

Translating Nouns into the Cuicateco Language

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The Cuicateco language is spoken by approximately 10,000 Cuicateco Indians, located in the northeastern part of the State of Oaxaca, Mexico, in mountainous territory surrounded by rivers which almost completely isolate them from the outside world during the rainy season. The Cuicateco language is a tonal language of three phonemic registers and is a member of the Mixteco language family. According to the grammatical structure the language has three formal classes of words: verbs, nouns, and particles. In the syntax the particles are divided into several classes depending on their function, namely, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, particles, relative pronouns, and prepositions.

This article deals primarily with problems involving noun-like words, showing when a noun is translated as a noun and when a noun must be translated as a verb. In translating Spanish (or Greek) nouns with a Cuicateco noun equivalent, one of two types may be used: simple nouns or derived nouns. All derived nouns must have an abstract derivative noun-word preceding them, which can probably be best translated into English with the word "thing".¹ This word "thing" never stands alone as other nouns, but it is followed by either a particle, or a verb, or a modifying phrase containing a verb. When it is followed by an adjective particle, such abstract nouns are formed as "thing good" (goodness), "thing quiet" (peace), "thing right" (righteousness), "thing full" (joy), and "thing high" (height). When the word "thing" is followed by a modifying phrase containing a verb, it functions as a regular noun. Compare the phrase "thing that is made" with "house that is made", or "thing that is painted" with "house that is painted". However, when the derivative word is followed by a verb, several problems are involved. The purpose of the paper is to discuss these problems concerning the nouns derived from verbs and the possible solution of these problems in translating. Although only the Gospel of John is published in the Cuicateco language, illustrations will be cited from any portion of the New Testament since an entire initial draft has been made.

Problem Presented

There are no participial forms nor are there infinitive forms of verbs in Cuicateco. For the most part participial forms and infinitive forms when they occur in noun positions in Spanish are translated as verbs. All verbs have a tense indicator whether they are verbs as such, or whether they appear in combination with the noun derivative. Likewise they must have a personal pronominal subject indicator which is expressed by an enclitic. Thus, in Cuicateco the verb stem must have a prefix and an enclitic. The tenses and aspects expressed in Cuicateco are (1) a present

¹ It is interesting to note that there is no noun word to express "thing" in Cuicateco but that the Spanish loan word equivalent *cosa* is used.

progressive tense, (2) a potential aspect which, when preceded by the auxiliary verb "go", has the future meaning of going to do something, (3) a past tense, and (4) a prior past tense. The tense and aspect indicators are of the fourth order of prefixes from the verb root. The first order is the verb derivative or the non-reflexivizer, the second order is for the manner of doing, the third order is the repetitive prefix, and the fourth order the tense and aspect indicators. As many orders as occur in the verb proper also occur when that verb is used in the derived noun form. However, there are only two tense indicators used in the derived noun forms. These are the present progressive and the past tenses.

There is another phase in the derived form which should not be overlooked, and that is the enclitic. Each verb must have an enclitic. The impersonal pronominal enclitic is used in the derived form, and no other enclitic may be used. The impersonal idea goes with the derived form. In order to associate the derived form with a personal subject, a separate phrase follows the derived form, meaning "of him", "of her", "of man", "of God", etc. When such a phrase is used by the Cuicatecos, it follows the pattern of the regularly non-inherently possessed nouns and is one of their ways of associating things with people. When the phrase does not follow the derived form, then it has no connection with a definite person.

Many derived nouns occur in the translation and the derivative word "thing" appears many times. At times it causes cumbersome noun forms with the derivative appearing over and over again. But this is the manner used by the Cuicatecos and must appear this way in the translation.

Translation of Nouns with Derived Noun-Verb Equivalent

Many derived noun-verb words occur in the translation, and they are words that describe qualities and processes. The derived noun-verb words occur in the following phrases. First the English corresponding term will be given, then a context citation from Scripture, followed by the literal Cuicateco translation of the word.

Love, "love of Christ" (Eph. 3 : 19). Love is "thing cared for".

Life, "eternal life" (1 John 5 : 11). Life is "thing awake" or "thing alive". "Eternal life" is "thing alive always". In speaking of the living Christ who arose from the dead, the Cuicatecos say that Christ lifted himself up from among the dead corpses, implying that he himself was a dead corpse, and now he is "awake". A "living" Christ is simply a Christ that is "awake".

Death, "he should taste death" (Heb. 2 : 9). Death is "thing dead".

Wisdom or knowledge, "the wisdom and knowledge of God" (Romans 11 : 33). So far no differentiation has been found for these two words and one word is used for both ideas. Knowledge is "thing known". A wise man and a learned man are the same thing in Cuicateco. It is "a man that knows".

Offence, "by one man's offence death reigned" (Romans 5 : 17). Offence is "thing not reached". It also implies that the goal was not reached, the task was not finished, or if finished, it was not satisfactorily done.

According to the Cuicateco way of thinking if one does not do what is expected of him, he offends and is an offence.

Obedience, "by the obedience of one" (Romans 5 : 19). Obedience is "thing hearing", for to hear is to obey.

Disobedience, "children of disobedience" (Eph. 5 : 6). Disobedience is "thing intentionally not understanding". It does not come from the same verb root as the word "obey", for obedience is related to hearing. It comes from the verb root meaning "understand".

Mystery, "I show you a mystery" (1 Cor. 15 : 51). Mystery is "thing hid".

Reward, "great is your reward in heaven" (Mat. 5 : 12). Reward comes from the root verb "pay". To the root is prefixed a form which has the meaning of "acceptable" or "well pleasing". Reward, then, is "thing pleasing-pay".

Salvation, "neither is there salvation in any other" (Acts 4 : 12). Salvation is "thing saving".

Faith, "in words of faith" (1 Tim. 4 : 6). Faith is "thing believing".

Hope, "abideth faith, hope, charity" (1 Cor. 13 : 13). Hope is "thing waiting".

Thought, "the thought of thy heart" (Acts 8 : 22). Thought is "thing thinking".

Wedding, "had not on a wedding garment" (Mat. 22 : 11). Wedding is "thing wedding-rite". Wedding rite comes from a compound verb which literally means "bone-house". After the wedding rites are performed the girl goes to the house of her husband and becomes a part of that household.

Gifts, "having gifts differing" (Rom. 12 : 6). There is no plural in the Cuicateco language, but one can specify whether it is one gift, two gifts, any number of gifts, or many gifts. Without specifying how many, it can be understood as either singular or plural. Pluralization is not always specifically indicated. Gifts are "thing given".

Drink, "blood is drink indeed" (John 6 : 55). Drink is "thing drinking".

Sign, "a sign which shall be" (Luke 2 : 34). A sign is a "thing showing". It has the meaning of something brought out into the open and being specifically shown to someone or to people.

Blessing, "blessing and glory to our God" (Rev. 7 : 12). Blessing is "thing blessing".

Miracles, "no man can do these miracles" (John 3 : 2). Miracles (or miracle) is "thing marveled". It has the meaning of standing off and marveling at something incomprehensible.

Nouns Translated with Verbs

Nouns that are translated with verbs in the Cuicateco language could also be translated with the derived noun-verb words; but when they are translated as such, the translation becomes awkward and even clumsy. These nouns that are translated by verbs indicate actions and processes.

The most striking examples occur in the list of sins and spiritual virtues.

Although the Cuicateco translation is based on the Greek, with the use of several versions in Spanish and in English, nouns will be cited in English for the sake of convenience. A passage will be given in English, followed by a free translation of the same passage from the Cuicateco language. The nouns which are translated with verbs will be numbered in the English translation with the corresponding number for the verbs in the Cuicateco translation:

2 Tim. 3 : 2-4, "For men shall be (1)¹ lovers of their own selves, covetous, (2) boasters, proud, (3) blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural (4) affection, (5) trucebreakers, false (6) accusers, incontinent, fierce, (7) despisers of those that are good, (8) traitors, heady, high-minded, (9) lovers of pleasure more than (10) lovers of God".

The free translation of the passage from Cuicateco is as follows:

"Men (1) will love their own selves. They shall want very much things. They (2) shall speak big of themselves. They shall think big of themselves. They (3) will speak sweet about God. They will not want to understand their mother and their father. They will not say thank you. They will not do good. They (4) will not love-good as they should. They (5) will not complete what they say. They (6) will not testify right. They will not guard the wants of their body. They do-fiercely. They (7) do not love those people that do good. They (8) (used to) speak equal with you but now no more. They (9) love pleasure more than (10) love God".

Notice that not only nouns are translated by verbs but also many adjectives are translated by verbs.

1 Peter 1 : 13 provides other interesting examples: "Wherefore gird up the loins of your (1) mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the (2) revelation of Jesus Christ".

The free translation of the Cuicateco is:

"Because of this you (1) think the things that are right. Remain in all your senses. You wait until afterwards for the thing-good that will come to you when Jesus Christ (2) will come and show himself".

Romans 1 : 29-31 illustrates a number of interesting correspondences between nouns and verbs:

"Being filled with all (1) unrighteousness, (2) fornication, (3) wickedness, (4) covetousness, (5) maliciousness; full of (6) envy, (7) murder, (8) debate, (9) deceit, (10) malignity, (11) whisperers, (12) backbiters, (13) haters of God, despiteful, proud, (14) boasters, (15) inventors of evil things, diso-

¹ Numbers refer to corresponding phrases in the following section.

bedient to parents, without (16) understanding, (17) covenant-breakers, without natural (18) affection, implacable, unmerciful”.

A free translation of the Cuicateco is:

“They are full (with) they (1) do-not-right. They (2) join themselves. They (3) do not good. They (4) want very much things. They want they (5) do fierce. They are full they (6) want things. They (7) kill people. They (8) speak wars. They (9) deceive. They (10) do-fierce. They (11) speak-hide against people. They (12) speak not good against people that are far. They (13) do not love God. They are mean. They think big of themselves. They (14) talk big of themselves. They (15) bring to light things that are not good. They do not want to understand their mother or their father. They (16) do not want to understand anything. They (17) do against the law. They (18) do not love-good as they should. They do not want to change what they do. They do not feel-in-their-breasts”.

By translating nouns of process or qualities by corresponding verbs, the translation is infinitely clearer in Cuicateco. Also by translating the noun with a verb one eliminates the cumbersome words which would consist of the noun derivative word “thing” plus the verb or verb phrase.

Languages are never completely parallel in their structures and therefore complete formal parallelisms cannot be employed in the translation. The few passages cited and translated show the Cuicateco translation differs so markedly from the English translation. The use of the verbs in full sentences makes the translation fully natural and avoids the impression that the Gospel is a foreigner's book or a book that expresses things in a clumsy fashion. It is the aim of the translator to translate the Word of God so that it speaks in the language of the people to the hearts of the people.

Check Those Literal Translations

“To give breath to the image of the beast” seems so obviously right as a translation of Revelation 13:15 that many a translator has let it slip past unchallenged. One reviser of a New Testament in Central America was not so gullible about foreign idioms and so he checked on this one, only to find that it actually meant “to make the image stink”. Perhaps for the people the phrase was not regarded as being so much out of place in speaking about the detested beasts of Revelation 13, but it certainly did not represent the meaning of the original, which could only be translated adequately as “to make the image of the beast live”.