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MACARONIC SCRIPTURE TRANSLATION?

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Introduction

One day in September 1995, I was sitting in the departure lounge at the airport in Yakutsk in Siberia with a group of four translators and one other foreigner. The translators represented the Yakut and Evenki languages, and were busy talking to one another. Then the other foreigner nudged me and said, "Did you notice that? Of the last five sentences they spoke, three were in Yakut and two were in Russian." The translators' conversation continued in this way. They were all familiar with both languages, and switched between them frequently and continuously. This kind of simultaneous multilingualism is referred to in this article as macaronic use of language. The term was originally a somewhat derogatory one used about vernacular verse which contained some Latin or mock-Latin words, and was associated with people who could not speak Latin, the language of scholarship, fluently. It is derived from the food macaroni, which was regarded as peasant food. Nowadays the term can be used of the mixing of languages in conversation, often for humorous purposes, but without any derogatory overtones.

Later we asked the translators what were the factors which led them to use two languages interchangeably in this way, but there was no satisfactory answer. In all likelihood they were hardly aware of what they had been doing. I know that when I have been involved in multilingual conversations, I have found it very hard and sometimes impossible to recall afterwards which parts of the conversation were in which language. It seems that when people are concentrating on the content of their communication, the choice of language code is often a secondary matter. The Evenki translator eventually stated that she talks about happy things in Evenki and sad things in Russian, but the grin on her face suggested that this should be taken with a pinch of salt. And in any case it does not show how she chooses between Russian and Yakut, neither of which is her mother tongue. This whole incident set me thinking about the implications of this kind of multilingualism for translation, and specifically for Bible translation.

In recent years linguists have done quite a lot of research on situations in which people use more than one language. Such change from one language to another is generally referred to as "code-switching." A brief and convenient summary and bibliography of this research may be found in a recent article by Bentahila and Davies.[1] The research has focussed on speech, and I am not aware of any

1 See Bentahila, Abdelli and Eirlys E. Davies, "Patterns of code-switching and patterns of language contact" in Lingua 96 (1995) 75-93.

publications relating code-switching, or what I am calling macaronic language, to the translation of literature in general, or the Bible in particular. Macaronic literary translations have certainly appeared however. Not long ago I read a translation into English of Tolstoy's novel *War and Peace*, in which many of the passages which were in French in the original Russian text remained in French in the English text, usually with an English rendering added in a footnote. Such an arrangement has the advantage of showing the English reader where Tolstoy considered the macaronic use of language important enough to be recorded. Is there any reason why the same principle could not be applied to the translation of the Bible, and perhaps extended to fit the patterns of macaronic speech in a modern receptor community?

The tradition of monolingual translation

When we talk about translating the Bible, we always seem to think in terms of translating it entirely into one language, English, Hausa, Tamil or whatever. It is not unreasonable to think in this way, because most people all over the world speak one language most of the time, and many of them cannot speak any other language. Furthermore most church services, though not all, are in one language. But although this may be the majority situation, it is by no means a universal situation, as the conversation at the airport showed. I have had no opportunity to do any systematic research on this, but I suspect that the situations in which such macaronic language use takes place are mainly those where speakers of a minority language have a reasonable fluency in a more prestigious regional or national language, but are sufficiently secure and confident in their group identity that they use the vernacular whenever the subject matter is appropriate.

I am reminded of a conversation with a multilingual Bible Society colleague many years ago in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. I asked her what language she thought in, and after some deliberation she gave me a detailed and convincing answer: "It depends what I am thinking about. If I am thinking about Bible Society affairs , I think in English. If I am thinking about church affairs in Moresby, I think in Tok Pisin. If I am thinking about church affairs in my village, I think in Kate. If I am thinking about village affairs, I think in Selepet." For her, subject matter was the primary factor in language choice, and probably subject matter was one of the main factors influencing the choice of language in the airport conversation.

What is deemed appropriate to one language or another must of course vary from one culture to another. Technical, legal, and other official matters are more likely to be discussed in the more prestigious language, as the vernacular may lack the necessary vocabulary, but a wide range of less formal subjects may be more readily discussed in the vernacular. All this raises the interesting question why Bible translation is always (as far as I am aware) into one language. Is this the only way things can be done? Is it the only way they should be done ? The question is worth further investigation.

Macaronic source texts

My own initial reaction when the question occurred to me was that a macaronic translation of the Bible, or part of it, was a cranky idea which would appeal to nobody. But then I was struck by the realisation so blindingly obvious that it is very easily overlooked, that the Bible itself in its original languages is macaronic! We usually think in terms of the Old Testament being written in Hebrew and the New

Testament in Greek, and as a generalisation this is true. But when we look at the text in greater detail, this statement must be considerably modified. Some parts of the Old Testament are not in Hebrew but in Aramaic. Ezra 4.8—6.18 and Dan 2.4—7.28 are the main sections, and no explanation of why this is so has succeeded in convincing the majority of scholars. Even more puzzling is the occurrence in the book of Jeremiah of one verse (10.11) in Aramaic. There is also a single phrase in Gen 31.47, though there the context makes it clear why there is a change of language. There are other isolated words in Aramaic scattered through the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, a few Greek ones, such as the names of some of the musical instruments in Dan 3.5, and even some Persian words, like *pardês* (Neh 2.8).

These relatively minor examples may be regarded as only marginally macaronic, because all languages borrow individual words from other languages and adopt them as their own. The vast majority of people who use such words as *bungalow* or *pyjamas* in English are no longer even aware that these words were originally borrowings from Hindi, and they certainly do not think of themselves as speaking another language when they use these terms. Words like *glasnost* and *perestroika* are much more recent borrowings (from Russian, and within the last ten years), but are on the way to becoming assimilated. For instance, the word *perestroika* means "reorganisation," and I saw it used recently of a proposed reorganisation that the writer disapproved of, and referred to as a "catastroika." The confidence that such a bilingual pun (an amalgam of *perestroika* and "catastrophe") will be well understood indicates how far *perestroika* has been assimilated into English. As for the Bible, apart from minor items, the larger passages in Ezra and Daniel certainly establish the principle that macaronic use of language is not in itself alien to the spirit of the Old Testament.

The same is true of the New Testament. Most of the text is in Greek, though the Gospels report events that took place in what was almost certainly a mainly Aramaic-speaking environment. Evidence for this lies in the occasional Aramaic expressions which are embedded in the Greek text. Especially noteworthy are *talitha koum* (Mk 5.41), *ephphatha* (Mk 7.34), and *elōi elōi lema sabachthani* (Mk 15.34), all short but complete sentences. Jesus is also recorded as addressing God in prayer by the Aramaic term *abba* (Mk 14.36), and this term is repeated by Paul in Rom 8.15 and Gal 4.6. Perhaps even more surprising is the use by Paul of *marana tha* in 1 Cor 16.22. He offers no explanation, presumably because he knew it was not needed even by the predominantly gentile church in Corinth. In addition to these overtly macaronic passages, there are as one might expect, individual words borrowed into Greek from Hebrew or Aramaic (technical terms such as *Pharisee* and *Sadducee*, *amen*, *hallelujah* and *hosanna*, as well as *abaddon* in Rev 9.11). There are also terms borrowed from Latin, mainly technical terms like *speculator* (Mk 6.27), *quadrans* (Mk 12.42), *census* (Mk 12.14) and *colonia* (Acts 16.12), but also more ordinary words like *sudarium* (Jn 11.44), *linteum* (Jn 13.4, 5), and *macellum* (1 Cor 10.25). Perhaps the most interesting example of assimilation in the New Testament is the use of the Latin noun *flagellum* not only as the Greek noun *phragellion* (Jn 2.15), but also as the basis for a denominative Greek verb *phragelloō* (Mk 15.15).

The conclusion then is that although macaronic use of language is not a primary feature of the text of the Bible, the Bible did arise from a multilingual

background; this is reflected in the text, and there is nothing intrinsically absurd about the idea of a macaronic translation.

Macaronic translations?

If the possibility of macaronic translation is admitted in principle, what might be its uses, and what should be its limits? In the vast majority of English language situations, it would clearly be useless because the vast majority of English speakers are disgracefully monolingual, and simply would not understand what was not in English. In most parts of the world, there is a hierarchy of languages, with native speakers of languages lower in the hierarchy learning languages further up the hierarchy, but native speakers of the hierarchically higher languages not bothering to learn lower ones. It is because English is in many respects at the top of the global language hierarchy today that so many native speakers of English are so poorly motivated to learn other languages.

It seems therefore that it is among speakers of languages lower in the hierarchy that macaronic translations might find a use. Even then, they could appeal only in situations where there is a high degree of at least passive bilingualism, that is, where most people have a good understanding of a more prestigious language even if they do not speak it much. In these days of widespread television, such situations are increasingly common. For instance, in the Yakut and Russian situation with which we began, it might be possible in the Gospels to have Jesus speaking to his disciples in Yakut, but to foreigners such as Roman soldiers or Pilate, in Russian. The choice of editorial language to carry the narrative might go either way, but on the assumption that a macaronic translation would be aimed primarily at the speakers of the language lower in the hierarchy, would probably be Yakut.

Sample text—a macaronic Matthew

It is interesting speculation to look at a Gospel and see how a macaronic translation could be arranged, and what sort of impact it might have on readers. Any combination of a vernacular and a trade or national language would serve as a test case, but to make the example more real, let us use the situation which sparked my interest, and assume that the vernacular editorial language is Yakut and the macaronic dominant language Russian. Similar principles would surely apply between any vernacular and dominant language, such as Northern Sami and Norwegian, or Northern Khmer and Thai. Let me emphasize that what follows is entirely my own guesswork, and the Yakuts may well wish to dissociate themselves from the fevered imagination of their Translation Consultant![1]

The opening chapter of Matthew would start with the genealogy and the birth of Jesus in Yakut, though the Old Testament quotation in 1.23 (and indeed all other such quotations in later chapters) could be in Russian. In ch 2, the wise men as foreigners would certainly converse with Herod in Russian, but the rest of the chapter and ch 3 would be in Yakut except for quotations from the Old Testament.

1 Since this article was drafted, I have had an opportunity to discuss the question with the Yakut translators. Indeed they were unenthusiastic about a macaronic translation, but not for the reason I had expected. They see the relationship between Russian and vernacular languages as potentially controversial, and wanted to avoid anything that would provoke controversy. In their situation this is very wise, but it does not invalidate macaronic translation in principle. In a different situation such as that in Paraguay, a macaronic translation involving Guarani and Spanish might have a very different reception.

In ch 4 it would be difficult to decide what language Jesus' conversations with the Devil should be in, but they could well be in Russian. An analogy to this might be the way in which ancient murals in Buddhist temples in Thailand sometimes show demons dressed as Dutch or French traders, and wearing very European beards! Towards the end of ch 4, Jesus would certainly call the disciples in Yakut. Most of the Sermon on the Mount would be in Yakut, with the Old Testament quotations again being probable exceptions.

In ch 8, Jesus would converse with the leper in Yakut, but with the centurion, a foreigner, in Russian, though probably his comments about the centurion in vv 10-12 would be in Yakut. The text would continue in Yakut until vv 29-32. The Gadarene demoniacs were in a pig-rearing area, so they were probably non-Jews, and the conversation with them might well be put into Russian.

Most of chs 9-12 would be in Yakut, with two possible exceptions. Since Matthew as a tax collector was regarded by pious Jews as a traitor, it may be considered appropriate for Jesus to address him in Russian (9.9). This may have the effect of emphasizing that he does not reject even people who are regarded as marginal in their own society. On the other hand it may simply sound odd and inexplicable. Again, in 11.21-24, it may be deemed suitable for Jesus to address the unrepentant cities in Russian, since they are behaving like those who have cut themselves off from the people of God. He would however switch back to Yakut for the prayer of 11.25-30.

The parables in ch 13 present an interesting problem (13.3-9, 24-33, 44-50). Jesus is addressing great crowds of people who presumably included Gentiles as well as Jews. Should he therefore address them in Russian? Or should he use the vernacular language of the presumed majority, and risk alienating the rest? Perhaps the first option is preferable, as it would underline the switch to the vernacular in giving the explanations to the disciples (13.11-23, 37-43, except for the Old Testament quotation in 13.14b-15). Similarly tricky issues arise in ch 14. Herod is a Jewish ruler, but is presented as one who rejects the messenger of God. Should he and the daughter of Herodias therefore speak in Russian or Yakut? Surely input from the target audience would be required to decide this question.

Whatever the answer, the text would continue in Yakut up to 15.22, where the Canaanite woman as a Gentile would surely speak in Russian, and Jesus would reply in the same language. From then on the text would be in Yakut for some time, perhaps with the direct speech in the parable of 18.22-35 in Russian if it was decided that the parable is about non-Jews. Yakut would resume until the parable in 20.1-16, where it might be deemed appropriate for the owner of the vineyard to speak Russian, and the workers to reply in Yakut. The same principle might apply to the parable in 21.33-40.

Apart from these debatable places, the text would be in Yakut up to 27.11. All the words of Pilate, his wife and his soldiers in ch 27 would be in Russian. The brief responses of the mob in 27.21, 22, 23, 25 might also be in Russian. The ascription over the cross in 27.37, as the choice of the Roman authorities, could well be in Russian. In 27.46, the quotation of Ps 22.1, preserved in Aramaic in the Greek text, could be kept in Aramaic or put into Russian, since the translation of it into Greek would have to be in Yakut. The words of the centurion in 27.54 would be in Russian, as would the conversations of the Jewish authorities with Pilate in 27.63-65 and with the guards in 28.13-14. The rest would be in Yakut.

The impact of macaronic translation

The above suggestions may not cover every last detail of Matthew, and some of them are quite tentative. But they are provocative enough to raise the question of how a macaronic translation would affect the reader's or hearer's interpretation of the text. Again what follows is largely speculation, but is nevertheless intriguing.

In general, it could be claimed that a macaronic translation of a Gospel would reproduce something of the multilingual environment in which Jesus actually lived, with Aramaic as the everyday language of Palestine, Hebrew in use for religious purposes, Greek for trade purposes (especially in Galilee), and Latin in use for the purposes of the Roman government. A macaronic translation using only two languages could not hope to mirror this situation fully, but would go at least some way towards evoking it.

Such a two-language translation would imply a basic contrast between an in-group who speak the vernacular and an out-group who do not. This is not too far from the first century Palestinian setting, where Aramaic and Greek were the major languages with analogous roles. To that extent it is reasonable to present Jews speaking to one another in the vernacular, and Gentiles speaking to one another in the dominant language. It would also be reasonable to have conversations between Jews and non-Jews taking place in the dominant language. This involves the assumption that Jesus as someone brought up in Galilee could speak the dominant language, Greek, but such an assumption is by no means far fetched.

The impact that is difficult to estimate lies in the more marginal decisions. If Old Testament quotations are all in the dominant language, it would serve to identify what are such quotations, and would also indicate that they come from books written in a language different from the editorial language of the New Testament text. However to imply an association between the Old Testament and gentile speakers in the New Testament narrative could be considered very misleading. It is indeed misleading if readers draw the conclusion that the Old Testament was a gentile book. However, it must be remembered that the New Testament writers cited the Old Testament in a language other than that in which it was originally written, namely the dominant language of their area, Greek. So to that extent it is not completely tendentious to put Old Testament quotations into the dominant language of a macaronic translation.

The language to be spoken by the Devil is a very tricky issue. Since the interaction between Jesus and the Devil contains several Old Testament quotations, their conversation would be partly in the dominant language anyway if this is used for quotations. But if the dominant language is used by Gentiles and those who are not expected to be obedient to God's law, it seems appropriate for the Devil to use it![1] But should Jesus respond in the vernacular? From one point of view perhaps he should as a true worshipper of God, but from another, his ability to rout the Devil in the Devil's own language could be seen as a powerful assertion of moral superiority.

Whether Jesus should address Matthew in Russian is a very moot point. It is a fair assumption that a person in Matthew's position as a tax collector would have

1 Dr Paul Ellingworth has drawn my attention to W.L. Lorimer's translation of the New Testament into Scots (published 1983): in an appendix, an alternative rendering of the temptations in Mt 4.1-11 (455) has the Devil speaking standard English! A delightful touch.

to know Greek, but it is questionable whether Jesus would have addressed him in that language, the analogue of Russian in our hypothetical macaronic text. If he does, it could imply that Jesus does not reject marginal people; if he does not, it could imply that Jesus invites renegades to resume their true role as the people of God. Neither implication is out of keeping with the overall thrust of the Gospels. One might argue that the first is more appropriate to Luke and the second to Matthew. The issue illustrates that a measure of interpretive subjectivity is unavoidable in a macaronic translation. On the other hand it also highlights the fact that the sociolinguistic complexity of first century Palestine was deeper and more pervasive than we generally recognise.

Similar issues arise in connection with the address to the unrepentant cities. The use of the dominant language rather than the vernacular could implicitly underline their culpable lack of faith.

In parables, it is difficult to decide whether any of the characters should use the dominant language. In principle it is not unsuitable to have rich people or rulers doing so, but the final decision could well vary in different situations. If the modern target audience was relatively prosperous, it might not be necessary. But the presentation of the (often unpopular) rich and powerful speaking another language could be a potent way of helping the reader or hearer identify with Jesus and his followers. Or is this exegetically indefensible manipulation?

Other parts of the Bible

Although it is impractical to survey the whole Bible from the point of view of macaronic translation, one can at least focus on a few places where it might provide an interesting variation on traditional practice. In Acts for instance, Jews addressing Jews would use the vernacular, but Gentiles addressing Gentiles, or interactions between Jews and Gentiles would be in the dominant language. In the New Testament letters, most of the text, with the possible exception of Old Testament quotations, would be in the vernacular. However, it may be possible to use the dominant language where it is reckoned that the writer is quoting his opponents or those who have written to him. Such a device could provide an effective and fairly unobtrusive way of showing where Paul is quoting in the Corinthian letters for instance. In a dramatic book like Revelation, the letters addressed to the mainly gentile churches of Asia Minor might be in the dominant language, whereas the heavenly worship would be in the vernacular. The laments over the fall of Babylon in ch 18 might be in the dominant language.

In Old Testament narrative, speeches by Gentiles could generally be in the dominant language, while speeches by the people of God, and the editorial narrative would be in the vernacular. Legal material such as much of Leviticus might be in the dominant language, while poetry could use both languages depending on the subject matter. Books like Esther dealing with the exilic period, and perhaps those psalms coming from that period might be entirely in the dominant language. In Ezra and Daniel, at least the passages which are in Aramaic in the original should be in the dominant language, and perhaps most of the rest in the vernacular. In the prophets, one might vary language according to the content of the oracles. For instance, oracles of judgement could be in the dominant language and oracles of hope in the vernacular, though there would be inevitable subjectivity in such an

arrangement. A lot more work would be required to arrive at careful, consistent and defensible decisions.

Church reactions

It seems probable that church reactions would vary according to the degree of bilingualism in the community. It should be noted that even in monolingual English language churches, some foreign phrases such as *magnificat*, *te deum*, and *kyrie eleison* are known where a liturgy is in use. And biblical scholars, who are usually less monolingual than the average churchgoer, do not hesitate to use foreign expressions like *Heilsgeschichte*, *Sitz im Leben*, and *Hauptbriefe* in their discussions. In eastern Orthodox services, the liturgy is in Old Church Slavonic, but the sermon, and sometimes the scripture readings, are in Russian, Bulgarian and so on. I have also attended a Baptist service much of which was in Russian, but with some of the hymns and sermons in Ukrainian. However, I have a feeling that even where bilingualism is common, there is likely to be a hesitant or even hostile reaction to the idea of a macaronic translation of the Bible. This surely is not because it is absurd, but simply because it is new and different. Perhaps an audio presentation of macaronic scripture would be less controversial than a printed text.

The whole notion of macaronic translation is intriguing. It may open up a large can of worms, but at least they are very succulent worms, and challenge us to think about issues in the interpretation of the Bible that a traditional monolingual translation sweeps under the carpet. Perhaps this article will serve as a catalyst for such a debate.

REVIEWS

Mukonyora, I.J.L. Cox, and F. Verstraelen (eds): **Rewriting the Bible—the Real Issues.** Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press 1993. 309 pp, ISBN 0 86922 538 3.

Rewriting the Bible is an extremely lively and controversial book which owes its origin to a seminal paper presented at the University of Zimbabwe on April 6, 1991 by Rev. Canaan Banana, one of its Honorary Professors. Rev. Banana is a leading churchman and controversial theologian, a s well as a highly respected statesman and political figure in his country. The main thesis of his paper, "The Case for a New Bible," which forms the basis and starting point for all discussions in this book, is that the Bible suffers from what he considers to be its particularism and exclusivism or its Jewish ethnocentrism. Hence the need to liberate the Bible from narrow ethnocentrism, from its being used to justify oppressive regimes, systems or ideologies aimed against those of dissimilar ethnicity, gender, economic class, religion, etc. Banana's main concern is that many of the voices of the world's oppressed and dispossessed peoples, which are also "voices of God's revelation, inspired by God's Spirit," are "not reflected in the Bible, directly testifying to God's presence in their lives, in their time" (21). Banana's punchline is in the form of a question and answer: "Has God's revelation finished? Is it not possible that there is more that needs to be added to as well as subtracted from the Bible as we know it today to make it relevant to our times and people?" The answer is as follows: "I had called for a re-writing of the Bible. This would include revision and editing what is already there, but would also involve adding that which is not included. It is not a new task that I am calling for, not really. I see that a re-written Bible, one