

helps one to understand better their viewpoints and social standards. Thus one may avoid those phrases and mannerisms which hamper one's message. Adjusting oneself in so far as possible to everything indigenous is not contrary to Bible standards. Too often the missionary tries to compel the people to adopt his "civilized" ways, but our commission is not "Westernize" but "evangelize", i.e. to preach the Good News. And it certainly is not "good news" to any people if they are required to change their style of dress and manner of eating in order to be Christians!

Some Problems of Translation in Kikuyu

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Kikuyu (Gikūyū) is the language of the Kikuyu (Agikūyū) people of Kenya Colony, British East Africa. It is a member of the great Bantu division of African languages and is spoken by some 1,026,000 of Kenya's population. Missionary work among the Kikuyu is just over 50 years old and a considerable proportion of the tribe is now Christian. The complete New Testament in Kikuyu was first published in 1926. The Old Testament is now on its way out to Kenya. Both books have been published by the British and Foreign Bible Society in conjunction with the National Bible Society of Scotland. The following problems arise in the course of revising the New Testament, which task has recently been taken in hand.

The Unity of the Trinity and of Believers

- John 10 : 30 I and my Father are one.
.. 17 : 11 ... that they may be one even as we.
.. 17 : 21 ... that they may all be one;
.. 17 : 22 ... that they may be one, even as we are one;
.. 17 : 23 ... that they may be perfected into one.

"One" in Kikuyu is expressed by the stem *-mwe* combined with a prefix appropriate to the noun it qualifies (when used as an adjective) or represents (when used as a pronoun). As in all Bantu languages, nouns fall into groups or classes, each of which, generally speaking, has its distinctive prefix. Thus with the word for "shoe" (*kīratū*) *-mwe* becomes *kīmwe* (*kīratū kīmwe* "one shoe"); with the word for "man", "person", "being" (*mündū*) it becomes *ūmwe* (*mündū ūmwe* "one person"); with *ihinda* "a time" it becomes *rimwe*; and so on. Singular and plural are likewise distinguished by change of prefix, and a singular noun necessitates the use of a singular prefix with its associated adjective or pronoun, whereas a plural noun requires its adjective or pronoun to take a plural prefix.

In common with other adjective-pronouns *-mwe* assumes plural as well as singular forms. When used with a plural noun it conveys one of three meanings: (a) "one lot (set, kind, family, fraternity, group, etc.)", (b) "the same", or (c) "some". The form appropriate to persons, men, beings (*andū*) is *amwe*.

So in translating "one" in any of the above passages in St. John's Gospel we have to choose between *ūmwē* (singular) and *amwē* (plural).

The choice involves questions as to the nature of the Trinity and the character of the unity which being "in Christ" imparts to His followers, both in relation to Himself and to one another. This is a case in which the translator cannot avoid theological issues.

In John 10 : 30 by using *ūmwē* we are stating "I and my Father are one (person, entity)" or "the same". Grammatically the use of *ūmwē* (singular) is wrong; "I and my Father" should strictly be followed by the plural *amwē*. But the use of *amwē* ("one lot") would denote a mere family or sectional relationship.

In John 17 : 22 (and 11) also, grammar demands *amwē* (in both occurrences of "one"). But this would again limit the desired degree of unity to that of membership in a family or other (more or less) close association: "that they may be united (associated, belong to the same fraternity), even as we are united (etc.)". If a deeper, more mystical union is to be indicated we are thrown back on *ūmwē*: "that they may be one person (one entity), even as we are one person (one entity)". Or are we to differentiate between the disciples and the Divine Persons and use *amwē* for the former and *ūmwē* for the latter?

In all these passages the existing Kikuyu New Testament has *ūmwē*, whether the reference is to the disciples or to Christ and the Father. As far as I am aware this has never been criticised by our African Christians, although in 17 : 11, 21, and 22 its use in "that they (all) may be one" might even convey the sense "that they (all) may be reduced to one", i.e. to a single individual! But the Kikuyu are still very uncritical of the printed word (and especially tolerant where the printed Word is concerned). What our attempt at translating these passages really conveys to the African we do not know; there are various possibilities. The area of equivalence of a word in one language often does not coincide with that of the corresponding word in another. To a European mind neither *ūmwē* nor *amwē* seems satisfactory.

A similar difficulty has evidently been felt in Swahili. In previous editions of the New Testament the expression *kitu kimoja* ("one thing") was used (the stem *-moja* corresponding to *-mwē* in Kikuyu): "that they (all) may be one thing (or, the same thing)". In Kikuyu this would be *kīndū kīmwe*. The connotation is too physical, however, the meaning of *kīndū* being restricted almost wholly to material things. In the Revised Swahili New Testament, recently published, *umoja* has been substituted for *kitu kimoja*. *Umoja* is a noun and means "one-ness". John 17 : 22 is thus rendered "that they may have one-ness, as we are a one-ness (a unity)". This seems admirable. But in Kikuyu we have no such noun. The nearest we could get to it would be by the use of *ūndū ūmwē*. *Undū* is a word of wide but vague meaning, ranging from "a matter, an affair, a subject (of utterance or of thought), cause, purpose," etc., to "an action or a deed". In contradistinction to *kīndū* ("concrete thing") it signifies "an abstraction", "an abstract thing". In suitable contexts *ūndū ūmwē*, literally "one thing", is used to express, among other ideas, those of sameness, unanimity, and unity. But its extreme width of connotation

renders it a somewhat indeterminate and variable expression for use in an unfamiliar situation.

The rendering of "one" in the foregoing passages therefore remains an open question.

Paul's Use of the Formal First Person Plural for the Singular.

In addressing the church at Corinth, Paul associates himself in the first Epistle with Sosthenes and in the 2nd with Timothy. In commencing Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon he also links himself with Timothy, and in the two Epistles to the Thessalonians he joins the names of Silvanus and Timothy with his own. In the introduction to Galatians he writes as, "Paul ..., and all the brethren that are with me".

In all these cases the first question that arises affecting the translator is whether the whole Epistle is intended to be taken as written by Paul on behalf of himself and another or others. Referring to 1 Corinthians, the Century Bible commentary says: "He (Sosthenes) joins in the salutation, but not in the composition of the letter, though he is doubtless in harmony with its sentiments, and more expressly so than if he were mentioned at the close of the letter". In regard to 2 Corinthians the same commentary notes: "Salutation, in which Timothy, one of his colleagues in the founding of the church, joins". Msgr. Knox in his New Testament in English has a footnote to 1 Cor. 1:1 in which he remarks: "he associates Sosthenes with himself *in this greeting*" (*my italics*).

These are the only references to the point which I have come across. It appears to be taken for granted that Paul is sole author of the above Epistles and that he writes them as from himself alone.

But in 2 Corinthians Paul repeatedly writes in the plural: "we, us, our". The context alone is our guide as to whether he is speaking for others besides himself (e.g. the apostles as a whole, the body of Christians, himself and his companions). Where the presumption is that Paul is speaking of or for himself alone it must be concluded that he is employing the formal or "editorial" plural. He frequently passes from "I" to "we", and vice versa, in the same verse or passage, e.g. in 1:13, 15-17, 23, 24; 7:2-9, 12-16.

Of the modern translations to which I have access Moffatt alone takes the step of changing "we, us, our" to "I, me, my" where the formal plural is assumed. In regard to this, Dr. R. H. Strachan in the Moffatt New Testament Commentary (2 Corinthians) writes:

"Dr. Moffatt's justifiable rendering of 'we', 'us', and 'our' in the traditional English version of Paul's letters by 'I', 'me', and 'my' where the Greek is plural, may seem to suggest a considerable strain of egotism. In Hellenistic Greek, 'we' is often used where 'I' is intended, and, similarly, 'our', meaning 'mine'."

Also on Chapter 10:1:

"Here Paul uses the Greek first personal pronoun singular. In the great majority of cases where he uses the plural, and the English versions translate 'we', Paul is also referring to himself alone, but is

not calling attention to his own state of mind or his own authority, as here”.

Again, in the Century Bible, Dr. Massie in a note on 2 Corinthians, 4 : 7-15, says: “The first person plural is here, as frequently, used by Paul chiefly, sometimes only, in reference to himself. See 1 : 8-11”.

On the other hand, commenting on 4 : 1 in the Cambridge Bible (1879), Professor Lias remarks: “It is to be noted that in *both* these Epistles the Apostle now uses the singular and now the plural. He uses the first when his vindication is distinctly personal to himself, the second when he speaks of Christian ministers in general”.

In our existing Kikuyu New Testament (as also in the new Revised Swahili New Testament) the Greek and the English AV and RV have been followed scrupulously, the plural being adhered to wherever it occurs. Granting that Moffatt and others are right, this must be most misleading to the African reader, for in Kikuyu and Swahili (and I think in Bantu languages generally) there is no such thing as a formal use of the first person plural in place of the singular. Where the words for “we”, “our”, etc., are used they are doubtless understood literally. Where the words for “I”, “my”, etc., appear it will be concluded that Paul is referring to himself alone, but where the plural occurs the only meaning to a Kikuyu will be that the writer is speaking not of himself alone but as associated with others. In order to convey the correct sense, a plural should be used only where a plural meaning is intended, and the same with the singular.

But courage as well as conviction is needed if the necessary changes are to be made in the Kikuyu translation. Not only are the passages affected very numerous, but our English-reading Africans will no doubt compare the Kikuyu with the English AV (likewise Swahili readers with the Swahili version) and be liable to call the new renderings in question. Further, the substitution of the singular for the plural where the change appears to be called for may have a limiting effect on the exegesis of certain texts, for example: 2 Cor. 1 : 21; 4 : 5, 6, 16-18; 5 : 1-9. (Compare these with Moffatt’s version). It may produce a tendency on the part of both reader and expositor to assume such spiritual experiences to have been the special privilege of Paul rather than shared by all true believers. But is the translator concerned with the possible effects of his translation, if faithful?

Two main questions have therefore to be faced. Should we be justified in making the change (in 2 Corinthians and in similar passages in other Epistles)? And is Moffatt altogether reliable as a guide to be closely followed?

The reason for the second of these questions is that here and there Moffatt might seem to be inconsistent. For instance, in Colossians 1 : 3, 7, 8, 9, where the English versions have “we”, “our”, “us” (apparently the formal plural), Moffatt retains the plural; also in 1 Thessalonians 1 : 2-9; 2 : 1-16; 3 : 4; 4 : 1, 2, 6, 10, 13; 5 : 12, 14; 2 Thess. 1 : 3, 4, 11; 2 : 13; 3 : 1-14.

A peculiar result of the use of the formal plural is seen in the corresponding pluralization of parts of the writer’s personality. In 2 Cor. 3 : 2,

for instance, he attributes to himself the possession of more than one "heart", and in 4 : 5 and 3 : 6 he becomes a multiple being: 4 : 5, "ourselves as your servants" (Moffatt: "I am simply a servant of yours"). Similarly in the Kikuyu version of 2 Cor. 7 : 5 "our flesh had no relief" has had to be rendered "our *bodies* had no relief" (also in 4 : 10). To say "our body" is unacceptable to Kikuyu thought.

"In Christ", "in the Lord"

This phrase was translated in the Kikuyu New Testament by its literal equivalent *thiini wa Kristo* and *thiini wa Mwathani*. *Thiini* means "(the) interior", *thiini wa*, "inside of", "in". It is anyone's guess what *thiini wa Kristo* really conveys to the uninstructed African. At the time it was felt that to attempt a paraphrastic rendering would be tampering with a hallowed expression, and that no paraphrase would be capable of covering all its aspects and inner depths.

But to a people, the majority of whom are still making their first acquaintance with Christian doctrine and experience, it does seem desirable to try to make the Word as lucid as possible. Even in English the production of so many versions in modern speech points to a need for making the Scriptures more easily understood by people of our own race and generation, notwithstanding their centuries of Christian background.

One finds, however, that in the case of this particular phrase there appears to be a reluctance to adopt explanatory renderings; or maybe it is assumed that "in Christ" is sufficiently self-explanatory. Neither the Revised Standard Version nor Moffatt, for example, have thought fit to depart from the traditional translation.

Dr. Weymouth, on the other hand, in a number of the less important occurrences, does resort to paraphrase, e.g. in Rom. 9 : 1; 16 : 2, 11, 12, 22; 1 Cor. 4 : 10, 15, 17; 7 : 39; 2 Cor. 1 : 21; 2 : 17; 12 : 19; Eph. 4 : 17; 6 : 21; Col. 4 : 7. And the translators of the Twentieth Century New Testament (1904) have succeeded in consistently rendering "in Christ" and "in the Lord" (when these are not simply the equivalents of "Christian") by a phrase frequently employed by commentators, namely, "in union with Christ (or, with the Lord)". Illustrative references are: Rom. 9 : 1; 12 : 5; 1 Cor. 4 : 10; 9 : 2; 15 : 22, 58; 2 Cor. 1 : 21; 2 : 14, 17; 5 : 17; 12 : 2; Eph. 2 : 21; 4 : 17; 6 : 10; Phil. 4 : 1, 2; 1 Thess. 4 : 16.

The latter is an attractive solution and there are ways in which the same idea could be expressed without much difficulty in Kikuyu, provided they met the approval of African assessors. One method would be by the use of a verbal form meaning "being joined with (or, to) Christ". It would at least have the merit of avoiding such literalisms as "I say the truth inside Christ" (Rom. 9 : 1), "Ye are wise inside Christ" (1 Cor. 4 : 10), "an holy temple inside the Lord" (Eph. 2 : 21). But one would like to be assured that such a rendering is adequate and entails no loss in the essential meaning of the original.

The expression "baptized into Christ" (Gal. 3 : 27) is also translated in the Twentieth Century N. T. "baptized into union with Christ".