

## PREFACE

### THE BIBLE AND ITS TRANSLATIONS: COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL ENCOUNTERS WITH THE INDIGENOUS

The translation of the Bible is the one publishing success story in the third world. It seemed to have overcome the natural resistance of a primary oral culture to the written word. In the past the Bible and its translations into the indigenous languages of the colonised represented colonial empowerment. In recent years, however, the status quo seems to have changed. By means of a process of indigenisation of the translated versions of the Bible, these translations have come to prescribe and dominate biblical dialogue, the nature of the colonial encounter between the source text and translations, and the target audiences, by commenting on the cultural mechanisms of ownership, resistance and indigenisation as vacillating media of oppression and liberation.

The papers in this volume originate from three conferences, as well as research introducing new areas in Bible translation and Bible translation training. The three conferences include the 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference of the International Association of Translation and Intercultural Studies held in Cape Town during July 2006. A special panel “the Bible and its translations: colonial encounters with the indigenous” formed part of this conference. The second conference referred to is a conference celebrating the 150 years of the Bible in Setswana on 26 October 2007 — “Is the Bible still relevant for the Southern African Society?” held at the Bible Society of South Africa, Bloemfontein. The third was an academic day organised by the Bible Society of South Africa, Bloemfontein on 29 August 2008 celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Bible in Afrikaans.

In his article *Hide and seek. Aspects of the dynamics of Bible translation*, **Christo Lombaard** sets the scene for the theme of this volume by using the metaphor of masks in Africa, which hide what lie behind them, and in another sense seek to project an interpretation. He views translation of the biblical texts, which result from very complex processes, as fetishes. The thick mesh of explicit meanings and implicit nuances cannot be duplicated during a translation process. With foundational religious texts such as the Bible, a host of connotations around the nature of holy text enter into the picture too, with most lay Bible readers remaining unaware of just how tentative an undertaking the enterprise of Bible translation is. A proper view of the nature of the Bible text and the theoretical load of exegetical and translation activities must be cultivated among lay translation users. This article provides a different perspective than the usual

lament on the complex dynamics of translation for both lay Bible readers and professional translators.

The next three articles focus on the Bible in Setswana. **Jan Lubbe** describes the colonial encounter of source text and target text and target audience in Robbert Moffat's translation of the Setswana Bible. The article, "*By patience, labour and prayer. The voice of the unseen God in the language of the Bechuana nation.*" *A reflection on the history of Robert Moffat's Setswana Bible (1857)*, gives a historical description on how Robert and his wife Mary convinced "the Bechuana nation" to accept and read the Gospel in their own language, by living "the voice of the Unseen God". The Setswana Bible was the first in an African language in sub-Saharan Africa and also the first to be printed at the mission station at Kuruman. The question is what made Moffat's Setswana Bible so popular? Sources indicate that it might have been the daily life and work of Moffat and his wife for nearly half a century amongst the Batswana. In the contribution by **Gerald West**, *The beginning of African Biblical interpretation: The Bible among the Batlhaping*, he refers to the value of a primary oral culture prior to the translation of the Bible in Africa. Africans were engaging with the Bible, initially as an iconic object of power and then as an aural object. Colonial powers, whether it was through missionaries, traders or explorers, brought the Bible to Africa believing in its power as 'the Word of God'. Africans observed them, however, as an object of power. Elements of early reception of the Bible among the Batlhaping people (for whom the Bible was translated into Setswana by Moffat) are indicated. West further analyses the theology that lies behind Bible translation, for the translation of the Bible into local languages must be understood as an aspect of a larger theological orientation. He indicates that once the Bible has been translated, the issue of ownership comes to the fore with these translations having the capacity 'to speak for itself'. Linking to the work of Robert Moffat, is the article by **Steve de Gruchy**, *Reversing the Biblical tide: What Kuruman teaches London about mission in a post-colonial era*. He uses a case study on the shift from the London Missionary Society (LMS) to the Council for World Mission and argues that there is a hermeneutical circle between the Bible and mission. A particular reading of the Bible led the missionaries of the LMS to Africa, and their concern to promote the Bible led to the translation and printing of the Bible in indigenous languages — most famously Moffat's Setswana translation. Inevitably, the availability of the Bible in indigenous languages led to new ways of understanding the church and mission from the perspective of the South. By translating and printing the Bible at Kuruman (and elsewhere), the LMS participated in a movement that ultimately led to its demise as a colonial mission society. Moffat's work can therefore be seen as both the climax of a certain way of understanding mission, and the planting of the seed for a new way of doing so. In this way it signals not only to what London contributed to Kuruman, but also to what Kuruman would ultimately contribute to London.

The primary oral and religious practices of traditional Zulu people are investigated in **Rose Masubele's** article *Missionary interventions in Zulu religious practices: The term for the Supreme Being*. Zulus conducted their religious practices orally and in their appeals to a Supreme Being used the terms *uNkulunkulu* (the Great-Great-One) or *uMvelinqangi* (the First-to-Appear) interchangeably. In the colonial encounter between source text (in the form of Western missionaries) and the target text and audiences (subsequent translation of the Bible into Zulu), the original concept of the Supreme Being was changed and cast into a Christian mould. This article traces interventions in Zulu religious practices by the missionaries and aims to show, with reference to 12 translations and a revised version of the Book of Matthew, translators' preferences for terms to refer to God that were unknown to the people. The linguistic choices of the translators indicate how the earliest translators adopted the norms of the source text and culture, while in the latest translations the norms of the target culture were adhered to.

**Johannes Makutoane** and **Jacobus Naudé** investigate the nature of translators' encounters and negotiations between the source text culture and the culture of the target audience in their article, *Colonial interference in the translations of the Bible in Southern Sotho*. Bible translations in South Africa were conceptualised and executed by either missionary societies or Bible societies from the colonial powers. The first translation of the Bible into Southern Sotho was the edition published in 1909. It represents colonial empowerment of the dominated target culture by the hegemonic culture of the translators. The second translation is the new Southern Sotho translation, published in 1989, exhibiting dynamic equivalent translation. Both translations prescribe and dominate biblical dialogue in the Southern Sotho community. The authors show that the readers of the Southern Sotho translations are held prisoner by Western translators by denying them the right to biblical texts received and interpreted on their own terms as religious artefacts from the ancient Mediterranean world.

**Robert Toledo** explains colonial encounters with the indigenous on another continent in his article *Biblical literacy and transnational Mayan liberation movements*. The Zapatista and other Mayan movements in Mexico and Guatemala are demanding autonomy and respect for indigenous cultures. Still struggling for land rights lost during colonialism and now suffering from neo-liberal trade policies, Mayan communities have creatively appropriated Christian doctrine to deal with their suffering. Toledo examines the central role of the Bible in the mobilisation of Mayan communities where the majority of members identify themselves as Christian as well as Mayan. Biblical literacy has led to broader identifications across multiple dialects and has given women and lower classes greater access to religious doctrine.

In *Where have all the bishops gone?*, **Ella Wehrmeyer** investigates how the Greek term \_\_\_\_\_ and its related variants are translated in English Bible

translations. From early translations to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “bishop” was the preferred translation equivalent. However, translations done in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century prefer the more generic term “overseer” or a functional equivalent. The apparent neutrality in selecting a more general term has, however, theological implications and may actually violate the principle of *sola scriptura*. The paper shows that the New Testament functions as a term with meanings similar to its secular use in ancient times as well as its use in the Septuagint. An even greater similarity can be seen between the Septuagint designation of the Jewish priests and Levites as *episkopoi* and the New Testament usage. In both cases, they governed God’s house and people, protected His laws and ordinances and provided primarily spiritual care and guardianship to believers. It can be concluded that the New Testament writers imported a specific term with related connotations of delegated authority. The New Testament *episkopos* can be regarded as God’s regent. It is suggested that the term boldly declares the colonisation of the kingdoms of men by the kingdom of God. Therefore the translation equivalent also needs to be a term with equivalent semantic content.

An article also focus on the first complete Bible translation into Afrikaans. **Jaap Steyn** elaborates on the nature of the language of the source text in his article *Die Afrikaans van die Bybelvertaling van 1933*. He states that the first translators of the Bible had to start their work before the standardisation of Afrikaans. Furthermore, both the readers and translators of the Bible were strongly influenced by the Dutch Statenbijbel. Steyn explores the difficulties encountered by the Bible translators in breaking with the language of the Statenbijbel and indicates how translators were able to utilise the insights of linguists and language practitioners who were in the process of standardising the Afrikaans language. The article explores difficulties encountered by the 1933 translators regarding vocabulary, pronouns, verbs and adjectives. Not one of the translators considered the imperfect seriously; only in the 1933 translation was the historical present tense used in a stylistically satisfactory manner. The plurals of adjectives in a substantive function, and the negative imperative, were not used consistently in the 1933 translation.

The last four contributions introduce new directions of research in Bible translation and Bible translation training. The need for the target language community to be involved in Bible translation has featured prominently in the writings of many Bible translators and scholars. According to **Chosefu Chemorion** as exposed in his article, *Towards a participatory approach to Bible translation (PABT)*, it is generally acknowledged that the participation of the target audience may enhance the community’s ownership and acceptability of the translation. In spite of this, individuals and organisations engaged in mother tongue translations of the Bible often involve the members of the target audiences only in secondary and non-technical aspects of the translation process. The translation teams often

make crucial decisions regarding the nature of the translation without adequate input from the community. As a result, there tends to be a mismatch between the objectives of the translation and the expectations of the community, which contributes significantly to non-use of mother tongue translations. **Susan Lombaard** and **Jacobus Naudé** give a proposal for an indigenous Bible in South African Sign Language (SASL) for Deaf persons in their article, *Towards an indigenous Bible (in SASL) for deaf persons*. Deafness and the use of Sign Language often deprive Deaf people of rights and privileges due to communication problems and lack of understanding by the hearing community. This study indicates that religious information in written format is, generally, inaccessible to the deaf community of South Africa and can be regarded as a second language. To address this problem, proposals are made for the conceptualising of the process and product of a signed Bible in electronic format. **Gladys Gelderbloem** and **Jacobus Naudé** explain in *Towards the translation of multi-lingual Bible Study Guides for the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Southern Africa* the translation process within the church's organisation. The church's Bible Study Guides are produced in English and sent via e-mail to various publishing houses around the world. In South Africa, the English source text is translated into five languages, namely Sesotho, isiXhosa, TshiVenda, isiZulu and Afrikaans. The focus of this research is amongst others to ascertain whether the church's translation department is serving the needs of a growing multilingual, multicultural church membership. The impact of localisation on these translations in meeting the cultural and linguistic needs of the target audience plays an important role. In conclusion to this volume, **Kobus Marais** explores Bible translator education in his article, *Wisdom and narrative: Dealing with complexity and judgment in translator education*. By referring to the work of Paul Baltes, he explores the biblical concept of wisdom, to guide translator education in institutions of higher education. Certain aspects of education are suggested, which would enhance translators' wisdom so that they may be able to judge ill-structured, complicated communication situations in order to enhance communication. This article proposes the notion of wisdom to function as the end-state of translator education, conceptualised as a holistic development of professionals. The education should thus lay the basis on which wisdom can develop with experience. In Marais's view, wisdom allows one much greater freedom than rationalistic thought in discussing the complexities of life.

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