

7.7.1. TRANSLATION PROBLEMS

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7.7.1.1. INTRODUCTION

A general coverage is given here of the problems of translating into the languages of Papua New Guinea.¹ These problems are divided into two broad categories, grammatical and semantic.

The first translations were of religious literature, especially parts of the Bible, and material for schools. Over the years a wide range of material in such fields as religion, education, health, agriculture, and politics has been translated. Most of the translation has been done from English, with some done from other European languages. Not many Bible translators, however, have worked directly from Greek or Hebrew. While much of the translation, especially in recent years, has been into Pidgin, with some in Hiri Motu, work has also been done in something over 170 vernaculars and the number is increasing.

Most of the illustrations given are drawn from Bible translation. This is the field best known to the present writers, and they have been able to draw on the extensive records which have been compiled by the Summer Institute of Linguistics of specific problems encountered by Bible translators.² Also, Biblical literature contains a wide range of discourse types, and its translation requires the use of nearly all of the resources of a language.³

It should be noted that in the writers' view a good translation is one which conveys as clearly and accurately as possible, using the natural forms of the receptor language, the meaning of the original message. It is the problems involved in this kind of translation that will be discussed.

7.7.1.2. PROBLEMS RELATED TO GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURE

7.7.1.2.1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

There are a number of problems of translating into Papua New Guinea languages that can be subsumed under the general category of 'grammatical'. That is, they arise because of the incompatibility of the structures of Papua New Guinea languages and English or other Indo-European languages. These problems will be discussed one by one, making reference in each instance to that feature common to many Papua New Guinea languages to which the problem can be traced.

7.7.1.2.2. RARITY OF VERBAL NOUNS

One of the first problems that strikes translators in most languages in the area is the rarity of verbal nouns. Concepts which are semantically events must be rendered as verbs, not nouns. A patrol officer asked a linguistic team to translate the Eight-Point Improvement Plan for Papua New Guinea (Papua New Guinea: Central Planning Office 1973). One of the points reads, 'Decentralization of economic activity, planning and government spending, with emphasis on agricultural development, village industry, better internal trade, and more spending channeled through local and area bodies.' Such sentences are nightmares for translators in the area. Words such as 'decentralisation', 'activity', 'planning', 'spending', 'emphasis', 'development', and 'trade' would have to be rendered by verbs in most languages. This of course requires that grammatical subjects and sometimes objects be added. If the concepts exist in the culture, this is not difficult; but when the concepts themselves (such as industry) are foreign to the culture, the translation problem is compounded. A translatable version of the above point taken from the Improvement Plan might be: 'The government wants to decrease the work it does for businesses and what it plans and the money it spends in Port Moresby, and wants to increase what people and groups in local areas do to help farmers and small businesses whose owners live in villages, and help people in this country buy and sell things made in this country, and to help local groups spend the government's money.' It might be noted that this version expands the original from 27 to 69 words.

Even scripts prepared in rather simple English, perhaps with a view to translation in local vernaculars, often contain scores of verbal nouns that require changing to verbs in the actual translation process. Here are some samples from *Matias Talks About Government* (Hoffman 1969) which has been translated into a number of vernaculars. The literal English equivalents of the translation in Gahuku follows the English in these examples:

hum of an engine = the thing that hummed put its sound
 the long wait = that he kept waiting a long time
 happy meeting = they met and were happy
 decisions = we will say-cut (decide)
 keep a diary of appointments = you will burn a carving about
 people saying, 'we want to see the Administrator man'
 many requests = the people are continually requesting

Here are a few samples of how verbal nouns have had to be rendered in various languages in translating scripture:⁴

'So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ' (Romans 10:17) = 'They will preach the talk about Christ, then some will listen and believe' (Muyuw)

'grace and truth' (John 1:14) = 'He gave free big help and true talk' (Fasu)

'For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men' (Titus 2:11) = 'God saying like this, "I desire to save without reward all people", sent Christ' (Wahgi)

'saw their faith' (Mark 2:5) = 'knew then that they believed in him' (Halia)

'grace be with you' (2 Timothy 4:22) = 'I want God to help all of you freely' (Iatmul)

It should be noted that whereas in the highlands it is often impossible to render verbal nouns literally, it is possible to do so in the Austronesian type languages. But here again it has been found that changing them to verbs in translation greatly increases the intelligibility of the translation.

One of the concomitant difficulties arising from the necessity to render verbal nouns as verbs in Papua New Guinea is that a decision must be made as to how the resultant clause relates to the context; i.e. exactly what logical or temporal relationship to use as a connector. Often the translator succeeds in removing the noun and substituting a verb, only to use the wrong conjunction to relate the clause to the rest of the sentence.

7.7.1.2.3. LACK OF PASSIVE CONSTRUCTION

Another grammatical difficulty related to verbs is the lack of passive construction in the great majority of Papua New Guinea languages. This demands that in translation an active construction replace each passive, with appropriate subjects supplied. In some cases it is possible to

give as the subject a third person pronoun, and not further specify the agent of the action, perhaps using a tense which emphasises more the completed state of the action than the performer. This then comes closest to a formal equivalent of the passive.

Since the translator must use active constructions, he usually does so automatically. It is not difficult to render 'Jesus came to be baptised by John' (Matthew 3:13) as 'Jesus came so that John would baptise him.' But translators sometimes supply the wrong implied agent. The subject of *call* in 'that we should be called the children of God' (1 John 3:1) was first rendered as 'the outside people' and later revised to 'God' in Sinasina. The agent of 'thoughts may be revealed' (Luke 2:35) was changed from 'they' (people in general) to 'he' (God) in Enga. The agent of 'blessed be' (Luke 6:20) was first given as 'you pl.' and later changed to 'God' in Ke'yagana. The agent of 'the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes' (Mark 10:33) was first rendered as 'God' and later rendered as 'a man' in Wahgi.

7.7.1.2.4. ORDER OF ELEMENTS

7.7.1.2.4.1. Word Order

Another grammatical translation problem existing throughout Papua New Guinea in general deals with order. Obviously within words and phrases this is a universal problem, but the difficulties exist on every level in this area. In the great majority of languages in Papua New Guinea there are postpositionals instead of prepositions, often of an enclitic form. The order of elements within a clause is usually subject-object-verb. Numerals usually come at the end of a noun phrase. Such adjustments are not hard to make in translation. Even if there are major adjustments of order across two clauses, these are usually made easily. In the following example from Upper Asaro, the morpheme-by-morpheme translation is given below the vernacular forms:

beleti ma meni hiz-el-ove lo tauni-u' v-ol-ove.
bread some payment stake-will-I saying town-into go-will-I

This is the Asaro equivalent of 'I will go to town in order that I may buy some bread.' The exactly 100% reversal of morphemes between the two languages is typical in Papua New Guinea highlands languages, but still causes little difficulty.

But other adjustments in order require one to be more observant of lexical arrangement. For example, in a good many Papua New Guinea languages, one says 'mother and father' and never 'father and mother', and

'night and day' instead of the reverse order. Similarly the pattern is often 'Zebedee's sons James and John', not 'James and John, the sons of Zebedee'. Vocatives come at the beginning of a clause, not in the middle; thus 'Jesus, son of the most High God, what do you want with me?' (Mark 5:7) instead of the reverse order as in the original. Two successive clauses with similarity of lexical content, one containing a negative concept or a negative morpheme, are arranged in many languages with the negative clause preceding. Thus in Daga in John 11:50 it was necessary to reverse the clause order of the original and say 'it is bad that all should die, it is sufficient that one man die on behalf of people.' Likewise in Yamalele in Mark 2:27 it was necessary to reverse clause order and say 'God did not put (=make) men for the reason of the rest day; he put the rest day to help men.'

7.7.1.2.4.2. Order of Clauses in Sentences

There are two other problems with respect to order which cause difficulty in Papua New Guinea. The first is that, in the non-Austronesian languages especially, a dependent clause occurs before the one it is subordinate to. Thus clauses expressing such relationships as reason, condition, purpose, prior or simultaneous event, normally precede the independent clause. Since the tendency in English is just the opposite, the proper order of clauses in Papua New Guinea languages is often just the reverse (Deibler 1973:99ff.), or nearly so, from English. The same difficulty of course exists in translating vernacular materials back into English. The problem is so acute that the majority of translators in non-Austronesian languages find it almost impossible to render back into English on the spot material they themselves have translated into non-Austronesian languages. In our opinion, knowing in which order to translate the clauses in complex sentences is the most difficult problem facing translators in non-Austronesian languages. It is fortunate that the three languages used for simultaneous translation of the proceedings of the House of Assembly in Port Moresby have similar order of clauses within sentences; otherwise the task would be hopeless.

7.7.1.2.4.3. Chronological Order

A related problem is that of chronological order. All the languages have a strong tendency to prefer maintaining strict chronological sequence. The classic Biblical passage requiring reordering is Mark 6:14-20 (Deibler 1968), describing the events leading up to the death of John the Baptist. Since Papua New Guinea languages do not have a past perfect tense to indicate flashbacks (events which occurred prior

to those in the sequence being narrated), translation of this passage requires major reordering to restore the chronological order. In Urii it was necessary to change the order of events in Luke 8:26-30 as follows:

- 27b There was a demon-possessed man there, who wore no clothes, etc.
- 29b People seized him and kept him a prisoner, etc.
- 27a Jesus met him
- 29a Jesus commanded the evil spirit to depart
- 28 The man cried out in a loud voice
- 30 Jesus asked him his name

There are scores of similar instances where sections have had to be reordered chronologically to fit the language pattern. In Mark 12:20 'he died without having children' was changed to 'not having any children, he died' in Wahgi; in Luke 10:34 'bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine' was changed to 'poured on oil and wine, then tied up the wounds' in Duna; Acts 8:1-2 were reversed in Manambu because the burial of Stephen (vs.2) occurred before the persecution resulting from his death took place (vs.1).

Related to the need for retaining chronological order in most Papua New Guinea languages is the difficulty in handling flashbacks where they cannot be removed by reordering the sequence of events. In these cases one must be careful to introduce the flashback by whatever words are necessary to indicate 'previously' or 'before that event occurred'. In some languages the flashback is further set off by repeating the clause which preceded the flashback.

Another chronological order problem prevalent especially in non-Austronesian languages is that events which are implied in a chronological sequence in English need to be inserted in the translation. Acts 10:48 states, 'he commanded them to be baptised ... then they asked him to remain for some days;' in Wahgi the additional actions 'so they baptised them' and 'so Peter stayed with them' had to be added so the readers would know both actions actually occurred. In Acts 1:4-5 Jesus says, 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait ...'; in Gadsup the words 'and then go' must be added at the end, otherwise the readers will think the injunction was never to leave. In Luke 2:7, after describing the birth of Jesus and his being laid in a manger, the text says, 'because there was no room for them in the inn;' in Enga the events were placed in chronological order and the words 'she entered the cattle place and' inserted before mentioning the birth, to account for Mary getting from the inn to the place of Jesus's birth. In Genesis 11 where the text says, 'so-and-so lived ... so many years and had other sons and

daughters,' at the end of each occurrence the Timbe translation adds, 'and he died' to complete the chronological sequence.

7.7.1.2.5. SETTING THE STAGE FOR NARRATIVE SEQUENCES

Another problem connected with narrative sequences faces translators in many Papua New Guinea languages. Typically it is necessary to 'set the stage' listing participants, locations, and any background information before describing a sequence of events which follows. In Mark 1:16-17 the original text has 'Jesus was walking ... he saw Simon and his brother ... they were casting nets ... they were fishermen.' The most natural translation would say 'there were two brothers ... they were fishermen ... they were casting nets ... as Jesus walked along he saw them.' In Acts 19 there is mentioned in verse 13 the first part of an incident of attempted exorcism. The identification of these men is in verse 14. So in Kewa the order is reversed. Similarly in Duna, in the translation of the story of the rich man and Lazarus from Luke 16:19-31, the fact that the rich man had five brothers (which is not stated in the original until verse 28) needs to be mentioned at the beginning of the story.

7.7.1.2.6. RECAPITULATION OF THE VERB IN SUCCESSIVE SENTENCES

One final point regarding translation of sequences in narrative or procedural discourse deserves mention. It is typical in the non-Austronesian languages of Papua New Guinea to express a series of chronologically successive events by a long succession of clauses, all but the last of which occur with verbs in a dependent temporal form whose morphology is quite different from that of the verb in the final clause. In translating narrative passages into these languages, then, one does not necessarily make sentence breaks as frequently as they occur in the source text. When there is a sentence break, however (following a sentence-final independent clause), the succeeding sentence typically begins with a recapitulation of the same verb in a dependent temporal form. Thus in the Gahuku translation of *The Farmer* (Havenhand 1963), in one paragraph one sentence ends with 'he plants it' and the following sentence begins with 'As he plants it...'. Further on in the same paragraph one sentence ends with 'he spreads on medicine' (insecticide) and the following sentence begins with 'After he has spread on medicine ...'. It should also be mentioned that in most highland languages of Papua New Guinea a translator cannot give the clause expressing 'after he has spread on the medicine' until he has made a decision on whether the agent of the succeeding clause will be the same as or

different from the one who does the spreading, because the morphology of the verb in the temporal clause (and often other clause types as well) differs according to whether its subject is the same as or different from that of the following clause.

7.7.1.2.7. QUOTATIONS

Also in the general area of discourse structure are translation problems regarding the use of quotations. Very few Papua New Guinea languages have both direct and indirect speech forms to express quotations. Direct speech is used almost exclusively. This requires adjustment of pronouns to conform to patterns of direct speech when translating indirect speech forms. In quite a few languages there is, under certain pronominal circumstances, a curious mixture of direct and indirect pronominal forms within quoted speech (Deibler 1971). Thus in Gahuku, when translating either of the sentences 'He said that he would give it to me' and 'He said, "I will give it to you"' the result comes out literally as 'He said I will give it to me.' The first person subject pronoun of the verb *give* refers to the original speaker of the utterance, and the first person indirect object pronoun refers to the one citing the quote.

It should also be noted that in many Papua New Guinea languages it is customary to mark the end of a quotation by words indicating the speaker. Similar quotation-citing forms often precede the quote as well.

7.7.1.2.8. PROBLEMS WITH PRONOUNS

There are a number of pronominal problems in connection with translating into Papua New Guinea languages. Some Sepik and Bougainville area languages distinguish gender but very few other languages do. In translation this means that sometimes a noun phrase must replace a third singular pronoun to remove ambiguities. In Mark 1:30-31 after removing the gender distinctions, the passage would read thus (representing the ambiguous third singular pronoun by the Pidgin *em*): 'Em was told about em. Em took em by the hand and helped em up. The fever left em and em began to wait on them.' The result is obviously very hazy as to who did what to whom.

On the other hand, many Papua New Guinea languages make distinctions which Indo-European languages do not. This requires the translator to make a choice where the source language requires none - often the choice being an educated guess. Many languages distinguish dual versus plural. In such cases Acts 4:7 has to be translated 'they (pl.) made the

apostles (du.) stand before them (pl.) and asked them (du.), "How did you (du.) do this?'" Many Austronesian languages distinguish inclusive and exclusive. This requires the translator in Mark 4:38 to decide whether the disciples thought Jesus would die in the storm too when they woke him up in the boat and asked him, 'Don't you care that we are about to die?'

The other pronominal problems in translation in Papua New Guinea languages centre about non-literal use of pronouns, which phenomenon is much more limited than in Indo-European languages. The 'editorial we' does not seem to exist. Thus a literal translation of 'we write to you' (1 John 1:1) is bound to cause confusion about authorship. Likewise referring to oneself in the third person singular, as has been common in speech-making and book-writing in English, is virtually unknown. As a result nearly all the gospel passages in which Christ refers to himself as the Son of Man, the Son of God, or the Son, need to have a first person singular pronoun added.

Although the problems on non-literal usage of pronouns often cause the same problems in translation elsewhere as in Papua New Guinea, there are two of these which deserve mention because of their widespread occurrence in Papua New Guinea and their frequency in Biblical passages. One is that if one uses a non-first person pronoun, he excludes himself from those being referred to. Thus in Gahuku in the translation of Romans chapter 9, when the apostle Paul speaks of the heritage of the Jews, he says, 'they are God's chosen people; he made them his sons ...' etc. This meant to the hearers that Paul was not a Jew; so the whole passage had to be recast using the first plural pronouns instead of the third plural. Another widespread problem is in expressing the generic sense intended by such expressions as 'he who', 'whoever', 'if anyone'. A literal translation of these in many Papua New Guinea languages conveys the idea that one specific unnamed individual is being discussed. Thus in John 5:24 'he who hears my word and believes in him who sent me has eternal life' meant in Daga that there was one fortunate individual to whom it applied; and almost every one of these generic pronouns in the New Testament had to be changed to the plural.

7.7.1.2.9. ABSENCE OF COMPARATIVE AND SUPERLATIVE FORMS

Another grammatical translation problem which exists in all Papua New Guinea languages to our knowledge is that there is no simple comparative (or superlative) construction such as the *-er than/more than* in English. There are usually two avenues open to the translator: either he uses a verb meaning 'surpass' and says, 'A surpasses B', with

the quality such as length, height, size, age, etc. being left to be understood from context; or he uses two clauses, one of which contains a negative, an antonym, or a morpheme meaning 'very' or 'not quite so'. Thus in Sinasina 'I have no greater joy' (3 John 4) is expressed as 'this happiness of mine surpasses all other happiness.' In Selepet the expression 'there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine respectable people ...' (Luke 15:7) was finally rendered as 'God is not greatly happy with ninety-nine ... God is very happy with one sinner ...' Sometimes, of course, one must use the antonym throughout the comparison to make sense in translation. Thus in Wahgi the passage 'it is easier for a camel ... than a rich man ...' (Mark 10:25) had to be finally rendered 'it is heavy for a camel ... it is very heavy for a rich man ...' Likewise in Muyuw the statement 'It shall be more tolerable on that day for Sodom than for that town' was effectively rendered 'Sodom village will encounter bad payment ... that village, they will encounter very bad payment' (Matthew 11:24).

7.7.1.2.10. PROBLEMS WITH ELLIPSES

Most ellipses that are possible in English are not possible in Papua New Guinea languages. Verbal ellipses especially must be filled in. In most languages one cannot say 'are you going or not?' but must make the second clause 'or are you not going?'. The capitalised words in the following rendering of John 15:4 are ones which are omitted in the original but required in translations in Papua New Guinea: 'Dwell in me, as I DWELL in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it remain in the vine, so you cannot BEAR FRUIT unless you remain in me.' In Mark 11:32 the elliptical main clause in the sentence, 'But if we say it was from men ...' must be filled in with something like 'the people will mob us.'

7.7.1.3. PROBLEMS RELATED TO SEMANTICS

7.7.1.3.1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In the area of semantics many problems of translation seem to be either very general or very specific. Studies have shown similarities among the grammatical structures of groups of languages in Papua New Guinea, but there has not yet been much in the way of studies to show similarities in semantic structures between groups of languages. And perhaps the area of semantics will not reveal so much according to groupings of languages, though Laycock (1970) refers to some widespread similarities in the area of meaning of certain lexical items in Papua New Guinea.

7.7.1.3.2. ITEMS NOT KNOWN IN A CULTURE AND WITH NO TERM IN A LANGUAGE

7.7.1.3.2.1. Objects

One very obvious problem is how to deal with items that are not known in the culture and for which there is no term in the language. These include, e.g. natural phenomena, such as 'the sea' for some people living in the highlands, flora and fauna, things connected with Western science and institutions, and various parts of Biblical culture. Some translators have simply borrowed words from the language they are translating from, with the hope that the readers will eventually come to know the meaning of the words through receiving teaching and through noting the various contexts in which the words occur.⁵ When a word is borrowed, its spelling is usually changed to fit the orthography of the Papua New Guinea language. However, there have been quite a number of languages in which translators have kept the English spelling of borrowed words. Thus, e.g. for '*donkey*' one finds forms like *donki* and *doniki*, but also *donkey*, and where the plural is needed sometimes one even finds *donkeys*, where the English plural suffix is used instead of the appropriate vernacular form, which in Papua New Guinea is often zero. Some translators have felt the strangeness of including words in English spelling and so they have such words printed in italics. This helps to alert the reader to the fact that a strange word is there, but it still leaves him with a pronunciation problem.

In Bible translation some borrowings have come from Greek, Hebrew, and Latin. In London Missionary Society translations on the south coast of Papua, for example, *evanelia* from Greek *evangelion* was commonly used for '*gospel*' and *satauro* from Greek *stauros* for '*cross*'.

In time the meaning of such borrowings may become generally known, and the words themselves become part of the language. This has happened with *evanelia* and *satauro*. But in the meantime the meaning of borrowed words is missed by many people; and if there are quite a few borrowings in a translation, their intelligibility suffers and reader interest drops. And if a translator regularly adopts the 'borrowing' solution he can soon find he has many unintelligible passages.

Sometimes the context may give the reader enough idea of what a borrowed term means. However, if it does not do so, then the necessary information ought to be supplied; perhaps not at every occurrence of the word but in sufficient places to ensure intelligibility for each discourse the word occurs in. One way of dealing with the problem is to use the borrowed word together with a word or phrase which gives the needed information. For example, in the Au language a translator put a word meaning '*domestic animal*' with the word *tonkii* '*donkey*'. In the

issue of *Nius Bilong Yumi* of 15 September 1973, '*prospectus*' is translated *liklik buk ol i kolim prospectus 'a small book called a prospectus'*. Often proper names require this approach too; for example, it is advisable in Acts 13:4 to say 'Cyprus island' rather than just have 'Cyprus' (which is all the Greek has), otherwise it is not clear to the Papua New Guinean reader just who or what 'Cyprus' refers to.

However, if too long an explanation is attempted it may obscure the main point of the discourse. If the translator wishes to give more information he can use footnotes or a glossary. This is done in a number of Bible translations, especially to give information of historical or cultural background. Illustrations can also help in some situations.

The use of a borrowed word can be avoided in a number of ways. A descriptive phrase may be used. So, for example, 'prophet' is often translated by a phrase meaning 'one who speaks out God's message', and 'phylactery' by a phrase meaning 'a small box containing verses of Scripture'. For items which occur frequently, translators generally try to develop a shortened version of the phrase after a while.

If an item is unknown, it may be that a more general word will do. In Mark 2:23 there is a reference to 'grainfields' and 'eating grain'. In Fore and Faiwol translators have used the generic 'food gardens' and 'food', which is the point of the story, and avoided the problem of a specific word for 'grain'. Also in Faiwol, 'basket' has been translated 'container'. However, a more generic term is not always available. Laycock (1970), for example, notes that not everywhere in Papua New Guinea are there generic terms for 'snake' or 'fish', and it seems no language has a generic term 'animal'. In this situation, the translator chooses the name of the most appropriate species, perhaps adding a qualifying word or phrase. Thus in many translations 'donkey' is translated 'donkey pig', since 'pig' is the generic term for domestic animal. In Karam (Kalam), while there are many terms for specific colours, there is no general term 'colour' (Bulmer 1968). This is so in many languages, and the English word is often borrowed by the speakers themselves, whether directly or through Pidgin.

Then there is the possibility of using a cultural substitute, some item in the culture which has a function equivalent to that of the term one wishes to translate. So, if one is translating a story in which 'sheep' are mentioned simply as a farm animal that may be eaten, one might translate it 'pig' or 'cattle'. In Guhu-Samane biiri '*festival longhouse*' has been used for temple; and for 'priest' an expression meaning 'knife man', a term used of a man who made sacrifices in a Guhu-Samane cult (Richert 1965a). There are many occasions where cultural

substitutes might be used. However, just how much use one makes of them depends on the type of translation one is doing. Bible translators generally feel that they must keep the historical integrity and cultural setting of the original text. Thus in Faiwol at Mark 6:43 putting 'string bags' for 'baskets' was considered, but this was decided against as it was not what was really used, and so they chose to use the generic term 'containers'. Greater use is made of cultural equivalents in teaching discourses, though most people want to avoid having a translation that expresses the culture of Papua New Guinea in the teaching and Palestinian culture in the historical parts. But it is hard to draw a line on just what is best at this point, and it is a topic much debated by Bible translators. Though not a translation, Atkin 1970 gives an idea of what a completely cultural translation would be like. In it 'the good Samaritan' becomes 'the good Chimbu', and the journey between Jerusalem and Jericho becomes one between two places in Fort Moresby.

A cultural substitute may be introduced more acceptably in some situations by the use of a simile. In Biangai in Genesis 8:7 for 'raven' the translator put 'a bird like an akomek'.

7.7.1.3.2.2. Customs

So far only objects have been referred to. A similar range of problems and solutions is found with customs. A custom may be unknown, and while the action associated with it can be translated, its function might not be understood. An example is the washing of someone else's feet as a sign of humility. In Muyuw, for John 13:14 a translator put 'serve one another like washing one another's feet' to make the meaning clear. The Jewish idea of not being worthy of even removing the sandals of an important person is foreign to Papua New Guinea, and so in an Awa translation this was translated 'because he is an important one, when he speaks I will be silent' (Mark 1:7).

The same item or custom may be found in two cultures but the function or significance may be quite different, with the result that a literal translation leads to misunderstanding. For the Jews the left side could mean the bad side as against the right side, which was the good side; but it could also just mean the slightly less important of the two sides, as in Mark 10:37, where James and John ask to sit on the right and left side of Jesus. However, in many Papua New Guinea languages the left side is only the place of dishonour. In a Sepik language one translator tried using the more general 'white, i.e. light-coloured, bird' for 'dove' in a passage referring to the Holy Spirit. However, to the people the white bird was taken to refer to the white cockatoo, a noisy

quarrelsome bird, which was inappropriate, so a different solution had to be found. In Siane a translator was going to put the word for 'twin' in to describe a man (John 20:24). However, it was found that the word had a bad connotation for the Siane, as twins are despised in that area. It was thus better to omit the reference to 'twin', as it was not important for the understanding of the story.

Probably in all cultures the names of certain groups carry particular connotations, good or bad, but these connotations may not be understood by outsiders. In Papua New Guinea just to say a man is 'a Samaritan' is not enough in translating a passage where the connotation of 'foreign, despised' is important, as in the story of the good Samaritan. The tax-collectors in the time of Christ were generally considered dishonest, so that the term could be used in the sense of 'wicked people'. While tax-collectors may not be liked in Papua New Guinea, the term does not have the same connotation as it had in Palestine in New Testament times, and in translation this connotation must often be made explicit.

7.7.1.4. DIFFERING SEMANTIC DOMAINS

We turn to another major problem in translation, that of differing semantic domains. For example, words from different languages may have part of the area of meaning they cover in common, but there may also be some differences in their area of meaning which can be important for translation. Davis (n.d.b) discusses this problem with the word for 'shame' in Wantoat. He says that in English 'shame' means 'to feel badly because someone has said bad things about me which I consider deserved; or to feel badly because I think my actions towards another have been improper or disappointing to him', while the Wantoat word means 'to feel badly because someone has said bad things which I consider undeserved, or to feel badly because another's actions towards me have been improper or disappointing to me'. So while in Luke 9:26 one uses 'shame' in English, 'whoever is ashamed of me ... of him will the Son of Man be ashamed', one cannot use the word for shame in Wantoat. Rather one has to translate it by a word meaning 'reject'.

While Papua New Guinea languages have a word for 'heart', the heart is not the seat of the emotions as it is in English. In many languages the stomach is the seat of the emotions, as is *bel* in Pidgin: *bel i hat* 'to be angry', *bel i gut* 'to be happy'. In other languages it is the liver, as in Gahuku where 'Martha was upset' is expressed as 'it entered Martha's liver'. The translator must, of course, follow the usage of the language he is translating into.

One word may be used to cover the area of meaning that another language has two words for. Laycock (1970:1168) points out, for example, that it is common in Papua New Guinea languages to find one word meaning both 'tree' and 'wood', and one word meaning 'man' and 'husband'. In ordinary communication the context generally makes the meaning clear, but in a translation this may not be so and some adjustment may be required. In Witu, as in some other languages, there is one word for both 'shadow' and 'spirit'; and so in Acts 5:15, which talks of people hoping for healing even if only Peter's shadow fell on them, it is necessary to say explicitly 'sun-shadow'. Another problem for Bible translators is that often the same word is used for a man's spirit, the spirits of the dead, who are often considered to be evil, and for the Holy Spirit. It is almost always necessary to make the particular meaning explicit by the use of a qualifier.

In many Papua New Guinea languages the area of meaning covered by the word 'sibling' is divided differently from English. English has a sex division, 'brother' and 'sister', whereas these languages may have three terms, 'older sibling of the same sex', 'younger sibling of the same sex', and 'sibling of the opposite sex'. The translator has to know if a sibling of the same sex is older or younger. But this information does not have to be specified in English, so the translator has to do some research before he can translate, for example, Matthew 4:18-21 in which two sets of brothers are mentioned.

There are some other interesting points about kinship terms. Many Papua New Guinea languages have some reciprocal kinship terms. For example, they may have the same word for 'grandparent' and 'grandchild', for 'uncle' and 'nephew', and for 'father-in-law' and 'son-in-law'. The translator must decide in each case whether it is necessary to be any more specific, and if so then he may need to add a qualifier or a longer expression, such as 'daughter's husband' for 'son-in-law'.

In Biblical Hebrew the terms for 'son' and 'daughter' could be used of all descendants, but this is often not so in Papua New Guinea. So for example, the expression 'daughter of Abraham' where it does not refer to a real daughter, must be translated 'a woman of Abraham's clan' or the like. Also, in Biblical usage 'brother' and 'sister' can be used of friends or fellow-Christians. In many languages this extension of meaning is not found, so one has to use another term such as 'friend'. In Iai 'brother' can be used of someone from the same area, but 'friend' for others, and so the translator has to decide whether the person is from the same area or not. In Motu a very wide relationship term meaning 'relatives' is used.

Earlier the problem of how to deal with items that are not known in the culture and for which a language has no term was discussed, considering the items by themselves. However, in many cases the best solution can only be found after considering a number of terms in the language which cover the area of meaning involved. For example, most Papua New Guinea languages have terms for only a few musical instruments. In Daniel 3:5 there is a list of five, probably six, musical instruments, some stringed and some wind. The translator has to see how they match the instruments for which there are terms in the language. Some then choose just to use those terms, feeling that they cover the area of meaning adequately; others add a phrase such as 'and others like them'; and others make up descriptive phrases for the instruments they do not already have terms for. Another example is the area of meaning involving rulers - governor, king, emperor, lord, etc. Many Papua New Guinea languages do not have a range of terms comparable to the English ones, but the terms a language does have and their area of meaning must be considered before the translator makes a decision, whether it is to just use the terms available, or add qualifiers, or try to construct a descriptive phrase, or whatever. The areas of weights and measures also involve similar problems. In pre-contact times, while a few languages had some units of measure, very few if any had any units of weight, but today a number of terms, such as 'pound' and 'mile', have been borrowed from English. However, not all English terms have been borrowed and also, in some contexts, exact quantities are not meaningful. So translators on occasions use, for example, bags of rice or drums of flour as units of weight, rather than give an exact number of pounds weight.

7.7.1.5. PROBLEMS IN TRANSLATING NUMERALS

There are problems in translating numerals in many Papua New Guinea languages. Some languages have ordinal numbers and some do not. Those which do not, often borrow the Pidgin expression *namba* followed by the cardinal numeral to express ordinals. An even more basic problem is that in many areas the counting systems are very cumbersome. For instance, the expression for 'eight' in Gahuku is *ligizani lugaloka asu' oake lugaloka losive makole oli'o molago*, which means '*after the fingers on one side were finished, two (and) another jumped over (from) the other side*'. Obviously a system which uses nine words to express the number eight is not very satisfactory for translation purposes. In most areas the younger generation rapidly adopts Pidgin or English numerals, but these have to be re-translated for the older generation. Trying to get across concepts of basic arithmetic in the vernacular is very difficult,

because the people are not used to dealing in abstract terms and have had very little use for anything numerical except elementary counting. One book-keeper in the Wahgi area was recording amounts collected in offerings. The sum of \$68 was recorded as \$60.53. This was quite logical: 60 was recorded as \$60 and eight was recorded (following the vernacular counting system) as 5+3. Terms such as 'add' and 'subtract' can usually be extended from idiomatic expressions such as 'join on' and 'cut off and get rid of'. But terms such as 'times' or 'multiplied by', 'goes into' or 'divided by', 'equals' or 'is the same as', are foreign to the culture. Fractions and percentages are still more difficult to try to translate. A translator trying to express in Kamano the concept that 'it took me longer to travel from A to B yesterday than it did today' received the native reaction that the road was longer yesterday.

7.7.1.6. DIFFERENCES IN PERMITTED COLLOCATIONS

Differences in permitted collocations exist between all languages, and the wider the linguistic and cultural difference the more likely the differences are to cause translation problems. In some cases difference in collocation forbids certain lexemes being used in conjunction. For example, in translating John 12 in non-Austronesian languages one cannot usually speak of trees as dead but as dried up. But in Kalam one cannot speak of being healed of hemorrhaging (Mark 5:28) but one must say instead it was dried up. In Gahuku a leper is not made clean (Mark 1:42) nor healed but 'made to shed his skin'. Many languages will not permit a translator to speak of being 'baptised with the Holy Spirit' (Mark 1:8) but require a different verb to be used. Most of the languages forbid using the verb *come* with anything but a human agent; thus one cannot speak of a voice coming (Mark 1:11), faith coming (Galatians 3:23), or a kingdom coming (Matthew 6:10).

7.7.1.7. DIFFERING DISTINCTIONS IN LEXEMES

Likewise Papua New Guinea languages have distinctions that are required in certain lexemes, which are not a feature of Indo-European languages. The majority of Papua New Guinea languages have obligatory possession of a great many terms expressing body parts. So in such languages one must change 'the eye cannot say to the hand' (1 Corinthians 12:21) to 'a man's eye cannot say to his hand', or 'our eyes cannot say to our hands', etc. A great many of the languages require kinship terms to be possessed. Thus 'the father loves the son' (John 5:20) must be rendered 'my father loves me, his son'.

7.7.1.8. OBLIGATORY DISTINCTIONS IN SOME LANGUAGES

Many Papua New Guinea languages have obligatory directional distinctions. In Gahuku there are five expressions for 'go' depending on the relative amount of ascent or descent involved; Mountain Arapesh requires a decision to be made on whether an object is nearer the speaker or the hearer in stating a term for 'this' or 'that'. Muyuw requires a distinction be made on whether a motion is toward the speaker, away from the speaker, or away from both, and whether things are possessed intimately, distantly or intermediately. Many languages make obligatory distinctions between actions that are real or unreal, and between those that are seen or just reported. For example, in Angal Heneng there are three different forms of the verb depending on involvement of speaker and hearer in the action, and all three are illustrated in Luke 18:18-19. When Jesus says, 'I saw Satan fall', it is assumed that the speaker saw the action and the hearers didn't, and the form of the verb indicates such. When Jesus continues and says 'I have given you power', the form used indicates that both speaker and hearers were together when the action occurred. But on the verb of the clause expressing 'Jesus said to them', a third form is used which indicates that neither the writer (Luke) nor the addressee (Theophilus) were there at the time the incident occurred.

7.7.1.9. FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Figurative language presents problems. It is probable that most languages use most of the various types of figures of speech and draw figures from many areas of culture. However, it does not always happen that the same figure with the same meaning occurs in two languages, even when the languages concerned are closely related, so that a literal translation will be confusing or meaningless. The main approaches are (i) to retain the original figure but to give the meaning as well, (ii) to omit the figure and give only the meaning, or (iii) to use a figurative expression from the language into which the translation is being done which has the same meaning as the original figure.

Similes contain a word which signals that one is dealing with a figure, and so it is more often possible to retain the original figure than it is with most other types of figurative language. But if necessary changes can be made, as in the following examples. In an Iatmul translation of 'I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves' (Luke 10:3) the word 'weak' was added to make clear the point that the lambs are defenceless. A translator of 'be wise as serpents and innocent as doves' (Matthew 10:16) in Komba found it necessary to take out the

picture as it was too strange, and just the meaning was given, 'live without falsity and with wisdom and straightness'. In Duna for the picture that a doubter is 'like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind' (James 1:6), a translator used a natural local figure 'like the wind moving the leaves of the tree backwards and forwards'. The equivalent of a Biblical figure indicating a large number, 'like the sand of the sea', is 'like the hairs on a dog' in the Angal Heneng language.

Metaphors contain no word that identifies them, and so it is easier for them to be misunderstood and taken literally. For example, Davis (n.d.a) found that the metaphorical use of adultery in the Bible in the sense of being unfaithful to God was not correctly understood by speakers from a number of languages in Papua New Guinea. As well as the approaches already mentioned for handling figurative expressions, metaphors may be turned into similes, specifying the meaning if necessary. So for 'made shipwreck of their faith' (I Timothy 1:19) one Pidgin translation has bilip bilong ol i bagarap olsem sip i bruk long rip *'their faith has been ruined like a ship wrecked on a reef'*.

The translation of expressions involving metonymy generally involves a change of form. Thus, for example, when a place name is used to refer to the inhabitants, translators in a wide range of languages have found it necessary to refer specifically to the inhabitants. So for example, 'Jerusalem' becomes 'the inhabitants of Jerusalem', and 'the world' becomes 'the people of the world'. Even if a language does have this use of metonymy, it may not be so readily understood if the name involved is a strange one. A thing may be used for the custom it is associated with and it may be necessary to refer specifically to the custom. In Gahuku a translator found he had to change 'let the marriage bed be undefiled' (Hebrews 13:4) to 'do not spoil the marriage'. Also, a thing may be used for an event associated with it. In Acts 5:28 'blood' is used to refer to death, and translators in both Motu and Pidgin have given the meaning 'killing' or 'death' to make the meaning clear.

Another type of figurative expression is synecdoche. It too generally requires the meaning to be made explicit. For example, 'flesh and blood' (Galatians 1:16) and 'tongue' (Philippians 2:11) are often translated as 'person'.

As a result of the translation processes just outlined, it usually happens that the translation will have fewer figurative expressions than the original, unless the translator makes a conscious attempt to compensate by translating some non-figurative expressions by figurative ones. This aspect is extremely important when translating into those

languages of Papua New Guinea which make great use of figurative language. Such languages are found particularly in the highlands. Brennan (1970) says that there are two vocabulary levels in the Enga language, one which is that of neutral or everyday speech and another which makes great use of symbols. The latter is used in contexts of dignity and importance, such as the telling of traditional stories and making public speeches. Brennan points out that a good translator will make appropriate use of the symbolic language. Young (1968) notes the use of 'hidden talk' among the Bena Bena when serious matters are being discussed, and suggests that in some types of material the translator should not make everything quite clear.

7.7.1.10. EUPHEMISMS

All languages have euphemisms for certain things, for example the areas of sex, death, and the supernatural; but languages differ as to just what things they have euphemisms for, the circumstances in which they use them, and the form of the euphemisms. The translation problems are rather similar to those for dealing with figurative language already mentioned. It is not often possible to translate a euphemism literally. A euphemism may be translated by a euphemism with the same meaning. In the Hebrew of the Old Testament various euphemisms such as 'know' and 'lie with' are used to refer to sexual intercourse. Most translations also use euphemisms, such as the Hiri Motu *mahuta hebou* and Pidgin *slip wantaim* which both mean literally '*sleep with*'. A problem for Bible translators is the translation of 'circumcise', where the custom is in many areas not known but where it is felt a euphemism should be used to refer to it. Both Hiri Motu and Pidgin translations generally use expressions meaning 'to cut the skin'. However, this is not at all clear; so in a few places in one Pidgin translation of Genesis the meaning is made explicit in the text, while in one Hiri Motu translation of Genesis the meaning is given in a glossary entry. The Jews also avoided mention of the name of God and sometimes also of the term 'God' itself. Thus in the New Testament 'heaven' is often used for 'God'. Many translators have not felt a euphemism necessary and so have simply translated it by the word for God. A plain expression may need to be translated by a euphemism. The need may depend on who the audience is to be. Bible translation will often be read aloud to a mixed audience, so translators have to be particularly careful. In Gahuku one does not normally mention blood in connection with menstruation, so the translator uses the usual euphemism, 'the moon struck her'. In Mangga Buang for 'your daughter is dead' a translator found it preferable to use the euphemism 'your daughter's eyes are closed'.

7.7.1.11. RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

Considerable space could be devoted to problems of translating rhetorical questions in Papua New Guinea languages. The problem is general, however, and not confined to Papua New Guinea. It is enough to say that the forms and semantic functions of rhetorical questions used in Papua New Guinea languages do not fully correspond with those of Indo-European languages. They are very commonly used in Papua New Guinea to express various kinds of negative evaluation, such as disapproval, rebuke, or the impossibility of some action. Thus 'Is it possible to do God's work and also want a lot of money?' is a good translation of a sentence which is indicative in the original (Matthew 6:24), and 'Why weren't you able to stay awake?' is a good way to indicate rebuke by adding the word 'why' to the question in the original (Mark 14:37). But rhetorical questions to introduce a new subject or express uncertainty or amazement or personal belittlement, such as occur in Biblical materials, are foreign to Papua New Guinea languages. One translation helper, during 35 years of previous pastoral experience, could never understand why Jesus said 'Who are my mother and my brothers?'

N O T E S

1. The languages and cultures of the people of Irian Jaya are very similar to those of Papua New Guinea and one finds similar translation problems there (Dr M. Bromley and Rev. J. Ellenberger, personal communications).
2. We express appreciation to the Summer Institute of Linguistics for allowing us to draw on these records.
3. Problems in some other fields, e.g. government and law, are discussed in chapters 7.7.2.-5. of this volume, which deal with Interpretation Problems.
4. Quotations from the English Bible are taken from the Revised Standard Version with some variations for clarity.
5. Of course, many words have been borrowed from English by languages of Papua New Guinea, as the people have had increasing contact with Western culture. These words come into use when the objects they refer to become known, so there is not a problem of learning the meaning. It is borrowing words for items that people are unlikely to learn about in their everyday life that is the real problem.

7.7.1. TRANSLATION PROBLEMS

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