

insistence, 'But it *can* be said'. This may of course be very true, but the real question is not whether or not something *can* be said, but whether it is said with the same frequency as the translator is attempting to employ it. For example, in the Nilotic languages there are both active and passive constructions. There is a marked preference for the passive, but that does not mean that a translator should immediately undertake to turn every active construction in Greek into a passive construction in Nuer, Anuak or Shilluk. In the first place, one must discover under what circumstances the language in question employs passive rather than active forms. But even in such instances one will always discover different forms which apparently have identically the same value. That is to say, it may not be possible to discover just why in one sentence the speaker uses an active form and in another very similar statement a passive form. In fact, a certain amount of alternation seems to be preferred as a matter of stylistic variation. However, one may find that in eighty per cent of the cases the passive is used and in twenty per cent the active. A translator should attempt to reproduce approximately this same type of variation. He may, however, discover that the active form tends to be ambiguous, while in the passive construction such features as the goal, process, agent, and benefactor (e.g. 'the money was given by the man to the boy') are always more clearly marked (either by special forms or by word order). If this is the case, then in any potentially obscure or ambiguous passage he should make it the practice of following the grammatically 'clearer' construction, while leaving the more ambiguous construction for passages in which the relationships between the participants are more readily recognized from the context.

Bambara People and Language

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The Bambara tribe numbers between one and one and a half million, located largely in the French Soudan, but with groups more or less numerous in the Senegal, the Haute Volta and the Ivory Coast. There are even something over a thousand of them in Mauretania. It is estimated, however, that the language is spoken by more than four million people since it is used as a trade language, under the name of Bambara or Dioula, by most of the other tribes of French West Africa, and is the one spoken by the colonial troops. Large sections of the Mianka tribe are completely bi-lingual, using Bambara as their second language. There are also large groups of sedentary Fulas who have forgotten the Fula language and speak only Bambara, though in population figures they are listed as Fulas. Of all the Mandingo languages Bambara and Malinke are the most nearly alike though they are not enough so to make one translation possible for both tribes. Dioula is a variation of Bambara.

The government school system has functioned efficiently for more than a generation and is increasing the number of schools all the time. This gives an ever increasing potential reading public for the Scriptures, since even children who stay no more than two years in government school

and have learned to read, can read their own language with understanding, while much of the French is still beyond their comprehension. There were over ten thousand children in the primary and secondary schools in the Soudan alone in 1954. Not all of these were Bambara but the number of Bambaras in school in the other colonies of French West Africa might well bring the total number of Bambaras up to that figure. Adult readers are increasing though, of course, nothing like so rapidly, but all new converts are expected to learn to read in the vernacular.

The Bambaras are originally fetishists in religion and farmers by occupation. However, Mohammedanism is spreading rapidly until perhaps thirty per cent are more or less attached to that faith. In the large centres the proportion is very much greater than in the villages. Many have embraced Mohammedanism as a matter of convenience and/or prestige, especially when travelling, and still keep all their old faith in their fetishes. Many of the educated city Bambaras claim to be 'free thinkers' and follow no religion.

Fetishes may be personal, for the family or some particular group, for the village or for the tribe. One of the commonest charms is a knotted string tied around some part of the body to cure or prevent disease, accident or pain. The knots must be spit upon as they are tied and the proper words muttered. This is called *kirisi fo* and almost any one can learn to do it. It is not necessary to have a witch doctor do it. Women wear charms of various kinds called collectively *tafo*.

There are sacrifices made at births, at the puberty rites of both boys and girls, at marriages and at deaths. There are sacrifices for the young children, by the boys who are a little older but not yet 'men', sacrifices for hunting, for voyages, in fact for almost any occasion. Some of the better known fetishes are the *nya*, the *ti*, the *kono* and the *komo*. Dogs are sacrificed to the *nya*, white chickens to the *ti*. The *komo* is the most feared of all and no woman or uncircumcised boy is allowed to see anything connected with it. Whenever the *komo* is brought out of its house warnings are given on certain musical instruments and all women and children hasten into the house and close the door. Any women outside the village will make for the nearest shelter and hide until the all-clear signal is given. Men are stationed on all the paths leading to the village, not so much to warn the women as to spy and see if one approaches the *komo*. The *komo* is supposed to cause the death of any woman who sees it and she really does die; the men see to that. It may be that an almost invisible fishhook tipped with poison will be let down from a tree as she passes under it on the way to the fields. To her it seems only an insect bite, but death soon results. Even though she were the favourite wife of the chief of the fetish she would have to die and the rest of the men would help him buy a new one. Some of the women and most of the men no longer believe that there is any supernatural power in the *komo* itself, but they know the power of the men who control it and therefore conform to the rules.

A typical woman's ceremony is the *moribayasa* to whom a sacrifice is made in gratitude for any great happiness that comes to her, a child after years of barrenness, the return of a soldier son, etc. The rejoicing woman dresses in cast-off rags of men's clothing and ties a pair of old

sandals to her ears for earrings. A group of well-dressed women follow her, all clapping their hands and singing praises to the *moribayasa*. They make their way to the trash heap where, in the midst of laughing, dancing and singing, the rags are discarded and the woman dons a clean new garment and the party breaks up. The *moribayasa* is considered as the spirit of a young man who answers women's prayers. The cast-off rags are the only offering he accepts. The phrase has become proverbial, 'I am so happy I could dance the *moribayasa*'.

Mohammedanism has influenced even those who have not accepted it, so that many words have been incorporated into the language from Arabic and have been adapted in pronunciation until the present generation has no knowledge of their origin. The word *ngala* which the old people use for 'rain' and the 'Sender of rain' is so like the Mohammedan *Alla* for 'God' that the younger people think it is the same word though the oldest people insist that it isn't. Words like *dyurumu* for 'sin', *ardyana* for 'heaven' and *dyahanama* for 'hell' are typical of these borrowed words. The original, and still current, word for 'sin' is *ko dyugu*, literally 'bad deeds'. These consist of certain stated acts and have no thought of an offence against a holy God. Some examples of things regarded as evil are: incest; adultery; murder by witchcraft; stealing (but only if discovered); failure to pay a debt; disrespect to parents; breaking of taboos, such as whistling after dark, singing on a housetop or cutting cooked grain with an instrument of iron.

The Bambara language could scarcely be more simple as to its grammatical structure. There is no declension of nouns. Verbs are invariable in their conjugation for all persons and both singular and plural. Intransitive verbs and the passive voice of transitive verbs have the same form, taking the suffix *-ra*, *-la*, or *-na* in the past tense. All other tenses and aspects are indicated by invariable particles preceding the verb. The object of the transitive verb comes between the particle and the verb. What answers to the English preposition is in post position and most of them are really nouns though there are a few that can hardly be classed as such.

Many nouns become verbs with no change of form, the position in the sentence indicating which it is. For example:

Tle — 'day' or 'to pass the day'.

Tle saba temena — 'Three days passed'.

A be tle yā — 'He is spending the day here'.

Kuma — 'word' or 'to speak'.

A ka kuma ka tya — 'His words are many'.

A be kuma ne fe — 'He is speaking to me'.

Suffixes are used in a variety of ways, *-ma* added to nouns makes them qualifying adjectives, *-ya* makes them abstract, which gives rise to the following interesting combination.

Mogo — 'human being'.

Mogoma — 'humanlike'.

Mogoya — the quality of being human.

Mogomaya — the quality of being humanlike.

This was useful in distinguishing between godliness and the Godhead.

Alla — 'God'.

Allaya — the quality of being God or Deity.

Allamaya — 'Godlikeness'.

Bambara is largely monosyllabic though sometimes phrases are used as such close units that they are treated as single words and it is not easy to know where to draw the line. These phrases are frequently descriptive as *dji-dyukoro-sa* for 'hypocrite', literally 'water-under-snake', and *da-dyukoro-kuma* for 'muttering', literally 'mouth-under-words'. August, because of its frequent rains, is called *Moso-koroni-dē-ta-ḥini-tyē-kalo* or 'Little-old-woman's-child's-clothes-spoiling-month'.

The Bambara language, in spite of the simplicity of its structure, is rich in idiom and can express any idea desired. The difficulty for the translator is in understanding the idiom and using it skilfully. It is possible to know each word in a sentence without having any idea of the meaning of the whole. *Ne nyena sisira*, literally 'My eye in smoked' means 'I was sad'. *A dusu bora*, 'His soul went out' means 'He became angry'. *Ne b'a fe*, 'I am with it' means 'I desire it'. *A be dji ko*, 'He is washing the water' means 'He is bathing'.

Contrary to expectations it is not so difficult to express spiritual truth and abstractions as some of the more mechanical terms of things foreign to their culture. 'Love', 'faith' and 'peace' and even 'grace' were not too hard to find words for, though the last two need to be enlarged by teaching. There are two words for 'peace'. One, *dusu suma*, is subjective and the other, *hera*, is more objective, and means particularly absence of strife. Both are used in the translation according to context. As with most primitive languages the word for 'holy' and its allied term 'sanctify' is not entirely satisfactory. The word for 'clean' is the nearest single word that approaches it, but whenever it is possible the phrase 'set apart (for God) and make clean' is used, the words in parenthesis where the context does not make it plain without them.

For some things that are new to them Bambaras coin their own descriptive names. A bicycle is an 'iron horse', an aeroplane is a 'skyboat'. For other things the French word is taken over with more or less mutilation in pronunciation. A hammer is a *marto*, a table, *tabali*. After all these years of using wheels there is no word for wheel except the native word for 'foot'. That is clear when speaking of a bicycle or a cart, but for the wheels of Ezekiel's vision the word 'foot' gives no image of a wheel. The expression 'circular foot' has been used but that is rather vague since the context gives no clue to wheels. Perhaps it would be permissible to add, in parenthesis, the words 'like a cart foot' on the first occasion of its mention in a passage and thereafter say, 'circular foot'. Experience with the first edition of the New Testament has shown that footnotes are not practical, as they are usually read right into the text where they occur and not where they belong, hence the suggestion to use a parenthesis.

Many French words are being introduced into the language, even when there is no particular need for them. Verbs are made from French adjectives or adverbs by using Bambara verb endings. A *tropolembe* for 'it

has gone too far' and a *cherela* for 'it is expensive' are both verb forms in Bambara and might be translated, 'It exceeded' and 'It expensived'.

Snow is utterly unknown though they have seen ice in the form of hailstones. If it were only a matter of Isaiah 1 : 18, some other object of extreme whiteness could be used, but, since snow is again found in Job and Proverbs where nothing else can take its place, the French word *neige* is used, spelled *neje*.

Figurative speech poses a problem. Although Bambara uses much figurative language, the introduction of new figures is sometimes hard to explain. 'Sleep' may be used for 'death' in some places where it is clear that death is meant, but in 1 Corinthians 11 : 30 the translation reads simply "and many died".

"The wings of the morning" in Psalm 139 : 9 conveyed no meaning when translated literally and various expedients were tried until it was discovered that it was the verb 'take' that was causing the trouble. When it was translated 'If I fly with the wings of the morning' it seemed to be perfectly clear even though the figure was not native to them.

In some cases the figurative use of a word seemed so plain that the natives accepted it unnecessarily, as *nene* for 'taste'. For nearly twenty years *nene* was used in the expression "taste of death" and apparently raised no question, but as the revised New Testament was going to press *sifle* was offered as being used both literally and figuratively, whereas in their own use *nene* is literal only.

Referring back to the word 'take' mentioned above in Psalm 139 : 9, 'take' is such a general word in English that it is easy to forget to be more specific in Bambara. Two important illustrations will show the difference. A missionary in paying a helper at the end of the month gave him one half the month's wages remarking, "You took the other half two weeks ago, remember?" Knowing that the insult was due to ignorance and not intent he corrected her, saying, "You implied that I stole that money two weeks ago. You should have said that I received it, not that I took it". On another occasion a native Christian said, "Why do you say that Joseph took Mary when that is a sin? He married her, didn't he?" As a result of these instances all translation work has been carefully combed for every instance of the word 'take' and checked to see if some other word should have been used. For example, one does not 'take' another person with him unless literally in his arms or in a cart. They simply 'go together'.

The native Christians did not like the word 'bread' in John 6 : 35, 48. True, they have a native word for bread and almost every one knows what it is, even the children in the bush, but it is not the 'staff of life' but a luxury. It would be the equivalent of having the Lord say, 'I am the cake of life'. The general word for food is used instead.

Specific words are used for different kinds of eating; *nyimi*, 'to chew', is used of eating meat; *mi*, 'to drink', is used for semi-liquids like cereal; *sogi*, 'to pick up one by one', is used only of birds or fowls, as the birds who ate the seed that fell by the wayside.

The ordinary word *bō* for 'to pour out' was not suitable for "I will pour out my Spirit upon you" as it implied that the thing poured out was

really thrown away. The word *yelema*, 'to pour out from one vessel into another' was considered, but rejected. It was finally translated 'I will make my Spirit descend on you'.

The words for 'heart', 'soul' and 'spirit' gave difficulty, as usual in translations into languages of people not accustomed to making metaphysical distinctions. *Dusu kū* is generally used for 'heart'; a typical exception is, 'He said within him' for 'He said in his heart'. *Dusu* without the *kū* is more loosely used and involves the emotions more than the will and this is used for 'soul'. The life principle is *ni* and, in many places, is used for 'spirit'. Sometimes *hakili*, which is the 'mind' is used for 'spirit', but none of these terms can be consistently used with either English or Greek, but are used as the native informants deemed most suitable to the context and meaning.

Quotations within quotations are difficult to handle. Usually they must be made indirect. This becomes involved in such places as "The Lord spake unto Moses saying, Speak unto the children of Israel saying", and the following words are the words of God in direct quotation in English. No absolute rule can be made as to which is indirect, but in the above instance it would probably be "The Lord told Moses to speak thus unto the children of Israel, saying" and follow this with a direct quotation. Judah's speech in Genesis 44:18-34 is an example of such involved quotations with its 'I said' and 'thou saidst' and 'My father said', etc. Judah's own speech is made a direct quotation, but he makes all the others indirect as he speaks.

One important example of improvement in the revision of the New Testament is found in Colossians 1:16. 'To believe' and 'to create' are both *da*, and as far as we can find out there is no difference of tone or length to distinguish them. There is no difficulty when 'create' is used transitively for the tense particles show which it is. But the passive voice, past tense of 'create' and the active voice, past tense of the intransitive 'believe' are both formed in the same way and become *dara*. Even this is not usually a problem for one believes 'in' and things are created 'by' or 'for'. *Fē be dara ale fe ani ale ye*, "All things were created by him and for him" is perfectly clear, and thinking from English, it seemed logical, in the context, to say *Fē be dara ale la* for "All things were created in him". But the use of 'in' immediately turns the verb from 'create' to 'believe' which makes a statement that is not true, for not everything that is in heaven and earth, visible and invisible believed in Him. In other words it is simply impossible to say, "All things were created *in* him".¹ The revision reads, 'All things were created in his power'.

The national church leader who has been our chief informant in the work of revision is enthusiastic about the changes, though he started with the conservative idea that anything that had been printed must be right even if he did not understand it.

¹ Can this really be so? Obviously an attempt to translate by verbal equivalence breaks down. But is the substituted phrase 'created in His power' what Paul actually means? It may make sense and it certainly is true, but what he says, "created *in* Him" is theologically much more significant. Probably the concept should be approached from an entirely different angle. *Ed.*