

Conclusion

The context, grammar, and theological patterns support the thesis that "the seed" in Galatians 3.16, 19 is specifically a reference to Jesus Christ and none other.¹¹ A corporate interpretation is not only impossible to establish grammatically, but it runs counter to Paul's argument throughout this entire section of the letter.

¹¹ This is made explicit by GNB ("The Scripture does not use the plural "descendants," meaning many people, but the singular "descendant," meaning one person only, namely Christ") and *Die Gute Nachricht* ("Nun gab Gott seine Zusage Abraham und seinen Nachkommen. Genau genommen hat er aber zu Abraham nicht gesagt: 'Deinen Nachkommen gilt diese Zusage,' als ob viele gemeint wären, sondern er hat gesagt: 'Deinem Nachkommen'. Er spruch nur von einem, nämlich von Christus.").

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TALKING ABOUT TRANSLATION: SOME OBSERVATIONS ON AN INTRODUCTORY TRANSLATION COURSE

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The purpose of this article is to share some results of a short introductory translation course for speakers of a vernacular language in Irian Jaya, the former Dutch New Guinea. I hope these will be helpful for others engaged in training national translators. Of course, this subject has been discussed several times already in *The Bible Translator*; but the circumstances in which the present course was held had special features, though no doubt comparable circumstances are found by other instructors working with people who became literate only recently.

The course was not aimed at making full-fledged translators of the students, but rather at providing them with more insight into the act of translation, in such a way that they would be able to transfer the portions of the Indonesian Old Testament which had not already been translated, and to use these passages in their sermons in Yali, the local vernacular. It was also expected that a better understanding of translating would help them to criticize more effectively the previous translation into Yali of the New Testament and portions of the Old.

The participants were native speakers of Yali, a non-Austronesian language of the Central Highlands of Irian Jaya. Some of them were bilingual in that they understood and used to some extent either the Mid Grand Valley or the Western dialect of Dani. Moreover, the Yali area under discussion was evangelized in the first instance by speakers of Western Dani. Although there are lexical differences between the Yali and Dani languages, the average cognation being between 60% and 70%, the morphological and syntactic structures are highly comparable. The Yali people also had contacts with Ekagi-speaking teachers who came in after the first signs of acceptance of the gospel, using low Indonesian as the means of communicating their wisdom. Although

Yali and Ekagi share only 5% of basic vocabulary, Yali told me that they "sought to understand" in a certain sense the Ekagi language. As far as knowledge of language is concerned, I am inclined to think that this seeming to understand was based mainly on situational evidence and partly common cultural background.

In the course of a rapid process of acculturation and the common acceptance of the "New Word", several Yali mastered some type of Indonesian, generally not of a high level. The participants in the language course, however, all being students of the Higher Bible School at the Landika mission station, acquired a fairly good passive working knowledge of official Indonesian as used in the 1977 Indonesian Alkitab. Moreover, at least two of the participants were deeply involved as principal informants in the Yali translation of the New Testament and parts of the Old. They did some tentative cross-dialect translation from Western Dani into Yali.

The previous knowledge of language phenomena shared by members of the Yali culture was not highly differentiated. The general word for sound, *une*, was used not only for human language, but also for animal communication (for example, *sue une*, bird's sound), for natural sounds (*bohól une*, thunder) and cultural sounds (*binggon une*, the sound of the Jew's harp). Other words were in use denoting specific sounds such as crying, yelling, groaning etc.

The art of translation was denoted by a form of the general term *miraltuk*, to switch, in connection with the verb *umburuk*, to put down, to write, that is, *une miraloko umburuk*. *Miraltuk* denoted a rather straightforward activity of directional change, involving no deep thoughts concerning translation.

A first check on translating sentences from Indonesian into Yali produced no results, except for very simple kernel sentences which could be translated by just replacing the words in the source text by words of the receptor language. A test of the New Testament translation resulted in nothing but the detection of printing errors. My conclusion was that neither the previous involvement in translation activities as informants, nor the use of Indonesian by these Yali speakers as students, had resulted in the development of a practically useful concept of translation.

One could argue, of course, that this failure to recognize the processes involved in translation was due to lack of training, especially to the lack of training of the first translator. However, such training would have been of no help, since the informants did not have another language at their disposal. In fact, they did some cross-dialect translation from Western Dani, which is structurally so similar to Yali that the simple view of translation was sufficient. Thus the way in which the Yali New Testament was translated was the traditional way of a western translator: learning the receptor language, then making proposals, discussing problems and checking formal features of the translated items, all with the enthusiastic help of monolingual informants struggling to understand the new message in their own language.

Although these informants eventually got a fairly good grip on Indonesian, and were apparently able to handle two languages reasonably well, they apparently could do this without being conscious of the principles of translation.

The first step in the course aimed to make the participants reflect on the nature of the human faculty of language. This was done, not by discussing the nature of communication (something so abstract that it could have created problems), but first by using biblical passages on language, and second by comparing the *une* of man and of animals.

In the discussion of biblical passages, special attention was given to the account of the tower of Babel. This passage was used as a starting point for illustrating the important distinction of form and meaning in language. Texts such as Gen. 2.19 were also discussed.

Genesis 11.1 says in Indonesian that the earth was *satu bahasanya dan satu logatnya* (TEV: "the people of the whole world had only one language and used the same words.") The distinction between *bahasa* and *logat* corresponds to the distinction between *safah* and *devarim* in Hebrew. Exegetes disagree about why these two terms are used. Is it an example of Hebrew parallelism, or do the words refer to two different aspects of language in its original unity? The second option seems the better, since the story says explicitly that the *safah* was disturbed, but does not say that this was also the case with the *devarim*. Moreover, the plural *devarim* suggests plurality, whilst the singular *safah* points to a whole. My conclusion is that in this pericope *safah* means language as a meaningful system, and that confusion in this system resulted in misunderstanding (compare verse 7), but not necessarily a sudden change in all parts of the system.

To apply this distinction on another level, I discussed the difference between the formal and the semantic aspects of language. Yali had already made this distinction too, but within one language, not using the distinction as a bridge to translation. They could say that people had one language, "*Inune misig-at werehima*" (their-sound one-only being), but at the same time that similar messages had more than one meaning ("*ebe undamon*", the inner body or content). In sermons the preachers tried to look for the *ebe* of the stories, i.e. their meaning for the hearers.

After having stressed these two aspects of language, the next issue was the comparison of human and animal communication. It was interesting to note how engrossed the students became in discussing this topic. The Yali pay far more attention than westerners to the sound of nature in animals and inanimate objects. They therefore stated emphatically that animals, such as pigs, whether in Europe or Indonesia, had one *une* from birth and consequently could understand each other everywhere, but that though humans had minds and could think, they had no *une* from birth, but learned a language from their parents and therefore could not understand each other unless their parents' *une* was the same.

At this point I introduced the simple unilinear model of communication, "A sends a message to B", and asked the students to describe the model in their own language. They used the general word *wene* for the message, and then came up with four phases in the transmitting process: *ahla buruk*, (the sender) thinks; *ambilikan uruk*, he speaks, utters by mouth; *esanggo holtuk*, (the receptor) hears; *ahla buruk*, he thinks, understands. It was interesting to note the fluent change from semantic to formal phases and back. The participants

insisted on the semantic aspect of a *wene*, while at the same time the *une* was necessary as the bearer of the message. They also reacted favourably when I used a can with its contents to illustrate the distinction between the packing (*eset*) as the *une* and the content as the *ebe*.

From here it was only a short step to translation. People can hear the *une* of a message in another language, but cannot find the *ebe* unless they are able to "open the can". Translating is "repacking" the original message transmitted by the sender, in such a way that the receptor is able to open the *eset* of his own *une* and understand the *ebe*.

It became clear to the participants that their former concept of *une miraloko umburuk*, "to change sound", was not the total process of translation, requiring to be preceded by analysis of the content in the source language and followed by restructuring in the receptor language.

The distinction between *une* and *ebe* was helpful again in explaining the difference between explicit and implicit information in languages. In struggling with the translation of Indonesian sentences into Yali, the students gained more insight into the fact that one language has *ebe* in its *une* in one way, and another language in another; and that translation therefore involves stating the complete *ebe* of the source, whether explicitly or implicitly.

I was impressed by the apparent ease with which the students identified the semantic categories to which the meanings of the words to be translated belonged. As far as I know the Yali had no specific term for "word".

Moreover, they are unhindered by the Greek philosophical influence which caused, and perhaps still causes, so much trouble for Europeans in their study of language. Nominalization is hardly possible in their language, so that the idea of reification is fortunately still far from their minds. The positive effect of the absence of the European tradition was in my opinion a factor in the speed with which they grasped the semantic aspects of the messages.

Yali now use the Indonesian *kata* for "word". I introduced the four main semantic categories (Object, Event, Abstract, Relation) using Indonesian terms which in fact distinguish word classes, not semantic categories. Nevertheless, the students immediately opted for a semantic use of these words, and thus were able to perform the analysis of Indonesian source sentences in a far more effective manner than I had expected. That is to say, the terms *katakerja* (verbs), *katabenda* (nouns), *katasifat* (adjectives) and *katasambung* (conjunctions) were used to interpret the *ebe* aspect of a message, despite the fact that they were understood to be primarily terms for the analysis of the *une* aspect. From the Yali point of view the meaning of messages is apparently more central in their approach to language than the grammatical aspects which cause westerners so much trouble. Of course, this does not prevent mistakes, but at least it puts translators in the right frame of mind for their task.

The course was too short to introduce more specific grammatical analysis in the formal sense. In any case, I wonder how far it is necessary to burden barely literate people with general grammatical theory in order to make them good translators. Nobody would argue that a translator could do his work without a good knowledge of his source language. But if, for example, such a source is Indonesian, and the receptor language is Yali, local translators can do a good job without the refinements of a linguistic theory designed by westerners for the

analysis of their own languages. That theory is very useful also for the analysis of the original biblical languages. But I think one of the participants expected too much, and greatly underrated the years of study ahead, when he remarked: "Now that I have understood a little bit how translation works, learning quickly would be a nice thing."

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A NEW TYPE OF HELP FOR TRANSLATORS¹

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Introduction

Discourse analysis and structural exegesis are rather new approaches to the interpretation and translation of Bible passages. Most of the (traditional) exegetical commentaries on the Bible or studies on translating seem to neglect the structure of Bible books as one clue for a better understanding of the text.

Even the *Translator's Handbooks* published so far have devoted little attention to it. The absence of a detailed analysis of structural matters seems to run parallel with the use of the TEV as starting-point for the discussions of pericopes and verses.² As soon as the importance of structural matters was acknowledged in one way or another, the authors of *Translator's Handbooks* found it necessary to quote the RSV (which follows as closely as possible the form and structure of the original text) as well, but always in a restricted way, viz., at the beginning of a section.³ The TEV has remained in use for the discussion of individual verses.⁴

¹ This article is based on the authors' paper for the ERTC meeting held on Cyprus, September 20–21, 1983. The authors are, of course, conscious of the fact that it mentions just some lines along which structural matters might be presented to translators. Nevertheless, they hope that the article may start a discussion on the importance of structural exegesis for translators of the Bible.

² Apart from the first two *Translator's Handbooks*, those on Mark and Luke, which use RSV.

³ From the *Translator's Handbook* on Thessalonians onwards.

⁴ Future *Translator's Handbooks*, however, beginning with that on Hebrews (1983) use RSV as a base text and as a running text repeated at the beginning of each verse, while TEV will be quoted as a translational model.