

CALL MY BLUFF

Aim: to show the difference between literal and true meaning in translation.

Audience: teenagers and adults. Any number, minimum 6 people.

Duration: 20–30 minutes.

Description: a panel game in which the audience has to guess meanings of idioms.

Equipment: 3 Panel Scripts, 3 True/False Cards, OHP acetate (provided).



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Leader's Instructions:

1. Invite three volunteers to come and sit at the front. They form a panel, facing the audience.
2. Give each of them a different Panel Member's Script and a True/False Card.
3. Explain the game using the Audience's Instructions.
4. Begin round one by showing the first idiom on the OHP acetate. Make sure the other four are covered up.
5. Read out the information about the language and the idiom, using the Leader's Script.
6. Tell the panel members to read out their definitions.
7. Lead the audience in a vote to find out whose definition they think is most plausible.
8. Tell the panel to hold up their True/False Cards to indicate who was telling the truth.
9. Go on to the next round.
10. When you have completed all five rounds, use the Talk Back section to lead the audience in group discussion.

Audience's Instructions:

1. Every language has expressions and idioms which are not meant to be understood literally. For example in English we say "I'm pulling your leg" to mean "I'm joking". These idioms cannot be translated literally from one language to another.
2. This is a game of *Call My Bluff*. Each of the five rounds highlights an idiom in a different West African language.
3. At the beginning of each round, the idiom will be displayed on the OHP, together with a literal translation of it into English.
4. Each member of the panel has a definition of the idiom. Two of the definitions are false and one is true. Each member of the panel will read out their definition in turn, and try to convince you that theirs is the correct one.

Talk Back:

1. *Focus on the game itself:*

What made it difficult to guess the right answers?

2. *Focus on the English Bible:*

Can you explain what these idioms mean? Do you know what part of the English Bible they come from?

- 'Their hearts sank'
- 'You're out of your mind!'
- 'Everyone's eyes were fastened on him'

3. Focus on the Konkomba Bible:

Can you guess what these idioms mean and what part of the Konkomba Bible they come from?

- 'I will pull their ears'
- 'He went away spoiled in his stomach'
- 'He walked, he only'

4. Focus on the translation task:

Imagine you are an African Bible translator who speaks one of the languages in the game. How can you make sure that you're using the idioms of your own language correctly in the translation?

5. Focus on the end result:

Use the *Spitting Image* story to illustrate the impact that a good translation made on one man's life.

Comments to use in discussion:

All the idioms in this game come from West African languages which now have a translation of at least the New Testament. The game highlights the difference between literal and true meaning in translation. Literal translation often gives no clue as to real meaning. There may be no obvious link between the words of an idiom and its meaning. If there is a link, it is often rooted in an aspect of the culture that outsiders would not be aware of. That's one reason why it's so much better for translation to be handled primarily by a mother-tongue speaker of the language. It's the translator's job to achieve a balance between conveying the message in a natural way, and conveying it accurately. On the one hand, the use of idioms can make the translation sound more natural, and as a result the message comes across more powerfully; on the other hand, a literal translation stands a better chance of being accurate, but the overall effect may be lifeless.

Idioms in the English Bible

- 'Their hearts sank' means 'they were suddenly disappointed'. This is how Joseph's brothers react when they find the silver cup in Benjamin's sack (Genesis 42:28).
- 'You're out of your mind!' means 'You're mad!'. It's what the disciples say to Rhoda the servant girl when she says she's seen Peter (Acts 12:15).
- 'Everyone's eyes were fastened on him' means 'Everyone looked at him intently'. This happened when Jesus stood up to read in the synagogue (Luke 4:20).

Idioms in the Konkomba Bible

- 'I will pull their ears' means 'I will punish them'. This is what God says when the Israelites make the golden calf at Mount Sinai (Exodus 32:34).
- 'He went away spoiled in his stomach' means 'he went away sad'. This is how the rich young man responds when Jesus challenges him to give away all his possessions (Matthew 19:22).
- 'He walked, he only' means 'he didn't wear any clothes'. This refers to the demon-possessed man whom Jesus healed (Luke 8:27).

NOTES:

If you were an African translating the Bible into your own mother tongue, there would be many different ways of ensuring that your translation is accurate, clear and natural. For example:

- *Get consultant help.* Translation consultants are able to draw on a lifetime of experience to help others. The consultant may not know the answer, but can give guidelines and principles which help the national translator to crack awkward problems.
- *Go to workshops.* Translators find it beneficial to get together to discuss their translations, especially if they are working on related languages or if they are working on the same book of the Bible. Such occasions are also opportunities for further training in different aspects of the work.
- *Test the draft translation* with different groups of people: young and old, men and women, educated and uneducated, Christians and non-Christians.

Spitting Image

In one part of Africa, revenge is such a normal part of life that there isn't even a word for forgiveness in the language. However, if you want to make it quite clear that you forgive someone who has wronged you and have no intention of taking revenge, you go to the offender and 'spit out the wrong', spitting a mouthful of water over them. So the phrase, "God will forgive your sins," (Mark 1:4) was translated, "God will spit your sins out over you."

When one old man heard this, he said, "Ah! Now I understand it! Sin is actually something important to God! What's more, when He forgives us, He really means it!"

Ideas for Use:

- This version of the game has no system for scoring. This can easily be added.
- It is not necessary to go through all five rounds. You probably need three to establish a pattern.
- After two or three rounds, the panel may be changed so that more people are involved.
- At the end of each round, instead of having the audience raise their hands to vote, invite them to stand in front of the panel member they think is telling the truth. In order to do this the panel members need to be seated apart from one another.
- The game may be adapted for use in a small home meeting, by playing it without an audience. Two panels (of three people each) face one another and take each round alternately. One panel gives the definition and the other panel votes.

LEADER'S SCRIPT

Round 1: The Vagla Language

The Vagla language is spoken by 10,000 people in Ghana. The New Testament was published in 1977.

Vagla idiom: *I doo hiah werge*

Literal English translation: *You have a lot of liver.*

A) This phrase means "You're a brave hunter".

FALSE

B) This phrase means "You sure can put away a lot of beer!".

FALSE

C) This phrase means "You've no respect for your elders".

TRUE

Round 2: The Mbembe Language

The Mbembe language is spoken by 100,000 people in Nigeria. The New Testament was published in 1985.

Mbembe idiom: *Odim kwe ovohko ejo che*

Literal English translation: *Her husband broke her water pot.*

A) This phrase means "He tried to help his wife in the home and, as you would expect, made a right botch of it".

FALSE

B) This phrase means "Her husband broke her heart by divorcing her".

TRUE

C) This phrase means "Her husband made her jealous by flirting with another woman".

FALSE

NOTES:

Round 3: The Kusaal Language

The Kusaal language is spoken by 400,000 people in Ghana. The New Testament was published in 1976.

Kusaal idiom: *M ya'a kpi da kum*

Literal English translation: *When I die, don't cry.*

A) This phrase means "You love me now, so there's no need to show how much you care by weeping and wailing at my funeral".

TRUE

B) This phrase means "When I go away from the village, don't worry if I'm gone a long time".

FALSE

C) This phrase means "I'm the greatest" because in this society, if you reach the top, nobody mourns for you when you die.

FALSE

Round 4: The Konkomba Language

The Konkomba language is spoken by 250,000 people in Ghana and Togo. The New Testament was published in 1984.

Konkomba idiom: *Ngisubil*

Literal English translation: *Tree children*

A) This phrase means "illegitimate children". They aren't regarded as part of the family tree, so they are looked after by one of the sacred trees near the village.

FALSE

B) This phrase means "fruit", especially the kinds that hang on trees like bananas.

TRUE

C) This phrase means "monkeys", because monkeys look like children when they're climbing in the trees. It works the other way round too: when children climb trees, people call them monkeys.

FALSE

Round 5: The Kasem Language

The Kasem language is spoken by 180,000 people in Ghana and Burkina Faso. The New Testament was published in 1988.

Kasem idiom: *Sana bam keeri ba ti*

Literal English translation: *The beer has cried and finished.*

A) This phrase means “The beer’s finished fermenting and is ready to drink”.

TRUE

B) This phrase means “The beer’s run out, so the party’s over”.

FALSE

C) This phrase means “Your youth is over. It’s time to forget about having a good time and to prepare yourself for the after-life”.

FALSE

NOTES:

SCRIPT FOR PANEL MEMBER A

You should not change the basic content of the text, but you can do anything else you like to persuade the audience that your definition is the correct one. For example, you may exaggerate, add a story to illustrate the point, or disagree with the definitions of the other panel members.

1. Vagla idiom: *I doo hiah werge.*

Literal English translation: *You have a lot of liver.*

Your definition: *This phrase means "You're a brave hunter".*

FALSE

2. Mbembe idiom: *Odim kwe ovohko ejo che.*

Literal English translation: *Her husband broke her water pot.*

Your definition: *This phrase means "He tried to help his wife in the home and as you would expect made a right botch of it".*

FALSE

3. Kusaal idiom: *M ya'a kpi da kum.*

Literal English translation: *When I die, don't cry.*

Your definition: *This phrase means "You love me now, so there's no need to show how much you care by weeping and wailing at my funeral".*

TRUE

4. Konkomba idiom: *Ngisubil.*

Literal English translation: *Tree children.*

Your definition: *This phrase means "illegitimate children". They aren't regarded as part of the family tree, so they are looked after by one of the sacred trees near the village.*

FALSE

5. Kasem idiom: *Sana bam keeri ba ti.*

Literal English translation: *The beer has cried and finished.*

Your definition: *This phrase means "The beer's finished fermenting and is ready to drink".*

TRUE

SCRIPT FOR PANEL MEMBER B

You should not change the basic content of the text, but you can do anything else you like to persuade the audience that your definition is the correct one. For example, you may exaggerate, add a story to illustrate the point, or disagree with the definitions of the other panel members.

1. Vagla idiom: *I doo hiah werge.*

Literal English translation: *You have a lot of liver.*

Your definition: *This phrase means "You sure can put away a lot of beer!"*

FALSE

2. Mbembe idiom: *Odim kwe ovohko ejo che.*

Literal English translation: *Her husband broke her water pot.*

Your definition: *This phrase means "Her husband broke her heart by divorcing her".*

TRUE

3. Kusaal idiom: *M ya'a kpi da kum.*

Literal English translation: *When I die, don't cry.*

Your definition: *This phrase means "When I go away from the village, don't worry if I'm gone a long time".*

FALSE

4. Konkomba idiom: *Ngisubil.*

Literal English translation: *Tree children.*

Your definition: *This phrase means "fruit", especially the kinds that hang on trees like bananas.*

TRUE

5. Kasem idiom: *Sana bam keeri ba ti.*

Literal English translation: *The beer has cried and finished.*

Your definition: *This phrase means "The beer's run out, so the party's over".*

FALSE

SCRIPT FOR PANEL MEMBER C

You should not change the basic content of the text, but you can do anything else you like to persuade the audience that your definition is the correct one. For example, you may exaggerate, add a story to illustrate the point, or disagree with the definitions of the other panel members.

1. Vagla idiom: *I doo hiah werge.*

Literal English translation: *You have a lot of liver.*

Your definition: *This phrase means "You've no respect for your elders".*

TRUE

2. Mbembe idiom: *Odim kwe ovohko ejo che.*

Literal English translation: *Her husband broke her water pot.*

Your definition: *This phrase means "Her husband made her jealous by flirting with another woman".*

FALSE

3. Kusaal idiom: *M ya'a kpi da kum.*

Literal English translation: *When I die, don't cry.*

Your definition: *This phrase means "I'm the greatest" because in this society, if you reach the top, nobody mourns for you when you die.*

FALSE

4. Konkomba idiom: *Ngisubil.*

Literal English translation: *Tree children.*

Your definition: *This phrase means "monkeys", because monkeys look like children when they're climbing in the trees. It works the other way round too: when children climb trees, people call them monkeys.*

FALSE

5. Kasem idiom: *Sana bam keeri ba ti.*

Literal English translation: *The beer has cried and finished.*

Your definition: *This phrase means "Your youth is over. It's time to forget about having a good time and to prepare yourself for the after-life."*

FALSE

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