

Names equivalent to *Benyamin* are sometimes “Son of good luck,” “Happy future,” “Born to see good things.” If a language has names like these, it is often possible to use them in translation to make the contrast in the meanings clear.

This article will appear as part of the introduction to the forthcoming book *A Handbook on Genesis*. Throughout this Handbook special attention is called to the handling of names, particularly names that have a special symbolic significance for the context in which they are introduced.

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SPECIAL FEATURES OF FIJIAN PRONOUNS AND THEIR USE IN BIBLE TRANSLATION

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With a community of over 350,000 speakers and another 300,000 people using it as a lingua franca, Fijian is one of the major languages spoken in the South Pacific.

One important feature of the Fijian language is the elaborate system of pronouns and the role played by the pronouns. In this article I would like to survey some of the features of the Fijian pronoun system and discuss the effect they have for Bible translation.

Four classes of number

While most of the major modern European languages distinguish only between the singular and the plural, Fijian has four classes of number, which have been named **singular**, **dual**, **trial**, and **plural**. We know that Old Testament Hebrew also has a dual form, and this feature exists in some other languages such as classical Greek, Sanskrit and certain Slavic languages. However in Hebrew the dual form is mostly restricted to objects which occur naturally in pairs, such as “two wings” (Exo 25.20), “two eyes” (Gen 49.12), “two horns” (Dan 8.3), or to a lesser extent to units of measurement and time, such as “two days” (Exo 16.29), “two years” (Gen 11.10), “two cubits” (Exo 25.23). In other words, the Hebrew dual forms are confined to nouns, whereas its pronouns, adjectives, and verbs are inflected only for singular and plural forms.

In Fijian it is the pronouns which command the most attention and which are distinguished between the four classes of number. The Fijian language has only singular and plural forms for the nouns (although numerals can be used to convey number more precisely, when required). In the case of pronouns, however, the singular is used for one and only one, the dual for two and only two, the trial for three or a few, and the plural for many.

There is no sharp division between the forms that are called trial and plural, and the number they stand for may be indefinite. For instance the

numerical value of the trial form may vary from three to six or seven. The plural is also indefinite and may refer to ten or to ten thousand. In fact either trial or plural may be used within a certain range according to the needs and the understanding of the speaker. The trial should really be thought of as a “limited” plural, and can often best be translated by “a few” or “several”. The plural is unlimited, and is best expressed as “many”.

Let’s take as an example the second person pronouns used as the subject at the beginning of an utterance (a statement, a question or an order). While there is only one word available for use in English, “you”, Fijian has the following, all referring to a person or persons spoken to:

Second person pronouns used as subjective pronouns:

Singular	<i>o</i>	you (one)
Dual	<i>o drau</i>	you (two)
Trial	<i>o dou</i>	you (three or several)
Plural	<i>o ni</i>	you (many)

When the second person pronouns are used as the object of a sentence (known as “objective pronouns”), they have the following forms:

Singular	<i>iko</i>	you (one)
Dual	<i>kemudrau</i>	you (two)
Trial	<i>kemudou</i>	you (few)
Plural	<i>kemuni</i>	you (many)

The four classes of number in Fijian pronouns can show other things in addition to numerical value. The various forms are also used as a mark of respect or deference to address or to refer to human beings, regardless of the number of people involved. Thus the singular may be used in speaking to or in referring to children, juniors, friends and acquaintances, while the dual can be used for a stranger of the same age as the speaker and whose status is not known. Then there are certain kinship relations which may require the dual or trial even when only one person is addressed. And finally the plural can be reserved for God, royalty, chiefs, old people, and strangers in general.

The Fijian speaker also has to distinguish the third person pronouns between different classes of number and between the subjective and objective uses. Depending on his particular needs, he has to make the right choice from the following forms:

	<i>Subjective</i>		<i>Objective</i>	
Singular	<i>e</i>	he, she, it	<i>koya</i>	him, her, it
Dual	<i>e rau</i>	they (two)	<i>rau</i>	them (two)
Trial	<i>e ratou</i>	they (few)	<i>iratou</i>	them (few)
Plural	<i>e ra</i>	they (many)	<i>ira</i>	them (many)

I have already referred to the important role pronouns play in Fijian discourse. Whenever more than one participant is mentioned for the first time in the discourse, whether as subject or object of the sentence, it is absolutely necessary to provide the pronoun at the beginning of the utterance to indicate the number. Thus to say "the young men are awake", the Fijian speaker will have to determine immediately whether there are two young men, a few young men or many young men; then he will naturally produce the appropriate sentence:

"They (*erau*, two) are awake the young men."

"They (*eratou*, a few) are awake the young men."

"They (*era*, many) are awake the young men."

To say "I saw the children", the speaker can produce one of the following sentences:

"I saw them (*rau*, two) the children."

"I saw them (*iratou*, a few) the children."

"I saw them (*ira*, many) the children."

Inclusive and exclusive pronouns

In English as in other European languages, two kinds of situation are covered by the use of the pronoun "we":

(a) A situation in which the speaker excludes the person or persons she is speaking to, that is to say when "we" could be replaced by "he and I" or "they and I":

We would like to come and stay with you.

We have come to ask your opinion.

(b) A situation in which the speaker includes the person or persons she is speaking to, that is to say when "we" could be replaced by "you and I":

Are we going to let him in?

We might just as well tell them what we think.

This distinction is expressed in Fijian and two sets of pronouns are in use in the first person in the dual, trial, and plural numbers. This inclusive-exclusive feature, which is found in both simple pronouns and their possessive forms (pronouns and adjectives), is found in many other languages around the world.

An unusual system of noun classes

Another important feature of Fijian pronouns is the distinction between different classes of nouns. There are four classes of objects,

determined by their qualities as **possessed items**, which require different forms of all the pronouns. These different forms should not be confused with English pronouns which may reflect the gender of the possessors (in the case of third person singular “his”, “hers”, “its”) and never the class of the possessed items.

Strictly speaking the pronouns used in referring to the possessors of the various items are known to grammarians as possessive pronouns. They are pronouns like the English “my, your, his, her, its, our, your, their” and possessive adjectives “mine, yours, his, hers, its, ours, yours, theirs”.

In Fijian the four noun classes are:

(1) **Possessible** items in general, taking normal or “neutral” pronoun forms

(2) **Edible** items, to which are linked “edible” pronoun forms

(3) **Drinkable** items, to which are linked “drinkable” pronoun forms

(4) **Body parts and kinship**, taking “familiar” pronoun suffixed forms

Thus there are a number of different ways of saying “my”, for example, depending on whether the possessed item is an object in general, or an edible object, or a drinkable object, or a body part or relative:

General	cat	<i>pusi</i>
	my cat	<i>noqu pusi</i>
Edible	fish	<i>ika</i>
	my fish	<i>kequ ika</i>
Drinkable	beer	<i>bia</i>
	my beer	<i>mequ bia</i>
Familiar	hand	<i>liga</i>
	my hand	<i>ligaqu</i>
	mother	<i>tina</i>
	my mother	<i>tinaqu</i>

It is interesting to note the shades of meaning that can be expressed with the Fijian pronoun system. For instance, if the word *ika* is referred to as *kequ ika*, the speaker, in saying “my fish”, indicates that the fish is to be eaten; but if he says *noqu ika*, also meaning “my fish”, he then obviously treats the fish as merchandise meant to be sold and not for his own consumption.

A challenge to the Bible translator

When all the various features such as number, noun class, inclusive–exclusive first person are taken into account, it is obvious that the Fijian pronoun system is very complex. So the translator involved in rendering the Bible text into Fijian is constantly confronted with the problem of

determining the right number of participants and of choosing the correct pronouns. And this is a very constant exercise. To translate “we”, for instance, there are six Fijian words to choose from; to render “our” there are twenty-four possible forms to consider.

The Fijian Bible is a translation which was made and published in the mid-19th century, although its text was later revised in 1902 and 1931. This version is still widely used by the Fijian people, though a new translation of the New Testament has been published in recent years. A new translation of the Old Testament has also been produced and that text is being reviewed at the present time.

In what follows I will examine a number of passages from the old version, to show how the complexities of Fijian pronouns affect both the understanding of that text and new translation efforts.

A few or many?

As I have already said, pronouns are an integral part of Fijian discourse; and even when a subject is mentioned for the first time, a pronoun has to be supplied at the beginning to indicate the number of participants involved. This can present a challenge to the translator as well as to the reader when the text does not tell us the exact number of participants.

The word “cherubim” in Ezekiel 10 is a good example. The context is a vision about the idolatry and the punishment of the people of Jerusalem. The whole chapter talks about the glory of Yahweh departing from the Temple and mentions repeatedly the presence of some “cherubim”. GNB renders the term “winged animals” and provides a footnote which says “Animals with four wings and four faces, thought of as guarding God’s throne and symbolizing God’s majesty.”

In the old Fijian Bible the pronouns used for “cherubim” throughout the chapter are the trial forms such as *eratou* and *iratou*, except in verse 17 where the cherubim are once referred to as *vei ira* meaning “with them many”, probably in confusion with the presence of many wheels. Obviously the translator, rightly understanding that there were just a few cherubim (at least four) involved in the vision, always used the trial forms – but inadvertently slipped in one plural form. In the new translation, the cherubim were referred to in the plural forms in the first draft, probably due to the misleading *vei ira* in the old version; the trial forms are now used instead.

Another example of a problem with pronouns is found in Ezekiel 13.1-16 where the text has to do with God condemning “false male prophets”. The problem of deciding on the number of “false male prophets” is made more difficult here by the fact that the Hebrew text sometimes refers to the prophets in the third person plural (verses 2-4, 6, 9a, 10-11, 15a, 15c, 16), and sometimes addresses them with the second person plural “you” (verses 5, 7-8, 9b, 12, 14, 15b). There are also a few other instances of a singular “you”, by which the prophet Ezekiel refers to himself as the one who hears God’s message (verses 2, 11) or to the nation Israel collectively (verse 4). Nevertheless interpreters generally understand that both the plural “they”

and the plural “you” in this passage refer to the same group of people, the “prophets”, and the GNB rendering affirms this understanding.

The old Fijian Bible follows the text quite literally in this passage, using the third person plural forms *era*, *ira*, *-dra* wherever the Hebrew text has the third person plural, and using the second person trial forms *dou*, *nomudou*, *kemudou* wherever the Hebrew text has the second person plural. The early translator must have had the idea that there were many false prophets, but that when God addressed them as “you”, there were just a few. The switch between plural and trial forms was thus the result of the translator’s own understanding, but it leaves the Fijian reader quite confused. After all, the Hebrew text does not make any distinction between a small group of false prophets and a large group of false prophets. The meaning of the passage would be much clearer if the second person pronouns were changed from the trial forms to the plural forms in order to match the third person plural forms. This is the solution which the new translation has taken.

The issue of identifying the number of participants arises again in the Book of Zechariah, first in the passage about the vision of the horns in 1.18-21. Although the Hebrew text clearly indicates that there are four horns and four temple workmen, the Hebrew pronoun “these” which occurs three times in the text can easily lead to a wrong understanding. The problem is further compounded by the need to say “them” in Fijian (*ira* “the people of”) together with “Judah”, “Israel”, and “Jerusalem” in verses 19 and 21, thus bringing to the scene a third large group of participants. If the various participants are correctly identified, the meaning of the passage is quite clear. The prophet Zechariah saw four horns symbolizing the powerful nations which have scattered the people of Judah and Israel; then came four temple workmen who frightened away the nations. The workmen symbolize God’s intervention and the victory of his people (Judah and Israel), achieved through peaceful and constructive means such as the work of Temple-building. The difficulty lies in verses 20-21 which says literally:

²⁰ And showed me Yahweh four workmen. ²¹ And I said, what (are) these coming to do? And he said saying, these (are) the horns which have scattered Judah, so that a man not lifts up his head. But have come these to terrify them, to throw down the horns of the nations who lifted up (their) horn against the land of Judah to scatter her.

The word “these” occurs three times in verse 21 and can be quite misleading. It is natural for the reader to take the first “these” in the prophet’s question as referring to the noun “workmen” which comes immediately before it. But then the second “these”, which occurs in the beginning of God’s reply, could easily be wrongly understood as referring to the workmen again; in fact it should rather be understood as referring to the four horns mentioned earlier in verses 18-19. The third “these” can then be easily understood as referring to the workmen who came to counter the scattering action of the horns.

Throughout this passage the translator of the old Fijian Bible uses the third person trial pronouns such as *iratou*, *ratou*, *eratou*, and *nodratou*

to refer to the four horns or the four workmen. But he has rendered the prophet's question in the most confusing way by saying "What are these many coming to do to these few?" thus giving the impression that it was the many people of Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem who came to do something to the several workmen or horns in question. This misunderstanding of the prophet's question will need to be addressed by the reviewers when the Bible text is revised. In the new translation trial form pronouns are used for the four horns and the four workmen, but when the four horns are identified with powerful nations of the world, the latter are referred to in plural forms.

The second chapter of Zechariah contains a similar problem. The expression "daughter (of) Zion" in verse 10 is grammatically one single person in the Hebrew text; hence "in your midst" is in the form of second person singular feminine, though it actually refers to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The Fijian text, however, instead of keeping the Hebrew form (second person singular), adopts for the expression "in your midst" the trial form *kemudou*, thus giving the impression that there were several daughters of Zion. Here the plural form *kemuni* "of you many" would fit better to give the figurative meaning "people of Jerusalem" as rendered by GNB and the new Fijian version.

Which "our" to use?

Given the large number of Fijian words meaning "our", the Bible translator needs to look at the context constantly to identify the number of the participants and whether the person(s) spoken to are included or not. The expressions "our God" and "our Lord ..." are mostly rendered by the plural inclusive form *noda* "of me and of you many", indicating that the writer considers God not only as his own but also as the God or Lord of the people he is addressing, and ultimately of all readers at large. There are, however, some exceptions in the old Fijian version, such as two instances of "our God" in 1 & 2 Thessalonians (see 1 Thes 2.2; 2 Thes 1.11) in which the trial exclusive form *neitou* "of me and of them two" is used instead. This choice is understandable in view of the introduction found in both letters, where the writer Paul indicates clearly that the letters were co-authored by two other colleagues, Silas and Timothy, hence the use of the trial form "our God" ("of me and of Silas and Timothy").

An edible or a possessible?

Since the use of pronouns in Fijian requires the distinction between four classes (edible, drinkable, neutral, familiar) of items possessed, it is interesting to find out how the translator of the old Fijian Bible tackled the problem of classifying certain ambiguous items such as "sacrifice", the "passover lamb", and the terms "body" and "blood" in the narrative(s) of the Last Supper.

In general, the old Fijian version considers "sacrifice" as a general possessible item, so it is referred to by neutral pronouns. For instance, in Exodus 23.18; 34:15, 25 and Leviticus 7.16 "my sacrifice" and "his

sacrifice” are mentioned in association with eating and yet each is referred to as a neutral item (*noqu, nona*) and not as an edible item (*kequ, kena*).

However there is an exception to this, the “passover lamb” in Exodus 12.5, which the old Fijian version considers as a food item rather than as a sacrifice. The pronoun or possessive adjective used in the text is the edible second person trial form *kemudou* “[a lamb] of you few people”. Understandably this usage reflects the context of verse 4, where it is stated that the lamb is to meet the need of one average-size household, presumably made up of a few people, and to be eaten by them. Domestic animals such as cattle and sheep, though meant to be eaten, are generally referred to as possessions with neutral pronouns, such as the second person plural *nomuni* “[flocks and herds] of you many people” in Exodus 12.32.

Lastly the “body” and the “blood” used in John 6.54-56 as symbols of Christ’s sacrifice are not treated by either version as edible and drinkable objects, even though they are said in the text to be eaten and drunk. The apparent reason is that the passage is taken to be about the institution of a memorial and not about the actions of eating and drinking themselves. Hence the translators of both versions use the familiar pronoun for the body part (*lewequ* “my body”) and the neutral pronoun for the blood part (*noqu dra* “my blood”).

Conclusion

Because the Fijian pronoun system is so extensive and elaborate, speakers are able to express many subtle distinctions and shades of meaning in their use of pronouns. But from a different perspective the range of meanings which are possible in almost every context makes the task of the Bible translator in Fijian a very exacting one.

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REVISING THE SHELLABEAR BIBLE: Reviving an old translation for a special audience

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A Christian organization in West Java is working among people of Muslim background. Some time ago this organization approached the Indonesian Bible Society (IBS) and requested a special edition of the Indonesian Bible with appropriate names and terms for their ministry among this audience. At first they asked for the permission of the IBS to produce such an edition from either the Indonesian formal translation or the Indonesian common language translation. Armed with computer technology and a table of changes to be carried through consistently, it should be easy to produce such an “altered” edition.

Although the IBS was fully sympathetic with the request, it was not too keen on allowing changes to names and terms in the widely accepted