

THE BIBLE TRANSLATOR

QUARTERLY PUBLISHED BY THE UNITED BIBLE SOCIETIES

EDITOR

John J. Kijne

ASSISTANT EDITOR

David H. Wallington

EDITORIAL BOARD

Wilfred J. Bradnock

Fidel P. Galang

Åge Holter

Eugene A. Nida

VOL. 14, No. 4, OCTOBER 1963

SYMPOSIUM ON HONORIFICS

INTRODUCTION

In this issue we are happy to present a number of articles dealing with problems which arise in Bible translating in languages where "honorifics" of various kinds play a role. Here the term "honorifics" is taken in a wide sense to include not only special words, particles and affixes, but every means by which politeness and respect may be expressed in written language.

Those immediately involved in the thorny problems of honorifics in any particular language may have great difficulty in viewing the issues objectively and dispassionately. It is our hope that by the study of these articles, translators will be enabled to see more clearly the general linguistic principles involved in this aspect of language, and so be helped in analysing the issues raised in the particular language in which they are working.

At the same time it appears that even in languages which do not seem to contain honorifics, there can be related problems which deserve study in this wider context. For example, even in English there are at least two areas in which the principles governing the use of honorifics are involved. Firstly there is the use of capitalization for Deity, particularly in regard to personal pronouns. Most English versions do not use initial capitals for pronouns referring to God and Christ, but some, e.g. the Berkeley Version, do. Moreover, in popular writing, such as devotional books and personal letters, many writers use capitals extensively in such references. When discussing the pros and cons of this usage, it is helpful to consider the matter in the wider connection of honorifics.¹ Secondly the use of "thee" which persists in many modern versions in prayers, psalms etc. would also appear to have become a kind of honorific usage. The inner resistance which many people feel to changing this to "you", will help us to appreciate the emotional back-

¹This question is, of course, also related to the general usage of capitals. A historical and comparative study of the diverse uses of capital letters in the various European languages would prove an interesting subject for research, if it has not already been undertaken. As is well-known, in German all nouns have initial capitals; in French on the other hand, even many proper nouns, e.g. names of languages, do not begin with capitals. In Dutch there is a present tendency to reduce the use of capitals, e.g. for the names of days and months.

ground to many of the problems discussed in these articles.

We begin this symposium with an article which appeared in the first volume of *The Bible Translator* (1:124-30, July 1950). This article, originally entitled "Bible Translation and Politeness in Bali" by J. L. Swellengrebel, describes a typical instance of a language which raises the problem of honorifics, and is reprinted here since many readers will not have the first volume of *The Bible Translator* in their possession.

Other references to the subject in *The Bible Translator* occur on the pages indicated of the following articles:

Questions, by J. L. Swellengrebel, 1:29-30 (Jan. 1950)

The Translator's Problems, by E. A. Nida, 1:44-45 (Jan. 1950)

Three Major Problems in Taungthu Translation, by G. H. Luce, 1:153-54 (Oct. 1950)

Problems in Translating the Scriptures into Shilluk, Anuak and Nuer, by E. A. Nida, 6:58 (Apr. 1955)

Readers' Corner, by W. R. Hutton, 7:185-86 (Oct. 1956)

Some Problems in Translating the Scriptures into Thai, by F. M. Seely, 8:52-53, 56-57 (Apr. 1957)

Readers' Corner, H. G. Grether, 8:211-14 (Oct. 1957)

Readers' Corner, J. L. Swellengrebel, 8:214-15 (Oct. 1957)

It is hoped that this symposium will stimulate further discussion of this exceedingly difficult problem.

Finally, we should add that the Symposium on Honorifics is preceded by a valuable article on the recently held Translators' Institute in the Philippines. The importance of the topics dealt with in this article has led us to placing it first, rather than after the articles on honorifics where it might be overlooked.

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND OTHER PAYMENTS

Subscribers are reminded that their subscription for 1964 is due to be paid by January 1st.

In order to simplify administration, subscriptions and all other payments should from now on be made direct to:

The Business Manager,
The Bible Translator,
United Bible Societies,
146 Queen Victoria Street,
London, E.C.4, England.

In cases where this arrangement causes difficulty for any subscriber, he should write to the above address, and arrangements will be made for him to pay locally. However, we hope that in general the new arrangement will prove more satisfactory. It should avoid the inconvenience which has sometimes been caused when payment has been made locally, but there was delay before this information reached the administration of *The Bible Translator*.

Subscription rates will be found inside the front cover.