* are in need (Haacke, et al 2002). The love between *okatekulu* and *meekulu* is said to be greater than the love between a parent and a child. This is summed up in the Oshiwambo apothegm: *Okatekulu oke vule omwana uukali* (A grandchild is greater to stay with than to stay with one's child, i.e., the love for *okatekulu* is greater than the love for one's child) (Haapanen, 1958). The word *omutekulu* shifts to *okatekulu* to express endearment. The nominal prefix –*ka-* is semantically used in Bantu languages for a similar purpose. The child of one's granddaughter or grandson is called *omutekulululwa*.

One's sister's husband or one's brother's wife is called *suwala* or *uukwe*. The word *suwala* comes from the Afrikaans word *swaer*. Although this is a sex gender term in Afrikaans, which refers to men only, in Oshiwambo, it has transformed, thus it refers to both male and female. The word *uukwe* is a truncated form of the word *uukwetu*, which Tirronen (1986) defines as family circle or kinship. One's daughter's husband or wife is called *oshitenya*. The stem – *tenya* refers to the daytime. One may be referred to as *oshitenya* when he/she is formally introduced to the future in-laws, but the official title is bestowed upon him/her after marriage. Traditionally, before a person is pronounced as *oshitenya*, he/she does not enjoy freedom in the presence of his 'future in-laws' (Loeb, 2018) He may often sneak into the homestead of his partner at night without being seen by the parents of his/her partner. The meeting between the two is often confined to nighttime. But when the relationship between the two partners is officially declared, they begin visiting each other freely during the day, hence the word *oshitenya*.

2.4. Father's kinship terms

Kinship terms express the relationship and obligations towards one another. One's father is called *tate* and one's mother is called *meme*. The father's sister is also called *tate/tatekadhi* and all relatives of the mother's generation, regardless of sex, are called *meme*. One's mother's brother is called *kuku* or *tatekulu*, or *meme*. The father's brother may be referred to as *tate* because he is related to one through the father. He also has the same obligations towards ego as ego's biological father, for example, traditionally, the father's brother has the obligation to do the mapping of the homestead for his son. It has to be noted, however, that the word *tate* applies to all male relatives of one's mother of the same generation as one's father. One's brother or sister is called *omumwameme*, the stem –*mwa*–references to the relation, while *meme* refers to mother, thus showing matrilineality. *Omumwameme* may also refer to all paternal cousins. One's father's brother's child is called *mumwaameme* (brother/sister). One's father's father is called *kuku* or *tatekulu* and one's father's mother is called *kuku* or *meekulu*. One's brother's child is called *omumwandjegona* (little son or daughter) just as their children may refer to one's father's brother as *tategona*. The morpheme – *gona* means little. In other words, *tategona* means little father. Many Aawambo, however, do not like the morpheme – *gona* because it does not demonstrate full kinship.

In Oshikwanyama, for example, the diminutive morpheme is avoided at all costs, and the father's brother is simply referred to as *tate omumwaina watate* (my mother who is the sister of my mother). Similarly, my daughter's son or daughter is called *omutekulu*. This word may also be used to refer to one sister's child and all the children of one's parallel and cross cousins. The etymology of the stem – *tekulu*, is not well known, but it is speculated to have come from the verb stem *tekula*, which means to rear, care for, tend, or bring up. This may be ascribed to the mutual and reciprocal obligations that exist between a grandparent and *omutekulu*. The *omutekulu* is expected to be cared for by the mother's grandparents (Loeb, 2018 & Ndeutapo, 2014).

The *omutekulu* is expected to reciprocate when the *tatekulu* and *meekulu* are in need. The love between *okatekulu* is said to be greater than the love between a parent and a child. This is summed up in the Oshiwambo apothegm: *Okatekulu oke vule omwana uukali* (A grandchild is greater to stay with than stay with one's child, i.e., the love for *okatekulu* is greater than the love for one's child). The word *omutekulu* shifts to *okatekulu* to express endearment. The nominal prefix –*ka-* is semantically used in Bantu languages for a similar purpose. The child of one's granddaughter is called *omutekulululwa*.

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2.5. Affinal kinship terms

One's mother-in-law is called *kukumweno*. One's father-in-law is also called *kukumweno*. In some dialects other than Oshindonga, the word *meekulu* and *tatekulu* may be used to refer to father-in-law and mother-in-law, respectively. One's mother-in-law is called *meemweno* and one's father-in-law is called *tatemweno*. One's brother-in-law or sister-in-law is referred to as *suwala* or *uukwe*. The relationship between one's brother or sister-in-law is cordial and warm. They are regarded as members of one's clan therefore, it is said, *suwala ezimo* (one's brother or sister-in-law is a member of his/her family). In other words, they assist one another as if they belong to one clan.

One also advises his/her sister-in-law to be economically prudent or to be a miser. This is summed in the proverb: *Uukwe tu lye ombuku, onyama yongombe katu yi mono* (brother or sister-in-law let us eat the mouse, we may not find the beef) (Haapanen 1958 & Kuusi, 1970). Eating mice is equated with indigence and low self-esteem in Oshiwambo culture. *Aali yoombuku* (mouse eaters are regarded as destitute and imbecile people). In this case, one advises his/her brother or sister-in-law to live within his/her economic means. One's son or daughter-in-law is called *oshitenya*. One's co-sister or brother-in-law is called *uutenyuukwetu*. One's stepchild is called *omumwandje*. One's stepfather is called *tate*, and one's stepmother is called *meme*. The use of *meme* and *tate* in this context is summed in the proverb: *A hokana nyoko oye owala ho* (whoever marries your mother becomes your father) (Tirronen, 1986). The wife of one's mother's brother is called *kuku*. The child of your husband's sister is called *omutekulu*. The child of your sister or brother is called *omumwandje*. The child of one's wife's sister's daughter or son is called *omutekulu*.

2.6. Translation problems and kinship terms

One of the challenges translators sometimes face is the translation of kinship terms in African languages. If translators are not careful, they may misinform the target audience simply because they may not be aware that kinship systems differ from those of their language (Mafela, 2012).

Wangia and Ayieko (Wangia & Ayieko, 2016) concur that kinship terms are culturally and socially tied to the society's structure and values, which have developed over the years. This implies that kinship terms are likely to differ from society to society.

People from different cultural backgrounds communicate differently. Words from one language cannot easily be translated into another language without any hiccups. For one person to become well-versed in the cultures of another person, it may take them a long time. The difficulties that one experiences when he/she tries to learn the culture of another person is inherent in the complexity of another culture, coupled with its alien cultural practices to a translator. In Oshiwambo, the word for son or daughter is *omumwandje*, but one may need a paragraph to translate this into English. Tirronen (1986) provides the meaning of *omumwandje* as my son or my daughter. Such equivalents are not inclusive enough because they exclude other possibilities. The words *omumwandje* can be provided as my sister's child, my brother's child, my cousin's child, or my namesake's child. My child may also refer to all the children of my maternal and paternal relatives. It would thus be an exercise in futility to translate the word *omumwanadje* as my child. This word cannot be differentiated according to gender. To distinguish between a female or male child, an explanation may be needed as *omumwandje gwomumati* (a boy child or *omumwandje gwomukadhona* (a girl child). Tirronen (1986) provides the sex distinguishing terms such as *omumwandjemati* (my child who is a boy), and *omumwandjekadhona* (my child who is a girl). Such terms, however, are rarely used in day-to-day communication.

When one tries to translate the word, brother or sister into English, one may never find an equivalent term, because Oshiwambo uses one word for both brother and sister. In Oshiwambo, the word *mumwameme* is used for both brother and sister. Of course, an attempt had been made by Tirronen (1986) to create words such as *omumwamememati* for brother and *omumwamemekadhona* for sister. However, the use of the two terms is primarily confined to written text because they appear clumsy in normal conversation.

2.6.1. Translation as an intercultural communication tool

Translation is defined as the process of translating words or text from one language into another. Translation means "rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text" (Newmark 2001, p5). Newmark (2001) further asserts that translating a text should begin with a detailed analysis of the text, such as the intention of the text and the translator, its readership, and attitude, to mention just a few. This shows that translation is a communication tool between two languages, namely the source language and the target language. Speakers of two languages usually hail from two different cultural backgrounds. Thus, the translation should take into account the cultures of the two speakers. The two speakers need to understand each other's cultures through translation. Once the speaker of a language gains a clear understanding of the culture of their neighbour, it prevents miscommunication and misunderstanding between the two cultures.

Catford (1965) argues that the translation of terms into another language is complicated by certain factors, namely, cultural untranslatability. Untranslatability is distinguished into two types, namely, linguistic and cultural untranslatability (Catford, 1965). On the linguistic level, untranslatability occurs when there is no lexical or syntactic substitute in the target language for a source language item. In this case, the translator would have to restructure the word order and adjust the syntax of the sentence in accordance with the system of the target language. Concerning cultural untranslatability, Catford (1965) noted that "it is caused by the absence of a relevant situational feature for the source language (SL) text in the target language (TL) culture. In such situations, the translator tries to find solutions to cultural differences between two languages" (p 66).

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Terms are, however, neither exclusively translatable nor exclusively untranslatable; rather, the degree of difficulty of translation depends on their nature, as well as on the translator's knowledge of the languages in question. Where there is cultural focus, there is translation problem due to the cultural gap or distance between the source and target language" (Newmark 1995, p 94). Quite often, a text or utterance that is considered to be "untranslatable" is a lacuna, or lexical gap. That is, there is no one-to-one equivalence between the word, expression, or turn of phrase in the source language and another word, expression, or turn of phrase in the target language. A translator can, however, resort to several translation procedures to compensate for this.

2.7. The application of Skopos and Nida's theory

The theory of the translation of Oshiwambo kinship terms emphasizes that translation strategies should be guided by the intended purpose (skopos) of the translation. Given the complex cultural significance and nuanced meanings of kinship terms like *aamwameme*, *omushakati*, *omusamane*, and others, the translator's goal should be to produce a target text that effectively communicates these relationships within the cultural context of the audience.

For example, the close kinship bond signified by *aamwameme* and the use of specific terms for birth order and marital roles highlight cultural norms that a mere literal translation might not capture. As the literature suggests, existing dictionaries and previous works (e.g., Viljoen et al., 1984; Tirronen, 1986) often lack comprehensive explanations, which can lead to intercultural miscommunication. Therefore, under Skopos Theory, a translator should aim to develop translations that clarify these terms' social and cultural roles, possibly by expanding explanations or choosing culturally equivalent terms when appropriate, to fulfill the translation's communicative purpose.

Moreover, the theory supports that translations should be adapted to the knowledge level of the target audience. If the purpose is to facilitate intercultural understanding, the translation might include footnotes or explanations of terms like the functions of the main wife or the roles of different wives in a polygynous marriage, as these are significant in Oshiwambo culture. The goal is not just lexical equivalence but achieving a functionally equivalent understanding that respects the culture-bound meaning, aligning with the skopos of effective intercultural communication.

In addition, Nida's theory of 1947, which encompasses both the dynamic equivalence and formal equivalence, is employed to provide the accurate translations of Oshiwambo kinship terms. The dynamic equivalence formal equivalence translates a source text by adhering closely to its grammatical structure and literal wording, preserving the original form and content, while dynamic equivalence focuses on achieving a natural and equivalent response in the target language, prioritizing the message's effect on the reader over a literal word-for-word rendering. Although highly recommended in authoritative texts, formal-based strategies (e.g., literal translation or word-for-word translation) seem to be a hindrance to communication in most of the examples discussed. Lexical incongruity existing between the SL and the TL poses a formidable challenge (Thawabteh, 2012). For this study, the dynamic equivalence is used because it eschews strict adherence to the grammatical structure of the original text in favour of a more natural rendering in the target language. By applying this approach, the quality of a translation in which the message of the original text has been so transported into the receptor language that the *response* of the *receptor* is essentially like that of a receptor of the original text (Eugene & Taber, 1969).

In sum, if the aim is to ensure understanding across cultures, the translation may favor more straightforward equivalents or descriptive phrases that bridge cultural gaps (Read, 2001). Thus, Skopos theory underscores that the translation of Oshiwambo kinship terms should be tailored to its intended function, aligning linguistic choices with the specific communication goals to effectively serve its audience.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the challenges encountered in translating Oshiwambo kinship terms and to analyse how first-year students at the University of Namibia approach translating these culturally specific terms into English. The qualitative approach facilitates an in-depth understanding of the translation processes, students' interpretative strategies, and the cultural nuances embedded in kinship terminology. The research employs a communicative approach, which emphasizes the importance of context, culture, and the function of language in translation. This approach recognizes that kinship terms in Oshiwambo are deeply rooted in social and cultural norms, requiring translators to consider the pragmatic aspects of meaning beyond direct lexical equivalence.

The participants involved in the study were seventy (70) first-year Oshiwambo language students at the University of Namibia. They were selected because their limited exposure to advanced translation techniques provides authentic insights into initial translation strategies and potential difficulties faced by novice translators when dealing with culture-bound kinship terminology. The main data collection method involved asking these students to translate a predetermined list of ten Oshiwambo kinship terms into English. The list comprised the following commonly used kinship terms: *tate* (father), *meme* (mother), *mwameme* (main wife or senior wife), *tatekulu* (grandfather), *meekulu* (grandmother), *okatekulu* (elder or senior relative), *okamwandje* (younger sibling or relative), *ntsezi* (a term for sister-in-law), *tatemweno* (a term for a wife of a sibling or relative), and *meemweno* (a term for a sister-in-law or relative). The students' translations were recorded systematically for subsequent analysis.

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To further analyse the quality and adequacy of the students' translations, the documented outputs were compared with established representations of kinship terms found in authoritative bilingual dictionaries. Specifically, the study consulted the *Ndonga-English Dictionary* by Emil Toivo Tirronen (1986) and the *Oshikwanyama-English Dictionary* by the Oshikwanyama Curriculum Committee (2019). These sources provided the official or scholarly renditions of the same kinship terms, enabling a comparison between student translations and standard references. The analysis involved identifying common translation patterns, misunderstandings, or gaps relative to the dictionary entries. This comparison aimed to highlight the discrepancies, interpretative challenges, and cultural gaps that may influence translation fidelity.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned earlier, 70 Oshiwambo first-year UNAM students participated in this study. These students are enrolled in the courses titled "Language and Culture." The data consisted of ten kinship terms sourced from the *Ndonga-English Dictionary* by Emil Toivo Tirronen (1986). The findings of this study are presented in accordance with the objectives of this study. The main purpose of the study was to identify the challenges in translating Oshiwambo kinship terms and propose a strategy that may be used to render the correct translated kinship terms. Content analysis was employed to gauge the quality of translation provided by the students. The students represented different linguistic varieties of Aawambo, namely, Oshikwambi, Oshingandjera, Oshikwaluudhi, Oshimbadja, Oshikwanyama, and Oshimbaanhu. Each student was asked to translate all ten kinship terms into the Oshiwambo dialect. The exercise took place over two days to give students enough time to produce a proper translation.

Of the seventy students, 65 gave a single English word for each Oshiwambo kinship term provided. Thus, they translated the Oshiwambo words into English as shown in the table below:

Table 1

Single word translation for Oshiwambo kinship terms

Oshiwambo kinship term	English translation
<i>Tate</i>	Father
<i>Meme</i>	Mother
<i>Tatekulu</i>	Grandfather
<i>Meekulu</i>	Grandmother
<i>Mumwameme</i>	brother or sister
<i>tatemweno</i>	father- in-law
<i>Meemweno</i>	mother- in -law
<i>Okamwandje</i>	my son or daughter
<i>Ntsezi</i>	Cousin
<i>Okatekulu</i>	Grandchild

By translating the Oshiwambo kinship terms into single English words, the students have provided partial translations. A cursory look at the kinship terms shows a loss in the semantic traits of the SL. This makes it difficult for the target users to grasp the complete meaning of the Oshiwambo kinship terms. Each student seems to have translated the kinship terms into English without paying attention to other possible meanings of the terms. It can be assumed that students are unable to provide possible meanings because they tend to use the Oshiwambonised kinship terms such as *anti* (aunt), *ankela* (uncle), *sista* (sister), *bradha* (brother), *niisa* (niece), and *nefewu* (nephew) in their day-to-day interactions.

Motjope-Mokhali (2023) makes similar observations among Sesotho and Siswati students: "students seem to be transferring Sesotho understanding into English without paying attention to the English structures and meanings (p.885)." It is important to note that the use of Oshiwambo kinship terms is not simply restricted to kinship or clan affiliation, but it also depends, age, social relations, gender, status, and namesake system. Prinsloo and Bosch (2012, as cited in Mtjope-Mkokhali, 2023) emphasise that the use of kinship terms among Bantu speakers is determined by various elements beyond language, including the relationship between the speaker and the listener, age, gender, and social context. This means that the participants in this study, due to their exposure to English, provided limited information about the meaning of Oshiwambo kinship terms, thus concluding that Oshiwambo and English terms are congruent. Nonetheless, five students provided more than one sense for the kinship terms as presented in the table below:

Table 2

Kinship translations by students

Oshiwambo kinship term	English translation
<i>Tate</i>	father, father's brother
<i>Meme</i>	mother, mother's sister
<i>Tatekulu</i>	grandfather, mother's brother
<i>Meekulu</i>	Grandmother

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<i>Mumwameme</i>	brother or sister
<i>tatemweno</i>	father- in-law
<i>Meemweno</i>	mother- in -law
<i>Okamwandje</i>	my son or daughter, my child
<i>Ntsezi</i>	Cousin
<i>Okatekulu</i>	grandchild, nephew/ niece

Unlike in Table 1 where a formal strategy seems to have been employed to prove the translation, an attempt here is made to apply the dynamic equivalence and the tenets of Skopos theory to a certain extent. Nonetheless, these five students did not give the complete meaning of any term. In both tables, the term *ntsezi* was formally translated. From the table, it can be established that many kinship terms are gender-specific, but a few, such as *okamwandje* and *okatekulu* are gender- neutral.

Furthermore, Oshiwambo kinship terms are culture-specific terms. Hence, there is a lexical gap between the target language and the source language. In this case, there is no one-to-one equivalence between Oshiwambo and English kinship terms. Thawabtehp (2012) argues that “formal equivalence may be a hindrance to the communicative thrust of the source language (SL). This is due to the semantic gap between SL and the target language (TL). When lexical incongruence exists between the SL and the TL, pitfalls in the translation emerge” (p.6). This suggests that polysemous terms are difficult to grapple with in the translation process.

By translating terms through formal equivalence as shown in Table 1, the translator does not satisfy the needs of the target readers or audience. This means “when the gap between two cultures at some points is so large that literal translation may cause confusion or misunderstandings” (Newmark, 2012, p. 746). Nida (2001) cautions against heavy reliance on formal equivalence. She stresses that language is not just words; thus, one does not have to focus on specific words in the translation process. She further contends that words in the target and source languages very rarely correspond.

From the translations, it becomes apparent that the students did not consult the Oshiwambo dictionaries such as Ndonga English Dictionary(1986), Oshikwanyama-English Dictionary/ English Oshikwanyama Dictionary (2019), and Ndonga-English Dictionary (1984). These dictionaries provide some senses for kinship terms under investigation. Nida(2001) aptly explains that translation is likely to fail if the translator does not consult knowledgeable people and a dictionary because each field has a unique language; for example, the word *root* carries different meanings in linguistics and Mathematics, respectively. A word may have multiple meanings based on the context in which it is used. It is also important to note that a word may have different senses within the same field. Tirronen (1986) provides various senses for the word *tatekulu*: my father’s father, my mother’s father, my paternal uncle, sir, mister. Although Tirronen has not translated the word *tatekulu* adequately, he has demonstrated the polysemous nature of the word from the same field. The general observation here is that the students have ignored ambiguity and tend to conclude that there is a resemblance between Oshiwambo and English kinship terms.

Considering the demerits evident in the translation of all the students, one can conclude that the students lack the sound knowledge of the source and target languages. According to Mafela (2012, p.266), a lack of knowledge of the culture of other societies could result in great miscommunication between language groups.” Similarly, Motjope-Mokhali et al (2023) argue that if a translator is not proficient in the languages involved in the translation process, they are likely to mislead the target group. Likewise, Wangia and Ayieko (2016) agree that kinship terms are closely associated with a particular culture and society in which they have been used for a long time. The following table shows that the knowledge of Oshiwambo culture is indispensable for translating Oshiwambo kinship terms into English:

Table 3

Extended translation of Oshiwambo kinship terms

Oshiwambo Kinship Terms	English translations
<i>Tate</i>	Father, father’s brother, sir, father’s sister, father’s namesake, a male person whose child is named after me, father’s male cousin, (distant or close), any male royal person, stepfather, one’s husband
<i>Meme</i>	Mother, madam, mother’s sister, mother’s brother, mother’s female cousin (distant or close), mother’s namesake, stepmother, one’s wife .
<i>Tatekulu</i>	Father’s father, mother’s father, my paternal uncle, sir or honorable, any male royal person, my grandfather’s namesake, grandfather’s brother or male cousin, wife of one’s maternal uncle.
<i>Meekulu</i>	Mother’s mother, mother’s father, madam, my grandmother’s namesake, my grandmother’s sister, or female cousin.
<i>Mumwameme</i>	Sister, brother, maternal cousin, sister, or brother’s namesake
<i>Meemweno</i>	Mother-in-law, mother-in-law in-law sister, mother-in-law in-law female cousin, mother-in-law namesake
<i>Tatemweno</i>	Father -in-law, father-in-law’s brother, father-in-law female cousin, father-in-law namesake.
<i>Okamwandje</i>	Son, daughter, my brother’s child, male cousin’s child, my.

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<i>Okatekulu</i>	My son's child, my daughter's child, my nephew's child, my niece's child, one's wife's sister's child, one's husband's sister child or one's wife's female cousin's child /one's husband's female cousin's child
<i>Ntsezi</i>	son of one's father's sister, son of one's mother's female cousin.

The translations of kinship terms in Table 3, reveals that while English has one way to express some of the above kinship terms such as *okatekulu* (grandchild), *meme* (mother), *tate* (father), *okatekulu* (grandchild), Oshiwambo has several ways to express a relationship with the kinship terms. English terms are restricted, while Oshiwambo kinship terms are polysemic. According to Thawabteh (2012), in the Arab culture, “the word cousin may refer to mother's brother's son, mother's sister's son, father's brother's son, father's sister's son, and the like. Thus, the Arab system is completely descriptive and assigns a different kin term to each distinct relative.” (p.8) This shows that the Arab system is similar to the Oshiwambo system.

Although the terms lifted from the dictionaries consist of a single term, it is worth noting that some of these terms are expressed by circumlocution or by suffixing a diminutive morpheme to make the terms more explicit, for example, the term *tate* can be rendered as *tate omwayina gwa tate* (father who is the brother of my father). Similarly, *meme* can be rendered as *meme omwayina gwameme* (my mother, who is a sister of my mother). The diminutive morpheme-*gona* can also be suffixed to either the term *tate*, or *meme* to serve the same purpose. These morphemes can also be attached to the term *kuku*, a neutral word for both *tatekulu* and *meekulu*. In their translations, students did not use the extended form or the diminutive suffix. In this way, the students have dethroned skopos theory in favour of the formal equivalence approach. The coherence rule, which calls for the target text to make sense according to the culture of the target language, is not employed by the students because they did not give sufficient information about the kinship terms

Bearing in mind the challenges the students experience, as mentioned earlier, consultation with the Aawambo sages may serve as a remedy in the translation process. The Oshiwambo bilingual dictionaries, though they appear outdated because they were compiled many years ago, may serve as a useful aid. It is also important to rely on the tenets of skopos theory because there is no intertextual coherence between the source and target texts.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it is evident that translating Oshiwambo kinship terms into English presents notable challenges primarily due to semantic nuances, cultural specificity, and the absence of exact lexical equivalents. Many students resorted to single-word translations that often failed to capture the full contextual and cultural meanings embedded within the original kinship terms, leading to partial or incomplete translations. This highlights the limitations of relying solely on formal equivalence strategies, such as direct translation, which neglect the intricate social, age, gender, and contextual elements that influence kinship terminology usage.

Furthermore, the findings echo the Skopos theory, which asserts that translation production should be guided by the purpose or function of the text within its cultural context. In this case, translation of kinship terms should serve to facilitate mutual understanding and accurately reflect social relationships and cultural practices. Therefore, translating kinship terms effectively requires strategies that prioritize the communicative and functional aspects of the source material over strict lexical equivalence. This ensures that translations are meaningful and accessible, fostering better intercultural communication and understanding of Oshiwambo kinship systems.

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