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THE TRANSLITERATION OF NEW TESTAMENT PROPER NAMES INTO ZULU

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The transliteration of biblical names from Hebrew and Hellenistic Greek into modern languages is a problem which Bible translators continue to face today, as was highlighted in a recent article (*TBT*, vol 46, no 3), which suggested that the time is ripe for a more detailed consideration of the question.

Zulu is a major Bantu language of South Africa, with approximately eight million speakers. Christian missionary work was commenced among them early in 1836 by a group of missionaries from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Although the date is not certain, the first Scripture portions in Zulu were published probably at the beginning of 1837, the first New Testament, in 1865, and the first complete Bible, in 1883.

Missionaries from other missions arrived later and, unfortunately, some found it difficult to work together even with fellow missionaries of their own denomination. This resulted in a number of different Scripture portions and New Testaments being published.

A study (Hermanson 1991) was done of these New Testament translations in Zulu, by missionaries of different linguistic and ecclesiastical backgrounds, from the earliest attempts to commit Scripture to print circa 1837, to the latest New Testament in Zulu, published in 1986. It showed that various translators, at different times, have attempted to solve the problems of the transliteration of names in different ways. This has resulted in extremely few names being spelt consistently throughout all the translations.

Early orthographies

At the beginning, the tendency seems to have been to spell names as the Zulus pronounced them. That was when the missionaries were battling to learn Zulu, a language so totally different from their own and the Hebrew, Greek and Latin they had studied at school and theological college. They were struggling to devise an orthography which would enable them to make an adequate transcription of the sounds of Zulu, which were new to their ears. Few, if any, Zulus, except the handful they were teaching, could read the words they wrote in the sand when Dr Adams opened the first school at Umlazi on 7 March 1836, and began to print on paper over a year later. For example, \l\ replaced \r\, or \r\ was omitted in *uAbelama* or *uAbehama* (Abraham). The missionaries were aware of the Zulu class prefixes, which is a feature of Bantu languages, and supplied the singular prefix *u*-\ and plural prefix *o*-\ to personal names, and *i*-\ or the locative *e*-\ to place names. They were also aware that Zulu has open syllables and, although they were not always consistent, they normally supplied names with a terminal vowel and, by vowel epenthesis (insertion), deletion, and sometimes substitution, eliminated non-Zulu consonant clusters and closed syllables from the names they transliterated from the biblical languages, or from their own names.

Influence of language of translator

Missionaries were often influenced by the form and pronunciation of names in their own language, or by their own ecclesiastical tradition. Bishop Colenso, an Anglican, therefore, wrote *uAndru* (Andrew) and the translators of the first New Testament *uAnderu* and *uPita* (Peter); the German Hermannsburgers wrote *uHiob* (Job), and the Swiss German translator of the Roman Catholic translation stated in a letter that he was influenced in his spelling of names by the Latin with which he was familiar.

English became the medium of education, particularly at schools such as Adams College and Inanda, founded by the American Zulu Mission. As more Zulus learnt to read and became more exposed to English, care would have been taken to ensure that they could pronounce the English phonemes correctly. As early as 15 May 1837, Adams reported that a group of boys could read from the New Testament. This was probably the English New Testament, for by that time the missionaries had not even begun to publish their elementary reading books. This led gradually to the introduction of non-Zulu consonant clusters and closed syllables into the biblical names in Zulu. This process culminated in an attempt to spell personal and place names with class prefixes, while keeping as close as possible to the English. This is evidenced by the orthography used in the American Bible Society version of 1917 and the Hermannsburg version of 1924. From reports written at the time it was clear that the American editor, Dr James Dexter Taylor, was not convinced that this orthographic decision had been correct; he would have preferred to be more conservative in maintaining Zulu phonological and syllabic structures in the transliterated names. However, when he took over, the project was already far advanced and he did not want to delay it.

Close transcription of Greek

Personal and place names in the latest version of the complete Zulu Bible, published in 1959, end with an open syllable, but contain many non-Zulu consonant clusters, and also, at times, follow the actual spelling of the Greek too closely. For example, the New Testament Greek for Nathan ends in a *mu* instead of a *nu*, so that Nathan in the Zulu Old Testament is *uNathani* (2 Sam 5.14), whereas in the New Testament he is *uNathamu* (Lk 3.31). This Bible was being translated at a time when there was a major change in the orthography of Zulu. It is possible that this influenced the way in which some of the names were spelt, particularly in marking whether or not the bilabial plosive should be implosive, and whether or not the other plosives should be aspirated.

Adaptation to sound system of receptor language

The translators of the 1986 dynamic equivalent version of the New Testament in Zulu made a conscious effort to "spell the names as they are generally pronounced by Zulus today" (Joëlson, letter 11-08-88). A comparison of names in the published New Testament with those in the list of suggested spellings produced by the translation committee early in their work, and even with those in their interim publications, such as *Indaba Enhle kaNkulunkulu* (The Good News of God), containing Mark, Acts, Ephesians and Psalms, shows that they have not simply transcribed the Greek and supplied initial and terminal vowels. Nor, with the possible exception of the decision to supply \-*u*\ as terminal vowel to names derived from Latin and \-*o*\ to those derived from Greek, have they formulated rules and

applied them mechanically. They have rather sought to discover how the Zulu would most naturally pronounce each name today. This includes the use of consonant clusters which originally were not Zulu, but which are commonly heard in Zulu speech today, whether or not there is an acceptable way for the non-Zulu cluster to be resolved into Zulu phonemes and syllables. This is obviously acceptable, since not only has the Zulu Language Board introduced such non-Zulu clusters into the language in the terminology accepted for use in schools, but also Zulu and its cognate languages have sometimes adopted words from Afrikaans and English, adapting them completely to the African linguistic system, and sometimes by incorporating non-African consonant clusters, so that there may be two different adoptives for the same object, e.g. *ibhulashi*; *ibhrashi* (brush).

The process of transliteration

More than transcription Transliteration is much more than transcription. In the case of New Testament names, it is far more than rewriting the Greek, letter for letter, and substituting each Greek letter with a letter from the Roman alphabet in which Zulu is written.

More than substituting phonemes The process of transliteration is also much more than what has been called transphonologisation, that is, substituting the Greek phonemes with the phonemes in the Zulu phonemic system which have the closest distinctive features to those in the Greek system. This is important, but in transliterating Hellenistic Greek names into Zulu it is not as significant as it is when transliterating into Zulu words from Afrikaans, English, or any other modern language. Although much research has been done, it was found that scholars of Classical and Hellenistic Greek are not completely agreed on the phonemes represented by the letters of the Greek alphabet; there are different schools of thought regarding how Hellenistic Greek was pronounced.

Receptor language more important than source In transliteration, the phonological system of the receptor language, that into which one is transliterating, is more important than the phonological system of the source language. The original missionary translators into Zulu seem to have realised this and, with their extremely limited knowledge of the language, tried to represent the biblical names as the Zulus would most naturally pronounce them according to the Zulu phonological system.

This is what is recommended for those transliterating biblical names into a language which has no biblical tradition and little contact with languages with a completely different phonemic system from their own. It is unfortunate that the later translators did not follow the lead of their predecessors. Many problems could have been avoided, if they had closely studied the way in which the Zulu themselves were adopting words from English and Afrikaans into Zulu during the pre-bilingual period, and then transliterated biblical names and theological terms following the same principles. However, those who were being taught to read were not only being taught to read Zulu, they were also being taught English and other subjects such as grammar, arithmetic, history and geography, all of which required their share of words transliterated from English. It is no wonder, then, that as those who could read gained at the same time proficiency in English, so the missionaries, their teachers, felt less need for transliterations to follow Zulu phonological patterns. A

contributing factor was the fact that most of the pupils and also converts were being given English names, many of which were derived from the Bible.

Languages are in constant change

Modern languages are not closed systems. They are constantly developing, and are open to change and to adopt, not only words from other languages by transliteration, but also other features from languages with which they are in contact, including phonological features of those languages. Zulu is no exception, and it was found that many formerly non-Zulu phonemes are now commonly heard in spoken Zulu, particularly in urban areas. Many such phonemes are also included in the official Zulu Terminology and Orthography (1972).

Applying transliteration principles

In transliterating biblical names into Zulu today, Bible translators should try as far as possible to ensure that the resultant Zulu noun not only has a class prefix and terminal vowel, but that it has open syllables, and the closest natural equivalent Zulu phonemes to those which have been accepted traditionally as the phonemes of Hellenistic Greek.

The resultant Zulu is most important, so care must be taken not to use artificial rules, based on the origin of the words being transliterated, to determine the Zulu. Rather, the acceptability of the final form in Zulu by the Zulus themselves should be the main criterion. For example, the Greek name *Theophilos* could be transposed as *Theofilos*. It could be transliterated into a Zulu noun by adding the class prefix *u*-\, deleting the final consonant so as to have an open terminal syllable, and epenthesising the semi-vowel \-*y*-\ between the two vowels of the non-Zulu diphthong to produce two Zulu syllables, with the resultant *uTheyofilo*. Then changing the terminal vowel to \-*u*\ by assimilation, as was done in the 1959 Zulu Bible, results in the name *uTheyofilu*. The 1986 New Testament, however, has transliterated this name as *uTofilasi*, which is obviously not arrived at by the application of mechanical rules, but by representing a name to which Zulus are accustomed, in the way in which they pronounce it. Koopman (1976:87), found this name spelt in identity documents as *Theophilus* and *Theopplis*, and Sir Theophilus Shepstone, a former governor, was well known to the Zulus. Commenting on the acceptance of this name, Joëlson (letter 11-08-88), said: "We started from scratch, listening to the way the ordinary people pronounced the names. The name Tofilasi was accepted after some objection from my side. Classical was Baba Maseko's argument: 'Mfundisi (Pastor), if you want this to be a dynamic translation, you must have the names as the people know them.' No objection to the form Tofilasi came from the Review Committee."

A possible future problem

After the publication of the New Testament and Psalms in Zulu in 1986, and the retirement of the translation co-ordinator, the Rev. Nils Joëlson and his return to Sweden, the Bible Society of South Africa decided not to continue for the time being with a new translation of the Old Testament into Zulu. If the Zulu-speaking churches feel the need for a dynamic translation of the Old Testament along the lines of the 1986 New Testament and Psalms, the Bible Society may possibly be called upon and agree to assist. In that case the problem of transliterating biblical names from Hebrew into Zulu will arise. It is hoped that the translators will then

give attention to the problem at an early stage and that they will attempt to reproduce the Hebrew names with the closest possible equivalent in Zulu. Care will need to be taken that the names in the currently used Bible, originally published in 1959, are not changed simply for the sake of change. Also, the suggested Zulu forms will need to be tested over as wide a geographical and ecclesiastical area as possible to ensure their acceptability. There is always the temptation of those involved in the work to tend to force their own point of view, and to assume that because they are able to pronounce certain words everyone else should also be able to.

Using existing linguistic expertise

There have been great advances in recent years in the study of African languages. Previously, the missionaries, those who were responsible for Bible translation, were some of the very few who had any knowledge of African linguistics. They therefore had to rely on their own observations of the grammar and sound system of the receptor language. Today, however, there are highly trained African linguists who have made an in-depth study of their mother tongue, and who thus have a contribution to make when linguistic problems arise. Just as Bible translators refer their theological, exegetical, and biblical language problems to experts in those fields, so too they should be prepared to request help from African linguists when they are dealing with the transliteration of biblical proper names, and other linguistic, grammatical, or orthographical problems.

Co-operation between translators of cognate languages

It could also prove helpful for Bible translators in related languages to meet and see how far it may be possible to standardise the spelling and pronunciation of biblical proper names within the languages of the group, for example, the Nguni languages Southern Ndebele, Swati, Xhosa and Zulu; and Southern Sotho, Northern Sotho and Tswana. This would be particularly helpful in churches in the cosmopolitan areas of Southern Africa, where the preacher uses one language for preaching, and his congregation consists of speakers of different languages, each with a Bible in his own language. It sometimes seems that some of the differences in the spelling of proper names in the Bibles of cognate languages have been introduced to identify one translation as different from another, rather than because a significant difference, which must be reflected in the way in which adoptives from the biblical languages are incorporated into the receptor language, actually exists between them.

Munthali (1977, 1981), found the names in the Bibles in the languages of Africa as nauseating as flies in the soup, and as disfiguring as pock marks. With the necessary attention to the genius of Zulu phonological and morphological structure, and the processes by which words other than names are adopted into Zulu, it is hoped that, whatever may have been the case in the past, the transliterated names in future Zulu translations of the Bible will be pleasing to the ear and eye of the Zulu reader, and add to, rather than detract from, the beauty of the biblical text.

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MACARONIC SCRIPTURE TRANSLATION?

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Introduction

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

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

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

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