

Others of these linguistic features are colloquialisms, which are now offensive in written Arabic. In Ruth 1 : 10, *tasīrā* is the apocopated form of the verb instead of the indicative.³¹ In Ephesians 1 : 17, *yakūna* is not only unnecessary but contrary to strict rules of syntax.

Sometimes the language, though not grammatically wrong, is awkward. The word-order, for example, in Ruth 1 : 1 and Ephesians 1 : 19 is badly disjointed.

These linguistic short-comings made the Propaganda Version offensive to classicists, especially to Muslims. A Syrian Protestant notes that obscurities and infelicities are especially frequent in the prophets and the Pauline epistles.³² The American Protestant missionaries in Syria were almost ashamed to give this Bible to Muslims and regularly revised the grammar and vocabulary before a public reading of Scripture.³³

(To be continued)

Problems in Translating the Scriptures into Shilluk, Anuak and Nuer

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Every translation of the Scriptures encounters its distinctive problems, but often within a related group of languages there are a number of problems which show remarkable parallelism from one language to another. The translational difficulties in Shilluk, Anuak and Nuer, all of which are closely related Nilotic languages in the Sudan, can be readily classified as phonemic, grammatical and semantic.

I. Problems of Phonemic Structure

In most languages it is usually unnecessary to consider the phonemic structure of a language when discussing translation problems. One simply accepts the system of sounds and employs a more or less one-to-one set of correspondences. However, the problems in the Nilotic languages are not so simple as all that, largely because of the extreme complexity of the phonemic structure.

There is quite a little variation in the phonemic structures of the different Nilotic languages, but Nuer, which is one of the more complex, illustrates some of the essential problems. The Nuer language has fourteen basic vowels, seven of which may be described as noncentralized and the others as correspondingly centralized. However, these fourteen vowels are completely separate entities as far as the Nuer speaker is concerned. Each of these fourteen vowels may have any one of three phonemic lengths: extra short, normal, and extra long. There are many words which differ in meaning only on the basis of such phonemic length. But there is still a further consideration in dealing with the vowel structure, namely, the

³¹ Graf, *op. cit.*, pp. 31, 32.

³² Jamil Ḥannā Trānjān, *Al-kitāb al-muqaddas fī al-lughah al-'arabiyyah*. Cairo: Nile Mission Press, 1936, p. 17.

³³ Report of The Syria Mission, 1844, kindly copied by Mr. Clifton Anderson of Beirut.

breathiness or nonbreathiness, which likewise gives rise to numerous minimal pairs, that is, words which have totally different meanings depending on whether the vowel has a breathy or nonbreathy quality. For example, the only difference between words meaning 'bird' and 'one who thatches a house' is the breathiness of the vowel. Very slight differences of vowel quality, breathiness, and length (distinctions which have not been made consistently in writing) give a series of words meaning 'chin', 'life', 'hazy sky', and 'bead'. Failure to make proper distinctions in length can produce innumerable ambiguities, of which the series 'relative', 'whip of hippo hide' and 'dried fish' is only one.

But vowel qualities, length and breathiness are not the only factors. There are at least three levels of tone in Nuer and a number of glides. This makes the phonemic structure much more complicated, for a difference of tone is the distinguishing mark for many sets of words, e.g. (1) 'bird' and 'song', (2) 'relative' and 'relatives' and (3) 'leopard' and 'fish scale'.

The Nilotic languages would not be quite so complicated in their tonal structure if it were not for the fact that the basic tones of the words change constantly in the different syntactic positions. For example, in Shilluk in the so-called future active, positive and negative, of transitive verbs there are three basic classes: high, mid and low. In the passive of the same tense most of these verbs become high. In the completive aspect positive and negative, most of the high verbs go to mid, and most of the mid verbs shift to low. In the passive of the same aspect, most verbs are high in the positive and mid in the negative. In the habitual aspect almost all verbs go to low.

In view of the very complex phonemic structures of Nuer and Shilluk, it is no wonder that readers have had difficulty in reading when traditionally the orthographies have indicated only eight or nine vowel qualities (and these inconsistently) and only two units of length (likewise rather sporadically and inconsistently), while breathiness has often been confused with basic vowel quality and tones have never been marked.

If we add up the theoretical possibilities for the nucleus of any syllable, we arrive at a figure of 252 different sets of contrasts. We must multiply 14 vowel qualities first by three phonemic lengths, then by breathy vs. nonbreathy quality, and finally by at least three registers of tone. But this total of 252 possibilities is still not all. We must also consider some of the very complex diphthongs, which likewise have three phonemic lengths and produce confusion in such pairs as (1) 'fish' and 'ant' and (2) 'egg' and 'horns'.

In terms of the science of Information Theory one could say that Nuer is a very efficient language in that a great deal of meaning is carried by a highly differentiated consonant, vowel and tonal structure. Particles usually consist of no more than CV (C stands for any consonant and V for any vowel) and the 'full' words are rarely more than CVC. In a language which makes so many fine distinctions and which has such short words, thus giving rise to hundreds of nearly similar terms, it is essential that the orthography reflect the phonemic structure as closely as possible. In the past this has not been done and as a result people who have attended school for several years and who have had considerable

practice in reading their own language read very haltingly. Even in reading relatively familiar materials they tend to go over the same phrase at least a couple of times, trying to discover what words are intended and attempting to figure out the tonal pattern, for without the proper syntactic tones the entire expression is relatively meaningless.

It has been generally argued by missionaries and some educational authorities that since the people speak their own languages they have no difficulty in figuring out the right pronunciation. To an extent this is true, but this does not lessen the fact that efficiency in reading in proportion to effort is dismally small. For the translator this means two things: (1) some constructive efforts should be undertaken to experiment in more efficient ways of writing the languages, particularly if adult literacy programmes are to be undertaken, for adults cannot be subjected to the same type of rote drilling which children are accustomed to in schools, and (2) any translation must be completely idiomatic as far as grammatical constructions are concerned. Any awkward or unfamiliar juxtaposition of words will throw the reader off completely when he attempts to discover the syntactic tone pattern, without which the phrase has practically no meaning.

Another reason for the rather chaotic alphabets now in use in some of the Nilotic languages is the belief that because of the wide differences between the dialects of the respective languages there was not much point in attempting to be consistent with any one-for-one correspondence. We did not have an opportunity to check into any language other than Nuer, but in making a limited comparison of at least four widely scattered dialects, it was interesting to note that there were practically no differences of tonal structure, and relatively few differences of vowels. The major differences in dialects occurred in the consonants. This is not strange for in comparison with the vocalic structure there can be much greater latitude in the range of consonant variation while at the same time preserving intelligibility. But the traditional orthographies have been relatively consistent in writing the consonants and quite inconsistent in indicating the vowels.

So serious is the possibility of ambiguity in Shilluk (which is by no means a typical language) that some school teachers complain about school boys being able to give two or three entirely different answers to examination questions since the present orthography is so obscure. In the checking of translations of the Scriptures it has been found that complaints about the unintelligibility of some passages was not due primarily to the unnatural rendering but to the degree of orthographic confusion.

II. Problems of Grammatical Structure

At every turn the translator is confronted by special problems which reflect the lack of grammatical correspondence between the language from which he is translating and the one into which he is translating. The following list of grammatical characteristics includes the more significant features which must be constantly dealt with:

1. *Preference for the passive.* Almost inevitably a Nilotic speaker will shift from the active to the passive in transitive expressions in which the agent is mentioned. The translator is obliged to do the same if he wishes his translation to be readily understood.

2. *Preference for indirect discourse.* The shift from direct to indirect discourse can be made easily, but the translator has to bear such matters constantly in mind. This does not mean, of course, that all direct discourse must be changed, but one should reflect something of the percentage of usage of the indigenous language.

3. *Redundancy of pronouns.* It is quite common for Nilotic languages to have the equivalent of 'The man he went'.

4. *Use of nouns where English or Greek would use pronouns.* There are no gender distinctions between pronouns (e.g. *he, she, it*) and hence nouns must be repeated if the proper referent is to be understood. This is especially true of unfamiliar contexts.

5. *Fewer complex (subordinating) clause constructions than in Greek or English.* Sentences may be quite long, especially those expressing a closely related series of events, connected by conjunctions meaning either 'and' or 'so that'. However, the sentence patterns are much closer to the looser structure of Hebrew than to the highly involved system of Greek.

6. *Frequency of tense-aspect particles.* The Nilotic languages possess a number of different classes of tense-aspect particles, which are not only semantically important but which also function to bind the discourse together.

III. Problems of Semantic Structure

One cannot translate a sentence from one language into another without being confronted with problems of semantic structure. However, for the most part such difficulties are treated as isolated — and isolatable — facts of the language. Further study of these types of problems inevitably reveals that semantic difficulties fall into classes, which in turn reflect the basic semantic structure of the languages in question. The following are a few of the more significant types of semantic problems:

1. *Honorifics.* The Nilotic languages have no such elaborate system of honorifics as Siamese or Balinese, but there are a number of words in the various languages which are applied only to kings or chiefs, while in speaking of the common people one must use a different expression. For example, in Shilluk there are four different ways of talking about the birth of humans, all of which are euphemistic: (1) 'God will deliver' (i.e. 'save'), (2) 'She will go into the house', (3) 'She will make to fall down', and (4) 'It will collapse down'. In view of the fact that the word translated 'collapse' signifies a very important or extensive 'falling', it is regarded as appropriate when talking about the birth of a prince. Some translations into Nilotic languages have tended to be somewhat inconsistent in the matter of honorific language.

2. *Plural number for generic expressions.* Where English employs *everyone, each, whoever, or any*, the Shilluk, Anuak, and Nuer use plurals. Instead of English *whosoever*, one must say 'all who'. "Love thy neighbour as thyself", must be translated as 'Love your neighbours as yourselves' if the admonition is to apply to all and if one is to love more than just one

neighbour. In the preference for the plural forms these Nilotic languages can certainly be regarded as more 'logical', for the singular in Greek and English actually means plural number, despite the inconsistency in form.

3. *Wide area of meaning of relationals.* The relational particles, conjunctions and prepositions have exceptionally wide areas of meaning. This results in considerable ambiguity and obscurity in unfamiliar contexts. Ambiguous relationals can be substituted for by entire phrases which indicate clearly the relationships between the words.

4. *The indication of processes by verbs.* It is often possible to make up nouns to correspond to verbs of processes, but such expressions are generally neither indigenous nor fully intelligible. Instead of "God is love" it is better in Anuak to say, 'God loves'. In Shilluk an equivalent for 'righteousness' has been employed which is literally 'right by itself'. This type of phrase is both clumsy and relatively meaningless. In Matthew 5:10 one can translate, "those who are persecuted because they are righteous". Words such as *justification, baptism, redemption, salvation, forgiveness, conversion* and *repentance* should all be translated as verbs, not as nouns.

5. *The use of metaphors in the identification of psychological states.* To identify psychological states the Nilotic languages make considerable use of words meaning either 'heart' or 'liver' (the latter is more common). In Anuak there are scores of such expressions employing *cwiny*, 'liver', of which the following are typical: he has a *cwiny* (he is good), his *cwiny* is good (he is generous), his *cwiny* is bad (he is unsociable), his *cwiny* is shallow (he gets angry quickly), his *cwiny* is heavy (he is sad), his *cwiny* is stubborn (he is brave), his *cwiny* is white (he is kind), his *cwiny* is cold (he will not be impolite in eating ahead of others), his *cwiny* is burned (he is irritable), and his *cwiny* is sweet (he is happy).

In translating "they will be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6) into Shilluk, one must say 'their hearts will be cool'. Similarly, the "merciful" (Matthew 5:7) are 'those who habitually cry in their insides'.

6. *Differentiation in vocabulary following lines of cultural relevance.* A superficial examination of the Nilotic languages (or of any language, for that matter) gives one the impression that they are very weak in generic terms. The real situation is that their generic terms simply do not coincide with ours, but they do reflect the indigenous cultural relevance of the various traits. For example, in Anuak there is one term which means 'path', 'way', 'manner', 'principle' and 'law' (in the phrase 'law of sin'). The term *iwok* includes 'God', 'pagan deities', 'demons', 'supernatural power', and the essential characteristic of persons of unusual ability, medicine men, and shrines. Similarly a word for 'bad' means 'bad', 'sin', 'wrong', 'incorrect' and 'mistaken'. We must not complain that languages have few generic terms or that they cover too wide an area of meaning. The real problem is that they are different from ours because the culture is different. The solutions to such difficulties lie in two directions: (1) the use of qualifying terms and (2) differentiation of expressions to fit relevant distinctions in the culture in question.

In Anuak one may add to *iwok* the word 'Father', which is also a term

of respect, roughly equivalent to 'Lord'. The combination 'Father *Jwok*' makes it possible to distinguish this use of the word *jwok* from the numerous other meanings. In many Biblical contexts the Anuak words *yiey* and *ngadho* are neither one adequate in themselves to translate 'believe' or 'faith', for *yiey* implies only intellectual assent and *ngadho* is closer to hope and trust than to faith. However, the combination of the two words is an equivalent of 'believe' in such phrases as "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ". In such a context the combination of words implies not only agreement with but personal trust and confidence, coloured with hope.

In translating the word 'law' in Anuak one may employ 'the commands of God' when the text clearly refers to the Old Testament law. But the 'law of sin' is 'the path of sin'. "Those who are without the law" are 'those who do not know the word of God', and "another law in my members" may be rendered as 'another talk within me'.

7. *Strategic importance of the tense-aspect particles.* The continuity of discourse is almost completely dependent upon the proper use of the tense-aspect particles, which, however, are quite different from anything in Indo-European languages. The three basic particles in Shilluk, Anuak and Nuer have been generally described as being past, present and future. As a matter of fact they are not that at all, but completive, incompletive and change of state or activity. The completive and incompletive particles do not give much trouble, but the one which indicates change of state or activity is difficult to employ correctly. For example, in the Beatitudes one cannot say in Shilluk "Blessed are those who mourn", but rather "Those who mourn will be happy" (the 'will be' in our translation indicates the particle which signifies change of state), for the context indicates clearly a change of condition. If one translates into Nuer a sentence such as 'She did not speak but was quiet' the second clause must have the particle *bi*, for the second clause marks a change of state from the first, even though the first is negative. Some of the difficulties involved in understanding the present translations result from the unsatisfactory way in which these particles have been employed.

IV. Basic Principles

When one well educated informant was asked how he managed to understand the Scriptures in his own language (since he was obviously having great difficulty in explaining the meaning of some passages of a Gospel), he explained that in order to understand the Scriptures in his mother tongue, he generally had to read the passage first in English. This, of course, is not an infrequent criticism of translations produced in aboriginal languages. The principal reason why people often get more out of a translation into a trade language (which they know only imperfectly) than out of one in their own indigenous tongue (which they use constantly) is that the syntax and the figures of speech tend to follow slavishly the words of the text from which the translation is made, rather than communicating the message.

The following principles, formulated by translators now engaged in work in Shilluk, Anuak and Nuer, are by no means all-inclusive, and in a sense principles two through six are only elaborations of principle one.

However, they do reflect some of the fundamental problems which the translator into any Nilotic language is bound to meet with considerable frequency:

1. *A translation is not satisfactory unless it has communicated the intended message.* One can literally translate the words "and it came to pass" but such a phrase in a Nilotic language is not the equivalent of the Semitic idiom in the New Testament. Similarly one can find all the corresponding words for the phrase "he opened his mouth and taught", but the meaning is ludicrous to a Shilluk. If the reader attempts to take the statement seriously he can only picture someone trying to teach with his mouth open. The proper equivalent is 'he began to teach'. Proper translating consists in employing those expressions which will communicate the message, regardless of whether they happen to be the so-called literal equivalents.

2. *Metaphors which are certain to be misunderstood should be explained in footnotes or should be translated by acceptable corresponding similes or by nonmetaphorical descriptive phrases.* The expression "sons of thunder" would be completely misunderstood in Anuak. The correct and meaningful equivalent is 'men with strong livers'. Without a footnote to say that "sons of thunder" means in Anuak 'men with strong livers', the Anuak reader of Mark would only conclude that James and John were the supernatural offspring of 'Thunder'. Metaphors such as "I am the door", "Ye are the salt", and "false prophets who are... ravenous wolves", need to be converted into similes, 'I am like a door', 'ye are like salt', 'false prophets who are... like hungry hyenas'. The word 'stumbling-block' never means anything to an Anuak other than something against which one stubs his toe. There is no metaphorical significance in the literal equivalent. Accordingly, one is obliged to translate in some contexts 'cause to fall into sin'.

3. *Where there is a lack of direct correspondence between features of the Biblical and the Nilotic culture, one should choose the closest natural equivalent.* For example, instead of 'speaking with their tongues' people speak 'with their mouths' (a much more logical equivalent — to say the least). Similarly, instead of 'heart' one may employ 'liver', or in place of 'wolves' it is possible to use 'hyenas' (as noted in the previous paragraph). One special problem is posed by the verse "if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well" (Matthew 5 : 40). Most Nilotics go entirely naked in their villages and fields. They may dress up in half-sheets for some special occasion, but they would never understand the distinction between an inner and an outer garment. However, they would understand, 'If any person enters a talk and gets your poor cloth, let him have your good one'. They can imagine a person having two cloths, but certainly not two 'cloths' to be worn at the same time. However, this use of 'poor cloth' and 'good cloth' is culturally parallel to the Biblical distinction between coat and cloak, for the latter was generally of heavier material, larger, and more expensive.

4. *In order to approximate the content of the original it may be necessary to employ considerably more words than the original.* John 1 : 13

is a verse which is very meaningful in the original, that is, in terms of the words used and the cultural context as understood by the reader in New Testament times. However, in modern translations, which generally repeat the words of the original whether they mean much of anything to the reader, this very significant verse has lost much of its meaning. If this verse is reproduced word-for-word into a language such as Anuak not only does the reader completely miss the meaning of the original but he acquires quite wrong ideas. For example, "who were born, not of blood" could only mean that those who believed did not have any blood in their bodies when they were born or that their mothers did not bleed at the time of childbirth. If one is to communicate the meaning of this verse to Anuak readers, it must be translated more or less as follows: 'These became God's children because of God himself; they did not become God's children just because of the human family into which they were born, or because of men's bodily desires or because of men's plans'. It is not only necessary to employ more words, but also to reorganize the order of ideas, for in the original the positive statement "were born . . . of God" is interrupted by a long negative series "not of . . . nor of . . . nor of . . . but". Such an order must often be replaced by a positive statement followed by a negative statement.

5. *For features of Biblical culture which do not exist in the Nilotic culture, one must employ descriptive phrases which are culturally meaningful.* The Nilotics are another people who do not know anything about snow. They do have hail, but the Shilluks at least speak of hail as being 'clear' not 'white'. Accordingly, one cannot say 'white as hail'. It is probably best to say 'very white'. Such a rendering is usually preferable to one which introduces a totally different kind of object, such as egret feathers.

In the area of material culture it is not too difficult to find appropriate descriptive phrases. However, in nonmaterial phases of culture descriptive phrases are often difficult to formulate. In Anuak there is no term for 'spirit' in the sense of the Holy Spirit. There is a word *ywey*¹ which may be used to translate human soul or spirit, but which is essentially the 'life principle'. One cannot speak of the *ywey* of God, for the Anuaks insist that God does not have a *ywey* and that He is not a *ywey*. It is God who has given *ywey* to all people, animals and plants, but He Himself is of a different order of existence. To speak of the *ywey* of God would be to equate him with earthly creation. There seems to be no easy solution to this problem, but for the time being 'Spirit' is to be translated as 'that which comes from God', in the sense of that which emanates from or has its origin in God. This is not completely satisfactory but it at least provides a basis for probing further into the language and for discovering other possibilities which may prove more adequate.

6. *The use of alternative syntactic constructions should reflect the relative statistical frequency of these forms in the indigenous language.* Differences of opinion as to whether one or another expression should be employed in a translation are very frequently argued on the basis of the

¹ In Shilluk and Nuer there are the words *wey* and *yey* respectively, and they seem to work quite satisfactorily for 'Spirit'.

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

Caroline Campbell

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