NJB: New Jerusalem Bible
NRSV: New Revised Standard Version
Phillips: New Testament translated by J.B. Phillips
RSV: Revised Standard Version
SpCL (UBS Spanish Common Language): Versión Popular
TEV (ABS/UBS): Today's English Version/Good News Bible
TOB (French Bible Society): La Bible: Traduction Œcuménique

DAVID J. CLARK

THE TRANSCRIPTION OF PROPER NAMES

The author is a UBS Translation Consultant based in Woking, England.

Introduction

The question of the transcription of proper names is one which is of growing concern in a number of projects with which I am at present associated. Yet it is also a topic which as far as I can find out, has never been dealt with in a thorough and systematic manner, at least in a UBS context.[1] It seems then that the time is ripe for a more detailed consideration of the question. The following discussion cannot hope to be exhaustive, and readers may be able to add to the list of problems raised.

Basic decision

The first decision to be made is whether the spellings in the Receptor Language (RL) are to be based on the written forms of the Hebrew and Greek names, or on the common pronunciation of those names in the RL. From a technical point of view and for academic purposes, it might be preferable to base the transcription on the written form of the Source Language (SL), but from a practical point of view it may often be necessary to allow the common pronunciation to be the guide. Either way, there are numerous complicating factors.

Based on SL script

A) A comparison needs to be made of the SL script (Hebrew/Greek) and the RL script (Sami/Latvian/Bulgarian/Thai...). On the basis of this comparison, a set of general rules for transliteration can be drawn up. The correspondences are orthographic rather than phonological. This is the principle on which words borrowed from Sanskrit and Pali are written in modern Thai.

B) As the rules are applied, various problems will be encountered. They need to be listed and classified, so that principles can be drawn up for handling them consistently (or at least having good reasons for inconsistencies).

C) Classification of problems. Problems may be sorted into categories such as the following:

1 The references I have found in readily available sources are few, namely: Nida, Eugene A. *Toward a Science of Translating* (1964), 193-4. Munthali, Priest (1981) "Is your Bible disfigured? Transliterating Biblical Names" TBT 32.2:225-7. Loewen, Jacob A. and Gilbert Ansre (1982) "Adjusting Biblical Names: the Nzema Case" TBT 33.2:229-235. The latter two deal only with specific problems in certain African languages rather than dealing with general principles.

i) Linguistic
ii) Sociolinguistic
iii) Other

Under i) Linguistic, may be included:

(a) The need for a decision whether to try to use phonemic principles, and if so whether to record information which is predictable and therefore allophonic. This would include information like that conveyed in Hebrew script by the dot called *daghesh lene*. This marks the regular change from a stop to the corresponding homorganic fricative after a vowel.

(b) The lack of equivalences in RL script for characters in the SL script, such as the consonant letter ayin or the neutral vowel *shewa* in Hebrew. Many languages lack the contrast between *r* and *l* that occurs in both Greek and Hebrew. Again, in many forms of Roman script there is no way to mark the vowel length which is found in both Greek and Hebrew, though some Roman script languages such as Latvian do have diacritics to indicate vowel length.

(c) The question of whether to use known letters in the RL script with unfamiliar values; for instance the use of *q* to make a distinction from *k* when the RL has no such distinction. English does not do this with Bible names, though it does do it with modern Arabic place names like Iraq, Qatar.

(d) A related problem is whether letters which are known in Roman script but are not normally used in a language, like *q* in Sami, should be retained in names like Quartus and Quirinius, or should be replaced by the more familiar *kv*.

(e) The difficulty of handling combinations of consonants and/or vowels which are impossible or at least rare and strange in the RL. Examples in English would be the *-aa-* in such names as Canaan, Naaman. An extreme example is the absence of all syllable-final consonants in some minority languages of Thailand; more common is the limitation on consonant clusters or diphthongs in the RL. For instance, Greek has word-initial consonant clusters *kn-*, *mn-*, *pt-* in names like Cnidus, Mnason, Ptolemais, whereas in Akha such clusters are impossible and would look like printing errors.

(f) The problem of whether to include Greek case endings in the RL spelling when RL does not have case endings. English is very inconsistent, dropping the case endings on many names (Matthew, Mark, Luke, Stephen, Philip, Timothy, Mary) but retaining them on many others (most of the names in Romans 16, and of course Moses and Jesus). In Acts 13, the same name is treated in two different ways: the case ending is dropped from the name of the apostle Paul, but is retained in the identical name of the Roman official Sergius Paulus! English even retains Greek case endings on Greek forms of some OT names like Darius, Xerxes, Euphrates.

(g) The converse problem of adding case endings to OT names where the RL requires them but Hebrew does not supply them.[1] NT Greek names may be less of a problem here, at least in inflected languages like Latvian.

(h) The problem of whether Hebrew plural endings should be transliterated or translated (Anakim, or, descendants of Anak).

1 I remember my own surprise at seeing my name written with case endings as *Davids Klarks* in the announcement of a public lecture in Riga, Latvia. Notice also the change of *C* to *K* on the basis of pronunciation because *c* has a different sound in Latvian script.

Under ii) Sociolinguistic, may be included:

(a) Existing traditions of spelling in the RL, especially of personal names which are in common use, but which break the general rules established. English examples would include Andrew, Peter, James and John.

(b) Cases where the application of normal rules leads to accidental resemblances to bad words in the RL, such as Shittim in English. In some such cases, a translation of the name, like "Acacia City" in TEV may be preferable to a transliteration. In others an arbitrary change may be needed to avoid the bad word.

(c) Situations where different spelling traditions exist in different confessions, typically a Protestant version based on the Hebrew and Greek, an Orthodox version based on the Septuagint, and a Catholic version based on the Vulgate (such as Habakkuk/Ambakoum/Habacuc [as in Knox's English translation]).[1] In Bulgarian (Cyrillic script), the Orthodox tradition spells the name of Jesus with the equivalent of *Iisus* whereas the Protestant tradition spells it with the equivalent of *Isus*.

(d) Situations where an existing version is careless or inconsistent, but is still influential or much loved, as the KJV in English. In all probability this is the situation in many languages around the world where the translation has been made under the influence of native speakers of English.

(e) Situations where there is a name, usually a place name, in current media use; this may be based for example on English, French or Arabic rather than Hebrew or Greek, and is spelt differently from the same name in the Bible. Examples I have met include Jerusalem, Damascus, Cyrene, Syria, Egypt. Perhaps the most striking example is in languages influenced by Arabic, where the name by which the city of Jerusalem is known is the Arabic *Al Quds*, the Holy (City).

Under iii) Other, may be included:

(a) Variations between OT and NT in spelling what is essentially the same name; the OT form comes direct from Hebrew whereas the NT form comes from a Hellenised spelling. Examples from older English versions are Perez/Phares, Judah/Judas, Boaz/Booz, Manasseh/Manasses, Uriah/Urias, Zechariah/ Zacharias, and of course Joshua/Jesus.

(b) Situations where a name clearly carries a meaning, and it may seem better to translate the name than to transliterate it. Examples are Red Sea, Mount of Olives, Fair Havens, Three Taverns, and maybe the Ten Towns (the Decapolis).

(c) Situations where applying the normal rules produces an anomaly; for instance in the Kahua language of the Solomon Islands, the name of Rhoda turns out to be an RL man's name. In other cases, a name transliterated according to normal rules may turn out to carry meaning in the RL, not necessarily bad meaning as in ii)(b) above, just irrelevant and therefore misleading meaning.

(d) Situations where the SL uses variant forms of the same name with no obvious purpose; sometimes these are just spelling variants (Nebuchadnezzar/Nebuchadrezzar, Symeon/Simon), sometimes long/short forms (Jehoram/Joram, Priscilla/Prisca, Silvanus/Silas), sometimes apparently different names (Ishbosheth/Eshbaal, Jeconiah/Coniah). Translators are faced with various options. Where the differences are merely spelling variants, it is probably best to choose the most common form and use it consistently. Where there is variation

1 See *Guidelines for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible* (Rome: 1987), section 1.3.2, for a brief discussion of situations where Catholics and Protestants have different proper name traditions.

between long and short forms of a name, the choice may have carried in the original culture sociolinguistic information which can no longer be retrieved.

(e) Situations where genuinely different names are used for the same person or place (Shinar/Babylonia, Jerusalem/Zion, Jacob/Israel/Ephraim, Simon/Peter/Cephas, Saul/Paul). There may also be situations where it is not entirely clear whether different names are intended to have the same referent or not (Ishmaelites/Midianites in Gen 37.28, and sometimes Jerusalem/Zion). In cases like these where more than spelling is involved, the choice of name may in itself contribute to the overall meaning of the text. An example is the choice of the archaic name Shinar for Babylon in Zech 5.11; it probably produced an effect on the original readers similar to that produced on modern English readers by calling France Gaul, or China Cathay. Translators have to decide whether to handle such information in the translation itself, or in footnotes or glossary entries.

Based on pronunciation

A) A comparison needs to be made of the SL phonology (as far as it is known) and the RL phonology. On the basis of this comparison, a set of general rules for transcription can be drawn up. The correspondences are phonological rather than orthographic. This is the principle on which words borrowed from Sanskrit and Pali are spelt in modern Lao, a language closely related to Thai.

B) As the rules are applied, various problems will be encountered. They need to be listed and classified, so that principles can be drawn up for handling them consistently (or at least having good reasons for inconsistencies).

C) Classification of problems. Problems may be sorted into categories such as the following:

i) Linguistic
ii) Sociolinguistic
iii) Other

Under i) Linguistic, may be included:

(a) The need for a decision whether to accept existing popular RL pronunciations as they are, or to correct them when they are clearly wrong. For instance, many English speakers mispronounce Thessalonika to rhyme with pica, and this mispronunciation has become the basis for transliteration into other languages such as Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea (Tesalonaika).

(b) The need to make decisions on which SL phonemic contrasts can be abandoned, and which must be preserved in some way to avoid confusion between otherwise similar names. Examples in various languages could include Amariah/Amaziah, Amos/Amoz, Anna/Annas, Ariel/Uriel/Uriah, Danel/Daniel, Elijah/Elisha, Hosea/Hoshea, Jehoiakim/Jehoiachin, Libnah/Riblah, Potiphar/Potiphera, Seba/Sheba, Uzzah/Uzziah/Uzziel, and maybe even Jesse/Isaiah.

(c) Problems where normal RL patterns of stress or vowel length do not match with SL patterns. For instance, in languages which normally have a stress on the first syllable of each word, people may find the longer names of the Bible very difficult to pronounce clearly because they would have so many unstressed syllables.

(d) Problems associated with RL vowel harmony requirements. Some languages, including many Turkic languages and many languages in West Africa,

divide vowels into two groups and require all the vowels in a word to belong to one group or the other. This requirement may necessitate some distortion of the SL name, though rules may be relaxed for words known to be borrowed from foreign languages.

(e) Problems associated with RL consonant cluster restrictions, leading either to cluster reduction causing ambiguity, or to anaptyctic vowels making words unmanageably long (something like Aratakeserekesese for Artaxerxes).

(f) Problems arising from consonant distribution restrictions. For instance /h/ occurs in English, but not in syllable-final position, which causes many OT names to sound significantly different from Hebrew. In Thai, /s/ is never pronounced at the end of a word, which results in many names, especially in the NT, sounding significantly different from Greek.

(g) Problems arising from the absence of RL vowel-initial syllables, as in some languages of South India. Some or all of such SL syllables are probably labialised in the case of close back vowels, palatalised in the case of close front vowels, or aspirated in the case of open vowels.[1]

(h) Problems arising from the unavoidable introduction of arbitrary tonal distinctions to compensate for the loss of segmental distinctions as in paragraph (b) above. One language which has had to use such arbitrary distinctions extensively is Akha, but for typographical reasons, examples cannot be reproduced.

Under ii) Sociolinguistic, may be included:

(a) The desire to assimilate the RL pronunciation to a prestigious regional, national, colonial or church/mission language, even where the phonology of this language clashes with RL phonology. In Thailand, the Thai language has a strong influence of this kind on many of the minority languages.

(b) Different pronunciation traditions exist, related either to different dialects, or different confessional traditions; for instance, such Bible book names as Psalms and Isaiah are pronounced differently in England and Scotland.

(c) Different pronunciations are associated with educational level or social status, and may indicate the speaker's familiarity or lack of it with an erudite tradition in the RL. Translators may have to decide whether to follow a prestigious but minority pronunciation, or a non-prestigious but more commonly used one.[2]

Under iii) Other, may be included:

(a) The existence of other religious traditions, especially Islam, which recognise some historical figures in common with the biblical tradition. They may have such different views about these figures that use of the form of the name commonly known in the non-Christian tradition is potentially misleading; the classical quandary is whether the form Isa should be used for the Jesus of the NT.

Conclusion

The reconsideration of the problems of the transcription of proper names in the Bible has made me realise in a new way what a mess Bible name spelling is in

1 Some South Indian speakers of English fail to contrast "ooze" with "woos," or "east" with "yeast."

2 For instance, my wife (who does not know Hebrew) has rebuked me for using in public a two-syllable pronunciation for the name of the prophet Haggai, although this was certainly a two-syllable word in Hebrew. Her argument was that "Everyone pronounces it with three syllables."

English, and how difficult and contentious it would be to introduce anything approaching a rational system! My guess is that in most major language situations, the system in use is a muddled compromise which cannot be defended theoretically, but which is more or less accepted and more or less stable. Experience in Thailand indicates that the dissatisfaction caused by change can easily outweigh any theoretical gain. Perhaps in some smaller languages which have not yet developed rigid traditions, something better might be achieved. At least this article may help translators to be more clearly aware of the issues involved, even if it does not dare to propose ideal solutions.

REVIEWS

Buzzetti, Carlo: **La Bibbia e la sua traduzione. Studi tra esegesi pastorale e catechesi.** Leumann (Torino): Editrice Elle Di Ci 1993. 360 pp. ISBN 88-01-10243-7.

This book is intended to be a practical guide for Bible study groups as well as for translators. Carlo Buzzetti has a rich variety of experience with Bible translation and this book is obviously the result of his many courses and workshops. It is divided into four main sections: 1. "Quadri sommari", made up of reflections on the history of ancient translations of the biblical text, on the notion of language and the differences between formal equivalence and functional equivalence in translation, and on hermeneutical and pastoral ramifications of translation; 2. "Quadri particolari", divided into eight chapters on various specific considerations (the notion of interpreting, the necessity of fidelity to the text, linguistic competence necessary for translating, possible errors and pitfalls) or purposes of translations (youth groups, liturgy, interlinear translation, catechesis for beginners); 3. "Esempi di testi analizzati", which discusses examples of translating particular words or texts; 4. "Schemi o strumenti", which gives a series of practical considerations for specific ends (how to classify translations according to various uses: literal, literary, liturgical and catechetical; how to evaluate translations; how to organize a translation group and how to use two parallel translations).

Buzzetti treats somewhat briefly questions of the theory of Bible translation, especially in Chapter II, on language and formal and functional equivalence (cf. E.A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating* [Leiden: E.J. Brill 1964], especially 165-176). He has dealt with this topic more extensively in his *La Parola tradotta* (Brescia: Morcelliana 1973) and *La Bibbia e la sua comunicazione* (Leumann [Torino]: Elle Di Ci 1987), however, and the present book is geared more toward the practical application of these theories and toward how to go about translating the biblical text. Especially important in his presentation is the fact that he never loses sight of the main purpose of translating, communication of the divine Word in pastoral, liturgical and catechetical settings. The book is filled with concrete examples of solutions to translating difficulties, of helpful suggestions on translating for different contexts, and of pitfalls to be aware of when translating. Two cases of solutions which the interconfessional translation into everyday Italian has adopted are presented (Chapter XII: *kecharitōmenē* in Lk 1.28; and Chapter XIII: the expression "You are Peter..." in Mt 16.18) in order to show how it is