

## TRANSLATING FROM ENGLISH INTO EKEGUSII IN RADIO BROADCASTS: PRESENTERS' "MISTRANSLATIONS" vs. NATIVE SPEAKERS' ACCEPTABILITY OF THEM

Zipporah K. Otiso  
University of Nairobi

This paper investigates the procedures which presenters on *Egesa FM* (a radio station broadcasting in Ekegusii) use to translate segments of news and advertisements from English into Ekegusii, a Bantu language of Kenya. One prevalent procedure they use is calque. For example, they translate the English phrase *breaking news* as *amang'ana amayia buna agwateka*, which literally means 'words new now breaking'. This translation is quite unidiomatic in Ekegusii to the extent that combining the idea of *gwateka* ('to break, i.e. to split something into two or more parts') with that of *amang'ana amayia* ('news') is quite unnatural in Ekegusii, because for the speakers of this language (*Abagusii*), only something that is concrete and solid (though not necessarily strong) can break. Beyond sounding unnatural, some of such "mistranslations" are likely to sound offensive in relation to *Ekegusii* culture. The aim of the present paper is to analyse them with a view to drawing attention to the extent of the "cultural damage" they are likely to cause to an African mother tongue like Ekegusii. This damage arises from what the paper calls *pragmatic implausibility* and *semantic inadequacy*.

**Key words:** Ekegusii, Egesa FM, mistranslations, pragmatic implausibility, semantic inadequacy

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The starting point for this paper is a phenomenon I observed from listening to the *Egesa FM* radio station, which broadcasts in Ekegusii, a Kenyan Bantu language, which also happens to be my mother tongue. What caught my attention is the way the presenters manipulate language in an effort to translate messages from English, the source language (hereafter referred to as "source text, ST"), into Ekegusii, the target language (hereafter referred to as "target text, TT"). For instance, the phrases in (1) below are usually translated on *Egesa FM* radio as indicated:

(1) a) *breaking news*

Trans.: *amang'ana amayia buna agwateka* (literally: 'words new now breaking')

b) *betting can be addictive*

Trans.: *ogopeti nabo korabeke obogima bwao ase obwoba* (literally: 'betting can put your life in fear')

c) *fifteen minutes past eleven (11:15)*

Trans.: *chitageka ikomi na isano igoro ye chinsa isano* (literally: 'fifteen minutes on top of eleven')

The three translations sound “unnatural” and “strange” to a native speaker like me, with these unnaturalness and strangeness seemingly resulting from the speakers struggling to render the English message faithfully, while in the process ending up producing what can be termed “contrived calques”. For example, what happens in example (1a) above is that those radio presenters (or whichever of them first came up with that translation) “lift” the verb *break* from English and render it with the inappropriate verb *ateka* in Ekegusii. Yet, it can be argued, there is no need for such contrived calques, if one agrees with Nida (2012: 141). He writes:

SINCE NO TWO LANGUAGES are identical, either in the meanings given to corresponding symbols or in the ways in which such symbols are arranged in phrases and sentences, it stands to reason that there can be no absolute correspondence between languages. Hence there can be no fully exact translations. The total impact of a translation may be reasonably close to the original, but there can be no identity in detail.

Nida's (2012) words above echo those of Chesterman (1997: 88), namely that “[translators do not have to] achieve equivalence, but simply to arrive at the best version they can think of, what they regard as the optimal translation”. This optimal translation must be that which preserves the content by presenting it in the most *culturally* appropriate form of the language. It is this idea of *optimal translation* that underpins the discussion in the present study. The point is that in the Ekegusii “mistranslations” under study optimal translation tends to get sacrificed for the sake of achieving apparently only linguistic equivalence by calquing the translation on the original linguistic structure.

## 2. THE SOURCE AND NATURE OF THE DATA

Data was obtained from *Egesa FM*<sup>1</sup> radio broadcasts, specifically three types of these: news items, advertisements, and presenters' comments in the middle of call-in programmes on what the callers say. The data to be discussed below was produced by two female presenters by the stage names Motangi and Nana, between the 13 February 2020 and the 6 March 2020. The presenters were talking about a variety of topics, ranging from the 2020 Valentine's Day edition, to several advertisements, and news bulletins (at 11 a.m., at 12 noon, 1 p.m. and 7 p.m.).

Radio broadcasts were chosen for analysis because media personalities are an important segment of opinion-makers in society and, hence, not only whatever they say, but also however they say it, carries weight. As Trudgill (2000) puts it, "Very often, when speakers of a particular language happen to be dominant in some particular field, other language groups adopt words pertaining to the field from this language" (p. 163). In this connection, there is no doubt that however the *Egesa FM* radio presenters translate English expressions such as *breaking news*, their translations are likely to be adopted by a non-negligible segment of their listeners and, in the long term, perhaps by the entire Ekegusii speech community. So, by highlighting the "mistranslations" among the radio presenters' translations, the present study aims to (hopefully) forestall the taking root of what I view as unnatural, that is unfortunate calques creeping into the Ekegusii language through radio. But for a fair assessment of the "mistranslations" under analysis, my views must be confronted with those of other native speakers. To this end, views of six other native speakers (three female and three male), whom I interviewed, will be referred to.

## 3. THE VARIOUS "MISTRANSLATIONS" IN EGESA FM BROADCASTS

### 3.1 Presentation of the "mistranslations" under study

The various "mistranslations" are presented in three tables below, according to the three sub-registers (of the radio broadcasts register) in which they were produced,

---

<sup>1</sup> This is one of the two Ekegusii radio stations. The other radio station is *Minto FM*.

4 Zipporah Otiso

namely news bulletins, advertisements, and the presenters' comments on callers' comments.

**Table 1: Cases of English-into-Ekegusii “mistranslations” from news bulletins**

Original English expression	Egesa FM presenters’ “mistranslation”	The present author’s suggested translation:	Some other native speakers’ reactions to the radio presenters’ “mistranslation”
1. <i>A suspect</i>	<i>Omokagerwa</i> ‘a suspect’	<i>Omonto okageire</i> ‘a person who is suspected’ or <i>Omonto ogokwanwa</i> ‘a person who is said to be...’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- [The word] <i>suspect</i> is not realized in a single word. It’s usually realized through a descriptive phrase.</li> <li>- There wasn’t a judicial system which allowed for the use of words such as a <i>suspect</i>. This therefore sounds like a derivative form from the verb <i>gokagera</i> [‘to suspect’], which is the more common word in use in the language</li> <li>- I have heard it from the media, so it is all right.</li> </ul>
2. <i>Taking loans</i>	<i>Amakabeso</i> ‘the idea of taking things on credit’	<i>ogosaba chironi</i> ‘asking for loans’/‘taking loans’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This word sounds funny.</li> <li>- This word does not mean a loan. No interest is expected.</li> <li>- Since interest is expected, the right term should be <i>chironi</i> although it is a borrowed term from the English word ‘loan’.</li> </ul>

Original English expression	<i>Egesa FM</i> presenters' "mistranslation"	The present author's suggested translation:	Some other native speakers' reactions to the radio presenters' "mistranslation"
3. <i>Breaking news</i>	<i>Amang'ana amayia buna agwateka</i> 'news as it breaks'	<i>Amang'ana amayia aria achire</i> or <i>amang'ana aria atoikeire</i> 'news that has just come in'/ 'news that has reached us'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This cannot be. Things such as a pot and a wound break but not news.</li> <li>- It is okay in as far as radio news is concerned but not in everyday speech.</li> <li>- Is it possible to translate an idiom?</li> </ul>
4. <i>Two people have been arrested...</i>	<i>abanto babere babekirwe biara</i> 'Two people have been "put in the fingers"'	<i>Abanto babere babwatirwe</i> 'two people have been arrested'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It is alright but it is a more difficult terminology.</li> <li>- This is an archaic term</li> <li>- The more common expression is either <i>Abanto babere babwatirwe</i> or <i>Abanto babere babekirwe koboko</i> ('two people have been arrested' or literally 'two people have been "put in the hand"').</li> </ul>
5. <i>Award a tender fraudulently</i>	<i>Etenda etarenge y' oboikeranu</i> 'a tender that is not faithful/complete /exact'	<i>Etenda etarwetwe ase enchera y'oboronge</i> 'a tender that was not awarded procedurally'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There should be a better way to say this.</li> <li>- Award of a tender can't be exact/ faithful.</li> </ul>

7 Translating from English into Ekegusii in radio broadcasts

	Original English expression	Egesa FM presenters' "mistranslation"	The present author's suggested translation:	Some other native speakers' reactions to the radio presenters' "mistranslation"
6.	<i>A road accident</i>	<i>Omobasokano o para</i> 'an unexpected occurrence on the road'	<i>Achari ya para</i> , 'a road accident'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This is not a common term.</li> <li>- <i>Achari</i> is more common, (This is a naturalized borrowing from the Kiswahili term <i>ajali</i>, 'an accident').</li> </ul>
7.	<i>The mortuary</i>	<i>Enkendu</i> 'the cold one'	<i>Emochari</i> 'the mortuary'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I think both terms are used.</li> <li>- <i>Enkendu</i> is a more recent creation possibly from the ice used to preserve bodies.</li> </ul>
8.	<i>Smart driving licence</i>	<i>Chiraisensi chi'ekerero</i> 'the licences of these days, that is, modern licenses'	<i>chiraisensi chi'ekadi</i> 'the card licences'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This doesn't describe the concept well.</li> <li>- <i>Ekerero</i> has another meaning such as 'women's visit to a new mother'.</li> <li>- It can be: <i>Chiraisensi chi'amatuko aya</i>, 'the licences of these days'. However, although <i>ekerero</i> and <i>amatuko aya</i> can be loosely translated as 'these days', the two are not exact synonyms.</li> <li>- This translation sounds funny.</li> </ul>

	Original English expression	Egesa FM presenters' "mistranslation"	The present author's suggested translation:	Some other native speakers' reactions to the radio presenters' "mistranslation"
9.	<i>Business news</i>	<i>Amang'ana korwa ase emesa y'oboonchoreria</i> 'news from the table of exchanges/ 'barter trade''	<i>Omangana y'ebiasara</i> 'words of business', i.e. 'business news'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The expression is trying to be as Ekegusii as possible but it sounds like barter trade'.</li> <li>- <i>Ebiasara</i>, (<i>business</i>, borrowed from Kiswahili word <i>biashara</i>) is more common in everyday language.</li> <li>- <i>Oboonchoreria</i>, 'exchange of things', sounds like barter trade so not very accurate of modern business where money is key in business transactions.</li> </ul>
10.	<i>Business people</i>	<i>Abaonchoreria</i> 'people who do exchanges'	<i>Abakoria ebiasara/ abanyabiasara</i> 'people who do business'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This is okay since it captures the idea of exchange of things.</li> <li>- This is not how people would talk in everyday language. The word <i>abanyabiasara</i>, 'business people' is what is used in everyday speech.</li> </ul>
11.	<i>Transport sector</i>	<i>Esekita y'obosombi</i> 'The sector of transferring/ carrying	<i>Esekita y'orogendo</i> 'the sector for movement/ travel'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This sounds all right if we think in terms of transporting goods, but a better way of saying this would be any one of the</li> </ul>



9 Translating from English into Ekegusii in radio broadcasts

Original English expression	<i>Egesa FM</i> presenters' "mistranslation"	The present author's suggested translation:	Some other native speakers' reactions to the radio presenters' "mistranslation"
12. <i>Driving school</i>	<i>Esukuru y'obogendia</i> 'a school for driving'	<i>esukuru y'obontereba</i> 'a school for driving'	<p>following: a) <i>Esemo y'emesigo</i> ('the luggage section'), b) <i>Ase okobogoria emesigo</i> ('the place for carrying luggage'), c) <i>Ase emesigo ekobogorerigwa</i> ('the place for carrying luggage'). d) <i>Esekita ye chigari</i> ('the sector of vehicles').</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It is all right since it describes driving in general.</li> <li>- It can be talked of using any one of the following options: a) <i>esukuru y'okwebundisa egari</i> , b) <i>esukuru y'okogendia chigari</i>, c) <i>esukuru y'okogendia chigari</i>, or d) <i>esukuru y'oborundia</i>.('a school for learning driving')</li> </ul>
13. <i>World Health Organization</i>	<i>Ekeombe ki' obochenu ase ense engima</i>	<i>Ekeombe getenenerete afia ase ense engima</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If it is in relation to a ministry or organization, then <i>obochenu</i>, 'cleanliness', is all right.</li> </ul>

Original English expression	<i>Egesa FM</i> presenters' "mistranslation"	The present author's suggested translation:	Some other native speakers' reactions to the radio presenters' "mistranslation"
14. <i>CS [Cabinet Secretary] for health</i>	<p>'The organization of cleanliness in the whole world'</p> <p><i>Omogwasiri bw' obochenu</i></p> <p>'The CS [Cabinet Secretary] for cleanliness'</p>	<p>'The organization in charge of health in the world'</p> <p><i>Omogwasiri oo afia</i></p> <p>'The CS [Cabinet Secretary] for health'</p>	<p>- If it is in relation to health, then the Kiswahili word <i>afia</i>, 'health' is okay.</p> <p>- This sounds strange but imagine health is <i>obochenu!</i> 'cleanliness'.</p> <p>- I think <i>afia</i>, 'health', is okay.</p>
15. <i>Measures are in place to ensure that we do not have an outbreak of Corona Virus in Kenya.</i>	<p><i>Emeroberio nereo Korenda ebinyinyi bia Korona tibibaisa gwateka aa Kenya</i></p> <p>'Measures are in place to protect the outbreak of Corona virus here in Kenya'.</p>	<p><i>Emeroberio nereo y'ogotanga oborwaie bwa Korona gosoa aa kenya</i></p> <p>'Measures are in place to prevent the entry of the disease of Corona Virus in Kenya'.</p>	<p>- The translation is okay since <i>ogwateka</i>, 'to break', is generally used for bad things/misfortunes.</p> <p>- We can talk of <i>emeroberio nereo gotanga ogwateka kw'oborwaire bwa Korona</i> or <i>emeroberio nereo gotanga ogwateka kw'endwari ya Korona</i>, 'plans are in place to stop the outbreak of Corona disease'.</p>

Table 2: “Mistranslations” from advertisements

Original expression	English	Egesa FM presenters’ “mistranslation”	The present author’s suggested translation	Some other native speakers’ reactions to the radio presenters’ “mistranslation”
16. <i>Be warned that betting can be addictive</i>		<i>ogopeti nabo korabeke obogima bwao ase obwoba.</i> ‘Betting can put your life in fear’	<i>Ogopeti nigo kong’a oborwaire botabwati eriogo</i> ‘betting is like an incurable disease’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I really don’t know how that can be said but that translation is not correct. The expression <i>putting your life in fear</i> is farfetched.</li> <li>- We can say: <i>Kamari nabo erasarie obogima bwao</i>, ‘The game of gaining or losing can spoil your life’, or <i>Kamari nabo eraturubani obogima bwao</i>, ‘The game of gaining or losing can disorganize your life’.</li> <li>- We should say: <i>Kamari nebwate enaro</i> ‘The game of gaining or losing can make one to be entangled in it’.</li> </ul>
17. <i>To get breaking news on your mobile phone, send ‘Egesa news’ to 30303</i>		<i>Konyora amang’ana amayia buna agwateka ase esimi yao ya koboko toma erieta</i>	<i>-Konyora amang’ana amayia buna agotoikera ase esimu yao toma erieta Egesa News ase 303033</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- That’s what <i>Egesa</i> presenters say but that’s not how people would talk about <i>news</i> in other contexts.</li> <li>- People can talk about <i>amang’ana amayia</i> or <i>amang’ana amageni</i> (literally, ‘words</li> </ul>

Original expression	English Egesa FM presenters' "mistranslation"	The present author's suggested translation	Some other native speakers' reactions to the radio presenters' "mistranslation"
	<p><i>Egesa News ase 30303</i>  <i>bwemanyie ayatekire</i>                      'To get news as they break on your mobile phone, send 'Egesa news' to 30303 to get news as that has "broken"'.                      "broken"</p>	<p>'To get news as it reaches us on your mobile phone send the word 'Egesa News' to 303033'.</p>	<p>new') or <i>amang'ana atoikeire</i>, 'news that has reached us'.                      - News is just news in Ekegusii. The idea of <i>breaking news</i> is foreign.</p>

Table 3: “Mistranslations” from *Egesa FM* radio presenters’ comments

	Original English expression	<i>Egesa FM</i> presenters’ “mistranslation”	The present author’s suggested translation	Some other native speakers’ reactions to the radio presenters’ “mistranslation”
18.	<i>We lost the caller / that phone call has disconnected</i>	<i>Eyio nigo echarogete</i> ‘that is a jumped one’	<i>Eyio nigo yabutoka</i> ‘that one has ‘cut’ / disconnected ‘	- This is not accurate, and a listener cannot relate jumping and the disconnection of a phone call.
19.	<i>I will play you the song you have requested</i>	<i>Ingokobwatokera ande ogotera okwo</i> Trans.: ‘I will unclench that song for you (I will play you that song)’	<i>Ingokobekera inde ogotera okwo</i> ‘I will “put” (play) for you that song’. <i>Kobekera</i> , ‘to put’ is the word used to mean ‘to play’.	- This does not make sense. - This can only be said if the presenter wants to use flowery language. - One should say it as: <i>ingokobugeria inde engero eyio</i> , ‘I will play for you that song’ (although <i>engero</i> , ‘song’, is archaic)
20.	<i>Love is in the air</i>	<i>Obwanchani boka bore embeo igoro</i> ‘It’s only love that is in the air.’	<i>Eye n’engaki y’okworokia obwanchani.</i> ‘This is the time to show love’	- This cannot be; love cannot be in the air. - This translation is too literal. - Someone who does not know that it is from English cannot understand such an expression. - It can be said as: <i>obwanchani bwatiokire</i> , ‘there is the smell of love.’

Original English expression	Egesa FM presenters' "mistranslation"	The present author's suggested translation	Some other native speakers' reactions to the radio presenters' "mistranslation"
21. <i>Your darling / sweetheart</i>	<i>Risase riao</i> 'your sun'	<i>Omwanchi oo bw'enkoro</i> 'The lover of your heart/your sweetheart'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This is not accurate. This is a term that was coined after 'slay-queen' became popular. This expression should refer to only women.</li> <li>- I think this expression can refer to both men and women.</li> <li>- Your darling/ sweetheart, husband or wife, is <i>omwanchi oo</i>, 'your lover'.</li> <li>- It is okay because it relates to the sun, which shines.</li> <li>- The presenter was simply trying to avoid using <i>omwanchi</i>, 'your lover' which is too direct.</li> </ul>
22. 11:15 a.m.	<i>Chitageka ikomi na isano igoro ya chinsa isano</i> 'fifteen minutes on top of 11'	<i>Chinsa isano ne chitageka ikomi na isano</i> 'fifteen minutes past 11'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This translation is not okay.</li> <li>- The correct way of saying this is: <i>Chinsa isano n'erobo</i>, 'a quarter past eleven'.</li> <li>- They should say it as : <i>Chitageka ikomi na isano chiaetanirie chinsa isano</i>, 'It is fifteen minutes after eleven'</li> </ul>

### 3.2 Discussion

The “mistranslations” in question will be analysed according to what I deem to be the reasons for their sounding unnatural in Ekegusii. Two such reasons have been identified: *pragmatic implausibility* and *semantic inadequacy*. *Pragmatic implausibility* refers to the fact that the “mistranslation” has attributed certain semantic features to some entity which, logically, it does not possess. This is the case of the *breaking news* example already illustrated with its “mistranslation” which is deemed (in this paper) unnatural because normally only an entity that is concrete and solid can be broken, while the equivalent of *news* in Ekegusii, namely *amang’ana amayia* (literally ‘words new’) is not such an entity. For its part, *semantic inadequacy* refers to the fact that a given “mistranslation” contains only part of the semantic information that would be required for the translation to be fully adequate. That is the case of the translation of the English word *mortuary* as *enkendu* (literally ‘the cold one’). Such a translation does not go far enough to differentiate a mortuary from other cold rooms or houses, places and other items like clothes. (A full discussion of this example appears in subsection 3.2.2.)

#### 3.2.1 Pragmatic implausibility

Under this heading fall the following examples:

- (2) *award of a tender fraudulently*, translated as *etenda etareng ey’oboikeranu* (see item 5 in Table 1), literally: ‘a tender that is not faithful/complete /exact’.
- (3) *We lost the caller / that phone call has disconnected*, translated as *eyio nigo echarogete* (see 18 in Table 3), literally: ‘that is a jumped one’.
- (4) 11: 15 a.m., translated as *chitageka ikomi na isano igoro ye chitageka isano* (see 22 in Table 3), literally: ‘fifteen minutes on top of 11’.
- (5) *Love is in the air*, translated as *obwanchani bwoka bore embeo igoro* (see 20 in Table 2), literally: ‘it’s only love that is in the air’.
- (6) *I will play you the song you have requested*, translated as *Ingokobwatokera inde ogotera okwo* (see 19 in Table 3), literally: ‘I will unclench that song for you’.

The translations above are deemed pragmatically odd because they use words that do not collocate in Ekegusii. In example (2), except for the word *tender*, which is borrowed and nativized to *etenda*, the translation uses words that exist in the language but a combination of which does not read as an acceptable collocation in the language: indeed, in the translation *etenda etareng e y'oboikeranu* ('a tender that is not faithful/complete or exact') for *award of a tender fraudulently*, the word *etenda* ('tender') cannot collocate with *etareng e y'oboikeranu* ('that is not faithful / complete or exact'), because this idea of a tender being faithful or not is hard to imagine in Ekegusii, because one wonders whether there are "faithful" and "unfaithful" tenders. To this extent, the presenters' translation has altered the original meaning, which is about the process of awarding a tender not being procedural, while in the Ekegusii translation it is the tender itself, not the process, that is fraudulent. In other words, there has been a meaning shift in the translation. Although the informants who gave their views about this translation did not suggest a "better" one, they too were of the opinion that it was a mistranslation. (See their views in Table 1, in the rightmost column.)

In example (3), *a phone call that has disconnected* is literally translated as 'that one is a jumped one' (*eyio nigo echarogete*). The pragmatic implausibility is obvious here: if, in the listeners' mind, this means that a phone has jumped. An Ekegusii speaker can hardly picture a phone jumping over something or someone as only animate beings can be associated with the ability to jump. The informants (see Table 3) did indeed comment that there was no way that a phone could *jump* and they proposed the use of the verb *kobutoka* ('to cut').

A similar "mistranslation" was produced in example (4), in which the presenters talk about time. In Ekegusii, expressing the minutes that are past the hour is usually done using the term *chiaetanirie* ('past'), as in *chitageka ikomi chiaetanirie chinsa isano* (literally 'minutes ten past time eleven'). The same concept can also be talked about using *ne* ('and'), as in *chinsa isano ne chitageka ikomi* (literally 'time eleven and ten minutes'). However, in (4) the presenters used *igoro* ('on top of') when talking about the minutes that are past the hour. Usually, *igoro* is used to talk about fractions, as a preposition and as an adverb of place but not about time. That is, it cannot collocate with temporal expressions. A translation like that in (4) is not only unnatural but it is also an unacceptable "abuse" to the language, to



borrow the term *abuse* from Lewis (2012: 240), who, however, suggests that “A ‘good’ translation must always commit abuses. Or perhaps a ‘good’ translation must always play tricks.” But for a native Ekegusii speaker, the abuse under discussion here did not lead to a good translation at all.

In example (5), the English idiom *love is in the air* was translated literally as ‘(it’s) only love that is in the air’ (*obwanchani bwoka bore embeo igoro*). As one respondent pointed out, to someone who did not know its English equivalent, this Ekegusii version would not mean anything at all, because of the strangeness of the idea of love (*obwanchani*) hanging up (or moving) in the air.

In example (6), the sentence *I will play you the song you have requested* was translated as *Ingokobwatokera inde ogotera okwo* (literally: “I will unclench that song for you”). A song is not a tangible thing which can be *clenched* and *unclenched*, like a fist. The idea of “unclenching” a song is not something that the native speakers of Ekegusii would conceptualize. For them, it is pragmatically implausible to unclench it. Expressions such as *kobekera omonto ogotera* (literally: ‘to put (to play) a song for someone’) is usually used. One informant suggested the translation *kobugeria omonto engero*, that is ‘to play a song for someone’. This translation is acceptable, although it uses *engero* (‘a song’), a word which is archaic, and may therefore not be understood by some people.

### 3.2.2 *Semantic inadequacy*

Under this category fall the following examples.

- (7) *Taking loans*, translated as ‘*amakabeso*’ (see 2 in Table 1), literally: ‘the idea of taking things on credit’.
- (8) *Two people have been arrested ...*, translated as ‘*abanto babere babekirwe biara*’ (see 4 in Table 1), literally: ‘Two people have been “put in the fingers”’.
- (9) *Business news*, translated as ‘*amang’ana korwa ase emesa y’oobonchoreria*’ (see 9 in Table 1), literally: ‘news from the table of exchanges / barter trade’.
- (10) *Business people*, translated as ‘*abaonchoreria*’ (see 10 in Table 1), literally: ‘people who do exchanges’.
- (11) *A road accident*, translated as ‘*omobasokano o para*’ (see 6 in table1), literally: ‘an unexpected occurrence on the road’.

- (12) *Smart driving licence*, translated as '*chirainsensi chi'ekerero*' (see 8 in table 1), literally: 'the licences of today/these days, that is, modern licences'.
- (13) *A mortuary*, translated as '*enkendu*' (see 7 table 1), literally: 'the cold one'.
- (14) *Transport sector*, translated as '*esekita y'obosombi*' (see 11 in Table 1), literally: 'The sector of transferring/ carrying heaps of things from one place to another'.
- (15) *Driving school*, translated as '*esukuru y'obogendia*' (see 12 in Table 1), literally: 'a school for driving'.
- (16) *World Health Organization*, translated as '*ekeombe ki'obochenu ase ense engima*' (see 13 in Table 1), literally: 'The organization in charge in the whole world'.
- (17) *CS for Health*, translated as '*omogwasiri bw'obochenu*' (see 14 in Table 1), literally: 'the CS [Cabinet Secretary] for cleanliness'.
- (18) *Measures are in place to ensure that there will be no outbreak of Corona Virus in Kenya*, translated as '*emeroberio nereo korenda ebinyinyi bia Corona virus tibibaisa gwateka aa Kenya*' (see 15 in Table 1), literally: 'Measures are in place to protect the virus of Corona to break here in Kenya'.
- (19) *Be warned that betting can be addictive*, translated as '*ogopeti nabo korabeke obogima bwao ase obwoba*' (see 16 in Table 2), literally: 'Betting can put your life in fear'.
- (20) *We lost the caller/ that phone call has disconnected*, translated as '*eyio nigo echarogete*' (see 18 in Table 3), literally: 'that is a jumped one'.
- (21) *Your darling/sweetheart*, translated as '*risase riao*' (see 21 in Table 3), literally: 'your sun'.
- (22) The noun phrase, a suspect, translated as '*omokagerwa*' (see item 1 in Table 1), literally: 'a suspect', coined from *gokagera*, 'to suspect'.

In example (7), the noun *amakabeso* was used to translate the idea of taking a loan. However, this noun, derived from the verb *gokabesa* ('to ask someone to lend you money' or 'to take goods, especially from a shop, on credit'), does not have the meaning of 'loan' in Ekegusii. This is because *amakabeso* 'loan' refers to getting a commodity, not a loan, on credit. The price that will be paid for whatever commodity taken on credit is equivalent to the original market price, unlike a loan,

which, by definition, attracts interest. Similarly, borrowed money, in the context of *gokabesa* (the verb from which *amakabeso* is derived) does not attract any interest. *Amakabeso* (which happens to be another uncommon word in everyday vocabulary) has a narrower meaning, that of ‘borrowing but without interest’. The presenters might as well have used *chironi*, which is an adaptation of the English word *loans*, which is the usual, everyday word used in Ekegusii. On this word, even the Bosire and Machogu’s (2013) dictionary suggests *eroni* (singular for loans, whose plural is *chironi*), an adaptation of the English word ‘loan’ (p. 421).

In example (8), the translation of ‘[...] have been arrested’ as *babekirwe biara*, literally ‘have been put in the fingers’, could indeed be argued to somehow refer to idea of being arrested, but it seems to be an idiomatic description of the way law enforcers traditionally arrested someone by ‘holding his belt using their fingers’. But this is only part of what is normally expected to be the process of arresting somebody, which entails going far beyond just ‘putting them in the fingers’. For instance, nowadays, a person who is arrested is likely to be handcuffed as well. One informant pointed out that the presenters’ translation *babekirwe biara* was “difficult”, while another suggested that it was “archaic” (see the informant comments in Table 1).

In example (9) the word *business* was translated by *oboanchoreria* (literally ‘exchanges’ or ‘barter trade’), and in example (10) *business people* was translated with *abaanchoreria* (literally ‘people who carry out exchanges’). While the two Ekegusii terms are indeed the earlier and “authentic” forms, they nevertheless do not reflect the way the language users ordinarily talk nowadays. The two words stem from the verb *goanchoreria* (‘to exchange one item/commodity for another’). This reflects the era of barter trade, before the advent of the money economy. With specific reference to the translation of *business news* in example (9) by *amang’ana korwa ase emesa y’oboanchoreria* (literally ‘words from the table of exchanges’), it includes a ‘table’, which is not represented in the source text, but which is suggestive of somewhere to place tangible goods that could be exchanged. It would be interesting to know from the presenters why they preferred to use archaic terms over those that are used in everyday speech. Whatever their reason(s), it suffices to note that the “mistranslation” of *business news* by *amang’ana korwa ase emesa y’oboanchoreria* (‘news from the table of exchanges

/ barter trade’) rather paradoxically reflects at the same time semantic inadequacy (which is a case of undertranslation) and semantic superfluosity (which is a case of overtranslation). The former is reflected in the fact of limiting business to dealing in goods only, the latter is reflected in addition of a table, something that is not present in the source text.

In example (11), *a road accident* was translated as *omobasokano o para* (literally: ‘an unexpected occurrence on the road’). The noun *omobasokano* is derived from the adverb *mobasokano* (“unexpectedly”). While a road accident is not “expected”, it is not the only thing that can be unexpected on the road, hence the inadequacy of the translation. Yet Ekegusii has a word, borrowed from Kiswahili, namely *achari/ajali*<sup>2</sup>, which it commonly uses for *road accidents*. The word *omobasokano* is recorded in Bosire and Machogu’s (2013) dictionary for *an accident* (p. 29) but the authors also give *achari* as a synonym (p. 1054), which is the word that one would commonly hear in regular usage.

In example (12), *smart driving licences* was translated as *chiraisensi chi’ekerero* (literally: ‘the licences of modern’). The words *modern* and *smart* are not synonyms, but in this translation the latter was used for the former possibly because the smart driving licences being issued in Kenya are a new phenomenon, hence the idea of modern appearing in the translation. However, the notion of *modern* encompasses much more than that of *smart*, because, it could be argued, not everything that is modern is smart (i.e. in the sense of ‘intelligent’). So, translating *smart* with *modern* did not necessarily cover the idea of ‘intelligence’, and, hence, was not adequate. Since the *smart driving licences* look like identification cards, translating this phrase as *chiraisensi chi’ekadi* (‘the driving licences [in the form] of cards’), as opposed to the older ones that looked like a book, would be a narrower, but better, translation.

In example (13), *a mortuary* was translated as *enkendu* (literally: ‘something cold’). *Enkendu* is ordinarily used to describe things like food, drinks, clothes or houses, which can literally get cold. (But there is also an idiomatic use of it, namely *egari enkendu*, in which it collocates with the term for a vehicle (i.e. *egari*), for

---

<sup>2</sup> The people who are more careful with pronunciation say *ajali*, the very Kiswahili word, not *achari*. However, the latter term is, pronunciation-wise, the real word in Ekegusii, a language which does not have the voiced sound for the Kiswahili <ja>.

the whole phrase to literally mean ‘a cold car’, and, figuratively, and in its intended meaning, to mean ‘a sleek and classy car’.) However, the use of *enkendu* for a *mortuary* obviously has nothing to do with being classy; it must have to do instead with the ice slabs used to preserve bodies in a mortuary. In this case, the translation suffers from semantic inadequacy because it does not give enough information capable of differentiating a mortuary from other cold places. Therefore, *emochari* as a naturalized borrowing from the English *mortuary*, should be a better translation. Such a translation shows that trying to avoid loanwords (as the presenters who used *enkendu* must have tried to do) can lead to less acceptable translations.

*Transport sector* in example (14) was translated as *esekita y’obosombi* (‘the sector of transferring/carrying ...’). The noun *obosombi* was derived from the verb *gosomba*, which means ‘to make many trips while moving heaps of things such as sand, soil, stones, firewood or something like water from one point to another’. This term thus limits *transport* to inanimate things, probably the transportation of luggage, meaning that the radio presenters’ translation is inadequate to the extent that it is not general. One informant suggested *esekita ye chigari* (‘the sector of vehicles’ however this seems to favour road transport only. It is however surprising that three of the four suggestions given by the other informants relate to goods or luggage only. One wonders if this narrow perception is from the influence of the radio presenters or whether the informants interpreted *transport* as a verb and not as a noun, therefore triggering the Ekegusii verb *somba* (‘to move things from one place to another’). A better translation would be *esekita y’orogendo* (‘the sector of movement/travel’) since this encompasses all modes of transport and it is not specific to goods only or human beings only.

In example (15), a *driving school* was translated as *esukuru y’obogendia* (literally: ‘the school of driving’). While the noun *obogendia* does indeed mean ‘driving’, the person who has gone to this school is not ordinarily called *omogendia*, as would be linguistically expected. A driver is referred to as *entereba*, a term borrowed from the Kiswahili word *dereva*. In fact, *entereba* (with its plural form *chintereba*) is the everyday word in Ekegusii. It would be perfectly correct to translate *driving school* as *esukuru y’obonterebeba* (‘the school for drivers’). It should be noted that two alternative translations were suggested by other native speakers:

a) *esukuru y'oborundia* and b) *esukuru y'okogendia chigari*. Both *oborundia* (a noun) and *okogendia* (a gerund) mean 'driving'; they seem to be simply dialectal variants in Ekegusii. It appears that the Egesa FM radio presenters have a translation (*driving school* as *esukuru y'obogendia*) not shared by other native speakers, but one which seems to have recently led to a "forced" distinction between *drivers* and *motorbike riders*: some informants suggested that *riders* are called *abagendia* (plural of *omogendia*) while *drivers* are called *chintereba*.

The *World Health Organization* in example (16) was translated as *ekeombe ki'obochenu ase ense engima* ('the organization of cleanliness in the whole world') and *CS [Cabinet Secretary] for Health* in example (17) was translated as *omogwasiri bw'obochenu* ('the CS [Cabinet Secretary] for cleanliness'). In both cases, the concept of interest is that of *health*, which was translated as *obochenu* (literally: 'cleanliness'). Since cleanliness is only one aspect that contributes to a person's health, translating health as just *obochenu* is a clear case of semantic inadequacy, since there are more aspects to health than just cleanliness. Surprisingly, it turned out that the vast majority (5 out of 6) of the informants interviewed so far also translated *health* as just *obochenu* ('cleanliness'), even though they too were somewhat perplexed by the idea of limiting health to just cleanliness. Only one informant suggested *ekeombe ki'oboikeranu bw'omobere ase ense engima* (literally: 'world organization for the normalcy of the body') for *World Health Organization*, and *omogwasiri bw' oboikeranu bw'omobere* (literally: 'the CS for the normalcy of the body') for the CS for health. However, the term *oboikeranu* ('normalcy') has many other meanings, such as 'faithfulness', 'exactness', and 'completeness'. Because of this, this latter informant's translation is not recommendable either. One which the present author recommends is simply the word *afia*<sup>3</sup>, a loan word from Kiswahili (where it is spelt as *afya*), but one which is already used and understood by many Ekegusii speakers, perhaps the majority of them.

In example (18), the sentence *Measures are in place to ensure that we do not have an outbreak of Coronavirus in Kenya* as *emeroberio nereo korenda ebinyinyi bia Corona tibibaisa gwateka aa Kenya* (literally: 'Measures are in place to protect

---

<sup>3</sup> The voiceless labio-dental /f/ is not one of the sounds in Ekegusii but it is now features in some borrowed words like *file* (realized as *efaeri* n Ekegusii) and *afya*

the virus of Corona to break here in Kenya'). The term *an outbreak* was translated by the verb *gwateka* ('to break'). (This is the same term that was used to translate the idea of *breaking* in the earlier example, *breaking news*). Translating *an outbreak*, which denotes an *epidemic*, using the same term as that which denotes 'an incident that is occurring/has occurred' (in *breaking news*) is a case of semantic inadequacy, because the extent of 'breaking' is quite different in the two cases: it is much larger in *outbreak* than in *breaking news*. So, the same radio presenters who translated both terms ought to have used a different term for *outbreak*. One informant pointed out that *breaking news* is usually bad news, a view which might be shared by the radio presenters in question, and which would explain why they used the same term. A better translation of *Coronavirus outbreak* would be a paraphrase that considers Coronavirus a disease, in which case that sentence would be translated as *emeroberio nereo y'ogotanga oborwaie bwa Korona gosoa aa Kenya* (literally: "Measures are there to prevent entry of disease of Corona here in Kenya"). Although the suggested translation does not make mention of *virus*, the causative agent has never been emphasized in the community. Instead, the emphasis is usually on how one contracts a disease and the preventive measures needed.

In example (19), the warning, *Be warned that betting can be addictive* was translated as *ogopeti nabo korabeke obogima bwao ase obwoba* (literally: 'Betting can put your life in fear'). Arguably, this can be analysed as a "mistranslation" because there is no direct relationship between betting and fear. That is, not enough information was given to clearly link the two. Or better still, two unrelated things were linked by that "mistranslation".

In example (21), the phrase *your darling/sweetheart* was translated as *risase riao*, (literally: 'sun yours', i.e. 'your sun'). This translation is inadequate to the extent that it does not offer specific information to clearly show why *a darling/sweetheart* should be compared to *a sun*. One informant suggested that *one's lover* can be compared to *the sun* since the sun shines, a suggestion which that the *Egesa FM* presenters would likely go along with. However, in Ekegusii culture people do not definitely relate love to the sun. This gives the "mistranslation" *risase riao* ('your sun') both an element of semantic inadequacy and that of semantic implausibility.

In example (22), the single lexical item *omokagerwa* ('a suspect') will not be the natural way of referring to 'a person suspected of ...'. The noun *omokagerwa* hardly occurs in Ekegusii; in fact, it could be argued that it was coined (by the radio presenters in question), from the verb *gokagera*, which means 'to assume', 'to guess' or 'to suspect'. The word could also have been picked up from Bosire and Machogu's (2013) dictionary, which also literally translates *a suspect* as *omokagerwa*. Although *omokagerwa* appears in this dictionary, it is important to point out that the dictionary suggests a word which is not in the language's everyday vocabulary. And to understand *omokagerwa* as a suspect, one will need to work around all the meanings of *gokagera* before getting to the intended one. While the coinage *omokagerwa* fits in the phonotactics of Ekegusii, it sums up a concept which cannot, in this language, be summed up in one word. So, in the process of "summing up", it "leaves out" some aspects of the idea of 'a person being suspected of ...', and, hence, it is semantically inadequate as a translation.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This paper pointed out and analysed instances of "mistranslations" produced by *Egesa FM* radio presenters in news bulletins, advertisements, and their own comments on callers' comments. The term *mistranslations* has been used in this paper because they are perceived by a number of native Ekegusii speakers (among whom is the present author) as being pragmatically implausible (for some of them) or semantically inadequate (for others) in Ekegusii. One illustration of pragmatic implausibility lies in the translation of *love is in the air* as *obwanchani bwoka bore embeo igoro* (literally: 'it is only love that is in the air'), a literal translation which, while seemingly remaining faithful to the source text, contains the implausible idea in Ekegusii that love is something that "hangs up" or "moves" in the air to the extent that it can be seen or smelt or felt in somehow or other. For its part, semantic inadequacy was illustrated by, among other examples, the translation of *transport sector* as *esekita y'obosombi* (literally: 'the sector of transferring heaps or large quantities of things such as sand, water, etc.'). Such a translation can only refer to the *movement of goods*, but not to that of people. Since *Egesa FM* radio presenters are opinion-makers among the Gusii community, the coinages and loan



words they use based mostly on calques of English expressions are likely to progressively take root. Indeed, one informant's comment received by the author is that a given translation deemed to be a "mistranslation" in this paper "is all right because it is said by *Egesa FM* presenters." While some of the "mistranslations" discussed in the present study are likely to stick in Ekegusii in the long term, given the inevitable phenomenon of language change, in the short term those presenters and other native speakers need to be sensitized to the damage that the tendency to calque certain English expressions without caring about how pragmatically odd or semantically inadequate these calques are is likely to cause to the Ekegusii language and the culture it embodies.

## REFERENCES

- Bosire, Kennedy Momanyi & Gladys Kwamboka Machogu. 2013. *Authoritative Ekegusii Dictionary: Endabaro, Endabasia y'Ekegusii*. Nairobi: Ekegusii Encyclopedia Project.
- Chesterman, Andrew. 1997. *Memes of Translation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Lewis, Philip E. 2012. "The measure of translation". In Venuti, Lawrence (ed.) *The Translation Studies Reader*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. London & New York: Routledge.
- Nida, Eugene. 2012. "Principles of correspondence". In Venuti, Lawrence (ed.) *The Translation Studies Reader* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn.). London & New York: Routledge.
- Trudgill, Peter. 2000. *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn. London: Penguin.

*Author's email address:* [zipporahotiso@uonbi.ac.ke](mailto:zipporahotiso@uonbi.ac.ke)