

LORD of Hosts *Tuhat nu megah sungoh* "God who is truly powerful"
the only God *Tuhat leh sa* "God only one"

The name "Lord GOD" is difficult, but it can be placed in a Topic position in the sentence and rendered *Tuhat ter, Tuhat besal deq atas* ("God - , God great above").

For Easy Reader booklets, the previous policy can be followed, using *Tuhat* normally, plus *Tuhat deq atas* when emphasis is desired. In later books in the series, from Book 3 on, the full title *Tuhat besal deq atas* can be used.

Conclusion

The previous policy on the names of God in Urak Lawoi' has therefore been modified, to enable greater precision in translating these names. This will not, however, cause any confusion or loss of understanding to those who are not instructed in the use of the various titles.

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THE PROBLEM OF A FEMALE DEITY IN TRANSLATION

The following is a reprint of an article which first appeared in The Bible Translator in April 1971. We are printing it again here, along with other articles about translating the names of God, because the topic it deals with is very closely related to the names of God.

When this article was written the Rev. Rodney Venburg was a translator serving in the Chad Republic.

The Problem

The Pèvé tribe numbering between forty and fifty thousand speakers is located for the most part in the Pala sous-préfecture of the Mayo-Kebbi in South-Western Chad, Africa. After spending our first two years in linguistic analysis of this language in order to put it into written form, we began some translation work. One of the very first problems we faced was to find a word for "God". Without any hesitation the Africans with whom I was working gave the word *Ifray*. Upon checking into just what this word meant I found that an earlier form of the word was *Yafray*: *Ya* being the Pèvé word for "mother" and *fray* being the word for "sky" or "the heavens".

In Pèvé legends on the creation of man it is said that God (*Ifray*) gave birth to two children—a boy and a girl. And it was from these two children that the tribe began.

The use of the word *Ifray* by itself caused no problems as a translation for God. The problem came when we began to look for a pronoun to use when referring to God, and also in the translation of such things as "Our Father" in the Lord's Prayer and "I believe in God, the Father . . ." in the Apostles' Creed.

The First Solution

After discussing the problem for some time I discovered that the Africans on the translation committee with whom I was working and who had been Christians for a number of years had learned to think of God as being male. They had been converted and taught about God by the Christians of a neighbouring tribe—the Moundang. (In the Moundang language the word for God is also of feminine gender—*Masing*, but in the Moundang language the third person singular pronoun is *ako* which can mean either “he” or “she”. One can know which is meant only by the context or by the use of additional adjectival markers.) Thus they had come to think of *Ifray* as only a name and that God was a male being.

In Pèvé grammar the personal pronouns in the third person singular are *Mum* for “he” and *Ta* for “she”, and as I begin to work with this problem I asked myself, “How can we possibly use *Mum* as a pronoun to stand for *Ifray* which carries the feminine gender?” My first reaction was to say to the committee, “Why not change the word for God to *Bafray*, “the Father in the heavens,” which would solve our problem. Almost without hesitation (and rightly so), they said, “No! that would be introducing a foreign God!” “Well then,” I said, “the only logical solution seems to be to use the pronoun *Ta* ‘she’ when referring to God.”

They discussed this for a while and then replied, “No, that isn’t necessary—though our word for God is feminine, we don’t think of God as having sex. *Ifray* is only a name and nearly all of the people in Church think of God as being ‘he’. Thus we can use the pronoun *Mum* ‘he’ and the idea of ‘Father’ with no difficulty.” So at first, this was the solution we followed.

The Present Solution

By following this first solution, however, I soon discovered that while this might be fine for the people of the church, it certainly sounded strange to the ears of those outside of the church. To speak of God (*Ifray*) with such terms as “he” and “Father” was totally inconsistent with their grammar and went against their whole notion of the creation (after all had a man ever given birth to a child?). Even some of the church people had learned to speak of God as *Mum* “he” when they were in church, but in their normal conversations outside of church used the pronoun *Ta* “she”. Thus there came into being a special language spoken only by the mission/church “in-group”, and when an evangelist went outside of this group the people were quite surprised and some amused at this use of their language.—“Had these people forgotten how to talk?” “Is it necessary to change our talk in order to become a Christian?”, they constantly inquired.

After a great deal of discussion it was decided that the only logical solution was to start using the female gender pronouns when referring to God.

Other Problems

Adopting this solution for the pronouns still left us the problem of the idea of “Father”. We could not very well use the idea of “Mother” in most cases since the “Mother” of Jesus was Mary. So when it came to the Lord’s Prayer we

simply said "Our God" (*Ifray*) who is in heaven". It might also be worth noting in this connection that in the petitions we used the second person singular pronouns, also in the feminine gender. (In Pévé when you ask a man to give you something you use *a*, but when you ask a woman to give you something you use *ng* (*nj*), so the phrase "give us our daily bread" begins with *ng*, not *a* as in our first translation.)

Another problem was the expression "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" which occurs in the first few verses of so many of the epistles (1 Cor 1.3, Eph 1.2-3, 1 Pet 1.3 etc.) If we translated this word for word into Pévé, the people could very easily understand that Jesus had two parents, "God" *Ifray* (female) and a father (presumably Joseph) (or another god) or else that we are blessing "God" *Ifray* and "Joseph" "the father" of Jesus. In these cases it has been suggested that we simply drop the idea of "Father" and use the word "God" (*Ifray*) alone or in other cases "Blessed be the God who gave us Jesus Christ."

A third, though similar problem, was the translation of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in God, the Father almighty." Here again we had a couple of alternatives: we could simply say "I believe in God who made heaven and earth" or something like "I believe in God the creator (in our case creatrice) who made heaven and earth."

Thus what started out to be what seemed a rather insurmountable problem—very basic to everything we translated—seems to have been resolved in a satisfactory manner consistent with the Pévé grammar, and yet not violating any of the central truth of the Scriptures.

The Lord's Prayer. One solution that has been suggested is that we translate the first phrase of the Lord's Prayer as follows: "God (*Ifray*) who is in heaven, We are your children." By doing this we would maintain the parent-child relationship and yet at the same time avoid the problem of Jesus praying "Our Mother" which could be interpreted as his praying to Mary.