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# Perspectives on Translating *YHWH* in Papua New Guinea

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## Abstract

Translating the word *YHWH*, the name of God in the Hebrew Bible, is a complex matter involving theological, linguistic, and cultural issues. This article considers six possible broad translation options for this name, and summarises case studies of thirty-one Papua New Guinean Old Testament translation projects, exploring and classifying the choices they have made and the issues that guided those choices. It ends by offering some of the advantages and disadvantages of the different possible translation options, as an aid to other translators working on Old Testament translation.

## Keywords

Yahweh, Tetragrammaton, LORD, Papua New Guinea, God, names of God, *'elohim*, Old Testament

## 1. Introduction

The letters *Y-H-W-H* are the equivalents in the roman alphabet of the Hebrew consonants in the name of the God of Israel, used frequently in the Old Testament. Vowels are not written here because the Hebrew texts do not record the original vowels that were used. Many articles have already considered the translation of *YHWH* into different languages around the world, exploring theological and linguistic issues (e.g., Ellingworth 1990; Slager 1992; de Blois 1992; Barnwell 1997; Daams 2005; Ekem 2005; Mundhenk 2010). This article summarises some of these and focuses specifically on translation issues in Papua New Guinea to help Old Testament translators.

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It is based on case studies of over thirty Papua New Guinean languages, presenting the options being considered for translating this name and the issues that the translators have encountered.

## 2. Words for God in the Old Testament

In the Hebrew Old Testament, several different words are used to talk to, or talk about, God. The most significant words are:

- *'elohim* (usually translated “god/s” or “God” in English)
- the name represented by the consonants *YHWH* (usually translated “LORD,” with small or all capitals, in English, and *Bikpela* in Tok Pisin).

The first word, *'elohim*, is used in the Bible for divine beings both of Israel and of other peoples. For example, in 2 Kgs 1, Elijah challenges King Ahaziah for going to seek help from Baal Zebub, the *'elohim* of Ekron, asking whether this is because there is no *'elohim* in Israel.

The name *YHWH* is only used for the *'elohim* of Israel. Thus, when Solomon dedicates the temple in 1 Chr 6.14, he addresses God by saying, “*YHWH*, *'elohim* of Israel, there is no *'elohim* like you in the heavens or on the earth.”

Another good example of the use of both words is the account in 1 Kgs 18 of Elijah confronting the prophets of Baal (*Ba'al*). In this narrative, Elijah sets up a contest to see who is really *'elohim*, and specifically, whether it is *YHWH* or *Ba'al*. Elijah says that the one who responds to prayer and sends fire on the sacrifices is the true *'elohim*. Despite all the activities of the many prophets of *Ba'al* as they call out his name to answer them, it is only when Elijah calls out in the name of *YHWH* that fire falls onto the offering. All the people of Israel respond by falling on their faces and crying out that *YHWH* is indeed the *'elohim*.

Further, in Exod 3.15, when Moses asks specifically for the name of the *'elohim* who is telling him to go and bring the Israelites out of Egypt, he receives the reply, “Say to the Israelites, ‘*YHWH*, the *'elohim* of your fathers—the *'elohim* of Abraham, the *'elohim* of Isaac and the *'elohim* of Jacob—has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.” This verse declares *YHWH* to be the name of the *'elohim* of Israel, and stresses the importance of remembering this name from generation to generation.

One problem when translating the name *YHWH* into other languages is that we do not know how it was pronounced. At some point in their history,

after the narratives were written down, the Jewish people stopped reading this name aloud when they read the Bible, under the influence of Exod 20.7, where the people of Israel are told not to use the name of *YHWH*, their *'elohim*, “emptily” (or perhaps “thoughtlessly” or “insincerely”). Instead, they read alternative words such as *ha-shem* (meaning “the name”) or *'adonay* (a term of relationship meaning something like “master” in English).

They developed ways to make it difficult to utter the name *YHWH* accidentally when reading the Bible. For example, in some of the Hebrew Bible portions at Qumran, scribes used the ancient Hebrew script to write the letters *YHWH* rather than the Aramaic script they used for all the other words. Even for those who cannot read Hebrew, the different script makes it easy to recognise where the name occurs in this sentence from the Psalms scroll found in Cave 11 at Qumran (Martínez and Tigchelaar 1997, 1174-75): עיני יי' על טובים תחמל ועל מפאריזו יגדל חסדו “*YHWH*’s eyes have pity on good people, he increases his compassion on those who give him glory” (11Q5, XVIII, line 16).<sup>1</sup>

Later, when Jewish scribes added vowels to the consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible, they applied the vowels of the word *'adonay* to the consonants *YHWH*, to prompt readers to say that word rather than the name itself. English translations have generally followed the lead of the earliest translators of the Hebrew Bible into Greek. Before the time of Jesus, these scholars translated the name *YHWH* using the Greek word *kurios* (“lord” or “master”), the same word they used to translate *'adonay*. Most English translations write “LORD” where the Hebrew original says *YHWH* in the Old Testament (sometimes with a few exceptions, as in the KJV, which has “Jehovah” seven times). Note that these English translations use capital letters for the whole word, to show that the word actually represents the name *YHWH* and not *'adonay*, “Lord.” In Tok Pisin, early attempts to use the name *Yawe* were abandoned because “it was felt that most readers did not connect this strange name with God” (Mundhenk 1985), so *Bikpela* was used instead. This is the same word that is used to translate *'adonay*, and means “big, important” in normal speech, but is used as a title meaning “important person” in the Bible. The Tok Pisin *Buk Baibel* does not give any cues (such as using all capitals) to distinguish the places where *Bikpela* represents *YHWH* from those where it represents *'adonay*.

When the Apostle Paul and others wrote the documents which became the New Testament, they continued the same practice as that of the early Greek translators. When they quoted from the Old Testament, whether they were using existing Greek translations or producing their own

<sup>1</sup> The Evyoni Palaeo-Hebrew font in the quote is used with permission (© Shemayah Shiloh-Phillips).

translation, they never transliterated the name *YHWH*, but rather used the word *kurios*. The situation is complicated by the fact that they used the same word, *kurios*, to refer to Jesus, both as a common term of respect (as in Matt 8.2 when a leper addresses Jesus to ask for healing) and when it carries more theological weight, potentially identifying Jesus with *YHWH*, the God of Israel (as in Rom 10.9, “if you confess with your mouth ‘Jesus is *kurios*’”).

These differences between the written and spoken forms of the Hebrew word, and the terms used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament and in the New Testament, together with specific linguistic and cultural issues in the language communities for whom the translation is being made, make the translation of the name *YHWH* a complicated issue.

### 3. Translating words for God in Papua New Guinea: Case studies

This section presents examples from thirty-one Papua New Guinean languages to show how Old Testament translation projects are translating the words *YHWH* and *’elohim*. There are over 800 languages in Papua New Guinea, many of which have fewer than 10,000 speakers. These thirty-one languages are a very small selection, but represent a mixture of large and small language groups and twelve different provinces from across the country.

In Papua New Guinea, there are several challenges when translating these words. Finding a word for *’elohim* can be difficult because many Papua New Guinean cultures acknowledge a variety of spiritual beings, but no particular spiritual being that is supreme over all of them. Often churches use loan words such as *Anut*, *Gote*, or *Deo*. Mundhenk (2004) gives the origins of these (and several other) Papua New Guinean words for *’elohim*.

Finding an appropriate way to represent *YHWH* is also a challenge, particularly because the name does not appear in the English and Tok Pisin Bibles that are in popular use, and the Tok Pisin *Buk Baibel* does not even give any clues that a special word is in use in the original Hebrew. Six options include:

- 1) transliterating the name with a word like *Yaweh* or *Iaue*;
- 2) using the name of a locally known supreme being;
- 3) using a name based on the presumed meaning of *YHWH*, something like *I am*, or *me, just me*;
- 4) using a word something like “Lord” or *Bikpela* (as in the Tok Pisin Bible) without special capitalisation;

- 5) following the English examples to put a capitalised translation of *Lord*; or
- 6) using another word or expression to show that a special name is being referred to, even though it is not explicit in the text.

Five of these are the options that were suggested by the UBS “Names of God” Study Group (1992), while the sixth has come from the Amam translation team, as will be seen below.

Each of these options has some advantages and some disadvantages. This section classifies the Old Testament translation projects in the survey according to each of these options for translating *YHWH*, and summarises the chosen approaches for translating *YHWH* and *'elohim*.<sup>2</sup> There is some overlap between the different groupings since some translators are testing out a few different options. Options that are in the early stages of testing are marked with an asterisk (\*). Section 4 will investigate the issues raised by these different options, and section 5 will consider the advantages and disadvantages of each choice.

### 3.1 *Transliterating the name YHWH*

The first group of languages (shown in Table 1) have chosen to translate *YHWH* with a transliteration of the original Hebrew name, using words like *Jaue*, *Yawe*, or *Yoba*. For these languages, the translation of *'adonay* “Lord” is also given for comparison, where the information was available.

### 3.2 *Using the name of a local supreme being*

The second group of languages (shown in Table 2) are those that have tried using the name of a local supreme being to translate the Hebrew *YHWH*. This is the least common solution, and most are being tried alongside other options.

### 3.3 *Using a name based on the meaning of Yahweh*

A few translation projects (shown in Table 3) have chosen to try to create a vernacular name to translate the word *YHWH*, based on the idea that *YHWH* is the “God who is,” a possible meaning for the Hebrew name.

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<sup>2</sup> Several of these options were presented at a discussion on August 12, 2010, as part of the *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* course for Papua New Guinean translators held at Ukarumpa, Eastern Highlands Province. Further examples came from other Papua New Guinean translators and expatriate advisors, collected between 2010 and 2013. More complete details of the choices and issues can be found in King 2013.

Table I

Language	Translation of YHWH	Translation of 'adonay	Translation of 'elohim
Gwahatike [dah] (Madang province, 1,570 speakers, NT 1999)†	Yaweh Al Kuruj (lit. "Yaweh big man") (see also Table 3)	Al Kuruj (lit. "big man")	baraj al ("creator") tikula al ("creator")
Imbongu [imo] (Southern Highlands province, 42,500 speakers, NT 1997)	Yawe	(Not available)	Gote Pulu iye (lit. "root man") Ola iye (lit. "above man") Gote
West Kewa [kew] (Southern Highlands province, 45,000 speakers, NT 1973, rev. 2003)	Adaa Yaweh (see also Tables 2, 4)	Adaa (lit. "big one")	Gote
Kovai [kqb] (Morobe Province, 5,000 speakers)	Yobaꞑ	Ai Kornut (lit. "big man," when directly addressing the Lord) Ngelae Kornut (lit. "big fellow," when talking about him) Nabo (important man)	Maro (variant of Molo, a traditional cultural hero)
Ap Ma [kbx] (East Sepik Province, 7,000 speakers, NT 1999)	Yawe	Nabo (important man)	Yamom (traditional creator god)
Mussau-Emira [emi] (New Ireland Province, 5,000 speakers)	*laue (see also Table 4)	Vau/Vau Ngepona (lit. "chief"/"chief above")	God Goto
Waskia [wsk] (Madang province, 20,000 speakers, NT 1985)	Jawe	Kari Biya (lit. "big man")	Kaem (general word for revered spirit)

**Table 1.** (Continued)

Language	Translation of YHWH	Translation of <i>ʾadonay</i>	Translation of <i>ʾelohim</i>
Adzera [adz] (Morobe province, 28,900 speakers, NT 1976)	Yawe (with a footnote in Gen 2.4 explaining this is the Hebrew name for God and giving the meaning as “he lives forever”) <i>lawe</i>	<i>Nifutsarif</i> (lit. “honored/ exalted [one]”)	<i>Anutu</i>
Maiadomu [mzz] (Milne Bay province, 730 speakers)		<i>Tomwaya</i> (lit. “big man”)	<i>Yaubada</i>
Onbasulu [onn] (Southern Highlands province, 700 speakers)	<i>Yawe Gode</i> (see also Table 4)	<i>Saminilo</i> (fight/clan leader)	<i>Gode</i>
Bamu [bcf] (Western province, 6,310 speakers)	<i>lawe</i>	<i>Auna dubu</i> (lit. “big man”)	<i>Godi</i>
Misima [mpx] (Milne Bay province, 18,000 speakers)	<i>Yehoba</i>	<i>Babala</i> (a big man/leader)	<i>Yabowaine</i> (traditional god who lives in the sky and helps with journeys or fights)
Waboda [kmx] (Western province, 2,750 speakers)	<i>lawe</i>	Probably <i>Ohu Dumereke</i> (lit. “high person”), but no relevant texts have been translated yet.	<i>Yehoba</i> <i>God</i>

<sup>†</sup>Population and Bible portion information is from [www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com), unless the survey respondents gave more accurate information.

<sup>‡</sup>The <b> letter represents a bilabial fricative, so this sounds similar to “Yova.”

**Table 2**

Language	Translation of <i>YHWH</i>	Translation of <i>'elohim</i>
West Kewa [kew] (Southern Highlands province, 45,000 speakers, NT 1973, rev. 2003)	* <i>Adaa Yaki</i> ( <i>Yaki</i> is a traditional supreme God) (see also Tables 1, 4)	<i>Gote</i>
Somsi [bmu] (Morobe province, 8,250 speakers, NT 1996)	* <i>Bemkoŋkoŋ</i> (a traditional “god of gods”)	<i>Kembu Anutu</i> (“creator god”)

**Table 3**

Language	Translation of <i>YHWH</i>	Translation of <i>'elohim</i>
Gapapaiwa [pwg] (Milne Bay province, 3,000 speakers, NT 2009)	<i>Miimiituwa</i> (lit. “the eternal, unknown one”)	<i>God</i>
Rossel [yle] (Milne Bay province, 3,750 speakers, NT 1987–97)	<i>Chóó Lémi</i> (lit. “Himself Big Man” or “the one who is of himself an important man”)	<i>Yápwó</i> (“Sacred [One]”)
Gwihatike [dah] (Madang province, 1,571 speakers, NT 2000)	* <i>Neponepo</i> (lit. “me, just me”) (see also Table 1)	<i>baraŋ al</i> (“creator”) <i>tikula al</i> (“creator”)
Ajaatiha [agm] (Morobe province, 2,100 speakers, NT 2004)	* <i>Susoatipiho</i> (lit. “the self-existing one”) (see also Table 4)	<i>Autahaatiho</i> (lit. “god above”)

### 3.4 Using a word like *Bikpela* without special capitalisation

Several languages (as shown in Table 4) translate *YHWH* with a word equivalent to “Lord” or *Bikpela*, without any capitalisation except for the first letter. This is the policy used by the Tok Pisin Bible.

### 3.5 Using a capitalised translation of *Lord*

This option is very similar to the previous one, but uses a different type of writing (all capital letters or small caps) to make it clear when the original says *YHWH*, rather than just a word like “Lord.” Examples are shown in Table 5.



**Table 4**

Language	Translation of YHWH	Translation of 'elohim
Aṅaatiha [agm] (Morobe province, 2,100 speakers, NT 2004)	<i>Autaahaatiho Awaisiho</i> (lit. “the big one”) (see also Table 3)	<i>Autaahaatiho</i> (lit. “god above”)
Enga [enq] (Enga province, 230,000 speakers, NT 1979-1988)	<i>Kamongo</i> (lit. “rich man”) <i>Akali Andake</i> (lit. “big man”)	<i>Anasuu</i> (not used much any more) <i>Gote</i>
Urim [uri] (East Sepik province, 3,740 speakers)	<i>Wailen</i> (lit. “big [one]”)	<i>Maur Wailen</i> (lit. “big spirit”)
Nek [nif] (Morobe province, 1,500 speakers)	<i>Molom</i> (lit. “lord/ owner”)	<i>Kunum Yambat</i> (lit. “Heaven[ly] God,” with the word <i>kunum</i> added to help people realise this is not their traditional gods, referred to as <i>Yambat</i> )
West Kewa [kew] (Southern Highlands province, 45,000 speakers, NT 1973, rev. 2003)	<i>Adaa Mudu</i> (lit. “big man who goes first”) (see also Tables 1, 2)	<i>Gote</i>
Binumarien [bjr] (Eastern Highlands province, 360 speakers, NT 1983)	<i>Karaambaiqa</i> (“fight leader”)	<i>Anutufa</i>
Mussau-Emira [emi] (New Ireland Province, 5,000 speakers)	* <i>Vau palepale</i> (lit. “paramount chief”) (see also Table 1)	<i>God</i> <i>Goto</i>
Onabasulu [onn] (Southern Highlands province, 700 speakers)	<i>Saminilo</i> (lit. “clan / fight leader”) (see also Table 1)	<i>Gode</i>

Table 5

Language	Translation of YHWH	Translation of ʾelohim
Bola [bnp] (West New Britain province, 13,700 speakers, Bible 2011)	BAKOVI DAGI (lit. “BIG MAN”)	Vuri (“super being”)
Sinaugoro [snc] (Central province, 18,000 speakers, NT 1995)	VERE GAUKA (lit. “BIG ONE”)	Barau
Guhu-Samane [ghs] (Morobe province, 12,800 speakers, NT 1975, revised 1985)	<b>QOBEROBA</b> (a term of address for a respected person, but also conveys the idea of “forever”)	Ohonga (someone who is permanently sitting on a chair. The word for “king” is derived from the same word.)
Kamano Kafe [kbq] (Eastern Highlands province, 83,600 speakers, NT 1982)	RA ANUMAZA (lit. “BIG STRONG”)	Anumaza
Dedua [ded] (Morobe Province, 5,620 speakers, NT 2006)	KEBU (lit. “LORD”)	Anutu
Nukna [klt] (Morobe province, 850 speakers)	TÁWI (lit. “BIG ONE”)	Ánutu
Gizrra [tof] (Western province, 1,200 speakers†)	LOD (Yeoba was tried, but rejected because of Jehovah’s Witnesses nearby. Agwad, the name of a traditional deity, was also tried and rejected, as this gave people the wrong ideas about who God is)	God (Adi was also tried)
Ubir [ubr] (Oro Province, 2,560 speakers, NT 1997)	BADA (lit. “BIG MAN / CHIEF”)	God
Mailu [mgu] (Central province, 8,500 speakers, NT 1936–79)	GUBINA (lit. “MASTER”)	Boi Ogoda (lit. “spirit big”)

†Nico van Bodegraven, 2013, personal communication.

**Table 6**

Language	Translation of <i>YHWH</i>	Translation of 'adonay	Translation of 'elohim
Amam [wer]‡ (Morobe province, 4,160 speakers, NT 1984)	<i>Aniak Tupup</i> (lit. “man of the holy house”)	<i>Kesangep</i> (lit. “big man”)	<i>Akop</i> (lit. “Most High”)

‡The Amam speakers consider Amam to be a separate language from Weri [wer], although this is currently the closest language listed in *Ethnologue*. The information given comes from the *Ethnologue* entry for Weri.

### 3.6. Using a word or phrase to show that a special name is being referred to

In most cultures in Papua New Guinea, there are several situations in which a person's actual name would not be used, and another word would be used instead to talk to, or talk about, that person. For example, in most cultures a man's wife's parents and close relatives must not be named, using instead a word like *tambu* (Tok Pisin for “taboo”), for fear that if their names are uttered the man would be under a curse. Often the names of elders should not be used either, but other words are found to talk to them, out of respect. These kinds of expressions could be used to translate the name *YHWH* to show that there is an actual name present in the original, but it is not being uttered, out of respect. One of the languages in this survey (shown in Table 6) is using a method like this, using a term that is usually used to refer to the special person who can enter a sacred building in the community, whose name could not be uttered.

## 4. Translating words for God in Papua New Guinea: Issues

The case studies revealed several important issues that need consideration when translating *YHWH* into Papua New Guinean languages. Eight of these issues are described below.

### 4.1 The uniqueness of God's name

The name transcribed in English with the letters *YHWH* is the unique name of the God of Israel which he gave to them to speak of and to him. Exodus 3.15 states that this is his name forever, the name by which he should be

remembered from generation to generation. This provokes two issues for Bible translation.

First, the reader should be aware when God's unique name is being used. By contrast, in the *Buk Baibel*, even the existence of this unique name of God is lost through its consistent use of *Bikpela*. The only way a Tok Pisin speaker can find out when God's unique name is used is by looking at an English translation of the same passage to see whether the word LORD is written in small or all capital letters. It is better to make a translation that allows the reader to know when God's unique name is being used.

Second, the fact that the Hebrew Scriptures declare that *YHWH* is the unique name for God is a reason not to use the name of a traditionally recognised deity as a substitute for the name *YHWH*. Names are very important in the Hebrew Scriptures, and nowhere do they suggest that humans are free to change the name of the true God. Using the name of a local deity for Israel's God risks losing connection to this historical context of the Bible's message.

#### 4.2 Respect for the Ten Commandments

The Hebrew text of Exod 20.7 commands the Israelites not to use the name of *YHWH* "to" or "for" *shav*. The word *shav* means something like "emptiness" or "falsehood" (Hamilton 1980, 2:908), so the commandment is prohibiting the Israelites from using the name in a way that is false, misleading, thoughtless, or pointless. The original context is likely that of making oaths or swearing in the name of a god, a way of strengthening what one is saying (Stuart 2006, 455). For example, when Elijah tells King Ahab that it will not rain for several years except at his command (1 Kgs 17.1), he starts his statement by calling out the name of *YHWH*. Here, Elijah uses God's special name in an appropriate way to show the truth of what he is saying. He is not using the name emptily, as would be the case if someone made a promise using *YHWH*'s name and then did not do what they said. However, the commandment is general enough to cover many more situations, affirming that *YHWH* is beyond human control, and so any manipulation, disrespect, or light treatment of his name is a serious offense, deserving of certain punishment (Durham 1987, 288). As has already been mentioned, the Jewish respect for this commandment has led them to go further and avoid ever pronouncing this name.

There are different views on whether this commandment means Christians should be careful about pronouncing the name *YHWH* today. These range from Ellingworth's (1990, 350) claim that such concern is "totally irrelevant to a non-Hebrew speaking non-Jew" to the Catholic Church's call never to utter this unpronounceable name which expresses the

“infinite greatness and majesty of God,” or use it in translation, remaining faithful to the practice of the church since the first disciples (Congregation 2008). At the very least, showing respect for this command suggests people today take some care about when and how the name *YHWH* is used, and this has implications for translation work.

Several of the people involved in the case studies felt that this commandment did have relevance for their present-day communities and the way they might use a transliteration of the name *YHWH*. This may be even more of an issue in Papua New Guinean communities (where even human names are considered significant and not uttered lightly) than in contemporary English-speaking cultures. The Añaatiha team were concerned by the way people were now praying in church and unthinkingly using the name Yahweh, and for that reason they are hesitant to use a transliteration of the name in their translation. If translations do choose to use a direct transliteration of God’s name, the church may want to provide teaching on the Ten Commandments and on showing respect for this name, as is happening in the Imbongu community.

#### 4.3 *Respect for different denominations*

Often, it is desired that a translated Bible will be used by people in several different churches and denominations. If this is the case, the official attitude of these organisations to the translation of the divine name needs to be respected. For example, in 2008, the Catholic Church’s *Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments* specifically enforced the traditional policy that “for the translation of the Biblical text in modern languages, destined for the liturgical usage of the church . . . the divine *tetragrammaton* [*YHWH*] is to be rendered by the equivalent of *Adonay/Kyrios*: ‘Lord’” (2008, 2).

This means that if a translation team chooses instead to use the transliterated name of God (*Yawe*, *Iaue*, *Yawe*, or similar), any Catholic churches that are aware of this ruling would not be able to use it without breaking with their leadership. The Bible in Solomons Pijin, dedicated in 2009, is an example of a Bible that used a transliterated version of the divine name, but has been prohibited from being used in the Catholic churches there.

#### 4.4 *Maintaining links between the Old and New Testaments*

When the New Testament authors identified Jesus as *kyrios*, they were using the word used to translate the name *YHWH* in the Greek version of the Old Testament with which they were familiar. By doing this they were

perhaps emphasising that Jesus was the incarnation of *YHWH*, the God of the Israelites, returning to his people. For example, in Rom 10.9, Paul says that “if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” This, and other passages that use the word *kurios* with Jesus (such as Phil 2.9-11), suggest that “there was an understanding among the early Christians that Jesus could appropriately be identified with *YHWH*, and that it was in fact the will of God the Father that Jesus should be known by that name” (Mundhenk 2010, 61-62). English translations that use *LORD* for *YHWH* and *Lord* for *kurios* enable readers to experience this link between Jesus and the God of the Old Testament, which is otherwise obscured. More details for this argument are given in Mundhenk 2010. The use of *Bikpela* in the *Buk Baibel* also preserves this link between the Testaments. Whatever translation is used for *YHWH* in the Old Testament, it is important to think whether it can also be used to translate *kurios* in the New Testament when it is used to describe Jesus in this way.

If a transliteration (like *Yawe* or *Iaue*) is used in the Old Testament, translators will need to decide if they will use it at any point in the New Testament too. In particular, when an Old Testament verse referring to *YHWH* is quoted in the New Testament, the Greek writers used *kurios*, following what was written in their (Greek) version of the Old Testament. So, for example, Mark 1.3 quotes Isa 40.3, saying, “Prepare the way for the Lord (*kurios*),” even though Isaiah originally said, “Prepare the way for *YHWH*.” If Papua New Guinean translators who have used a transliteration (like *Iaue*) in the Old Testament decide to use a translation of something like “Lord” in the New Testament quotes, these quotes will be even more different from the Old Testament passages they are quoting than in other Bible translations that use “Lord” or “LORD” in both situations. It could be helpful to at least include a footnote, or paragraph in the introduction, in this situation.

#### 4.5 Relation to existing translations

Most translations in Papua New Guinea will be used in a context where people have access to other versions of the Bible, whether the *Buk Baibel* in Tok Pisin, or any of the several English versions. Often churchgoers will compare the vernacular translation with these existing translations, and may choose not to use the vernacular translation if it does not compare closely enough with the other versions they know. If a vernacular translation of the divine name is chosen that does not follow the choices in Tok Pisin or English, the translation team will need to explain well the reasons to the rest of the community in order for them to feel willing to use it. This explanation

may be part of the introduction to the translated Bible, but face-to-face explanation and discussion will also be needed before any final publication.

#### *4.6 Different possible cues to special words in the text*

There are a number of different ways to let readers know they are reading a special word. Using an initial capital letter is an obvious option used for proper names and other special words in the Bible. Most English Bibles go further to show that something special is happening when they translate the word *YHWH* by writing the word “LORD” in small or all capital letters. This is an option in Papua New Guinean languages too. The Guhu-Samane translation team have taken a further step by using **bold face** as well as capital letters. The team have decided that this is an even better cue that there is a special name here than using a transliteration of the name itself, which readers might not realise is actually a name that deserves respect.

Introductions, footnotes, and glossaries offer further options. If the translators choose to use a word meaning something like “LORD,” it would be possible to add a section in the introduction, a glossary entry at the back of the Bible, or footnotes to individual verses to explain that in the original this is really the special name for God, *YHWH*. Several teams that are using a name like *Yawe* are also using footnotes and glossary entries to explain that this is God’s unique name (for example, in Adzera, Waskia, and Ubir).

However, it is important to remember that all these different possible cues rely on people being able to read the text and see the cues on the page. If the translated Scriptures will mainly be communicated orally, none of these textual cues will be there. This could potentially be overcome by teaching in the church if a transliteration of *YHWH* is not used. Alternatively, where the community wants to maintain the Jewish practice of not uttering God’s name, the use of another vernacular phrase that signals that a “taboo” name is being referred to could give a cue that would be recognisable in written or oral communication, as in the Amam language.

#### *4.7 Compound names that include YHWH*

There are several verses in the Bible where the name *YHWH* is used alongside other words to form a compound name when referring to God. These need to be considered when choosing what will be used to translate *YHWH*. These include phrases like “*YHWH* our *’elohim*,” which can be difficult if *YHWH* is translated by something that is not a name.

Even more significantly, the compound name *’adonay YHWH* needs to be considered. If a translation chooses to translate *YHWH* by using a translation of *’adonay* “Lord,” this last phrase could end up becoming something like

“Lord LORD.” Most English translations of this compound name choose either to use “the Sovereign LORD” (as in NIV, NLT, TEV, NET) or “the Lord GOD” (as in KJV, ESV, NCV, NRSV). When an option like “the Lord GOD” is chosen, this must also be compared with *YHWH ’elohim*, which these English versions typically translate with “the LORD God,” a difference which is quite hard to spot (and impossible to hear). The translation projects in the Bamu, Waskia, and Adzera languages all mentioned these compound names as a significant reason for choosing a transliteration rather than a translation of a word like “Lord.”

#### 4.8 Familiarity with a name like Yawe

In several of the case studies the option chosen for translating *YHWH* was based on the familiarity of the community with the various possibilities. Where there were churches already using a transliteration of the name in preaching or songs (whether something like *Yehoba* or *Yawe*),<sup>3</sup> it was much easier for them to accept the use of a transliteration in the Old Testament translation. This was the case in Ap Ma (East Sepik province), Waskia (Madang province), Kovai (Morobe province), Misima (Milne Bay province), and Waboda (Western province), showing a familiarity with this name at locations dispersed all across the country, at least in coastal regions. On the other hand, in several locations the lack of familiarity with this name in church was a reason the translators chose not to use the transliteration option (as in Nukna) or had to work hard to convince the community to accept it (as in Maiadomu).

This suggests that in general it will be easier to choose the transliteration option if the church is already using something like this in their worship. If they are not doing this, the translation team will need to do more work to get the community to accept this choice. Of course, familiarity with a term can grow over time, so a translation team strongly wanting to use a transliteration of *YHWH* in their translation may have more chance of the translation being accepted if they begin to engage the church leaders early on and include this name in preaching and worship before it is used in the translation itself.

### 5. Conclusion

Finally, the different options for translating the name *YHWH* will be evaluated. Rather than giving a firm rule for which is the best option, I present

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<sup>3</sup> A further complication arises if transliterations of both *Jehovah* and *Yahweh* are in use by different groups. In this case, church leaders and translators will need to discuss together to decide which should be adopted in the translation.



here the six options from section 3 with advantages and disadvantages for each one. Whichever option a translation team chooses to use, they need to consider these advantages and disadvantages as they discuss how to translate the divine name *YHWH*.

### 5.1 *Transliterate with a name like Yaweh or laue*

#### *Advantages*

- The unique name by which God revealed himself in the biblical context is clearly there to be seen in printed text or to be heard when the Bible stories are read.

#### *Disadvantages*

- Organisational policies may mean some churches cannot use the translated text.
- People may not realise that this name is special and so use it “lightly” or “thoughtlessly,” in a way that does not respect the commandment in Exod 20.7.
- It differs from the translations in the *Buk Baibel* and in English versions.
- It may not be clear that the New Testament authors were using the same word to refer to Jesus as the Greek translators of the Old Testament used to translate the name *YHWH* (unless a word is added that can be used both before the transliteration of *YHWH* and before the name of Jesus, such as *Al Kuruy* in the Gwahatike translation).
- Translators may need to begin by using this in the church (in preaching and worship) before it is accepted in a translation.

### 5.2 *Use the name of a locally known supreme being*

#### *Advantages*

- Could be very popular and readily accessible to people in the community.

#### *Disadvantages*

- Obscures the specific historical and cultural nature of the Old Testament by hiding the fact that God revealed himself by the unique name *YHWH* to the Israelites, at a particular time and place in history.
- Characteristics of the local “god” may suggest *YHWH* has characteristics which do not fit with the God of the Bible.

### 5.3 Use a name based on the possible meaning of YHWH

#### Advantages

- This will help people understand a possible meaning of God's name, and could particularly help with understanding Exodus 3.
- It could help people feel that *YHWH* is not a foreign God.

#### Disadvantages

- There is uncertainty over what precisely the name means.
- This will probably be an unfamiliar term, not found in Bibles in the languages of wider communication. So the translation team will need to do a lot of work with the church and community to help them accept this choice.
- It will not be clear that the New Testament authors were using the same word to refer to Jesus as the Greek translators of the Old Testament used to translate the name *YHWH*.

### 5.4 Use a word like *Bikpela/Lord* without any special formatting

#### Advantages

- Follows the policy of the *Buk Baibel*.
- Preserves links between the Old and New Testaments.
- It would probably be acceptable to all denominations.

#### Disadvantages

- Does not give any cues to the reader that there is a special name for God being used here.
- Does not distinguish between the occurrences of *YHWH* and *'adonay*.
- The translators will need to consider how to translate the compound name *YHWH 'adonay*.

### 5.5 Use a word like *Bikpela/Lord* with special formatting such as capitals, bold face type or underlining

#### Advantages

- Follows the policy of most English versions.
- Preserves links between the Old and New Testaments.
- Would probably be acceptable to all denominations.
- Allows readers to see that there is something special about this word.
- Distinguishes the name *YHWH* from the term *'adonay*.

### *Disadvantages*

- The actual name *YHWH* still remains hidden.
- There are no cues for those hearing the Bible to know the name of God is being used.
- The translators will need to consider how to translate the compound name *YHWH 'adonay*.

## ***5.6 Using a word or phrase to show that a special name is being referred to***

### *Advantages*

- There is a clear cue, even in audio format, that God has a name that was not used lightly or thoughtlessly by the Jews, and it is being used here. This shows respect for the Ten Commandments.
- Compound names for God may be easier to handle than using a translation of “Lord.”

### *Disadvantages*

- This is a different solution to most other translations, so the translators may have to do extra work to explain this choice to the church community if they are likely to compare with other translations that use “LORD.”
- There is no link between the translation of *YHWH* in the Old Testament and the translation of *kurios* in the New Testament. This link could be explained in a footnote or glossary entry.
- The translation may suggest characteristics of *YHWH* that do not fit with the God of the Bible.

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- ESV     English Standard Version  
 KJV     King James Version  
 NCV     New Century Version  
 NET     NET Bible (New English Translation)  
 NIV     New International Version  
 NLT     New Living Translation  
 NRSV    New Revised Standard Version  
 TEV     Today’s English Version