

A Comparative Analysis of *Βαπτίζοντες* in the Greek New Testament (Matthew 28:19) and the Fulbe Bible

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Abstract

Bible translation is a vital tool used by the Church to communicate the gospel in the heart languages of various communities, with the aim of fostering spiritual growth and discipleship. However, when a target audience lacks access to Scripture in their native language or encounters translation inconsistencies that obscure the original meaning, understanding the biblical message becomes significantly hindered. This paper explores the translation challenges faced by the Fulani people, focusing specifically on the rendering of the Greek term *βαπτίζοντες* in Matthew 28:19 within the Fulbe Bible. Using the Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics approach, this article investigates the contextual meanings of the Fulfulde terms *baptisma*, *baptisima*, *batisima*, and *looton* and compares them exegetically with the original Greek term *baptizantes*. The findings indicate that *mutineede* is the most suitable translation, as it accurately conveys the theological significance of water baptism while resonating with the cultural and linguistic framework of the Fulani people. By addressing these translation issues, the article contributes to a more theologically sound and culturally relevant understanding of baptism among Fulani Christians, an essential step toward deeper discipleship and integration into the Christian faith. Accordingly, churches, missionaries, and Bible translation organisations across Africa are encouraged to consider adopting *mutineede* in future outreach strategies and Bible translation revisions to enhance the Fulani community's comprehension and connection to Scripture in their own language.

Keywords: Bible translation, *βαπτίζοντες*, mother tongue, hermeneutics, Fulfulde

How to cite this article: Asamoah, Emmanuel Foster and Ebenezer Tetteh Kpalam. "A Comparative Analysis of *Βαπτίζοντες* in the Greek New Testament (Matthew 28:19) and the Fulbe Bible." *Pentecost Journal of Theology and Mission* 6, no. 1 (2025): 89-105.

Introduction

The Fulbe¹ ethnic group in Ghana is considered an Unreached People Group (UPG) because there are not enough indigenous Christians to evangelise their community

¹ The Fulanis are also known as Fulbe or Fula people.

without external help.² As a result, they have minimal or no exposure to the gospel of Jesus Christ, lacking access to Christian teachings, churches, or missionaries. This limited exposure is further compounded by the fact that fewer than 2% of the population identifies as evangelical Christians, making the number of Fulani believers too small to drive widespread evangelism within their community. Historical patterns of Christian growth, however, show that even small groups can have a significant impact under the right conditions.³

Despite diligent attempts by missionaries and churches to evangelise them, a significant number of Fula individuals who embrace Jesus Christ as their Lord and personal saviour continue to refuse the ritual of water baptism. This was apparent during a 2023 National Fulani Convention organised at Radash in Tamale by Home and Urban Missions (HUM), a ministry intervention within The Church of Pentecost to assess Urban Missions, Home Missions, and ministry to Unreached People Groups in Ghana.⁴ The conference, attended by over 494 participants, including Fulani⁵, Chokosi, Kotokoli and Chakali believers, resulted in 52 individuals accepting Jesus Christ as lord and saviour, thereby receiving salvation, although only 12 of these converts expressed their willingness to undergo water baptism, which is the Christian religious rite of immersing them in water, symbolising purification or regeneration and admission to the Christian Church.⁶ It was later revealed that a significant source of resistance can be traced to the translation of the term ‘baptism’ in the Fulani Bible, as it does not adequately convey categories consistent with their worldview and modes of thought.

This situation reflects Chroust’s assertion that “misrepresenting the mother tongue...can negatively impact cultural identity and communication with the local audience.”⁷ When a native language is translated inaccurately or used improperly, it not only distorts the message but also breaks the speaker’s connection to their cultural heritage. Such disconnection hinders comprehension and diminishes the impact of the

² Joshua Project, Definition: Unreached / Least Reached (UPGs) (2025),

<https://www.joshuaproject.net/search?term=fulani&limit=0>.

³ Global Frontiers Missions, *What is UPG?* Retrieved from

[https://www.globalfrontiermissions.org/missions-101/the-unreached-peoples-and-their-role-in-the-great-commission#:~:text=Unreached%20People%20Group%20\(UPG\)&text=The%20only%20opportunity%20for%20the,%E2%80%9Creached%E2%80%9D%20with%20the%20Gospel](https://www.globalfrontiermissions.org/missions-101/the-unreached-peoples-and-their-role-in-the-great-commission#:~:text=Unreached%20People%20Group%20(UPG)&text=The%20only%20opportunity%20for%20the,%E2%80%9Creached%E2%80%9D%20with%20the%20Gospel) on October 18, 2024.

⁴ Through observant participation during outreach missions at the 2023 National Fulani Convention, held in November at Radash in Tamale and organised by Home and Urban Missions (HUM), one of the researchers observed that despite the earnest efforts of church leaders to baptise over 20 Fulani individuals who had accepted Christ, more than 70% declined to undergo the ritual of water baptism.

⁵ The majority of participants were Fulanis, accounting for a total of 298 individuals, consisting of 195 adults and 103 children.

⁶ The Church of Pentecost – Home and Urban Missions, *Report on Fulani Convention 2023*, Unpublished

⁷ Gerhard Chroust, “Localization, Culture, and Global Communication,” *Networking and Telecommunications: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (2010): 925-936. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-60566-986-1.CH060> on June 23, 2024.

message within the local context, rendering communication ineffective and devoid of its intended significance. The issue becomes even more concerning when mistranslation leads to culturally inappropriate or misleading interpretations. A notable example is the rendering of the Greek term βαπτίζοντες in the Fulfulde Bible, which carries a meaning distinct from the original text and creates confusion for Fulani readers. This article is therefore motivated by the need to bridge this cultural and linguistic gap, aiming to encourage Fulani believers to embrace baptism, as commanded by Jesus Christ, through accurate, culturally resonant translation of key theological terms.

Bible translation into the mother tongue

God's objective to establish a connection with the entire world, particularly with his own people, is accomplished by utilising their indigenous languages.⁸ Bible translation is an essential instrument for disseminating the Gospel in Ghana and throughout Africa, as it connects the Christian message with the continent's varied local cultures. The translation of religious literature into native languages enables individuals to comprehend and assimilate the lessons of the Gospel in ways that are significant and pertinent to their daily lives. This process is essential, as language is closely connected to culture, identity, and perspective. Using a local language renders the Bible's message more accessible and intimate, facilitating a deeper connection with its teachings.

Furthermore, rendering the Bible into indigenous languages dispels the notion that Christianity is an alien or imposed faith.⁹ Historically, Christianity was frequently introduced to Africa by Western missionaries, and the utilisation of European languages such as English, French, or Portuguese in religious writings reinforced the perception that Christianity was associated with alien civilisations. Presenting the Bible in a local language facilitates dismantling this barrier. The populace no longer perceives the Gospel as an external or foreign entity but instead as a component that can be assimilated into their cultural and spiritual legacy.

This integration is essential, as it enables the Christian message to align with local traditions, beliefs, and perspectives.¹⁰ The Gospel's teachings are more likely to be embraced and adhered to as they harmonise with the culture, integrating seamlessly into it. By comprehending the Bible in their own tongue, individuals can apply its

⁸ Thomas Atta-Akosah, "The Language factor in African Christian Mission: Bible Translation and Biblical Interpretation in the Church in African Church," *Journal of African Christian thought*, Vol. 15(2), (2012): 20-22.

⁹ Emmanuel Foster Asamoah, "A Comparative Study of Alfa Kai to Omega in the Greek New Testament (Revelation 1:8) and Asante-Twi Bible," *Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics And Theology (MOTBIT)*, 2(1) (2020): 71.

¹⁰ See Emmanuel Foster Asamoah, "The Bible and Akan Traditional Religious Values: A Search for Dialogue," *Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics and Theology (MOTBIT)*, 2(2) (2022): 78-86.

teachings in accordance with their societal norms and customs, thereby enhancing its significance and enduring influence. A translation that fails to align with the religio-cultural worldview of the target audience or reflects the ideological intentions of the translator can, rather than supporting the local population, erode, dislocate, and disconnect them from their cultural heritage. This is exemplified by the work of Robert Moffat, who, in 1826, translated the first Setswana catechism, using Rev. William Brown's Catechism as a source text, along with the third chapter of the Gospel of John and the Lord's Prayer. According to Mothoagae, Moffat's translation served as a tool of power, ultimately disassociating the Batswana from their epistemic and spiritual heritage.¹¹

To address this challenge, David Dewey suggests two approaches to understanding Scripture in contexts other than those of the original recipients: either by gaining proficiency in biblical languages or by using a translated version of the Word of God.¹² Acquiring proficiency in biblical languages such as Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek is often regarded as a complex and difficult undertaking by many individuals. Recognising this challenge, Dewey's alternative approach, accessing the Word of God through its translated versions, emerges as a more practical and accessible solution for African Christians in their worship practices. For many believers in Africa, translations offer the opportunity to engage with Scripture in a language they understand, making the teachings of the Bible more immediate and meaningful to their lives. However, while this method brings clear advantages, it also introduces certain risks related to the accuracy and fidelity of the translations.

One significant risk is that translations may not always fully capture the original meaning or shades of the biblical texts. At times, misinterpretations or inaccuracies may occur, leading Bible readers and users to unknowingly rely on a version of Scripture that might not fully capture its intended meaning while assuming it to be correct. These theological challenges can have profound theological implications, potentially distorting key doctrines or leading to misunderstandings of biblical principles. For instance, if a term is mistranslated or misunderstood, it could lead to practices or beliefs that deviate from the original intent of the text. This is a critical concern, especially in communities where individuals may lack the resources to verify translations against the original biblical languages.

Additionally, translation issues may lead some believers to doubt. If they notice discrepancies between the translated Scriptures and their personal religious or cultural beliefs, they might begin to question the accuracy of the translation. As a

¹¹ I. D. Mothoagae, "A Decolonial Reading of the Third Chapter of the Gospel of John in Moffat's Translation of the Catechism into Setswana (1826)," *Acta Theologica* (2023). <https://doi.org/10.38140/at.vi.7752>.

¹² David Dewey, *A User's Guide to Bible-Translations: Making the Most of Different Versions* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 29.

result, individuals may become cautious about trusting pastors, theologians, or other Christian leaders who rely on these translated texts. The fear of being misled, especially when the translation contradicts deeply held cultural customs or values, can lead some believers to avoid using the translated Scriptures altogether. This hesitancy could hinder their spiritual growth and engagement with the Word of God, creating a divide between faith practices and Scripture.

Another challenge arises when original biblical materials are not translated precisely but rather are adapted or borrowed into the local language. In these cases, local individuals may come to regard these borrowed words as perfectly natural to their language, failing to recognise their foreign origins.¹³ This can create a situation where people accept these terms uncritically, assuming that they are authentic to their own culture, even though they may not reflect the original meaning intended by the biblical text. Over time, this can lead to a disconnect between the true message of the Bible and how it is understood in the local context.

Conversely, some individuals may discern that the language employed in a translation is not their native tongue, resulting in a complete dismissal of the translated version. For these folks, the inclusion of foreign terminology or notions in their religious texts may appear inauthentic and estranged from their cultural identity. This rejection is detrimental, since it may restrict their engagement with the Bible and alienate them from the tenets of the faith. Naudé endorses this viewpoint, contending that indigenous Bible translations have emerged as a significant influence in moulding biblical discourse, altering colonial interactions, and affecting cultural dynamics of ownership, resistance, and indigenisation.¹⁴ When translations are grounded in the traditions, languages, and cultures of local communities, individuals are more inclined to accept, rather than oppose, the work, facilitating its complete integration into their cultural and spiritual practices.

An example of this can be found in the analysis of the Greek word βαπτίζοντες, which appears in the New Testament in Matthew 28:19. The translation of this term and its presentation in the local language do not appear to align with the religious and cultural worldview of the Fulani people in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in Ghana. This translation diverges from the original meaning, leading to misunderstandings about the sacrament of baptism and its role in the Christian faith. As a result, it alters how Fulani Christians perceive this vital ritual, diminishing its spiritual significance.

¹³ Emmanuel Foster Asamoah, "A Comparative Study of *to Alfa Kai to Omega* in the Greek New Testament (Revelation 1:8) and Asante-Twi Bible," *Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics and Theology (MOTBIT)*, 2(1): 71. <https://doi.org/10.38159/motbit.2020049>

¹⁴ J. Naudé, "The Bible and its Translations: Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters with the Indigenous: Preface," *Acta Theologica*, (2009): 3-7.

This article provides an analysis of the Greek term βαπτίζοντες in Matthew 28:19, emphasising its theological implications beyond the mere physical act of baptism. It also investigates the translation of this term in the Fulani Bible, scrutinising the linguistic, cultural, and theological issues involved in rendering it into Fulani. The article evaluates whether the translation preserves the original meaning or forfeits essential nuances while considering the greater intricacies of Bible translation.

Methodological Considerations

This article employs a Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics approach, combining biblical interpretation with indigenous language and cultural settings analysis.¹⁵ The Greek text βαπτίζοντες (Matthew 28:19) is examined exegetically and semantically and then analysed across multiple Fulfulde Bible translations to evaluate how the concept of baptism is conveyed within Fulani linguistic and cultural frameworks. To apply this methodology, a detailed linguistic comparison was conducted between the Greek term and its Fulfulde renderings, assessing their clarity, resonance, and theological accuracy.

Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five Fulani Christians, three of whom are gospel ministers, selected as key informants for their linguistic and theological insight. Their responses helped assess how well the translated terms align with Fulani religious thought and cultural expression. Further data were gathered through secondary sources, including Greek lexicons, biblical commentaries, Bible dictionaries, and scholarly articles, to support the exegetical analysis and evaluate existing Fulfulde Bible versions. This triangulated method ensured both textual fidelity and contextual relevance, allowing for culturally informed recommendations for improved Bible translation.

Meaning of βαπτίζοντες

The Greek Text

πορευθέντες ὅν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, ἡ βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος (Matthew 28:19).¹⁶

¹⁵ See: Jonathan E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "Comparative study of the translation of Pleroustheen Pneumati in some Ghanaian mother tongue translations of Ephesians 5:18," in *West African Association of Theological Institution (WAATI)*, edited by Francis Appiah-Kubi, Peter Addai-Mensah and Nathan Iddrisu Samwini (2014): 87; Jonathan E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics: A Current Trend in Biblical Studies in Ghana," *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies* 3 (4): 575-579; Jonathan E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "Doing Biblical Studies using the Mother-tongue Approach," *Journal of Applied Thought* 1(1):55-80.

¹⁶ Matthew 28:19 BYZ.

Transliteration

poreuthentes oun mathēteusate panta ta ethnē, baptizontes autous eis to onoma tou patros kai tou huiou kai tou hagiou pneumatos.

Meaning

The Greek participle βαπτίζοντες derives from the root verb βαπτίζω, which mainly means to “immerse” or “submerge,” often in water. This term is important in various religious and cultural contexts within the New Testament. Its meanings vary depending on the setting, ranging from physical acts to deeper spiritual symbolism.

In the context of Jewish ceremonial traditions, βαπτίζοντες refers to specific purification rituals, particularly the act of washing hands before meals or after coming into contact with certain impurities. This is evident in Scriptures such as Mark 7:4 and Luke 11:38, where the term emphasises the importance of cleanliness in religious observance. These rituals were deeply embedded in Jewish religious practice as part of the broader system of purification.

More prominently, βαπτίζοντες signifies the practice of baptism, a central ritual in early Christianity. Baptism, in this sense, involved submersion in water as a sign of repentance and as initiation into the faith.¹⁷ This practice was carried out by John the Baptist and continued by the early Christian community. The act of baptism is highlighted in several New Testament passages, such as Matthew 3:11, where John baptises in water but speaks of a more significant baptism to come, and Matthew 28:19, where Jesus commands his disciples to baptise all nations in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Other biblical references, such as Acts 2:38 and 1 Corinthians 1:14-17, further illustrate the central role baptism played in the early church as a public declaration of faith and a means of spiritual cleansing.

Beyond its literal meaning, the term also carries metaphorical significance. In several New Testament passages, baptism is used figuratively to symbolise spiritual purification and transformation. For example, in Matthew 3:11, baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire signifies a deeper form of spiritual renewal and judgment. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 10:2, the act of baptism is linked to the Israelites’ passage through the Red Sea, metaphorically representing their deliverance and incorporation into a covenantal relationship with God. In 1 Corinthians 12:13, baptism is portrayed as the means by which believers are spiritually united into one body, the church, regardless of their cultural or social backgrounds. These metaphorical uses elevate baptism beyond the physical act of immersion, pointing to its role in the spiritual transformation and integration of individuals into the community of believers.

¹⁷ “Kuwornu-Adjaottor, “Translations and interpretations of baptizontes (Mt 28:19-20) in some Ghanaian mother tongue translations of the Bible,” <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i1.6859>

Thus, βαπτίζοντες encompasses a range of meanings, from physical purification and religious ritual to a profound spiritual act of renewal and community-building. The term's versatility in the New Testament reflects both the practical and symbolic importance of baptism in early Christian theology and practice, where it served as a bridge between physical cleansing and spiritual rebirth.

Problem with the Fulbe translation of Matthew 20:19

Brief Description of the Fula (Fulani) People

The Fula people, or Fulbe, speak in Fulfulde, their official language, and are considered one of the unreached ethnic groups in Ghana.¹⁸ Their presence extends across a broad geographical region in Africa, from Senegal in the west to Darfur in the east. Although the Fula people are widely distributed, their exact beginnings remain enigmatic, akin to the mystery of the universe's genesis.¹⁹ The Fulani people in Ghana are dispersed over the nation, with notable populations in the northern regions and certain areas of the Ashanti and Eastern regions.

Osman Alhassan notes that the Fulani community in Ghana, despite living in the country for many generations, continues to face limited acceptance from local populations. They are often marginalised and excluded from full participation in political representation and healthcare services.²⁰ This marginalisation has established obstacles to their complete absorption into Ghanaian society. Despite these limitations, initiatives to disseminate the Christian message among the Fulani have proliferated across multiple locations of their habitation.²¹ Bible reading passages and several outreach initiatives have been established to engage the Fulani population.

Currently, there are more than seven translated editions of the Bible available in their language. Nevertheless, these translations were not produced by translation organisations in Ghana, indicating the involvement of international entities in supplying Bible resources to this society. This highlights the ongoing efforts to connect the Fulani community with the gospel message, despite sociocultural barriers. A major challenge in reaching out to the Fulbe is the use of translated versions of the Bible that do not resonate with their religious and cultural thought patterns; accurate

¹⁸ A. Adebayo, "Of Man and Cattle: A Reconsideration of the Traditions of Origin of Pastoral Fulani of Nigeria," *History in Africa*, 18 (1991): 1-21. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.2307/3172050> on June 23, 2024.

¹⁹ M. D. W. Jeffreys, "Speculative Origins of the Fulani Language," *Africa* 17(1) (1947): 47-54. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1156939>.

²⁰ Osman Alhassan, *Identity, citizenship and the Fulani in Ghana: Observations from Gushiegu, Donkorkrom and Dawadawa*. Retrieved from <https://www.diiis.dk/en/node/24349> on June 6, 2024.

²¹ The Church of Pentecost has instituted a ministry known as Home and Urban Missions (HUM), which encompasses a specific division for Fulani Ministry, overseen by a Fulani pastor. This ministry is dedicated to disseminating the gospel among the Fulani population in Ghana, effectively converting some individuals to Christianity through their outreach initiatives.

translation is crucial for the clear understanding and acceptance of Scriptures among speakers of a specific language.

The Fulani Bible

Currently, there is no Fulani Bible translated and published specifically for Fulani Christians by Bible publishers in Ghana. As a result, Fulani converts in Ghana depend on Bible translations from other African countries to read and understand the Scriptures in their indigenous language, Fulfulde. The Fulfulde translations comprise the Fulfulde (Adamawa) Bible (1994), the Fulfulde DC Bible (1994), the Fulfulde Burkina Faso New Testament (2012, 2021), Fulfulde (Central-Eastern Niger) (2015), the Fulfulde (Maasinanakoore) (2005, 2012, 2022), Fulfulde (Western Niger) (2005, 2018), Fulfulde Caka Nigeria (2010), and the Pular Bible (2011).

In these Fulani Bibles, many phrases have been utilised to express the meaning of the Greek word βαπτίζοντες. The discrepancies in translation illustrate the linguistic diversity among various Fulfulde-speaking regions. The terminology used includes *baptisma*, *baptisima*, *batisima*, and *looton*. These terminologies are modified to reflect the dialectical and cultural variations among Fulfulde-speaking communities, ensuring that the notion of baptism is understood within the specific linguistic and cultural framework of each area. Nonetheless, these discrepancies in translation may pose challenges to maintaining consistency in theological understanding, particularly across diverse Fulani populations in numerous African nations.

Problem with the Fulfulde Translation of βαπτίζοντες (Matthew 28:19)

The employment of the term *baptisma* in the Fulani Bible, a transcription of the Greek word βαπτίζοντες, presents considerable difficulties for Fulani Christians. While transliteration utilises similar alphabetic systems to help Fulani speakers recognise the term, it often fails to adequately express its theological significance or the cultural implications of baptism within Christian doctrine. The lack of comprehension hinders Fulani Christians from fully grasping the significance of baptism, as the notion is absent from their traditional lexicon and religious customs. The names *baptisima* and *batisima*, both transliterations, face the same issue: they do not effectively convey the deep significance and spiritual importance of baptism in a way that resonates with the Fulani people's religio-cultural perspective.

Additionally, the Fulfulde word *looton*, which means "two or more individuals bathing someone or something," adds an extra layer of complexity to translating the concept of baptism. While it reflects the physical action of immersion, it lacks the symbolic and spiritual depth central to Christian baptism, such as repentance, spiritual rebirth, and incorporation into the faith community. As a result, *looton* does not adequately convey the theological significance of baptism, making it difficult for

Fulani believers to grasp its full meaning. Without a translation that aligns with both the religious and cultural context of the Fulani context, understanding and accepting the Christian concept of baptism remains a challenge.

Findings and Discussions

Five Fulani individuals, namely, Sulemana Abubakar Diallo, Hamidou Diallo, Mariam Barry Diallo, Jiddi Barry, and Iddirisa Barry, were interviewed to assess their understanding of the terms *baptisma*, *baptisima*, *batisima*, and *looton*, as well as their relevance within their religio-cultural context.²² All interviewees unanimously agreed that these terms are unfamiliar and do not resonate with their worldview or religious practices. They explained that the first three terms, *baptisma*, *baptisima*, and *batisima*, are similar in form but are not native Fulani words. In contrast, *looton* is a Fulani term; however, it lacks the theological significance of the Greek word βαπτίζοντες. This disconnect in terminology highlights a deeper issue in how baptism is communicated to the Fulani through Scripture.

The reluctance of many Fulanis to undergo water baptism can partly be attributed to the translation of certain terminology in their Bible, namely *baptisma*, *baptisima*, and *batisima*, which do not bring out clearly the meaning of the concept in their language, as well as the usage of *looton*, which is culturally embedded but does not convey the concept of baptism as understood in Christian circles. According to Diallo, the incorrect translation has substantial consequences for the Fulani population; their encounters with unfamiliar terminology have led to misconceptions and shallow interpretations.²³

The transliteration of baptism terms in the Fulfulde Bible does not fully meet God's objective of reaching his people through their indigenous language. These have profound effects on the Fulani people. Aside from leading to misunderstandings among Fulani believers, it also hinders their grasp of the spiritual significance and theological meaning associated with water baptism. This lack of understanding prevents individuals from fully engaging in or appreciating baptism's role in their

²² Sulemana Abubakar Diallo, "Interview on Baptism," interview by Emmanuel Foster Asamoah, A Comparative Analysis of Βαπτίζουτες In the Greek New Testament (Matthew 28:19) And Fulbe Bible, June 23, 2024; Hamidou Diallo, "Interview on Baptism," interview by Emmanuel Foster Asamoah, A Comparative Analysis of Βαπτίζουτες In the Greek New Testament (Matthew 28:19) And Fulbe Bible, June 23, 2024; Jiddi Barry, "Interview on Baptism," interview by Emmanuel Foster Asamoah, A Comparative Analysis of Βαπτίζουτες In the Greek New Testament (Matthew 28:19) And Fulbe Bible, June 23, 2024; Jiddi Barry, "Interview on Baptism," interview by Emmanuel Foster Asamoah, A Comparative Analysis of Βαπτίζουτες In the Greek New Testament (Matthew 28:19) And Fulbe Bible, June 23, 2024. Iddirisa Barry is a Fulani church planter in Burkina Faso and fellowships with JamTan; Mariam Barry Diallo, "Interview on Baptism," interview by Emmanuel Foster Asamoah, A Comparative Analysis of Βαπτίζουτες In the Greek New Testament (Matthew 28:19) And Fulbe Bible, June 23, 2024.

²³ Diallo, *Interview on phone*, on June 23, 2024

spiritual journey and growth. This is affirmed by Hamidou Diallo, who struggles to get the understanding from Fulani converts who read the Fulani Bible. In other words, they do not understand the meaning of the transliterated texts. Furthermore, it hinders the incorporation of Christian doctrines into indigenous cultures and traditions, diminishing the Gospel's transformational efficacy and resulting in theological ambiguity. Wendland contends that when listeners are required to expend considerable effort to comprehend a message, they do not fully reap the advantages of communication, rendering it less pertinent to their context.²⁴

Furthermore, the disconnect between translated terms and local cultural contexts diminishes the relevance and applicability of Christian teachings in daily life, potentially leading to resistance to embracing Christian beliefs and practices related to baptism. These hinder God's aims to establish a connection with the entire world, particularly His own people, through the use of their native languages.²⁵ This is because the current transliteration in the Fulfulde Bible falls short of achieving this goal. Furthermore, the misinterpretation of the concept in the Fulfulde language prevents converts from undergoing baptism.

To address these challenges, a proposed term for consideration in the Fulani context is *mutineede*,²⁶ which can mean both "to be dunked or submerged in water" and "to be baptised."²⁷ The first meaning implies compelling someone into water with the intent to drown, sharply contrasting with the Christian understanding of baptism. However, the second meaning aligns with the concept of water baptism. This dual meaning creates confusion among the Fulani people, who fear the former interpretation during water baptism.

Diallo observes that the Fulani find it difficult to understand the concept of baptism because, from childhood, they are familiar with the term *mutineede*,²⁸ from which

²⁴ E. Wendland, "Review: Bible Translation Basics: Communicating Scripture in a Relevant Way," *The Bible Translator*, 63 (2012): 219 - 224. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026009351206300407>.

²⁵ Thomas Atta-Akosah, "The Language factor in African Christian Mission: Bible Translation and Biblical Interpretation in the Church in African Church," *Journal of African Christian thought*, Vol. 15(2), (2012): 20-22.

²⁶ This term is supported by insights from multiple Fulani Christian leaders. Hamidou Diallo, a Fulani missionary based in Tumu (Upper West Region, Ghana), affirmed its relevance during a phone interview on June 23, 2024. Jiddi Barry, "Interview on Baptism," interview by Emmanuel Foster Asamoah, *A Comparative Analysis of Βαπτίζοντες In the Greek New Testament (Matthew 28:19) And Fulbe Bible*, June 23, 2024. Jiddi Barry is a Fulani pastor in Mali, and Iddirisa Barry, a Fulani church planter in Burkina Faso affiliated with the JamTan fellowship; Mariam Barry Diallo, "Interview on Baptism," interview by Emmanuel Foster Asamoah, *A Comparative Analysis of Βαπτίζοντες In the Greek New Testament (Matthew 28:19) And Fulbe Bible*, June 23, 2024.

²⁷ Dictionnaire Fulfulde – français – English. Retrieved from <https://www.webonary.org/fulfuldeburkina/files/Dictionnaire-Fulfulde-fran%C3%A7ais-english-et-images.pdf> on June 23, 2024.

²⁸ Dictionnaire Fulfulde – français – English. Retrieved from <https://www.webonary.org/fulfuldeburkina/files/Dictionnaire-Fulfulde-fran%C3%A7ais-english-et-images.pdf> on June 23, 2024.

expressions like *memuti* (“I put myself into the water”) and *omutiniikam* (“someone puts me into the water”) emerge, both deeply embedded in their cultural context.²⁹ He explains that when a person immerses themselves in water, they have the freedom to emerge at will. However, when another person forces them into the water, it is perceived as a form of punishment, since they can only come out at the other’s discretion. He added that, “traditionally, this method was used to teach children how to swim.”³⁰

In contrast, water baptism in Christianity is not a form of punishment but a ceremonial ritual symbolising profound theological truth. Baptism typifies the death and resurrection of a believer with the Lord. This spiritual transformation aligns with the concept of *mutineede*, where being put into the water signifies death. However, this death is not physical but spiritual, affirming the believer’s death in the Lord and resurrection into new life with Him.

To enhance the Fulani people’s understanding of baptism, it is essential to teach both meanings of the term *mutineede*: first, as the act of being immersed in water and brought back up immediately, and second, as a symbolic expression of dying with Christ and rising into new life. Fulani Bible translators should also include a footnote explaining this dual meaning to clarify that Christian baptism is not an act of coercion or punishment but a spiritual rite signifying transformation and rebirth. By adopting *mutineede* with proper theological and cultural explanation, Fulani Christians can more fully grasp and embrace the profound spiritual significance of baptism in the Christian faith.

This aims to bridge the gap between biblical teachings and local cultural contexts, facilitating deeper engagement with Christian beliefs and practices among the Fulani community. Moreover, it seeks to ensure that the translation accurately reflects the theological depth and spiritual meaning inherent in the concept of baptism, thereby promoting a more robust integration of Christian teachings into Fulani religious and cultural life. This approach corresponds with Asamoah’s view that Bible translation must be culturally pertinent to local groups.³¹ Bible interpretation must consider local

²⁹ Sulemana Abubakar Diallo, “Interview on Baptism,” interview by Emmanuel Foster Asamoah, A Comparative Analysis of Βαπτίζουτες In the Greek New Testament (Matthew 28:19) And Fulbe Bible, June 23, 2024.

³⁰ Sulemana Abubakar Diallo, “Interview on Baptism,” interview by Emmanuel Foster Asamoah, A Comparative Analysis of Βαπτίζουτες In the Greek New Testament (Matthew 28:19) And Fulbe Bible, June 23, 2024.

³¹ Emmanuel Foster Asamoah, “Resurrecting the Gospel in a Native Environment: An Evaluation of Some Translation Models,” *The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies* (2020). <https://doi.org/10.24940/THEIJHSS/2020/V8/I11/HS2011-031>; Emmanuel Foster Asamoah, “Role of Culture in Bible Interpretation: A Reference To Asante-Twi Bible Reading Community,” *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 5 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.46827/EJSS.V5I5.892>.

culture, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and evaluative dimensions, to facilitate understanding of God's message within individual contexts and environments.

Conclusion

The Fula people, or Fulbe, represent one of the least-reached ethnic groups in Ghana, facing significant challenges related to marginalisation and limited access to essential services. Their distinct cultural and linguistic identity often leads to inadequacies in Bible translation efforts, particularly regarding key theological terms such as baptism. The current transliterations fail to resonate with Fulani cultural frameworks, which undermines the understanding of baptism, a vital sacrament in Christianity. The introduction of culturally relevant terminology, such as *mutineede*, which signifies water immersion, presents an opportunity to bridge this gap.

By aligning this term with both Fulani cultural concepts and the original theological meaning of baptism, we can foster a deeper understanding of Christian doctrine within the Fulani community. This approach not only enhances access to Scripture but also deepens spiritual engagement among Fulani believers. Therefore, it is imperative for churches, missionaries, and translation organisations to prioritise incorporating *mutineede* in their outreach and translation efforts. Such contextualised terminology does not only provides clarity in understanding baptism but also enriches the Fulani's relationship with the Christian faith, promoting a more authentic and impactful integration of biblical teachings into their lives. In doing so, we can ensure that the message of the gospel finds its rightful place within the rich tapestry of Fulani culture, encouraging a meaningful exploration of faith that respects and uplifts their unique heritage.

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