

"Meshari" i Gjon Buzukut (1555). Botim kritik punuar nga Eqrem Çabej. II. Tiranë 1968.

Pllumi, At Zef, *Përkthimet e Biblës në shqip*. Hylli i Dritës. Revistë kulture shqiptare. Tiranë 1996, N 1-2. F. 110-114.

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"YOU CAN SAY YOU TO HIM"

T- and V-forms in common language translations of the New Testament

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The story is told of a German head of state who, on arrival in Washington, stretched out his hand to his American counterpart with the words, "Wir können uns dutzen" (We can use the familiar "du" to one another). The best the embarrassed interpreter could do, in the absence of any corresponding form in English, was, "He says you can say you to him." The American reaction is not recorded, but one suspects that, from that inauspicious start, inter-presidential communication had nowhere to go but up.

The purpose of this article is to examine the use of familiar and polite forms, commonly known as T-forms and V-forms, in common language translations of the New Testament into French, Spanish, Italian, and German.¹ The writer is not a native speaker of any of these languages, and is therefore subject to correction by those who are. Our intention is not to criticise those responsible for these translations, but to enquire how far, in this respect, they do in fact apply the criteria of common language.

"Common language" is probably an expression more commonly used in Bible translation circles than elsewhere. Nida and Taber's classic manual *The Theory and Practice of Translation* defines common language as "that portion of the total lexical, grammatical, and stylistic resources of a language which is both understood and accepted as good usage by all who know the language."² Similarly Jean-Claude Margot, though not offering a formal definition, claims that it should be possible "to publish a version of the Bible which could be read in any sociological milieu or in any region of the French-speaking world, for example;"³ while

1 *La Bible: Ancien et Nouveau Testament. Traduite de l'hébreu et du grec en français courant*. Alliance Biblique Universelle 1983, rev ed 1997 (differences between the two editions are discussed below); *La Biblia de Estudio Dios habla hoy*. Sociedades Bíblicas Unidas 1994; *Parola del Signore. La Bibbia. Traduzione interconfessionale in lingua corrente*. Leumann (Torino): Elle Di Ci, and Rome: Alleanza Biblica Universale 1985; *Gute Nachricht Bibel. Altes und Neues Testament*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 1997 (no differences were noted in the use of T- and V-forms between this and its predecessor *Die Bibel im heutigen Deutsch*, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 1983). We shall refer to these translations respectively as BFC (French), DHH (Spanish), ItCL (Italian), and GCL (German). Dr. Plutarco Bonilla informs me that the Brazilian Portuguese common language translation *A Bíblia na linguagem de hoje* uses polite forms, as does the Spanish *Nueva Versión Internacional*.

2 Leiden: Brill for the United Bible Societies 1969, 1974, 1980.

3 J.-C. Margot, *Traduire sans trahir. La théorie de la traduction et son application aux textes bibliques*. Lausanne: L'Age d'homme 1979, 298 (our translation).

de Waard and Nida refer to “the so-called ‘common-language level’ ” as “the overlap area between the literary and colloquial.”¹

This appears to be essentially the same as what secular linguists call the “common core” of language. David Crystal describes this as, “The range of linguistic features which would be used and understood by all speakers, regardless of their regional or social background.”² John Lyons speaks similarly of “a ‘common core’—a considerable overlap in the words [persons who are said to ‘speak the same language’] use, the manner in which they combine them in sentences and the meaning which they attach to the words and sentences”; adding, “The possibility of communication depends upon the existence of this ‘common core’.”³

The French equivalent of a “common language” Bible translation is one “en français courant” (in current French). This or similar expressions, unlike “common language” in English, appear to be part of common language French: the standard *Nouveau Petit Robert* gives as examples “Le langage courant” and “Un mot très courant.” Other languages use equivalents of “today’s language”: the previous edition of the German *Gute Nachricht Bibel* (1997), as noted above, was entitled *Die Bibel im heutigen Deutsch*.

Current linguistic analysis of the distinction between familiar and polite forms owes much to an article by Roger Brown and Albert Gilman entitled “The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity”⁴. This article also introduced the convenient abbreviations “T” (from Latin and French *tu*) and “V” (from Latin *vos* and French *vous*) for familiar and polite forms respectively. The significance of the distinction for common language translations of the Bible has been explored by R.A. Ross in relation to *Dios habla hoy*⁵, and by René Péter-Contesse in relation to BFC.⁶ We shall return to consider these studies later.

In any discussion of T- and V-forms, English is the “odd man out” (if the male-oriented expression may still be allowed). It is several centuries since common language English lost the distinction between a familiar “thou” and a formal “you”. As David Burnley writes⁷, “Middle English distinction in the use of *ye/you* from *thou*, by which the former implied politeness and the latter familiarity, superiority

1 J. de Waard and E.A. Nida, *From One Language to Another. Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating*. Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson 1986, 41.

2 D. Crystal, *An Encyclopedic Dictionary of Language and Languages*. Oxford, U.K. and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell 1992, 72.

3 J. Lyons, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press 1969, 140.

4 First printed in Thomas A. Sebeok (ed), *Style in Language*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Technology Press of M.I.T., and New York: Wiley 1960, 253-276; last republished in J. Laver and S. Hutcheson (eds), *Communication in Face to Face Interaction*. Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin 1972.

5 In Spanish in *Traducción de la Biblia* 1.2 (April 1991) (not available to me), and in English in “Marking interpersonal relationships in the ‘Today’s Spanish Version’ ” in *BTP* 44 (1993) 217-231. Ross’s earlier publications include work on honorific distinctions in Thai, which are more complicated than those in the European languages with which this article is concerned.

6 “Les formes de politesse et leur traduction en français”, in *Cahiers de traduction biblique* 16 (2nd semester 1991) 9-19, and “Les formes de politesse (bis)”, in *Cahiers de traduction biblique* 18 (2nd semester 1992) 16.

7 D. Burnley, *The History of the English Language. A source book*. London and New York: Longman 1992, 2000.

or contempt for the addressee...was abandoned in the latter half of the seventeenth century." Within living memory, "thou" and related forms were generally used in public prayer, and had thus lost their connotation of familiarity. In current (standard British) English, this use of "thou"-forms is largely "frozen" in specific areas such as the use of the Lord's Prayer and older hymns.¹ Divine persons were addressed as "thou" in the New English Bible (1970), but not in its successor the Revised English Bible (1989).

Standard grammars for the use of English speakers tend to make only brief reference to the use of T- and V-forms. For French, Farrar writes simply, "**Tu** and **te** are normally used when speaking to a single person who is a close relative or an intimate friend. They are also used to any child, or an animal."² Even more concisely, the *BBC Italian Grammar* states, "**tu** one person—family, friends, young people, children."³ For Spanish, Butt and Benjamin offer a more detailed account:

Tú...is used between friends, members of family, to children, and generally between strangers under the age of about thirty, to animals, in insults and in prayers or invocations. It is used more readily than French *tu* or German *Du* (at least in Spain), and almost always between persons who are on Christian-name terms. Its use is more common than thirty years ago, and is sometimes considered a mark of a democratic outlook.⁴

The *Berlitz German Grammar Handbook*⁵ is also rather informative.⁶

The 'familiar' ...**du**... [is] used when speaking to members of your family, to close friends and fellow workers, to fellow pupils, students, sports club members etc., to anyone under about 16⁷—and to animals! ...**Sie**...is...the normal form of address to anyone not close to you. Foreigners do well to let native speakers make the first move in changing from **Sie** to **du**.

There is clearly considerable overlap between these definitions, although some of the authors cited allow for different usage in different areas and periods. In any case, the relation between rules prescribed in manuals for (especially English) learners of these languages, and the reality of usage by native speakers, is problematical. There is strong evidence that native speaker usage is more complex than the manuals suggest.⁸ We may mention three examples in chronological order, the last two admittedly anecdotal.

1 P. Gardner-Chloros, "Ni tu ni vous: principes et paradoxes dans l'emploi des pronoms d'allocution in français contemporain", *Journal of French Language Studies* 1 (1991) 139-155, here 141, notes the converse phenomenon whereby in Sweden, the use of V-forms had been largely abandoned by 1991.

2 H. Ferrar, *A French Reference Grammar*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1967, 199.

3 Alwena Lamping, *BBC Italian Grammar*. London: BBC Books 1995, 66.

4 John Butt and Carmen Benjamin, *A New Reference Grammar of Modern Spanish*. London: Edward Arnold 1988, reprinted with corrections 1990, 105. Jean-Claude Margot (personal communication) similarly states that the use of familiar forms in French has become more widespread in recent years.

5 Christopher Wightwick, *Berlitz German Grammar Handbook*. Princeton, New Jersey and London: Berlitz 1997, here 193.

6 Among other things, it has to take into account the existence in German of a distinct familiar plural, with which we are not here concerned.

7 Gardner-Chloros, 144ff, takes age 15 as the dividing line for the purposes of her survey.

8 See W.E. Lambert and G.R. Tucker, *Tu, vous, usted. A Social-Psychological Study of Address Patterns*. Wobley, Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers 1976, and especially P. Gardner-Chloros (n 11). I am indebted to Dr. Glynn Hesketh of the Department of French, University of Aberdeen, for these and other references.

First, in French 17th century literature, as represented by Corneille, Molière, and Racine, usage seems to be determined by a combination of social status and social distance, and to be firmly established. The superior will always address the inferior as *tu*, and the inferior will reply with *vous*. But people of higher social status will use *vous* to one another¹, while servants will reciprocally use *tu*.

Second, a personal illustration of Wightwick's warning about waiting for native speakers of German to take the initiative in using *du*. In 1957, I shared a room for a semester with a somewhat younger German who, embarrassed by a conflict of social rules, eventually said to me (I give from memory a rough translation of his German), "I don't know how it is in England. In Germany, the elder would normally propose using *du* to the younger, but perhaps in the circumstances...". I was happy to explain that in English the matter is a *Scheinproblem*, though it has some analogy with the use of Christian names, in German associated with use of T-forms.

Third, illustrating Butt and Benjamin's remark about the "democratic" use of T-forms in Spanish, in the 1968 student risings in Germany, professors were startled to hear their students addressing them as *du*²: a short-lived development.

It is important to bear in mind these and other variations, both between languages and within a single language—especially world languages such as Spanish and French. Yet, as Margot correctly stated,³ a common language translation of the Bible is intended to reach as far as possible the entire language community, so comparison between different common language translations in respect of their use of T- and V-forms has at least relative validity.

As mentioned above,⁴ the matter has been studied in detail for Spanish by Ross and for French by Péter-Contesse. Their conclusions and recommendations, however, are strikingly different. On the one hand, Ross commends DHH for its use of V-forms, especially in Acts, where this would agree with common usage, but regrets that DHH did not use V-forms more consistently, especially in the Gospels. On the other hand, Péter-Contesse noted problems with the use of V-forms in the 1st edition of BFC, and recommended a return to the predominant tradition of using T-forms exclusively; this recommendation was accepted by the revisers responsible for the 2nd edition. The reasons for these conflicting assessments of translations of a similar type, deserve closer examination.

Let us begin by summarizing the situation of *Matthew*, as being for this purpose representative of the Gospels. Dialogues involving address to individuals may be roughly classified as follows:

1. *Address to or by a supernatural being*, such as the angel to Joseph (1.20f; 2.13, 20); Jesus and Satan (4.3, 6, 9, 10; compare 16.23); demons to Jesus (8.29, 31); Jesus to God (11.25; 26.39, 42; 27.46); the righteous to the Son of man (25.37, 39, 44). Included in this category are also quotations of Old Testament commandments: 19.18-19; 22.37-38. Here one would expect T-forms, and this is what is found in all the common language translations consulted.

1 For example, in his correspondence Racine addresses close relatives as *vous*. A. Ewert, *The French Language*, 2nd ed. 1943, 158, speaks of a "seventeenth-century...exaggeration of the...tendency" to favour *vous*.

2 Personal communication by the late Peter Rüger.

3 See n 3.

4 See nn 8 and 9.

2. *Dialogue between family members and close friends*: John the Baptist and Jesus (3.14-15); the disciples (or individual disciples, most often Peter) addressing Jesus, and Jesus replying to individual disciples (8.25; 13.10; 14.28, 29, 31, 33; 15.12, 15, 16, 23; 16.16-18, 22, 23¹; 17.4, 25, 27; 18.8, 21; 19.27; 26.17, 22, 25, 33-35, 49-50, 52-53, 75); Herodias to Herod (14.8); Jesus and the mother of James and John (20.21); a father to a son, in a parable (21.28); Pilate and his wife (27.19). T-forms are appropriate, and are used consistently.

3. *Dialogue between people who are unknown to one another, or who do not know one another well*: between Jesus and individuals who approach him (8.2, 4, 11, 19, 21-22; 9.2, 6, 9, 14, 18, 22, 27; 12.2, 13, 30, 47; 15.2, 22, 25, 27, 28; 17.14; 19.1, 17, 21; 20.30, 33; 21.16; 22.16-17, 36, 41; 26.62-64, 69, 70, 73; 27.4); John the Baptist's disciples and Jesus (11.3); John the Baptist to Herod (14.4)²; between Jesus and Pilate (27.11); leaders³ to Pilate (27.64). Here we would normally expect V-forms, in accordance with contemporary usage; but in fact, only DHH occasionally departs from the use of T-forms. In 26.62-63, the high priest addresses Jesus as *tu*, but Jesus replies in v 64 with the polite *usted*. This use of *tu* may be open to discussion⁴, but the polite response appropriately expresses Jesus' respect for the highest religious authority among his people. There is a similar alternation of T and V in Pilate's dialogue with Jesus (27.11), and the leaders use V-forms in addressing Pilate (27.64).

4. *Social inferiors addressing superiors*: servants addressing their master in a parable (13.27; 18.26; 25.20, 22, 24); women addressing the bridegroom in a parable (25.11)⁵. Here again DHH departs from the practice of other common language translations consulted: servants address their master as *usted*, in contrast to other translations, which for example in 13.27 have the awkward collocation *Herr...du* (GCL) *Maître...tu* (BFC). In 25.11, however, even DHH has a similarly awkward *¡Señor, señor, ábrenos!*, in a parable.

5. *Social superiors addressing inferiors*: a master addressing a servant (18.32; 20.8, 13-15; 25.21-23, 26-27); a king addressing a subject in a parable (22.11). Here, in a culture in which differences of status were perhaps more formally marked than in contemporary western societies, T-forms might be expected, and they are accordingly found in all translations consulted.

6. *An adult addressing a child or young person*: Herod addressing Herodias's daughter (14.7—but also category 5). The expected T-form is found in all versions.

7. Contexts suggesting *hostility or contempt*: between servants in a parable (18.28-29); the crowd shouting at Jesus (26.68; 27.40); the crowd shouting at Pilate (27.22-23). T-forms are found in all versions.

8. Jesus speaking to a fig tree (21.19); to Jerusalem personalised as an individual (23.27)⁶. T-forms are found in all versions.

1 Or category 1?

2 Or category 1 (as a prophet speaking in God's name, so T); less probably, category 10.

3 We use this term for conciseness to indicate scribes/teachers of the Law, Pharisees, and other Jewish leaders.

4 On this and similar situations, P  ter-Contesse comments, "Detective novels and films often have recourse to the clich   of the police officer using *tu* to an adult villain whom he is arresting or interrogating; it is not certain that this usage reflects what really happens in our police stations" ("Les formes de politesse...", 10, n 5).

5 Or category 3.

6 But in vv 38-39 the plural is used, referring to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Several of these categories call for discussion in the light of the complementary evidence of Acts.

1. Acts contains a large number of cases of *dialogue between human beings and God, Jesus, angels, or heavenly voices*,¹ and two Old Testament quotations using the 2nd person singular². To these, where T-forms are appropriate, may be added two examples of human beings explicitly claiming to speak with the authority of Jesus: Paul to the female slave in 16.18, and the sons of Sceva to those possessed by demons (19.13).

2. The situation in Acts is different from that in the Gospels, since a rapidly growing *Christian community* has taken the place of the small group of disciples of Jesus. We may however assume that T-forms are appropriate here, even for dialogue with those newly welcomed into the Christian community.³ Peter speaking to Ananias (5.3) and Sapphira (5.8) may still consider them as (apostate) members of the community; his words to them are keenly hostile, so T-forms would seem in any case appropriate.

3. As one would expect, there are a number of examples of *dialogue between strangers*: Peter speaking to a lame man (3.4, 6); Peter speaking with Simon "Magus" (8.20-23)?; messengers speaking to Peter (10.22); Peter speaking with Cornelius (10.26-33); Paul speaking to a cripple (14.10); Paul (and Silas) speaking to a jailer (16.28, 31); Athenians addressing Paul (17.19-20, 32); Paul addressing persons in authority (21.37a, 39; 22.25; 23.17; 24.10-11, 13, 21; 25.10; 26.2-3, 25, 27); similarly Tertullus addressing Felix (24.2, 4-5, 8); officials speaking or writing to one another (22.26; 23.27, 30; 25.22). In all these cases, V-forms would seem appropriate. Paul's outburst against the (unrecognized) high priest (23.3) is a possible exception. Whether persons in authority would speak to an accused person as T or V (see n 24) would seem to depend on the tone of what is being said. Luke's apologetically motivated approach, which is generally that of showing that Paul and other Christians were treated by officials and rulers with respect (21.37-38; 22.27; 26.24), is an argument in favour of the use of V forms; less probably, these passages would fall in category 7.

4,5. While current common language translations other than DHH have retained (or in the case of BFC reverted to) the uniform use of T-forms, the DHH makes some attempt to mark differences of status, but apparently not consistently. Peter says *tú* to Simon "Magus", perhaps connoting hostility or contempt. Philip uses the polite form to the Ethiopian eunuch (8.30), who however replies with the familiar *dime* (v 34); it is not clear whether this connotes a difference of status, a growing warmth in the relationship, or inconsistency on the part of the translators. Peter addresses Aeneas as *tú* (9.34), as Paul does the cripple (14.10). Cornelius's messengers use the polite form to Peter (10.33), perhaps indicating subordinate status. Paul and Silas address their jailer as *tú* (16.28, 31); a consciousness of superior status would fit the context quite well, but perhaps the familiar form is thought appropriate to someone about to be welcomed into the Christian fellowship. Surprisingly, the Athenians (17.19-20, 32) address Paul as *tú*; they have heard him speak, but this is their first personal contact with him. On two occasions, Paul addresses Roman commanders politely (21.37a, 39; 22.25), but the commanders

1 8.26; 9.4-6, 11-15; 10.4-5, 12, 15; 11.7-9; 12.7-8; 18.9-10; 22.7-10, 18-19; 23.11; 25.14-17; 27.24.

2 2.34; 23.5.

3 9.17, 38, 40; 11.3; 12.15; 21.20, 23-24; 22.13-16.

use the familiar form in reply (21.37b-38; 22.27). Captains address their superior officers as *usted* (22.26; 23.18). Paul's altercation with the high priest is interesting: despite his calling the high priest, whom he does not recognize, a "whitewashed wall" (22.3), he uses the polite form: a courtesy not reciprocated by the bystanders (22.4). Tertullus addresses Felix politely (24.2, 4, 8), as does Paul (24.10, 11, 13, 21); again, Felix does not reciprocate in speaking to Paul (24.25). Similarly Paul uses the polite form to Festus (25.10; 26.25), who uses the familiar form in return (25.9, 12). Surprisingly, Festus, a Roman procurator, uses a T-form to King Agrippa (25.22). Paul addresses him in the 3rd person as *Su Majestad* (26.2-3, 27), but Agrippa, as we have come to expect, uses the familiar form to Paul (26.1, 28). The magistrates' order to the jailor, clearly their subordinate, is transformed in DHH into indirect speech (16.35). Paul's young nephew uses *usted* to the commander (23.21), who has just used a T-form to him (v 19).

Categories 6 and 8 are apparently not found in Acts; a possible example of category 7 is noted under 3 above.

In general, DHH appears to show three tendencies which are to some extent in tension with one another. First, in contrast to other current common language translations, there is some attempt to reflect contemporary Spanish usage. Second, however, there is also an attempt to reflect social stratification in the original culture. And third, respect for the apostolic status of Peter and Paul leads DHH to make them use T-forms which modern speakers in similar situations would probably avoid. The result is, on the one hand, a laudable attempt to create a truly common language translation, but on the other hand, a failure to carry this initiative through. The resulting inconsistency produces in particular a lack of clarity concerning the apostles' status. Is the translators' intention to depict the apostles as of higher status than their jailor, and higher than that of those who come to them for help and healing, but of lower status than the high priest, Felix, Festus, and Agrippa? Whatever the answer to that question, how far, in this respect, does the translation reflect the purpose of Luke himself?

These questions rejoin the concerns expressed in Ross's article mentioned above.² His study is based on selected texts from the entire DHH Bible.³ He notes that T-forms are unexpectedly used, *inter alia*, by John the Baptist's messengers to Jesus (Lk 7.20), by an accused person to an official (Jesus to Pilate, Lk 23.3b; Jn 18.34, 37b), and by strangers (Lk 24.18). Exceptionally, Mary Magdalene addresses Jesus as V, since she does not recognize him (Jn 20.15).

Ross's findings are as follows. In the Gospels, "the only place that any effort is made to express normal social relationships by appropriate language forms is in the parables" (226). "[N]ot only is Jesus always addressed as T...in the...gospels..., but Jesus always addresses others in the same way" (227). However, "[c]ontrary to the case of the gospels, the Book of Acts does a good job of reflecting social relationships" (229). Ross concludes, "[W]hile I would like to see much more

1 Note that in 24.22, Felix addresses not only Paul but, by implication, all those responsible for bringing the charge against him. This nuance, quite clear in DHH by the use of the plural *ustedes*, is missed by some English translations, including NIV and CEV, but is expressed in GNB by the addition of the words "he told them".

2 See n 9.

3 In the following passage we shall refer only to New Testament texts, excluding Matthew and Acts, mentioned by Ross.

consistency in [DHH], I also commend the translators for having produced the only Spanish version that even addresses the issue” (231).¹

A contrasting view was taken by the revisers responsible for the 2nd (1997) edition of *La Bible...en français courant* (BFC). We are fortunate to have an article by one of the revisers², setting out in detail the reasons why the 2nd edition was led to abandon the use of V-forms; that is, the use of *vous* in address to an individual. Péter-Contesse distinguishes four situations:

1. *Dialogue between God and others*. The use of *tu* on both sides causes no problem now, though formerly Roman Catholics used the polite form in addressing God.

2. *Dialogue between Jesus and others*. Péter-Contesse recognises that for Jesus to use *tu* to everyone runs the risk of his being identified with God, “even where normally his divine nature should remain provisionally hidden.” (15) But if some were to address Jesus as *tu*, and others as *vous*, the choice between the two forms would depend on “the translator’s subjective assessment”.

3. *Dialogue between (other) human beings*. According to Péter-Contesse, (a) the choice between *tu* and *vous* would again open the door to arbitrary subjectivity on the part of translators, and (b) the use of the polite form would confuse readers who “know through the cultural milieu, impregnated with Christian influence, that use of the *tu* form was part of traditional biblical language.” (17)

4. Péter-Contesse cites a number of texts (Mt 20.20-23; Jn 4.48; Jer 21.3-4) where readers might be uncertain whether the *vous* referred to one person or several.

Péter-Contesse accordingly recommended that the use of the polite form be discontinued in BFC, and this recommendation was in principle accepted and applied in the 1997 edition. There are however at least two exceptions. In Mt 27.64, the chief priests and Pharisees use a V-form in addressing Pilate; and in Acts 24.2, Tertullus addresses Felix as *vous*—in contrast to Paul’s use of *tu* to Felix (Acts 24.10), Festus (25.10), and Agrippa (26.2).³ This, together with the evidence of the Gospels, suggests the implied principle that sacred personages such as Jesus and the apostles must never, by their use of polite forms, suggest inferiority to others; but that others, such as the chief priests and Tertullus, may use polite forms to secular rulers. If this perception is correct, it would appear to be a significant derogation from the principle of common language translation.

Péter-Contesse draws from his experience of detailed work on the revision of BFC a number of general arguments which call for examination.

First, he addresses the case of dialogue between God and human beings—a matter on which there is no disagreement. On the one hand, verbal utterances by God to human beings in contemporary situations are probably so rare as not to constitute a significant corpus for analysis—though one might expect such occurrences to use a familiar form. The usage is thus predominantly biblical. On the other

1 But now see also the *Nueva Versión Internacional*.

2 René Péter-Contesse, “Les formes de politesse et leur traduction en français”, *Cahiers de traduction biblique* 16 (2nd semester 1991) 9-19. A postscript by the same author, recording the decisions of the review committee, was published in no. 18 of the same journal, 2nd semester 1992, 16. I am indebted to Dr. Jean-Claude Margot for calling these publications to my attention.

3 GCL and ItCL use T-forms consistently.

hand, the tone of verbal utterances by human beings to God (essentially prayers and meditations) would tend to be affected by the choice between polite and familiar forms. The former use in French of the polite form suggested an approach by an inferior to a rather distant superior. Its displacement in current French by the (traditionally Protestant) familiar form suggests greater warmth and closeness—the freedom in approaching God through Christ which the New Testament calls *parrēsia* (Heb 4.16). As Péter-Contesse suggests, there are no serious problems in this area.

Second, Péter-Contesse advances the argument from *arbitrary subjectivity*, which claims that to give translators the responsibility of choosing between familiar and polite forms would lead to chaos and confusion. But the underlying situation would appear to be as follows:

- common language French uses distinct familiar and polite forms;
- ancient Hebrew and New Testament Greek did not;
- BFC is by definition a common language translation.

The conclusion from these premises would appear to be that French should follow current usage in the use of *tu* and *vous*, as in other respects. It may readily be admitted that the transition from a biblical language to a modern language raises questions of judgement. Our survey of selected texts has indicated a number of points where more than one translational option is possible. But the answering of such questions is part of the translation task. Not to answer them leaves the task unfinished; more precisely, the translation remains in one important respect less than completely a common language translation.

The problem of the choice between T- and V-forms is by no means unique. It arises, for example, in translating from a language with an aspect-based verbal structure, such as Hebrew, into a language with a tense-based verbal structure, such as French or English. Strange as it may seem to a monolingual speaker of French or English, there are many cases where translators of the Old Testament have to use their judgement in order to decide whether to translate by a past or a future tense verb: both are possible. In that case, translators cannot avoid using their judgement; in the *tu/vous* case, they should not, unless there are overwhelming reasons to the contrary. In any case, the choice between *tu* and *vous* should not in practice be as difficult as Péter-Contesse suggests. Jesus and his disciples would surely use the familiar form to one another. With people meeting him for the first time, such as Zacchaeus or Nicodemus, the polite form would seem appropriate. More difficult, it is true, would be trial scenes such as those in the Gospels and Acts, and here a little research might be necessary to establish what actually is current French in these and similar situations.¹

Péter-Contesse's next points relate to God speaking to an individual through an Old Testament prophet, or within a discourse by some other speaker. Each case would have to be assessed on its merits, but it seems in principle that where a prophet speaks in God's name, so that in some passages it is even uncertain whether the words are those of God or his prophet, the familiar language of God speaking to human beings could be extended to the prophet. In two of the three passages cited by Péter-Contesse (Jer 22.13-17; 34.2-5), *Dios habla hoy* uses the familiar form; in

¹ See n 26.

the third (Jer 37.17), which is a dialogue between Jeremiah and King Zedekiah, the prophet addresses the king as “Your Majesty”.

Among “additional difficulties”, Péter-Contesse points to cases where the use of the *vous* form would be ambiguous: the reader would be uncertain whether one or several people were being addressed. But there are various ways of resolving the difficulty. To take two of Péter-Contesse’s examples, in *Dios habla hoy* Mt 20.21-22, the mother of James and John addresses Jesus familiarly, and he responds appropriately in the same way. But in v 23 Jesus turns to address the sons, or possibly the whole family group, and the change to plural verb-forms makes this clear. In modern English, this is not possible, so the Good News Bible resolves the difficulty by making a slight expansion, “ ‘You don’t know what you are asking for,’ Jesus answered *the sons...*”. Similarly in Jn 4.48, the Good News Bible marks the transition by saying, “Jesus said to *him*, ‘None of you will ever believe...’ ”. Or, to take another example, in Lk 22.31-32, the Good News Bible has, “ ‘Simon, Simon! Listen! Satan has received permission to test *all of you...* But I have prayed for *you*, *Simon...*’ ”. If the transition between singular and plural cannot be conveyed in any other way, it could be mentioned in a footnote; but this would normally be a last resort. In any case, it does not seem necessary, as Péter-Contesse puts it, “usually to have recourse to extended and therefore heavy explicitations.” (19)

Péter-Contesse’s final point relates to the delicate interface between language and culture. He claims, as already quoted, that the generalised use of familiar forms in the Bible “reflects...a particular cultural feature”, and that readers will understand this. One might reply that, on the contrary, it reflects a (negative) linguistic feature, namely the failure to develop specifically polite forms. Distinctions of status were marked in other ways. To fail to use polite forms in languages where they are (now) available would, in our view, tend to distance readers unnecessarily from the biblical text. It could also, in the case of people speaking to Jesus, tend to cast a veil over his real humanity, as represented in the Gospels.

The above comments are not intended as a criticism of Péter-Contesse or the BFC revisers. Their conclusions are clearly based on careful study of a wide range of passages in which the question of the use of polite forms arises, and as such deserve the highest respect. We have to my knowledge no comparable statement of the reasons why those responsible for *Dios habla hoy* came to different conclusions, or indeed why German and other common language translators followed the same path as BFC. We would, however, plead for the *Dios habla hoy* translation strategy to be considered by translators in languages where similar questions arise. Three factors may work in favour of linguistic conservatism in this respect, but in our view none of them is decisive.

1. A tradition of translating ancient texts, including the Bible, using terms which grammatically correspond to the singular forms in the original. But if such forms, in the receptor language, connote a degree of familiarity absent from the original, then such a practice would appear to be a relic of formal correspondence

(or church language) translation, inappropriate in a functional/dynamic equivalence translation at the common language or indeed the literary language level.¹

2. A special problem in some languages concerns address to divine persons. As indicated above, the problem may also involve different denominational traditions. But as Ross (231) points out, usage in this respect is subject to change. To explore the christological implications of Jesus being “addressed with the formal or distant forms, because they know he is God and therefore insist he be addressed as such even by New Testament unbelievers” (Ross 231, referring to a personal communication from Nida) would be beyond the scope of this article. Systematic theologians would however describe such an attitude as at least implicit docetism, and therefore heresy. In any case, as the above examples show, the apparently inappropriate use of familiar forms is by no means limited to address to divine persons.

3. Some translators may assume that, in ancient times, people could interact freely with one another without needing to take account of differences of rank or social status. Perhaps such translators presuppose an idealistic picture, drawn from certain Old Testament texts, of a pastoral society in which anyone could take his case to the king or judge at a city gate. But that is far from the New Testament situation, in which Judæa and Galilee formed part of the mighty Roman Empire, and even relations within Judaism were highly stratified. As the above examples, and many other New Testament texts, show, social differences were clearly marked, if not realised, in grammatical structures on the surface of the text.

As we have already emphasized, we are not qualified to speak with the authority of a mother-tongue speaker about any of the languages or Bible translations discussed. Our more modest purpose has been twofold. *First*, we have indicated differences of practice between those responsible for current common language translations of the New Testament (including, in the case of BFC, a change of practice between two editions). *Second*, more importantly, our purpose has been to invite future common language translators, and revisers of their translations, as they prepare to begin their work, laying down principles and procedures for their project, to consider what is, in their language, common usage in the use of T- and V-forms, and how far they plan to follow it.

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A NOTE ON ERNST WENDLAND'S PAPER ON PSALM 73 in *BTT* JANUARY 1999

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I much appreciated this detailed paper, especially the single-column format of the Psalm, given on pages 146-147. Although I have always preferred that Bible versions use single-column formatting, especially of poetry to avoid numerous run-on lines, I have never seen a version which imitates the Hebrew (BHS) printing of poetry, where the two half-lines occupy the same line of printing, thereby

¹ A similar relic of formal correspondence in otherwise functional/dynamic equivalence translations would in our view be the translation of “Yahweh” in capitals as, for example in English, “the LORD”. See my article “The Lord: the final judge of functional equivalence?”, *BTT* 41 (1990) 345-350.