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## BIBLE TRANSLATION AND PRIMARY ORALITY

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### Introduction

In New Guinea but also in other parts of the world many Bible translation projects were and are carried out in speech communities that did not know writing prior to the commencement of Bible translation projects in their languages. The term primary orality for societies that do not know writing was introduced by Ong (1982) and the addition of "primary" was meant to clarify that we are not talking about orality in societies that have a tradition of writing. Most Bible translators working in such primary oral contexts want to incorporate in some way or other the oral perspective of their readers and listeners in their translations (Noss 1981).

The central question of my article[1] is what a primary oral context means for Bible translations. First, I will describe Ong's (1982) influential view of primary orality against the background of the academic debates which informed Ong's views. Then I will relate the findings of Ong to the study of corpora of primary oral texts from New Guinea. Finally, I will describe the relationship between the (macro)genre of Bible translations and primary oral genres such as myths, tales, songs or informal conversations.

Although the present consensus in discourse studies is that there is no proof of absolute differences between literate and oral societies (in terms of mode of thinking or type of discourse), there are good reasons to start our discussion of Bible translation and primary orality with Ong (1982) since Ong's picture of primary orality is still influential in the world of Bible translators.

### Primary orality according to Ong (1982)

Since Ong's views are crucially informed by three other academic debates, we need to consider those first[2]. The *first* debate is the debate about oral and written styles

1 This article is based on my inaugural address held at the Free University, April 2, 1998.
2 In representing those debates I follow Foley (1997:417-434).

in English. For Chafe and Danielewicz (1987:103; Chafe 1988) processing constraints are the critical factors distinguishing the styles of written and oral texts: "...there is a strong tendency for casual speakers to produce simple sequences of coordinated clauses, avoiding the more elaborate interclausal relations found in writing. Elaborate syntax evidently requires more processing effort than speakers ordinarily devote to it." Chafe emphasizes the syntactic fragmentation of spontaneous, casual talk as opposed to the syntactic integration of written texts. In addition to the integration factor, Chafe mentions the involvement factor: speech is more involved whereas writing tends to be more detached.

Whereas we still find two parameters in the work of Chafe, in the important study of Biber (1988) we find twenty parameters, such as situation vs abstract content and interactive vs edited text. Biber investigated around twenty genres of English texts but found no absolute differences between written and oral texts. Whether a given text, say an interview or a scientific article, scored high for a certain parameter could not be predicted on the basis of whether that text was oral or written. In other words, Biber's work undermined the whole idea of a style continuum with "typically oral style" and "typically written style" as extreme poles; that notion was replaced by genre-determined configurations of stylistic characteristics.

Besnier (1995) did a similar investigation in a non-western context, in the Polynesian society of Nukalaelae. Stylistically, personal letters group with conversations on Nukalaelae whereas written sermons group with political speeches and radio broadcasts. The genre of personal letters is determined by the cultural context of Nukalaelae in which kinship and exchange relations are crucial. In Besnier's work it becomes very clear to what extent genre, the decisive factor of Biber's work, is a culturally and historically determined notion.

The *second* debate relevant to Ong's view of orality is the anthropological debate about universal cognitive dichotomies, such as prelogical vs logical cultures (Lévy-Brühl 1926) or cultures with thought processes tied to the concrete vs those that can abstract from concrete circumstances (Lévi-Strauss 1966). In the work of Olson (1994), such cognitive dichotomies are reformulated in terms of oral vs literate societies. Olson (1994) emphasizes that written language is "decontextualized" when compared to speech. Speakers rely strongly on the context and situation of their utterances and they expect their listeners to infer information by combining utterance and context. Writers have to be much more explicit and cannot rely on implicatures to a great extent. Olson (1994) links this explicitness and autonomy of writing to cognitive changes in the direction of analytical and critical thinking of a type not possible in the contextualized, more implicit communication of primary oral cultures. The second element in Olson's view is the fact that a written text is available to the reader as a fixed object which can be compared to other texts, interpreted, summarized and so on. Such operations would stimulate the distinction between text and interpretation, and create a different meta-language consciousness, leading to grammars, lexicons and, ultimately, to the development of logic.

This anthropological debate on universal cognitive dichotomies of cultures is a thing of the past now, partly because of relativistic theoretical developments leaving no room for universal, ahistorical dichotomies, and partly because of the results of empirical research on the cognitive effects of the introduction of writing.

Scribner and Cole (1981) for example studied the effects of writing among the Vai of Liberia. Three writing systems are used by that community: the Arabic script for religious instruction, the English script for school, government and the workplace, and the syllabic Vai script for informal use at home, such as personal letters and shopping lists. The Vai script is informally transmitted in the home. There are Vai people without formal training who write just in the syllabic Vai. Those persons, although literate, turn out to score low for tests involving abstract categorizations but high for tests in which words have to be formed from syllables. In other words, there are cognitive effects of writing but those effects are not universal but local, determined by the local cultural and institutional contexts in which writing systems function.

The *third* debate is the philological debate on the oral nature and origin of texts from Antiquity, as we find in the work of Parry (1928) on Homer, and Kelber (1983) on the Gospel of Mark. Parry emphasized the high density of epithets, formulas, standard themes and other formulaic elements in the metrical epics of Homer. That formulaic nature of the Homeric texts was attributed to the oral performance of such texts in which performing artists produced their text by drawing from a rich store of fixed formulas, standard themes and epithets, stitching such elements together in various ways depending on the occasion and circumstances of the performance. Kelber (1983) also observes formulaic elements and other oral narrative style features in Mark, such as triads (three times Jesus wakes up the sleeping disciples, three times the prediction of Jesus' death), the use of the narrative present tense and the use of the 3rd person plural instead of the passive. Kelber (1983) sees those oral features as concessions of a writer to an orally oriented audience.

Many elements from the three debates mentioned play a role in Ong's *Orality and Literacy* (1982). Ong (1982:49) describes the oral mode of thinking as situational rather than abstract, aggregative rather than analytic, conservative or traditionalist, empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced. These cognitive characteristics stem from the anthropological debate on universal dichotomies as represented in the writings of Lévi-Strauss (1966) and others.

The textual and stylistic features mentioned by Ong include additive rather than subordinative, redundant, formulaic and no sequential parallellism. Ong's explication of the feature additive style makes it clear that the debate on speech and writing in English is crucially linked to Ong's portrayal of primary oral discourse. Referring to Chafe, Ong (1982:37-38) writes that he misses in primary oral discourse "the analytic, reasoned subordination that characterizes writing"; he continues with the observation that "written discourse develops more elaborate and fixed grammar than oral discourse does because to provide meaning it is more dependent simply upon linguistic structure, since it lacks the normal full existential contexts which surround oral discourse and help determine meaning in oral discourse somewhat independently of grammar."

The characteristics formulaic and no sequential parallellism in Ong's portrayal of primary orality have their origin in the philological debate on the so-called Homeric question, as Ong himself points out. That debate, in which Milman Parry was the central figure, is regarded by Ong as fundamental to the modern discovery of primary orality. Below I will return to the presumed formulaicity and absence of sequential parallellism in primary oral discourse.

Summarizing we can say that in Ong's picture of primary orality, the additive parataxis from the linguistic debate about speech and writing in English, the context-bound concreteness from the anthropological debate on universal cognitive dichotomies, and the formulaicity from the philological Homer debate come together.

**Primary orality in transcribed texts from New Guinea**

Let us relate the findings of Ong to the study of corpora of primary oral texts from New Guinea. As far as the cognitive characteristics from the anthropological debate go, such as "situational rather than abstract", there is little left to verify since cognitive anthropologists themselves have rejected universal dichotomies in which literate societies were contrasted with illiterate societies in oppositions such as rational vs traditional and abstract vs concrete thinking. As we saw above, such universal hypotheses were rejected on both theoretical and empirical grounds and were replaced by more limited hypotheses about local, culture-specific cognitive effects of writing systems (see for example Scribner and Cole [1981]).

Concerning the characteristics from the linguistic debate, the central feature here is additive parataxis, a characteristic from the area of clause combining, the way speakers and writers combine clauses into larger syntactic and textual units. Ong (1982) uses the term additive parataxis to refer to simple juxtapositions of clauses, with coordinating conjunctions providing the links. As an example of additive parataxis, Ong (1982) quotes Gen 1.1-5 in the Douay translation of 1610. That translation, according to Ong, reflects the additive parataxis of the Hebrew original:

> In the beginning God created heaven and earth. And the earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God moved over the waters...

According to Ong, the meaning relations between the clauses in such additive paratactic style are not coded in the utterances themselves but have to be inferred by the receptor on the basis of the context, a typical oral style which contrasts with the complex, interclausal relations found in written style, explicitly coded in the utterances by forms of subordination. Notice that Ong (1982) takes a written text, from a literary tradition in ancient Israel, to illustrate primary orality. Ong (1982) sees a massive oral residue in ancient Israel enabling him to take such texts as examples.

However, to study primary orality there is a much directer way: we can study the texts and the languages of really primary oral cultures such as are still to be found in isolated parts of New Guinea. There are well-documented oral languages that have subordination as the most frequent, unmarked way of clause combining, for example Yimas of Papua New Guinea. Foley (1991:497) writes that Yimas "contrasts with many other Papuan languages in making less extensive use of clause chaining. The most common type of clause linkage in Yimas involves nominalization, both finite and non-finite".

It is indeed true that clause chaining is by far the most widespread type of clause combining in the oral languages of New Guinea. In clause chaining languages, single verb clauses of usually simple internal structure are chained together to form long chains of clauses. The last clause of the chain has independent or final verb forms whereas the preceding clauses have medial or dependent verb

forms. The medial verb forms express interclausal relations of switch-reference and temporality. Switch-reference distinctions pertain to the question whether the next clause in the chain has a different or the same agent as the preceding clause whereas temporality relations pertain to relations of sequence or simultaneity of the events denoted by the verbs in the chain.[1] These medial morphological oppositions often play a major role in indicating textual coherence relations.

The functions of syntactic processes of subordination and coordination in Indo-European languages, to express interclausal and textual relations, are carried out to a significant extent in language groups such as Semitic and Papuan languages by morphological processes. For Hebrew I refer to recent work by Baayen (1997) about the textual role of morphological oppositions in biblical Hebrew verbs. If one looks at Semitic or Papuan languages from the perspective of Indo-European languages, one easily overlooks the morphological expression of interclausal coherence, since the morphological categories involved (such as switch-reference in Papuan languages and the opposition between prefix and suffix verb conjugations in Semitic languages) are unknown in Indo-European grammars. "Literal" translations of Papuan or Semitic clause chains often give an impression of a loose, additive "and...and...and" style, falsely suggesting a low level of interclausal integration in the Semitic or Papuan source texts because the translations do not capture the morphological processes of interclausal integration. The obligatory indication of switch-reference of Papuan utterances, for example, is hard to translate explicitly and naturally into Indo-European languages.

The philological debate on Homer is the source for the following three characteristics ascribed by Ong to oral cultures: a formulaic style, a highly redundant style, and the absence of sequential parallellism. By the last feature Ong (1982:147) means that oral narrators would have the tendency to start a story *in medias res*: "Oral narrative is not greatly concerned with exact sequential parallelism between the sequence in the narrative and the sequence in extra-narrative referents. Such a parallelism becomes a major objective only when the mind interiorizes literacy." The Homeric bards may have had a tendency to use an *in medias res* narrative style, but practically all Bible translators in New Guinea and elsewhere (Callow 1974:43) struggle with the opposite problem, namely that the target cultures tell stories in strict chronological order.

By a formulaic style Ong means the frequent use of epithets, proverbs, fixed sayings, standard themes and so on. Indeed, anyone reading Homer will be struck by the formulaic style. This style has been linked to the demands of the meter: to get metrically smooth lines the oral performers of texts from the Homeric tradition could choose from a large stock of epithets so that they could pick the epithet which best suited the metric scheme of the line. But Ong goes further than this metric motivation: for him there is a mnemonic motivation. Oral cultures cannot fix their insights and knowledge in writing and in order to be able to fix knowledge in the memory, knowledge is stored in easily storable rhythmic, formulaic form. According to Ong (1982), oral cultures think in rhythmic, formulaic fashion.

1 The importance of switch-reference and temporality distinctions in clause chaining languages of New Guinea does not imply the absence of overt grammatical marking of other semantic (interclausal) relations like Cause or Reason (see for example De Vries and Wiersma 1992:63-64).

However, in primary oral cultures formulaic elements do not appear to be significantly more prominent than in societies with writing. Rather, at least in some oral societies, such as the Awyu societies in southeast Irian Jaya, one has to look hard to find evidence for formulaic elements. It is quite possible that the idea that primary oral societies think in formulaic fashion has its roots in the fact that literate observers cannot imagine other ways of preserving and transmitting complex knowledge than through language, in the form of easy to memorize verbal forms. But it is easy to find other forms of preserving and transmitting knowledge in most oral societies. The complex cosmology of the Marind and Asmat of Irian Jaya is represented in very elaborate ritual actions, masks and wood carvings. The totemic ancestors of Korowai clans are remembered by food taboos concerning the totem animal. Of course, there are myths which relate the same notions in verbal form, but these myths have no fixed linguistic form: it is the content, the intention of the mythology, which counts. The symbolic and dramatic representation of those contents in rituals and carvings, together with the telling of the myths, ensures the transmission and continuation of knowledge. It is not that the myths form the basis for the rituals, rather rituals and myths express the same basic cosmological themes, in a mutually reinforcing way. In the Awyu cultures which I studied, even the magic "formulas" had no fixed linguistic form. In such magic expressions, the only fixed elements are proper names of ancestors and spirits. These names are the fixed heart of the magic expressions, since the names evoke the powerful entities they are associated with.

Apart from additive parataxis, formulaism and the absence of sequential parallellism, redundancy is stressed by Ong (1982) as a characteristic of primary oral discourse: recapitulation, repetition and a low information rate. When reading the reader can go back to what he has just read; the listener gets only one chance. When writing, the writer can endlessly rephrase what he wants to write; the speaker has to process his new utterance while performing the present utterance. Repeating information and other strategies of reducing the amount of information per utterance all help the speaker to win time to process his next utterance and the listener to process the present utterance.

The verification of the claim that primary oral discourse has a high degree of redundancy, by studying corpora of transcribed texts of oral societies, is not so easy since the notion of redundancy is hard to define. What is redundant at the propositional level may be informative at the interactional or rhetorical levels. Ong (1982) seems to refer to redundancy at the propositional level. If we study text corpora from New Guinea, such as the Korowai texts edited by Van Enk and De Vries (1997), from the perspective of propositional redundancy, two, at first sight conflicting, things strike the observer. In the first place, tail-head linkage and generic verb linkage of clause chains, two conventional recapitulative devices, occur very widely in New Guinea. Especially in narrative texts these repetitive linking devices occur very frequently. The other striking thing is the complaint by almost all scientific editors of such oral texts that so much information is left implicit and is supposed to be known to the addressees that it is often impossible to know who is doing what and where the events of the story are taking place.

These two at first sight contradictory aspects of New Guinea oral narratives, on the one hand, the redundance of the frequent recapitulative linkage devices, and on the other hand, the avoidance of redundance by leaving out known or inferrable

information, both have to do with the distribution of information in clause chains. The medial clauses in the chains have a high information load: wherever possible, the identification of participants with nominal phrases or pronouns is avoided. The addressees have to combine switch-reference and agent cross-referencing morphology on the verb with context and situation to identify participants of medial clauses. Not only participants but also the time and place framework are left implicit wherever possible in medial clauses. The clause chains are connected by tail-head linkage and generic verb linkage (Van Enk and De Vries 1997). In tail-head linkage the last clause of the chain (the tail clause) is repeated as the first clause (head) of the next chain. During tail-head linkage the speaker talks much more slowly and repeats information. Thus the tail-head linkages provide conventional resting points between two chains for the speaker to process his new chain and for the addressee to process the information from the previous one. The highly redundant recapitulative linkages are badly needed to compensate for the high rate of information in the medial parts of the chain.

Summarizing this section, we can say that very few universal claims about primary orality can stand the New Guinea test. The characteristics of primary orality as additive-paratactic, redundant, formulaic, bound to concrete contexts and so on did not emerge from empirical study of specific primary oral societies in their historical unicity but seem to result from universalistic projections on these societies of pictures from various academic debates such as the Homeric debate, the debate of written vs oral style in English and the anthropological debate on cognitive dichotomies in terms of literate vs illiterate societies.

**Oral genres and Bible translation**

The complex relationship between oral genres and the genres which we find in Bible translations can be clarified in terms of Foley's (1997) notion of genre. Building on the work of Bakhtin (1986), Foley stresses that genre is not an abstract, closed linguistic object like the grammatical notion of sentence, but rather a historically given way to produce and interpret texts in culture-specific settings and institutional frameworks. Genres change when society changes, and people use genre patterns creatively for their own purposes. The ability to produce texts according to a specific genre pattern is in many societies an important element in defining social roles, for example the pastor and the sermon, the scholar and the scientific article. This notion of genre moves away from an ahistorical, autonomistic and structuralistic notion of genre and comes close, in several regards, to the notion of genre of scholars such as Gunkel, Bultmann and Dibelius, for example in the link between genres and the social and institutional frameworks in which genres function, the so-called *Sitz im Leben*. The *Sitz im Leben*, the place of a text type in the life of a society, for example a wedding ceremony or a harvest feast, was very much a diachronic notion for scholars such as Gunkel, embedded in 19th century thinking; it was the place where oral Vorlagen of the biblical texts functioned. Modern notions of genre are both historical and synchronic, focussing on the way a text synchronically reflects the social and institutional setting in which it functions.

The historical and cultural dimensions of genres can be illustrated by the *lamolaup* genre of the Korowai of Irian Jaya. The name of the genre means "history of the world". Only adult Korowai males may listen to and transmit these sacred

origin stories. They are taboo for women, children and outsiders. They are told only in times of crisis such as severe droughts, solar eclipses, and famines. The *lamolaup* stories relate how the cosmic order came into being, and in crisis situations, when Korowai people feel that their world is falling apart, the narration of these stories is thought to help restore the cosmic order of things.

In primary oral societies Bible translations are a new genre, or rather a new macro-genre with sub-genres such as psalms and apostolic letters. The newness of the genre of Bible translations does not only reside in the new medium, writing, but also in the new social and cultural setting, the new *Sitz im Leben*, in which translated Bible texts function, and in the secondary character of translations, secondary texts in the sense that they represent texts written in the first place for other people, in another world and in another language. These three factors are constitutive for the new macro-genre of Bible translations and all three, the new medium (writing), the new social and cultural functions (e.g. in church, with marriage and burial ceremonies), and the new, secondary nature have tremendous impact on the way language is used in translations, causing pragmatic innovations which set apart (Bible) translations as a new genre of texts in oral societies.

Let us *first* discuss the new *Sitz im Leben*, the cultural function of translated Bible texts and its concomitant pragmatic innovations. The translation functions first of all as a religious base text in the young Christian community, in the liturgy but also on other occasions such as marriage ceremonies and burials, in a way entirely different from the functions and roles of oral genres which have their own cultural meanings following from their historically given *Sitz im Leben*. Compare the differences between a reading of Genesis 1 during a church service and a narration of a Korowai *lamolaup* story of origin to adult males during a crisis situation in order to overcome that situation.

The liturgical and ecclesiastical functions of Bible translations find their pragmatic expression in the new genres found in these translations. Take for example the pericopes with their headings found in translations. Whereas oral texts from narrative genres such as the Korowai *lamolaup* are narrated in their entirety in long sessions of many hours, the biblical stories, such as the Genesis narrative, are cut up into small pericope units which are read to the congregation in readings of usually not more than ten minutes. There is no place in the liturgy for the reading of whole books. The pericope divisions tend to lead to repeated, strong identifications (by full nominal phrases, pronouns) of participants at the beginning of pericopes. This strong identification of (given) participants at pericope breaks contrasts strongly with the weak (usually verbal) identification of given participants in traditional oral narrative genres. In addition to this, the headings form a new way to topicalize: oral genres do not require headings or titles to guide the addressees thematically and to identify short story fragments.

In most oral societies of New Guinea, most people remain functionally illiterate after literacy programs have been carried out, simply because writing and reading remain largely irrelevant for their daily lives. Bible translations tend to function as follows: a small class of *literati* reads the translation on formal occasions to the illiterate majority. In these circumstances it is of course essential that the translation is easy to read aloud. Visual structuring signs, such as pericopes, headings, and clearly visible paragraph breaks, usually help those who have the task of reading the translation to other people. But the addressees in these

circumstances need audible structuring signals. If Achtemeier (1990) is right, many source texts in the Bible contain such "acoustic clues", audible signals structuring the text, because those texts functioned in very similar fashion and were written to be read aloud to audiences. The apostolic letters for example correspond in a certain sense to formal, public letters from Hellenistic officials to the *ekklesiai* of the cities under their authority (Berger 1987:212). The *ekklesia* in the case of the apostolic letters is the Christian community and the authority is apostolic and prophetic. Public reading of such letters to the Christian community would fit that *Sitz im Leben*. Repetitions such as the threefold *paredôken autous ho theos* (NIV "God gave them over") in Rom 1.24, 26, 28 are examples of acoustic echoes in the sense of Achtemeier (1990). Translations in oral settings should not translate away such audible cohesion signals.

The secondary nature of translated texts, described by Hatim and Mason (1996:1) as "an act of communication which attempts to relay, across cultural and linguistic boundaries, another act of communication", is the *second* factor behind the new pragmatics of Bible translations. The world behind the translated text is a strange world, the world of the ancient near east. The participants in the translation move in that strange world. This makes the participants harder to trace and distinguish. The stylistic result is again a tendency to maintain given participants with relatively strong, nominal means in addition to verbal means. This is in contrast with the weak, verbal means commonly found in oral genres of New Guinea where participants, after a single strong initial introduction, tend to be maintained by verbal agreements and verbal switch-reference affixation. Biblical referents unknown to the receptor culture, such as the Sanhedrin or phylacteries, are often described in complex nominal phrases.

Both the pericope divisions (connected to the liturgical function) and the secondary nature of translations have a nominalising effect on the style. Another factor favouring participant identification by nominal means in Bible translations may be the influence of English, Indonesian and Tok Pisin base texts. This stylistic shift in the nominal direction leads in its turn to heavier, more elaborate clause structures. These heavier clauses, the building blocks of clause chains, lead to shorter clause chains.

The genres that develop in translations of the Bible, such as apostolic letters or psalms, could be called secondary genres. Secondary genres mediate between the primary genres of source and receptor cultures. They will always contain elements from both source and receptor genres but never coincide with them. For example, a translation of the Song of Songs will always have genre continuities with Israelitic love songs and with love songs of the receptor culture, but at the same time the translated text, as a secondary text, will be essentially different from both. A well-known secondary genre in Dutch are the psalms. They have genre continuity with the Hebrew genre, for example in *parallelismus membrorum* and in chiastic forms, but the rhythm and sound patterns are distinctly Dutch. At the same time the translated psalms have been given a crucial and special role in the liturgy of the various Dutch church traditions.

There are no general rules for the way in which secondary genres mediate between the primary genres of source and target cultures. Important factors are the function which a translation has in speech and church communities, the cultural place of receptor genres and the degree of formal and functional overlap between

source and target culture genres. The unique, historically given cultural place of a genre does not mean that there are no continuities of genres across cultures. When both source and target cultures have similar institutions (such as marriage or monarchy), there may be similarities between the text types that developed in those institutional frameworks. There are also formal similarities. Parallelism has been found in various forms in poetic genres in all parts of the world (Foley 1997:366). Such genre continuties support the mediating role of secondary genres. But in the end it is the creativity of the translator who creates, from elements of source and target genres, new secondary genres.

The *third* factor distinguishing Bible translations as a new genre in oral societies is the new medium of writing. The new medium has drastic effects on patterns of language use, but not all pragmatic innovations should be ascribed to the new medium. One of the most striking effects of the new medium is the sharp decrease in the use of topic markers in written genres; in oral genres topic markers tend to be used frequently. The change in the use of topic markers is not just a quantitative change. Bromley (1981) notices a new constraint on the use of topic markers emerging in written genres of Dani: one topic marker per clause. I have observed that Papuan Bible translators, in the process of re-editing their translations, not only edited out topic markers in many places, but also sometimes inserted them in places where they had been absent in the first drafts.

The drastic decrease of topic markers in translations follows from the double functionality of topic markers in oral genres of New Guinea languages: they indicate thematic coherence but they also have a processing function, namely to mark pause, in order to give the speaker the chance to formulate what he wants to say and the addressees to process what they just heard (Bromley 1981; Van Enk and De Vries 1997). The thematic function remains in translations: it is realized in a different fashion in translations than in oral genres, but the pause and hesitation function of topic markers becomes irrelevant. Another effect of the written medium is the decrease of the use of tail-head linkages in Bible translations; just like topic markers, tail-head linkages have both thematic and processing functions and it is the processing function which becomes irrelevant in written genres.

The combined stylistic effects of the three genre distinguishing factors of new medium (writing), new cultural functions (church, burials, marriages), and the secondary nature are pervasive and drastic: decrease and different distribution of topic markers and tail-head linkages, increase of nominal participant identifications, heavier clauses, shorter clause chains, to mention only a few.

The fact that specific new pragmatic patterns develop in the new (macro)genre of Bible translations makes it problematic to apply stylistic patterns from other genres, such as traditional oral genres, in Bible translations. An example would be the use of cohesive elements such as topic markers. The way these are used in oral genres is not automatically right for a genre such as Bible translations. Renck (1990:96-97) gives interesting data from the Yagaria area of Papua New Guinea. The New Testament has been translated into two dialects of Yagaria, in the Move dialect and in the Kami-Kuluka dialect. Renck (1990) gives Mk 15.21 in both translations:

(1) Yagaria (Move dialect):

*Gitogane'vagani* *ve* *bogo* *agi'a*
path-on while they go-and he man one name-his
*Simo', Gilene yo'* *igopaloti'* *de* *Alesategi*
Simon Cyrenevillage land-from man Alexander-and
*Lufugiteti'* *avoti'ama'* *agaea hoyaviti'*
Rufus-and both father-their dl.he garden-from
*no'egapi* *fotu* *hida* *lebelebe* *hida*
while he comes-and they meet they-and urge they-and
*tagani* *Yesu* *malipuyava'a*
do him they-and he Jesus cross tree-his
*govilegapi* *idae.*
he carries-and they they went

While they went on the street, a man by the name of Simon, a man from the settlement of Cyrene, the father of both Alexander and Rufus, as he came from the field, they met him and urged him, and (as) he carried the cross of Jesus, they went on.

(2) Yagaria (Kami-Kuluka dialect):

*Zisasibo* *bagesamahebo* *gavaileda*
Jesus kill-they were going to him lead they-and
*lida* *baledane'vaganahebo* *debogobo*
take-and put-end while they go-and he man-one
*no'egana* *fotu hae.*
while he comes-and meet they
***Fotu hama*** *demo* *Sailini* *gaigali*
meet they-that man Cyreneplace
*demo* *Alekesadagiti'a* *Lufasigiti'a*
man Alexander-and both Rufus-and both
*avo'ina'amabo* *gi'amo* *Saimonibo* *lina*
father-their dl.name-his Simon take-and
*balona* *e.* ***Egana*** *Zisasibo* *gavaileda*
put-and comes come he-an d Jesus him lead they-and
*ama* *vemo* *havu* *vemagimo* *hakeli'a*
come they-that man bow men strong
*gemo* *hapaedahebo* *kagaemo* *taginoka*
word him tell they you you turn back-and
*taloka* *Zisasibo* *bagesupa*
you take and Jesus kill-in order that we shall
*zavamo* *govilika* *vuvo* *hida* *hagana*
tree you carry-and you go say-and speak they-and he

| | |
|---|---|
| *govilina* | *vize.* |
| carries he-and | he goes |

While they go, leading Jesus in order that they kill him, a man is coming, and they meet him. The man they meet, a man from the place of Cyrene, the father of both Alexander and Rufus, by the name of Simon, he comes. As he comes, the men which lead Jesus and come, the soldiers, tell him strongly: you turn back, and take the timber on which we will kill Jesus, carry it and go! After they say that, he carries it and goes.

The Kami-Kuluka version in (2) uses cohesive markers (and tail-head linkage) as in oral Yagaria narrative genres: it has 17 cohesive markers (printed in bold) in 3 sentences which are connected by tail-head linkage (in bold). The Move version does not use those devices in this fragment. Renck (1990) writes that the Kami-Kuluka version is harder to read than the Move version because of the high frequency of cohesive markers and other "oral" features.

We still do not know much about processes of pragmatic innovation in Bible translations in oral societies. The little that has been written approaches such processes from written/oral style oppositions. Renck (1990:87) interprets the differences between the two Yagaria versions from that point of view: he sees the Move version as having a compact written style and the Kami-Kuluka version as a long-winded, hard to read "oral" style. However, when we look at the two Yagaria versions from a broader notion of genre, within which the medium (writing vs speech) is only one genre-determining factor, we see that the Kami-Kuluka version indeed follows oral genres as far as topic markers is concerned, but in terms of referent identification the Kami-Kuluka version has a typical secondary genre pattern: the soldiers and the cross for example are identified with heavy nominal phrases. In this regard, the Kami-Kuluka version deviates more from oral narrative genres than the Move version.

New pragmatic patterns, such as reduction and redistribution of topic markers and increase of nominal participant identifications, emerge quickly in the new written genres of oral societies. Just like lexical-semantic innovations, they emerge spontaneously in speech communities as a response to new communicative needs. In the very initial stage of new written genres, for example in first drafts of the first translated Bible books, some translators in New Guinea still use many cohesive markers and recapitulative linkages. However, when reviewing and editing their texts, translators tend to edit out many cohesive markers and recapitulative linkages but at the same time they insert them in places where they were absent in the first draft. These editing tendencies are even stronger in later revisions of the translation. All this points to processes of pragmatic innovation that are going on in the new written genres. Sometimes this birth of new genres is not welcomed by translation consultants who see the traditional oral genres as the natural model for translated texts, and in such a framework favour the use of topic markers, recapitulative linkages and sequential parallellism as a "natural" style for translations.

Given the influence and strong role of external translation consultants in many translation projects in oral contexts, it is crucial that they view "naturalness" from a broad notion of genre and not from the perspective of oral-written style oppositions and of stereotypes of primary orality. What is needed is a genre notion which distinguishes between primary and secondary genres and which treats genres

not as a formal, structuralistic notion but as a pragmatic and historical category. In this perspective a natural style is a style which follows from the factors which are constitutive of a given genre. In the case of the macro-genre of Bible translations, these factors are the secondary nature, the written medium and the cultural role of these texts in the church and in the speech community. The secondary nature is responsible for the integration of elements from both primary source and primary receptor culture genres into the new secondary genres found in the translations. These elements from primary genres are not copied into the translations but rather creatively transformed within secondary genres.

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GOSNELL YORKE

# BIBLE TRANSLATION IN AFRICA: AN AFROCENTRIC PERSPECTIVE

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> *we are obliged to classify all...translations...as instances of "ethnocentric violence..."*[1]

## Introduction

An Afrocentric approach to Bible translation is influenced not only by the various contemporary liberationist genres of biblical theology and hermeneutics, but also by the cross- or trans-disciplinary impact of an ongoing postcolonialist discourse.[2] Such an approach to Bible translation is an attempt to translate Scripture from a premeditatedly Africa-conscious perspective—and, in doing so, to break the apparent hegemony and, at times, what, for some, seems to be a racially motivated ideological stranglehold that the various Western versions now enjoy in relation to the Bible. As a method, the Afrocentric approach to Bible translation seeks to put Africa, Africans and Africana generally (for example, fauna and flora) back into

1 Although B. Hatim and I. Mason make this remark (slightly amended) within the specific context of their recent discussion of how ideology and translation/translating are (inter)related, it is my conviction that generalization is permissible with respect to translation practice as a whole. See their *The Translator as Communicator* (London: Routledge 1997), 162. See also D. Slager, "Translation and Theology via a Study of Ruth," in *Current Trends in Scripture Translation, UBS Bulletin* 170/171 (1994) 67.

2 The literature about such issues is already vast and continues to grow. A bibliography is available from the author at PO Box 3768, 1620 Kempton Park, South Africa.