

Suki Translation

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The Suki language is spoken by a small tribe known as the Sukis living round the Lake of the same name in the Western Division of Papua. Only two decades have passed since this tribe was the terror of its neighbours because of its successful head-hunting raids. The nomadic background and prowess as huntsmen has affected the language. Until recently outside influence was negligible, although some knowledge of the trade language known as Police Motu was held by the men. Words abound for all types of bush life, but anything in the nature of love, grace, worship, and other such abstract qualities is difficult to translate. Although two not far distant neighbours made small images of men, birds and animals for use in worship, no such practice is known amongst the Sukis.

Work on the Suki language was commenced in September 1945. A few months had been spent with the people prior to the withdrawal of missionaries from the area in 1942. Because of approaching furlough, and the fact that a good number of men had learned to read, an early attempt was made to translate Mark's Gospel. This was, of course, difficult, especially as in many places we had no way of checking accuracy of results. For checking purposes several copies were typed and read with a small group of men. As is usual with those who read slowly, comprehension was poor. Some found it hard to know what was required, and quite some time was spent in further explanations. Probably the same end would have been gained had the men sat in on the original sessions when the draft was made using two men. However, Mark was completed and filled a great need whilst we were away.

After furlough it became necessary for us to relieve at the Bible Training School in a different language group; thus an interval of over two years elapsed before we returned to take up our work at Suki. In the meantime two of our Suki men have spent time at the Bible Training School in the other language area. One of these gained a very good working knowledge of that language, and as this language was already known to us we thought this would be a great advantage for future translations. This, however, has not proved to be the case. Although the two languages are not widely separated in distance, in morphological construction and idiomatic expression they are poles apart. We have had to be most careful in referring directly to translations from the Gogodala language as a literal translation of their idiom, etc. sounds awkward in Suki. However, being able to read the passage in another language for himself has been of value to our helper. We have used one man for most of the work. He has not only a naturally quick intelligence, but has also experienced that which we are translating.

In August of last year Acts was begun. Pressure of other work made a concentrated effort difficult, but at the time it seemed as much as our helper could stand. He has gradually become more accustomed to the concentration, and is now able to do several short sessions a day.

Since the completion of Acts we have been working on several small books. As we are working in a district where the people are primitive and have no other education except that which we give, we have found that the literal translations are difficult for new readers. So instead of making a literal translation of any one book of the Old Testament we have done two small books of Old Testament stories in direct narrative style. With quite a number being added to the church a book containing short articles on Baptism, Communion, Church Government etc. with appropriate translations of scriptural passages has been written. It is, however, our plan to make a translation of John's Gospel in the near future. Material for school reading, etc. has to be done in the meantime.

Suki has several interesting features. One of these which seems fairly unusual amongst primitive languages is the use of the word "heart" to express emotional experiences.

Biaekraru	heart	
to love	biaek watmauwa	lit. send heat to heart
to forgive	biaek eisaemaewa	make heart soft
to be agitated	biaekraru umiaesaeraeri	heart dances
hard hearted (unfeeling)	biaekraru keikrubiae	hard heart
grace, mercy	biaekwtru inae	hot heart way
forgiveness (a state of not retaliating)	biaek eisae inae	soft heart way (not now used for forgiveness)
repentance	biaekwtrudap gjaeraesae	turn with sorrow

Suki is a very adaptable language in the formation of verbs from adjectives. The verb *wa(mu)*, (*wamnatu*), to send, is added to the stem of the adjective. The verb *wa(mu)* also takes the place of verb "to be" in certain circumstances.

cold	neikru	
make cold	neikru waru	future: neikru wataeru, it will become cold
fright	maga	
make frightened	magawaru	
strong	reiraeru	
make strong	reiraer waru	

etc. with few exceptions.

Another interesting feature is the manner in which adjectives are placed with their nouns. Most adjectives have comparative and superlative forms so this makes the system more complicated.

This	maemti	
this man	maem darti	(man daru)
this woman	maem atuti	(woman atu)
this child	maem aeniti	(child aeni)
this house	maem gagti	(house gagu)

(Final word vowel frequently lost when suffix added)

Negativisers and Pluralisers

Two other features of the grammar are the number of negativisers and comparative lack of pluralisers.

Negativisers

1. *na* first order adjectival negativiser. Used to form opposites.

maga frightened
magana frightened not, therefore the word for bold
tu knowing
tuna knowing not, therefore ignorant.

also used with other emphatic endings to form a sarcastic expression.

dae tunabiae darditumka
you knowing not very men are You don't know a thing!
dae reiraernabiae giaeditumka
you strong not very boys are You're only weaklings!

2. *Namu* Used with adjectives for emphatic *not*.

sidaedae namu small not very big!
sidaedae zuagi namu small girl not quite big!

3. *Naita* Used as a question expects answer *no*.

Azimu naita sago not?

The answer is *nai*, or with emphatic ending *naitka* —

2nd and 3rd person
singular and plural.
or *naitma* —
1st person
singular and plural.

4. *nait* A verbal negativiser. Causes verb endings to change.

rugaeru come
u nait rugaernati he came not
u nait rugaerumu he is not coming

5. *nakap*, *nakapat*. A conditional negativiser.

ae rugaernakap irubu, nae atar nakapat irataru.
you coming not living in, I giving not will live.

This is a conditional clause:

Ae nan nakap irubu, ae urasae nakapat irataeru.
You if not (or in) eating living, you will not grow living.
(If you don't eat, you won't grow)

Pluralisers

1. Ordinary nouns in the nominative have plurals formed by infixal reduplication of final syllable with vocalic harmony with preceding vowel. Few of these.

zuagi	bigu	aeni
zuagagi	biribu	aenaeni

However, when the noun is used in Possessive it then has a fairly regular mode of pluralising. i.e. -rae 1st order
 (-tae 2nd order possessive.)

daru—man	jaka—name
dartae jaka	man's name
daraetae jaka	men's names
atu—woman	aeni—child
atutae aeni	woman's child
ataeraetae aenaeni	women's children
aenitae jaka	child's name
aenaenaetae jaka	children's names

2. Some adjectives take the pluraliser of the noun.

gasabiae—thin	katabiae—long
gagsaditi—many thin	kaktaditi—many long
dukabiae—short	amkari—new
dudgjaediti—many short	amkakiditi—many new

3. Some plurals can be formed by adding "di" first position.

dartibae	to the man
dardibae	to the men
dardu	with a man
dardidu	with men
daruku	to the man (spoke)
dardiku	to the men „

Suki *Idioms* are expressive, but their range does not include many of the ideas necessary in translation of Scriptures. In some places it has been necessary to "make" a word or phrase.

betray	kadapudap tit reigrirua	not wanting turn away from
deny	tuna gi tinae ma giaeraeri	not knowing word on top saying
idols ('made')	igi gurnae paupa	false spirit things
worship „	igi gurnae paupa jaewaedae	false spirit things thinking
(idol)	inae	way
worship	God jaewaedae inae	God thinking fashion
(Christian)		

The fruits of the Spirit

love	biaekwatru jaewaesae inae	hot hearted thinking way
joy	gamgabwasae inae	very good making way
peace	kiwasae inae	making mature way, peace making
patience	aesmakap itmi jaewaer inae	slow careful thinking way
kindness	biaekwatru tikasae inae	hot hearted helping way
goodness	inaegamgabu	all good way
faithfulness	magva itraenae inae	work not forsaking way
gentleness	gitusaena inae	not snatching way
self control	pibku poisae pigadaem inae	body wanting tying up way

The Holy Spirit

In the first place the word used for *spirit* had to be chosen from the two existing words.

1. *gurnae* the name given to spirits of dead people. These come about molesting relatives and enemies and are always held in fear.
2. *ugugru* the name given to the spirit of a man while he is living. The term is also used for shadow or reflection.

Because the *gurnae* could not be called good the second name *urugru* was chosen.

Holy This has caused no little difficulty. However, Suki is not entirely without possibilities in this direction. When we heard some of the Christians praying for each other using a word which means something between different, and careful, we immediately thought of its possibilities. It denotes something very special, good and different. *Itim*.

So a church is an *itim* gagu.

The Holy Spirit is *Godtae Itim Ugugru*.

We would not like to say that this word means the exact equivalent of our word "Holy", but it has been accepted and used by the native Christians in such contexts that make us think it is quite a good substitute.

a person can live <i>itmi iru</i>	"goodly or carefully"
a thing can be carried specially carefully	<i>itmi gwari</i>
do something carefully and well	<i>itmi unumu</i>

One very encouraging feature of this usage is the manner in which the Christians have taken up this term for the Holy Spirit. Even the word "itim" and its compounds seems to be gaining in area and depth. It is most heartening to hear phrases from translations of Scripture and hymns being used in preaching and prayers.

Real Evaluation

To get a valid judgment of a translation one can rarely depend upon the responses to direct questioning. Politeness usually dictates that kind people will praise the translation regardless of some of its glaring errors. How then can we tell whether a translation is good or bad? The answer is often to be found in those unconscious comments made by readers who speak without realizing that their words are being overheard.

In one instance the missionary had taken great pains to explain to the people that his translation was God's Word. That is to say, it was God speaking to them. A puzzled believer turned to his friends and said, "Apparently then God never took the time to learn our language correctly".

In another instance a young woman sat reading the Gospel of Mark with rapt attention. Every expression on her face seemed to be reflecting the anguish and pathos, beauty and compassion of the words and life of Jesus. At last she exclaimed, "Why, it is just as though I could see Jesus!"