

newer models. The idea of “frames” in particular is gaining wide acceptance among translation consultants, since it demonstrates quite clearly how both the speaker and the hearer carry with them their own frameworks of concepts. Since the idea of “components of meaning” deals with arrangements of features of meaning on the part of both the source language and the language of translation, it should be possible to incorporate the fundamentals of componential analysis into the “frame” model in some manner. Thus a highly useful way of dealing with meaning need not be lost in moving from one basic model of communication to another.]

P.M. RENJU

## THE PASSOVER LAMB

Peter M. Renju is a UBS Translations Consultant based in Kenya

### *Being sensitive to the cultural contexts of source and translated texts – a basis for interpretation and translation of Scriptures*

Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed (1 Corinthians 5.7, NIV): commentaries and interpretations of Paul’s writings have rarely appreciated the full force of this statement. Its background is the presence of sin among the Corinthian church community. The point Paul is making is that this sin is something that has to be discarded altogether: it is “leaven” (verse 5). Leaven was not allowed during the Jewish Passover when the Passover lamb was sacrificed. The Christian Passover is the sacrificial death of Jesus.

There is a clear contrast in this passage between Jewish religious practice, which at that time had become a cultural event celebrated every year, and in which no leaven was allowed, and the once-only event of the death of Jesus, on account of which no sin is allowed throughout the Christian life. Paul here makes a cultural shift and contrast, or a replacement if you wish, for the Corinthian Christian community. He spells out the Christian new understanding of the event of Christ’s death.

For us today the new understanding is also valid in all our cultures. A careful choice of expressions from the languages into which we translate may be able to convey this important message of Paul. Language is part of culture and reflects the feelings of the people of that culture; and we need to keep this in mind if we are to translate religious ideas and communicate effectively what the new event of Christ means in our languages and cultures. In other words, we are talking of bringing the word of God into our cultures, as we express it in the languages of our people.

This article is a case study with the aim of revisiting Swahili translations of the New Testament and considering the possibilities for choices from words and expressions of the Swahili language for speaking about the event stated above.

Without going into interpretations of 1 Corinthians 5.7, it will be my task to put side by side some selected Swahili translations of the passage

followed by some critical comments on each translation. The comments will focus on the aspect of sensitivity to the culture and language contexts involved.

### The source language

Sensitivity to the context of the source language text of 1 Corinthians 5.7 should include being aware of all other passages in the letters of Paul that refer to, or are similar in meaning to, what Paul states here. Some of the more important texts which focus on the same themes of sacrificial death, formation of a new community, and liberation from sin are Romans 3.25; 5.9-10; Ephesians 2.13; 5.2, 25. These passages shed light on the way we ought to understand the use of *etuthe* "sacrificed" in 1 Corinthians 5.7. The verb ought to be translated so as to have the meaning of "sacrificed" (or "immolated" to use a more technical English term). Paul, in a daring manner, takes up the Jewish culture regarding the celebration of the Passover and the avoidance of the leaven, which he sees in this context as a symbol of sin. And he makes a radical transition to the Christian culture in which Christ is the "real sacrifice" that constitutes the Christian community which is liberated from sin (symbolized by the "leaven").

In other words, we may say that Paul effectively recognizes the religious culture of the Jews, and from this he makes a very meaningful transition to the new Christian culture, a culture which was initiated and effectively established, once and for all, by the sacrificial death of Christ. The "lamb sacrifice" in the Jewish Passover has become the symbol of Christ. But the symbolism is not that of a one-to-one equivalent with the Passover lamb; otherwise Paul would not have made the transition from the Jewish culture concerning this, to the new Christian culture. Nevertheless, in spite of what has been called a "tangle of allusions in this passage", the connection with the Passover lamb is itself sufficient to warrant the use of "sacrifice" in translation, even if not all translations are uniform in rendering the verb as such.

### The language of the translation

Turning now to sensitivity to the context of the language of the translation, that is the Swahili New Testament translations in this case, I would like to observe that I am studying these translations without taking into account the translators' views about translation and the particular choices of words and expressions they may have made.

Below are various Swahili translations of the statement "for Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed".

a) *Habari Njema Kwa Watu Wote* (1977), *Agano Jipya na Zaburi* (The NT and Psalms, the Bible Societies of Kenya and Tanzania):

*Kristo, Pasaka yetu, amekwisha tolewa tambiko*  
 ["Christ, our Passover, has already been offered as a sacrifice"]

b) *Agano Jipya* (New Testament, Benektine Publications, 1986):

*mwanakondoo wetu wa Pasaka ametolewa, ndiye Kristu*

["our lamb of Passover has been given / removed (probably meaning 'has been offered') that is Christ"]

c) *Habari Njema Kwa Watu Wote, Agano Jipya katika Kiswahili cha Siku Hizi* (Société Biblique du Zaïre, 1981):

*Pasaka Yetu imekwisha kuanza, kwa sababu Kristo amekwisha kusulibiwa kama kondoo ya Pasaka yetu*

["Our Passover has already begun, because Christ has been crucified as sheep of our Passover"]

d) *Biblia Habari Njema* (the Bible Societies of Kenya and Tanzania, 1995):

*Kristo, Pasaka yetu, amekwisha tolewa kuwa sadaka*

["Christ, our Passover, has already been given to be a gift / an offering"]

e) *Biblia* (Holy Bible in Swahili, Zanzibar, translated by Dr K. Roehl, 1937):

*nasi tumechinjiwa kondoo wetu wa Pasaka, ndiye Kristo*

["and to us it has been slaughtered our sheep of Passover, who is Christ"]

f) *Biblia* (Swahili Union Version, 1952):

*Pasaka wetu amekwisha tolewa kuwa sadaka, yaani, Kristo*

["our Passover has already been given to be gift / offering"]

### Seeking a translation that best fits the original

In this section I want us to use sensitivity to the cultural context of the original text as well as to the language of translation to evaluate the renderings I have just quoted.

I have noted above that the Jewish Passover lamb was an item with deep meaning in their culture. I have also noted that Paul used this to express a new concept, which I would suggest also has its meaning in a culture, in this case the Christian culture.

I have also suggested above that all indications in the original cultural context point to the idea of "sacrifice". In the light of this, it would seem that translations of the Greek verb *etuthe* that do not include the idea of sacrifice may need to be reconsidered. And in this process of considering a different rendering, it will be best to choose words and expressions from Swahili that will, if possible, also do justice to the cultural aspects of the passage.

"Sacrifice" is very much a feature of culture. It is on this understanding that expressions such as *ametolewa* in example (b) may need to be reconsidered, since they do not give adequate expression to the idea of sacrifice.

The expression *kusulibiwa* in (c) refers to the crucifixion of Jesus. This may also need to be reconsidered, notwithstanding the attempt of

the translators to represent it by a simile, *kama kondoo ya Pasaka yetu* "as sheep of our Passover". Furthermore, the identification of Christ as our Passover (in the text "Christ" is in a position of emphasis) has been watered down.

In the case of examples (d) and (f), which are almost identical, the use of the Swahili term *sadaka* could be defended; but the problem we face here is that the word *sadaka* is ambiguous. It is used in some contexts as a reference to "a gift" or "alms" offered to the poor, or "an offering" (for instance of money or other things in the church).

All the five translations (b) to (f) above have chosen expressions which do not have anything to do with the culture of the readers. They have avoided an ordinary word *tambiko* which is used in translation (a). *Tambiko* (verb, *kutambikia*) is a rite performed in order to re-establish peace and friendship, usually between a people and their dead ancestors (the living-dead), or between a people and their God/god.

The translation of Dr Roehl uses the term *tambiko* and related words some 2747 times in the entire Bible (290 times in the New Testament). The high frequency of the expression in Roehl is due to the fact that he uses it for rendering both "worship" and "adore" as well as for "sacrifice". Incredibly, Roehl did not use *tambiko* in the passage I am considering here, 1 Corinthians 5.7.

But Roehl is not alone. The *Biblia Habari Njema* which is a common language translation of the Bible, uses *tambiko* and related words some 118 times in the entire Bible, including the Deuterocanonical Books (17 times in the New Testament). This is done especially in contexts relating to false gods, but we find also quite a good number of places where Yahweh is the one who benefits. The rest of the occurrences of "sacrifice" are rendered by the ambiguous *sadaka* (924 times), or by the less known (among ordinary people) *dhabihu*, which is Arabic in origin (395 times). Interestingly, the New Testament (1977) which was the first publication of the same project that led up to the publication of this Bible (1995) used *tambiko* in 1 Corinthians 5.7. It is not clear why this was done. There seem to be some feelings among church people, starting with earlier translators and missionaries, that the expression *tambiko* is too pagan and not worthy to express "holy" ideas such as sacrifice with reference to the true God. This is instructive. However, it is necessary to make a thorough study of the individual items before we can draw any useful conclusion.

To appreciate the differences between the various words and expressions used for "sacrifice" in the Swahili language, it is best to make a componential analysis of the meanings involved in each item. (For the theory of componential analysis of meaning, see Eugene A. Nida, *Componential Analysis of Meaning*, 1975.) Some components of meaning are distinctive to each individual item and as such distinguish any one of them from the others. Other components are more or less common, and these form the basis and reason for these items to possibly function easily in the field of meaning being described. All in all, this process of studying the features of meaning of various words and expressions is

a very reliable means of deciding which of them best fits a particular context and should therefore be used in that context.

The following table is relevant for this study. What is new in this presentation is the inclusion of one additional aspect of meaning that will in the final analysis show conclusively that our translations need to pay attention to the use of words and expressions in their cultural context. In other words, after all that can and may be said with regard to studying the meaning of certain terms for the purpose of selecting them for use in translation, the cultural relevance of those terms must also be studied and evaluated.

**Swahili terms for sacrifice**

			Purpose		Recipient		Culture
	Living	Des- troyed	Establish relations	Situation alleviated	God/ gods	Human	Relevant?
<i>Sadaka</i>	-	-	-	+	-	+	-
<i>Dhabihu</i>	+ -	+	+	-	+	-	-
<i>Kafara</i>	+	+	+	-	+	-	+ -
<i>Tambiko</i>	+ (-)	+	+	-	+	-	+

As can be seen from the table, *sadaka* is the most ambiguous expression, and together with *dhabihu* these two terms have no setting in the culture. On the other hand, *kafara* and *tambiko* come close together in all components of meaning, but they have one feature that distinguishes them, which is their proximity to the culture. *Tambiko* (with words related to it) is perhaps the only item that derives fully from the culture and practice of the Swahili speakers.

**Conclusion**

It is my opinion that the term *tambiko* (and terms related to it) is most probably the best term in Swahili for rendering the Greek term *thusia* and derivatives in contexts of "sacrifice" similar to 1 Corinthians 5.7.

I have chosen 1 Corinthians 5.7 as the text for discussion for various reasons and in the context of the topic: Culture (and language) sensitivities in the language of the audience are an effective basis for the translation of Scriptures. It is not uncommon in areas where Swahili is spoken that Christians, after celebrating the event of Christ who is our Passover lamb (*tambiko*) that truly establishes the good relationship and reconciliation with God, go back to their homes and perform the *tambiko*. To me, this attitude shows that the event of Christ has not found a home or has not been appreciated among our people. This is because we have used language expressions that have not taken into

account the culture and its language. The result of this attitude is far-reaching. It also adversely affects interpretation of the Scriptures in our own native language and cultural contexts.

If this discussion of just one case has revealed or given a picture of what has happened and is happening in our translations, a lot of work will have to be done in other similar areas. This is especially the case in those areas of meaning where similar words and expressions have been deliberately imposed without due consideration of the culture and language of the readers and hearers. This observation is also relevant for transliteration of key words of the original language into the language of the translation, as well as borrowings from a dominant language, two processes that do not exploit the resources of the culture and language of the people who receive and use a translation.

S. HRE KIO

## REVISITING “THE SONS OF GOD” IN GENESIS 6.1-4

Stephen Hre Kio is a UBS Translations Consultant based in Micronesia

Genesis 6.1-4 is one of the most difficult passages in the Bible to interpret. Its nature has been described as “puzzling and controversial in the extreme” (Speiser), and the words “the sons of God” as “an enigmatic phrase” (Hamilton). It is simple enough to understand the text as it stands. It is when we try to identify the participants that we are faced with one problem after another. The text (NRSV) says:

When people began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose. Then the LORD said, “My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years.”

The Nephilim were on the earth in those days – and also afterward – when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown.

I want to focus here on the problem phrase “the sons of God”, and not on detailed interpretation of the whole passage. There have been various attempts to identify “the sons of God” but three stand out. We might call them:

The heavenly-earthly mixed race view;  
 The religious mixed marriage view; and  
 The ruling class “harem” view.

### The heavenly-earthly mixed race view

In this interpretation, “the sons of God” (in Hebrew *bene-ha 'elohim*) refers to **angels**. This is supported by the Septuagint rendering *angeloi tou theou* (“angels of God”). It is also supported by other passages from