

The Holy Scriptures demand perfection of the translator, something he never reaches, but always strives for. So many will reach a certain linguistic attainment and feel that there is not anything more for them to strive for. But there is. No one ever speaks an adopted language like his own. Always encourage those about you to correct you and persist in correcting you when you make mistakes. My experience is that they will gladly do so, and continually take pride in your striving to speak their language better. The moment you give them the impression that you've arrived, they will let you alone, and deplore your ignorance if you do not yourself do so. A third thing is that, though again and again I have heard uninformed people say that the African languages are deplorably lacking in vocabulary, I must insist that if you will continue to make notes in your little vocabulary notebook, and memorize the new words that you acquire, you will be astonished at the completeness and the extent of the rich African tribal languages.

Luyia Old Testament Translation

II. The Work of the Translation Committee

Lee Appleby

In a previous article the linguistic situation in the Luyia country was described, and also the steps taken through the agency of the Luyia Language Committee to decide upon a standard written form for the seventeen dialect areas concerned. In 1942 the Church Missionary Society had set me free to work with this Committee as Secretary; and when the scheme was well established, in 1951, I was seconded to the British and Foreign Bible Society for Old Testament translation.

It was clearly recognized from the beginning that there must be free and wide discussion of the work from its earliest stages. The East Africa Secretary of the Bible Society approached the various Protestant missions in the area, asking each to appoint at least one African and one European to the Luyia Old Testament Translation Committee; and they all agreed to do so. As the Friends and the Pentecostal Assemblies are working almost entirely in Logoli¹ they have not the same urgent sense of need as the rest of us, and they are not often able to attend meetings. As was mentioned in the previous article, the Friends' Africa Mission had already been for some time at work, and the late Mr. J. W. Ford and his assistant, Mr. J. Litu, had nearly completed a translation into Logoli. The American Bible Society had asked for an opinion from the field as to the advisability of publishing this version; and as the Committee could see no prospect of a version in Standard Luyia being ready for publication within twenty years or more from that time, in 1943 they recommended

¹ Also known as Luragoli.

that it should be published. So most of the work on the Luyia version is being done by representatives of the Church of God and the Anglican Church (Church Missionary Society).

Once again we saw evidence of "the good hand of our God upon us" in sending the right man at the right time. Just before the Committee was formed the Right Rev. Bishop L. J. Beecher had arrived in Kisumu, where he was to work for the next two years. He had already investigated Luyia for the Bible Society, and had guided me in my first survey of the dialects, and advised about many of our early problems; and when he was approached he very readily agreed to be Chairman of the Committee. His wide experience in Bible translation and his understanding of Bantu languages were invaluable, as the experience of the rest of us was strictly limited. He was able to lead our discussions through the whole of Genesis, and when he left us our methods were well established. An outline of those methods may be of interest to others embarking on the same project with problems similar to ours.

The first work on a passage is done independently by my assistant, Mr. Jared Isalu, and myself. He works mainly from the Union Swahili version, while I work mainly from the English Revised Version. I also get considerable help from Young's Literal Translation and the American Revised Standard Version; and I also have other versions at hand — the Authorised Version, Moffatt, Knox, the Septuagint, and versions in other Bantu languages — and commentaries on the particular book being translated. A double-decker book-rest, to hold a large selection of books in use open and easily visible, is a great help. In addition, I constantly refer to the actual Hebrew words, through the medium of Young's Analytical Concordance, often followed by reference to Brown, Driver, and Briggs' Hebrew Lexicon. Unfortunately, we have no Hebrew scholar on the Committee; but we get very considerable light on the meaning of the text by constant reference to those two volumes. We cannot say too emphatically how essential we find it to get back as nearly as we can to the meaning of the original Hebrew. The main reason for this is that very seldom does one find the same range of meanings covered by corresponding words in different languages. A simple example of this is found in Isaiah 65 : 22: "My chosen shall long *enjoy* the work of their hands". The Hebrew word *balah* means primarily 'become old and worn out'; then 'wear out by use; use to the full'. The whole passage is stressing the security of life in the new earth; no more going into captivity; there will be time to wear out the things you make! The Concise Oxford Dictionary says for 'enjoy': "experience pleasure; take delight in; have the use of". This last sense of 'enjoy' obviously corresponds to that implied by *balah*; whereas the two preceding ones are not in any way implied by the Hebrew word. In Luyia there is a word *luyirisia* which means 'tire out; use until it is worn out'; a proverb says *Induyirisi yafunaka omuyini* — 'Long use broke the hoe handle'. A form of this word then seems to be the rendering that is required. One Bantu version consulted used a word that definitely means 'rejoice in'; obviously the translators had assumed that the English word was used in its most usual sense, and translated it accordingly. In this case the fundamental

idea was not seriously altered, but in many cases it might be; and constant reference to the Hebrew roots will help to minimize the danger.

When we have each prepared our first draft, Mr. Isalu and I discuss them together. If we worked together from the start it is probable that a lot of my anglicisms would creep into the text. At this stage I am able to amplify his understanding of the text from my wider studies, and he is able to correct my grammar and to suggest new words. From this discussion Draft 2 is prepared, and eight copies typed.

For half a day every week a group of five or six older men of the Marama tribe come to check the work we have been doing. They examine it verse by verse and make a considerable number of alterations, mainly in grammar and idiom. As these men are all from one tribe the conflict of dialects does not arise, and the whole stress is on construction; and their complete ignorance of English makes them quick to notice any foreign idioms or constructions that have crept into our rendering. The aim at this stage is a version that reads naturally in a Luyia dialect; changes necessary to make it intelligible and acceptable in the other sixteen areas will be dealt with later. So after this assessors' gathering, Draft 3 can be prepared.

This draft is cyclostyled, and copies of it are sent to all the Committee members, so that they have the chance to study it before we meet. At first the Committee used to meet for three days at a time, but latterly we have found it more convenient during school term-time to meet from Friday midday till Saturday night, and then have a session of a week or ten days during the holidays. Over a period of three working years, during which Genesis and Proverbs have been completed, and Isaiah brought to the stage of being ready for the final checking, we have had 24 sessions, totalling 72 days, and averaging about 8 hours a day.

My previous experience had shown that it was quite impracticable to try to have every dialect represented on a Committee and depend on the representatives for checking such things as vocabulary distribution. For one thing, they would never all be there together; for another, no one man could possibly speak authoritatively for his dialect; and most important of all, it is not likely that we would find a man of the required spiritual and intellectual calibre in each of the seventeen areas. Further, educated men (and on the Committee it is necessary to have educated men) can seldom speak any Luyia dialect in a pure form. In fact it not infrequently happens that a European member of Committee has to correct the idiom of a Luyia member. The men we have at present are two Abanyole, one Omusamia, one Omumarama, and one Omutsotso, with two Abalogoli as occasional visitors; we hope to add an Omubukusu and an Omwitakho to our number next time we meet. The present members have been on the Committee from the beginning, and have background knowledge and a grasp of the principles of translating that make them now invaluable as Committee members.

When we began we asked members to send me notes on points that needed discussion, and hoped that only points so raised would need to be dealt with. But at our first meeting we found that the Committee wanted and needed to examine the draft verse by verse—phrase by

phrase—word by word; and by the time they have finished with a page of Draft 3 it is a sorry sight! Of course as time goes on these alterations are becoming less, and I still have hopes that in time we will only need to discuss points already sent in in writing.

The most important aspect dealt with by the Committee—though it may seem superfluous to say it—is the exact rendering of the meaning of the text. That involves in the first place as full and clear an understanding of what the text actually says as it is possible, by the grace of God, for the Committee to reach. As will readily be understood, the joint study with the examination of many sources of reference, and the sharing freely of each gleam of light that the Holy Spirit reveals to each of us, result in a deeper and fuller understanding than any one of us could ever reach alone. Then comes the examination of the draft, and the eager search for further Luyia words that may more accurately convey these ideas. Sometimes this is a slow and laborious search, and many words are tried and discarded before the right one is found. Occasionally one dialect alone will have a word for the idea under discussion, and it will be used with an explanatory footnote; occasionally it will be necessary to borrow a word from another language—Swahili, or Hebrew, or English; these of course are usually nouns to name things not known in the area—for instance, tower, concubine, wine. Quite often it is possible to use what is virtually a new word in the language; that is to say, a word that could have been used at any time, but probably never has, because no need for it has been felt. For instance, we wanted a word for 'altar'. The *amachina* at which sacrifices are made in the village are two or three long irregular stones 'planted' on end in the ground. They could not by definition be made of gold or of wood, or carried about, nor could the sacrifice be laid on them. But the phrase *mala omusango* means 'offer a sacrifice'. Taking the verb *mala*, a prefix *eshi-* would imply a 'thing', often man-made; and an applied ending with a final *-o-iro-* is used in forming a noun referring to a place or thing at, on, or with which an action is habitually performed. So *eshimaliro shiomusango* is clearly 'a thing, probably made, on which sacrifices are habitually offered'. The word has been used in Genesis, and as far as I know no-one has commented on it or asked what it meant—it is self-evident. Again, extensive enquiries failed to produce any noun in use for 'flood', although there was a good selection of verbs for flooding of various types and degrees; the most suitable and widely known was *yemba*. A noun in Class 2 can be formed from a verb stem by prefixing *omu-* and changing the final vowel to *-o*, and such a noun indicates the result of the performance of the action. So as *yemba* means 'to flood the country-side', *omuyembo* obviously conveys a similar idea to the English noun 'flood'. Again it has been accepted without comment.

Two main aspects of the translation have been checked by the two groups already considered; but there still remains the important one of vocabulary distribution. It is impracticable for every word used to be checked in every dialect area; but quite often the Committee members will have a very fair idea as to whether or not a word is widely known. When there is doubt the word is put on a list for investigation. Then

when a book has been checked through once by the Committee I try to make a round of all the dialect areas. Mr. Isalu always comes with me, and usually one or more of the other Committee members.

When we are due to visit a district we first write to a leading man in the area—the church leader, or the chief—and ask him to convene a meeting of about twelve people. We specify the types of people we want: that most of them should be elderly men who do not know English; that there should be men from each of the church denominations in the area, as a check on words that have become thoroughly familiar to one group through church usage; and that there should be some really old heathen men who will know the words that have always belonged to the dialect, and are not influenced by modern trends.

Those with any experience of a multiplicity of dialects will know well the type of investigation that is done. Usually we start off with a pair of words that are synonyms or near-synonyms. For instance, for 'begin' we had *chaka* and *simikha*, which in Marama I understood to be synonymous. In Samia *chaka* was in use, and *simikha* fairly widely understood. In Marachi we were told that both were in use—but that *simikha* also meant 'plant', of trees or bananas, and that the sense was 'to erect', akin to Swahili *simama* = stand, not 'to start'. Mr. Isalu then told me that that sense was also known in Marama. From there we went to Khayo, where both were known; then to Bukusu, where *chaka* was not known at all, *simikha* was used only for 'plant', and the words for 'start' were *simama* and *rachikha*. In Tachoni (part of Bukusu location) the words were *rachikha*, *simikha*, and *inyuha*. In Kakalelwa the only word in use was *tanikha*; in Isukha only *ranga*, which in some areas meant 'scold'. A final summary gave the following results:

<i>Chaka</i>	known	11	areas	
<i>Simikha</i>	..	7	..	In 7 (an overlapping group) = plant
<i>Ranga</i>	..	4	..	Elsewhere = scold
<i>Banga</i>	..	4	..	In 1, only of a new village
<i>Rachikha</i>	..	2	..	
<i>Tanikha</i>	..	2	..	
<i>Inyuha</i>	..	1	..	

And further examination showed that while *chaka* should generally be used in the text, *simikha*, *rachikha*, *ranga*, and *tanikha* should all appear in a footnote.

On other occasions we might start with a blank. For instance, when we came to "the plain of Jordan" all the Committee members were quite sure that there was no word in the language for 'plain'. But by patient and persistent questioning we got a formidable list of thirteen words. Some of them were limited in meaning—some meant such things as a marshy plain, a level grazing ground, a level slope, or a cleared patch. But finally *omuhololokhwe* was decided on as the most suitable word, with footnote *omweyweywe*, *eshipapi*, *olwenya*.

Another aspect that has to be gone into with these groups is the desirability or otherwise of a word. Sometimes it is not until we get a

group of assessors talking freely amongst themselves that we begin to realize that a word under discussion is in that area considered indecent. For instance, for 'waist', or 'loins', there are three words—*eshishienje*, *eshibuno*, and *eshisindi*. Each of these words is known in five areas (the figures are not yet complete); but in five of the areas *eshibuno* is considered an obscene word; it is only used in connection with indecent dances. So although distribution is even, *eshibuno* will not be used in the text at all. Occasionally it has happened that a member of the Committee, perhaps because of some personal association, has felt unhappy about the use of a particular word; but investigation amongst a group of unprejudiced people in his area may show that the word has no undesirable connotation, and that his fears are groundless.

Further, during these safaris it is often possible to explain to the more backward people in outlying parts just what is meant by a unified orthography, and how it can help them, and the advantages that will be found in the use of a common written form, and to prepare them for the coming of the new books. For these and for many other reasons we regard our safari work as indispensable to the satisfactory carrying out of our task.

After each session of the Committee, the section of Draft 3 that has been checked is typed on stencils, and copies of the new section of Draft 4 sent to members for their further study and consideration. Quite frequently at the next session some of the members or the translators themselves will have suggestions to make as to still further emendations that should be made. Still later, when words listed for investigation have been dealt with and their distribution is known and tabulated, those results have to be incorporated in the draft. Usually this is a direct word-for-word exchange, but occasionally it involves changes in the structure of a sentence. Sometimes too a new idiom will have been learnt that may be substituted for the less natural direct translation. All these changes are referred to the Committee at a special session or sessions, when all the members have a chance of making further suggestions for improvement. Then at last a 5th Draft can be prepared—and the 'tentative version' is complete, and we can turn our attention to another book.

Translation Work in Fulfulde (Fulani)

E. Roulet

The Fulani people were the conquerors of the hinterland of West Africa from Senegal in the West to Baghirmi in the east, and form the ruling class today. Many pagan tribes were brought into subjection, and as a result, these tribes understand Fulfulde moderately well.

The Fulani are divided into two sections — the 'town' Fulani, who form the greater part, are all Mohammedan, and are settled in towns and villages, tilling the soil, trading, and keeping cattle. The 'cattle' Fulani or Bororo Fulani, on the other hand, are nomads, moving with their cattle