

basis, the foreign origin of any given word does not necessarily mean that it should be rejected, but the archaic nature of a word almost always does.

“Christian” or “spiritual” language versus “common” language

The original language of the New Testament is called *koine* or “common” Greek. It was truly the language of the people. God chose not to communicate the message of his Son in a lofty, formalized language. He made sure that the New Testament was written in a (trade) language that was clearly understood by the common person of the day. The average first-century Greek speaker could read or listen to any of the writings of the New Testament and say, “This book speaks the very same language I speak!” This no doubt helped to reinforce the idea that the message of the Gospel is relevant to every area of life.

What then are we communicating when we translate the New Testament into a form that is very different from the common language of the readers? A Bible that is written in a form that sounds heavy and out-of-date may tend to reinforce in the minds of the readers the notion that there should be a distinct separation between Christianity and the everyday affairs of life. Most languages have a written style which is somewhat different from the spoken style of the language. However, in considering this factor we need to be careful that we do not use it as an excuse for bringing in archaisms or newly invented vernacular terms as we see fit.

Clear communication, or language preservation?

Bible translation is a tremendous privilege, but at the same time it is an awesome responsibility. It is of utmost importance that each person involved in the Bible translation task not lose sight of the primary goal – that of communicating the message of the Scriptures in the clearest possible way.

All the languages of the world will change or disappear some day. Any attempt to preserve them as they are will be temporary at best. However, as the Scriptures say, God’s Word is eternal. It will never pass away, and neither will the benefits of communicating the message of his Word in a clear and understandable way.

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WHO’S WHO IN ROMANS 16? Identifying men and women among the people Paul sent greetings to

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A number of years ago while checking Romans 16 in a translation in Africa, it occurred to me to ask the translators what they could tell me about Aquila and Priscilla. The most that they could say was that “these

two men were apostles before Paul was." A number of years later while I was checking a translation in the Paraguayan Chaco, I asked the same question and was told, "These two women were apostles before Paul was." That surprised me, so I asked how the translators knew these two persons were women. "Because," they replied, "their names both end in the letter *a*, and since most Spanish names ending in *a* are female, the two people must be women."

Additional checking with other teams in several different countries of Latin America and West Africa revealed that translators were not always certain which of the twenty-six people mentioned in chapter 16, not including Phoebe, were women. Nine, in fact, are women: Priscilla (verse 3), Mary (verse 6), Junia (verse 7), Tryphena and Tryphosa (verse 12), Persis (verse 12), the mother of Rufus (verse 13), Julia (verse 15), and the sister of Nereus (verse 15).

Commentators have approached the names in Romans 16 from several different perspectives. Some have attempted to determine which of the men and women named were Jews and which were Gentiles. Some have sought to determine the socio-economic status of the persons named. While such studies have their own value in efforts to understand as much as possible about the makeup of the Christian community in Rome, the results have little, if any, importance for the translation of the names. It is, however, important for both translators and readers to understand that Paul was greeting women as well as men in this chapter.

When translators learn that some of these persons were women, they almost always agree that readers should be made aware of this. In the following paragraphs I will focus on the nine persons identified above as women, indicating what we can know about them, and I will suggest ways in which translations may make clear that women as well as men are mentioned.

Priscilla and Aquila (verses 3-5)

The Greek text of verse 3 refers to *Priskan*, as do 1 Corinthians 16.19 and 2 Timothy 4.19. Some translations transliterate the Greek as "Prisca" (RSV), while others use the spelling "Priscilla" (NLT, FrCL, GNB), harmonizing with the diminutive form of the name as it is spelled in Acts 18.2, 18 and 26. If Romans 16.3-5 were the only mention of these two people in the New Testament, readers might think that these were two men, or even two women. Since Paul writes that the church meets in their home, readers may guess that they were husband and wife. But since Acts 18 clearly identifies them as husband and wife, there is no need to guess. I usually recommend that translators follow the model of the German Common Language translation (GeCL, 1982), which alone among common language translations says, *Grüßt das Ehepaar Aquila und Priska* "Greet the married couple Aquila and Priscilla."

Interpreters frequently note that Priscilla is often mentioned before Aquila (Rom 16.3; 2 Tim 4.19; Acts 18.18, 26). The reason for this is not clear. Perhaps Priscilla came from a higher social status, or perhaps she was more active in the work of the church than Aquila was (Peter Lampe, "Prisca", page 467). Some translators find it odd that the wife would be mentioned before the husband and would prefer to reverse the

order of the names here in verse 3, as in GeCL, but the order should be preserved since it gives prominence to Priscilla. However, we should recognize that a translation such as “Greet the married couple Priscilla and Aquila” will probably lead readers in some languages to identify Priscilla as the husband.

All that the *Translator’s Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (page 291) says regarding Priscilla and Aquila is that they “are no doubt the two persons mentioned in Acts (see in particular Acts 18; cf. 1 Corinthians 16.19).” But this is inadequate. Translators often do not remember Acts 18 and will not bother to turn to check it. They will not know, therefore, that this is a married couple and will not even consider a rendering such as that found in GeCL.

Junia (verse 7)

The difficulties here are well known. The circumflex accent on the accusative *Iouinian* results in a man’s name: Junias. The acute accent on *Iouinian* will make a woman’s name: Junia. Some interpreters have simply assumed that for this person to be called an apostle, this must be a man. S.F. Hunter, for example, states that “in all probability this is the masculine” (page 1165), but no reason is given for this conclusion. Moffatt goes so far as to translate, “Salute Andronicus and Junias – they are men of note among the apostles.” Goodspeed similarly translates, “Remember me to Andronicus and Junias. They are noted men among the missionaries.” Nearly the same is Phillips, “they are outstanding men among the messengers.”

Clarence Jordan’s Cotton Patch Version rendering clearly shows both Andronicus and Junia(s) to be men and is also interesting for its cultural adaptation: “Warm regards to Andy and Junior, my kinsfolk and fellow captives, who are highly respected in ministerial circles.” More recently, Cassirer (*God’s New Covenant: A New Translation*, Eerdmans, 1989) translates in the text, “Andronicus and Junias, fellow countrymen of mine who share my imprisonment.” In a note he provides the alternate translation, “Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews and fellow prisoners.”

Elizabeth Castelli tartly comments on the “remarkable interpretive contortions, resulting ultimately in a sex-change-by-translation” (page 279). She further states, “Once again, the argument is a circular syllogism: since, by definition, women cannot be apostles, when a woman is called an apostle, she is either not an apostle or she is not a woman” (page 280).

In his expanded paraphrase, F.F. Bruce translates, “and to my kinsfolk Andronicus and Junia, who shared my imprisonment – *a couple* [italics mine] well-known in the circle of the apostles.” Stanley Stowers states without further argument that Andronicus and Junia “worked as a husband and wife team” (page 75), and this view seems to be the more widely held view today. According to Fitzmyer, “Many ancient commentators up to the twelfth century understood either Iouinian or Ioulian to be the wife of Andronicus” (page 737). An examination of both Greek texts and modern translations, according to whether they have “Junias” or “Junia,” tends to show that a consensus has not yet been reached, although we can no longer say, as Brooten did in 1977, that “virtually all modern biblical translations have Junias (m.) rather than Junia (f.)” (page 141).

The discussion regarding Andronicus and Junia(s) in the *Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Romans* is woefully inadequate: "Andronicus and Junias are not mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament; they could easily have been husband and wife, or brother and sister." Andronicus and Junia may indeed have been husband and wife, but what about Andronicus and Junias?! There is no discussion of the problem of accenting the name *Iounian* and no discussion of the lexical issue. Then a few lines later the handbook states, "They are well known among the apostles has been understood by some to mean 'the apostles know them well,' but a far more acceptable interpretation would imply that *these men* [italics mine] were counted as apostles and were well known."

Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis (verse 12)

The Greek text makes clear that these are all women. However, many English translations do not indicate the gender of Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis. NRSV is typical of such translations: "Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord." It is possible, however, in English to show that they are women. NIV, for example, says, "Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord." Similarly NCV says, "Those women work very hard." Numerous commentators point to the interesting way the two names are placed together and Paul's comment about these two women. Their names mean "Dainty" and "Delicate," yet Paul says that they "work hard in the Lord." It is tempting to translate these two names rather than transliterate them, but no translation does so.

The relationship, if any, between these two women is uncertain. According to Lightfoot, "it was usual to designate members of the same family by derivatives of the same root" (*St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, pages 175-6). Fitzmyer states that they "are probably to be regarded as sisters" (page 741), and most interpreters agree. However, since any relationship is a matter of speculation, translators should not say "the sisters Tryphaena and Tryphosa." Mary Rose D'Angelo argues, somewhat convincingly, that the context in Romans favors the view that these two women were "a missionary couple, partners in the early Christian mission" (page 73).

In some languages such as French and Spanish, where adjectives and articles must agree in gender with the noun, a literal translation shows that these are women. *La Bible du Semeur* says *qui toutes deux travaillent*. RVR (1960) says *las cuales trabajan en el Señor*. RVR (1995) takes a step backward for the sake of style, rendering *que trabajan en la obra del Señor*. *La Biblia de las Américas* refers to these two women as *obreras del Señor*.

Clarence Jordan was admittedly doing a cultural translation in his Cotton Patch Version, so we are not surprised to see names such as "Prissy and Adrian" instead of Priscilla and Aquila, or "Elwood, who was the first real Christian in Alabama" instead of "Epaenetus, who was the first Christian in Asia." In verse 12 "Pearl," instead of Persis, is certainly recognized as a woman's name in the southern United States. But why does he say for Tryphaena and Tryphosa, "Greetings to Truman and Trudy"?

Persis (verse 12)

As noted above, translations such as NRSV do not help the English reader know whether Persis is a man or a woman. But it is possible to make clear that Persis is a woman. Moffatt says, for example, "Salute the beloved Persis; she has worked very hard." NIV says, "Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord"; and NCV (similarly Cassirer) has "She also has worked very hard for the Lord." In languages such as Spanish, French, and Portuguese, where definite articles and adjectives have gender, the translation easily shows that the reference is to a woman. French translations, for example, say *ma chère/ma bien-aimée Perside/Persis*.

Unfortunately, the *Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Romans* (page 294) makes no suggestion as to how translators might deal with verse 12 in order to show clearly that the three persons named are women. It is regrettable that Persis is not identified as a woman in many translations, but the greater insult comes in the *Christian Community Bible* published in the Philippines in 1990 and in *Biblia del Peregrino* published in 1993, in which Persis is completely omitted from the text!

Julia and the sister of Nereus (verse 15)

The most natural understanding of verse 15 is that the sister of Nereus and Olympas are two different persons. In many translations in English it is not clear from the punctuation whether Olympas is the sister of Nereus or another person being greeted. Fitzmyer, for example, translates verse 15, "Greetings to Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, Olympas, and all God's dedicated people who are with them." Moffatt avoids the ambiguity by saying, "Salute Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, Olympus too." ItCL, however, makes Olympia the sister: *Salutate Filòlogo e Giulia, Nereo e sua sorella Olimpas, e tutti i credenti che sono con loro*.

Schüssler Fiorenza suggests that Philologus and Julia, and Nereus and his sister, were missionary couples like Priscilla and Aquila, "if *adelphè* is here, as elsewhere, an official title, since the woman is not mentioned as 'wife' but in her significance for the community" (page 180).

Barrett translates "Greet Philologus and Julias" and surprisingly does not even mention in his commentary that the name may be translated Julia. But then, neither does Barrett mention in his commentary that Junias may be Junia and that Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis are women. REB gives "Julias" as an alternate translation, but the *Translator's Handbook* (page 294) does not even mention that Julia could be understood as a man's name, that is, as Julias.

A suggested translation of Romans 16.3-16

³ I send my greetings to Priscilla and her husband Aquila, who worked with me in the service of Christ Jesus. ⁴ They risked their own lives for me, and because of that not only I but also all of the Gentile churches give thanks. ⁵ I greet also the believers who meet to worship in their house.

I also greet Epaenetus, whom I love. He was the first person in the province of Asia to believe in Christ. ⁶ Greetings to Mary, who

has worked hard among you. ⁷ Greetings to Andronicus and Junia, both he and she are fellow Jews and were in prison with me. [*In languages which have the same pronoun for third person masculine and feminine, this solution will not work.*] They are distinguished among the apostles, and they were believers in Christ before I was.

⁸ Greetings to Ampliatus, whom I love in the Lord. ⁹ Greetings to Urbanus, who serves Christ along with us, and my dear friend Stachys. ¹⁰ Greetings to Apelles, who has proved himself to be a genuine Christian. Greetings to those from the household of Aristobulus. ¹¹ Greetings to Herodion, a fellow Jew. Greetings to those who are Christians in the household of Narcissus. ¹² Greetings to Tryphaena and Tryphosa, women who have worked hard in the service of the Lord. Greetings to my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord. ¹³ Greet Rufus, who is distinguished in his service of the Lord, also his mother, who is like a mother to me. ¹⁴ Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the believers who are with them. ¹⁵ Greetings to Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the believers who are with them.

¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ (with which I am associated) greet you.

Readers will notice that the “default” gender in this translation is masculine, that is, the names without any special indication of gender are assumed to be masculine. For the reasons I have given above, it seems necessary to mark the feminine names as such. But I wonder whether even this necessary marking may have the undesirable effect of putting women in a secondary or inferior position.

Conclusion

Translations which use footnotes or similar devices should at the least indicate that some of these people greeted by Paul are women (or that some of these people are men). Beaumont, for example, says, *On notera la place des femmes parmi les collaborateurs de l'apôtre* “We note the place of women among the apostle’s helpers.”

Why, it may be asked, do readers need to know that nine of these persons are women? Beverly Gaventa’s concluding comments in her commentary on Romans provide the answer: “Nothing in Paul’s comments justifies the conclusion that these women worked in ways that differed either in kind or in quantity from the ways in which men worked. Indeed, all of the individuals listed appear to be engaged in tasks of ministry, a fact that needs to be taken into account in any assessment of the roles of women in early Christianity” (page 320). Brooten further declares, “If the first century Junia could be an apostle, it is hard to see how her twentieth century counterpart should not be allowed to become even a priest” (page 143).

Käsemann, however, expressed the view in his commentary that Priscilla would have had “access to the *gunaikōniti* [the women’s apartments in a house], which would not generally be accessible to the

husband. This part played by the Christian woman in the formation of the first churches has rarely been paid sufficient attention, although our chapter requires that" (page 413). But, as against Käsemann, Castelli correctly notes (page 279) that in light of the role played by Priscilla in Acts 18.24-26, the fact that Priscilla and Aquila were wife and husband does not require us to understand Priscilla's role merely "as that of a missionary to the segregated women of communities her husband sought to convert."

Romans 16, along with some other passages in Paul's letters, indicates that women played a prominent role of leadership in the churches which he established. But already by the end of the first century, women were being relegated to subservient roles; and as the centuries passed, things only got worse. It is in light of this historical situation that translators in many languages today may have to take special care in order to allow their readers to understand this chapter in the same light as those Christians who were its first readers.

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