

The New Edition of the Ddu Alur Bible

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The Alur people are of Nilotic origin and are found on the western shore of Lake Albert in the Belgian Congo. Part of the tribe is in the West Nile District of Uganda, and others are interspersed among the Western Sudanic tribes in both the northeastern part of the Belgian Congo and the southern Sudan. They are related to the Luo people who in the dim past settled north of Lake Victoria and, more distantly, to the Shilluk, the Dinka and the Diang; tribes of the Upper Nile, in the Sudan.

The success or failure of a translation or a revision hinges upon the faithfulness and conscientiousness of those who are assigned to the task, as well as upon the thoroughness and perseverance of those who have pioneered in the early linguistic struggles as they reduced to writing this hitherto unrecorded language. In our case, the excellent work done by the original translators of the complete Bible into Ddu Alur¹ was so thoroughly and meticulously done that the work of the present committee, that of correcting and revising for a new edition, was greatly simplified.

We have been constantly spurred on by the hunger of the Alur brethren, so recently become literate, for the Scriptures! To them it is bread that satisfies and brings to full growth, water that assuages thirst, love that comforts, and grace that meets daily need. It is the *plus ultra* of all reading matter for it is to most of them the unique source of all knowledge and guidance. Their constant enquiries about the progress of the work and their intense interest in the work of the revision committee were not only a stimulus to us, but a sure sign of a church that was growing in spiritual power.

As is always the case in translation work, the search for the right idiomatic expressions seems endless. Constant watchfulness and unremitting search are always rewarded, though there are many with which we are still dissatisfied. 'Faithful' is *Ng'atu m'andda* or 'A person of truth'; 'holy' is *Ng'atu maleng'* or 'A clean person'; 'grace' is *bero* or simply 'goodness' which is hardly strong enough to express the full meaning of that marvellous word and all it means to the Christian!

We had been using *lego* for 'pray'. We had heard it used for 'beg, pray, wheedle' and were never quite satisfied with it. Soon, however, we found that it was normally used in the case of a hungry mendicant when he begs for beer at a beer-drink, or for food when away from home! Unfortunately its use was more frequent in its relation to beer than in the latter sense! Small wonder that we immediately pressed for a more suitable word for 'pray'.

¹ The New Testament appeared in 1932 and the Old Testament in 1936, both published by the British and Foreign Bible Society. The Africa Inland Mission Committee was composed of Dr. C. L. Trout, Ch., and the Misses Halstead, Halsey and Stirton, aided by several Congolese, of whom the outstanding genius was Samuel Wapol who has since been decorated by the Government for many years of faithful service under the auspices of the Africa Inland Mission.

We found the word *kwayu* which means 'to beseech' and for a long time we used it in prayer to God. One day as I was travelling through strange country and staying in the government resthouse, I discovered it. About daybreak one morning I was roused by a group of old men approaching single file on the path that led through the compound. Their conversation intrigued me, and I pulled on some clothes and called them back before they got beyond earshot. "Where are you going?" I queried. "We're going to *rwo* to *rubanga* our god," was the response. What a strange expression, I thought; but as I talked further with them I knew that at last we had discovered the word for 'worship'. It meant complete submission, adoration, consecration. The same term is used when two men are wrestling and one finally puts the shoulders of the under man to the ground. In complete submission and defeat he calls *arwo iri* meaning 'I give up to you; I am subdued; I admit your greater strength'. All these are implied. Ever since then we have used *rwo* for worshipful prayer to God.

The seat of the emotions is not the heart. It is the liver! Thus you have such idiomatic expressions as:

<i>Cwinyi bedo nenedi?</i>	How is your liver? (How are you?)
<i>Kwiocwiny</i>	Peace (cool liver)
<i>Cwiny m'uwang'</i>	Anger (a liver that burns)
<i>Twiocwiny</i>	Patience (a liver that is controlled or tied)
<i>Ang'aba-cwiny</i>	Troubled in liver (worried). The same word is used when a cat tries to claw its way up an insurmountable wall: <i>Eng'abre</i> meaning it claws futilely.
<i>Mielcwiny</i>	Fear (a trembling liver)

It is interesting to note in this regard that in Ezekiel 21 : 21, "The king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way..... to use divination: he made his arrows bright, he consulted with images, *he looked in the liver.*" Just exactly as the witchdoctors of this tribe do!

There are 'onomatopoeic' words which are so expressive of the meaning:

<i>Pi upong' <u>le le le</u></i>	the water fills it full (you hear the water lapping at the edge of the water-pot)
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<i>Yeco <u>brwa</u></i>	tear a cloth (hear it rip!)
<i>Tong'gweno potho <u>klpu</u></i>	the egg fell and broke (hear it splash!)
<i>Cwinyi ringo <u>r-r-r</u></i>	you are confused (your liver runs here and there)

<i>Ewotto <u>tto tto</u></i>	he paddles (as a child in bare feet)
<i>Tong' uringo <u>ngia</u></i>	the spear that flies <i>swiftly</i>
<i>Ecungo sebele ('e' as in get)</i>	the sea stands calm (not a ripple)

Two women are standing in the middle of the village scolding each other, calling each other scathing names at the top of their voices (it could be two men just as well). The Alurs say *Giloko ddoggi kle kle* meaning 'They exchange their mouths back and forth'!

There are difficulties in translation when you find a verse like Isaiah 33 : 15, q.v. In this language it becomes literally, "The person who walks white, and that speaks straight; the person who hates deceitful exchange for personal gain, that snaps clean his hands from taking this world's riches, who closes his ears (literally corks up) from hearing bloody (things), who closes his eyes from looking upon evil; He will abide up high".

Isaiah 1 : 18 also raises a problem in the tropics. How to say "white as snow". Our people use the same word for snow and hail, for up in the highlands of the Great Rift it sometimes hails and they take the hail in their hands and say 'It burns!' One hundred miles to the south of us is the snow-capped top of the Ruwenzori Mountain Range, almost 17,000 feet high. One May afternoon when the rain had cleared the atmosphere we stepped out of our front door to look upon that beautiful scene; the setting sun shining full on the glistening snow, brilliantly white in the distance. Our houseboy stood there smiling broadly and said just one word, *Pei*—Snow! Thus they know how pure the blood of Christ makes the sin-stained heart that believes Him. But the "be as wool" remains a difficulty. The sheep in that country are brown or black. On one trip down the Nile River I saw on the horizon a whole herd of sheep, and not one was what I would expect. Every single one of them was black as ink! So it is that not until other strains than the black or brown sheep native to the country are introduced can they even begin to understand this passage.

Then there are such expressions, astonishing to us, as when one dark-skinned person will refer to another who is furiously angry: 'His face is black', referring, of course, to his facial expression. When referring to one who is ageing they say, *conge* ('c' as 'sh' in shore) *mbe* meaning 'he has no knees' or 'he is getting feeble'. Sometimes they say *Edoko ng'ic* meaning 'he is becoming cold', used also of a lazy workman who is losing all interest in his work, the antithesis being *Etimo ku morcwinj* meaning 'He works with a warm liver'.

A letter or two can make a difference, or a faulty pronunciation can completely change the meaning of a word:

pio means 'quickly'

abitha means 'temptation'

kwer (n.) means 'a hoe'

luro means 'to peddle'

bedo ttu means 'to abide in one's own village'

kot means 'all'

ringo means 'to run'

kwo (broad 'o') means 'life'

piyo means 'to drill'

abitta is 'peeling' as of a potato

kwer (v. in the imper.) 'refuse'

loro means 'to descend' (the u/o pronunciation of 'o' is typical of this language and often causes difficulty)

bedo tuu means 'to be vile'

kott means 'rain'

ring'o means 'meat'

kwo (long 'o') means 'to steal'

Which reminds me of a much-loved fellow missionary who would invariably, when quoting John 3 : 16, say "If you believe in Christ, he will make you a thief" instead of 'a person of life'.

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.