

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

The goal of this thesis is to present and test a method of evaluating key translation terms. A key translation term, as used in this thesis, is any special technical term that is crucial to the understanding of a translated text. These terms are evaluated using a pilot multiple-choice test instrument.

This document will advance research in techniques used to choose key translation terms. It will adapt and build upon previous research in objective methods of testing translations, specifically, that of Stephen H. Doty. In addition, this thesis will contribute to the documentation of the traditional language and religion of the Bisu people.

Chapter one of this thesis introduces the goals, hypothesis and rationale for this thesis. Chapter two reviews literature relevant to the study, identification and evaluation of key translation terms. Chapter three reviews the methodologies used. Chapter four focuses on terms identification using worldview interviews to isolate the receptor language group's religious beliefs. In chapter five, a componential analysis of the key translation terms is conducted. Chapter six evaluates a list of ten potential terms identified in chapters three and four, using a multiple-choice test instrument. Chapter seven concludes this thesis with an assessment of the multiple-choice test instrument for evaluating key translation terms.

### 1.2 Research Questions

The research questions to be answered by this thesis are:

- Can a multiple-choice test instrument be productive in evaluating a list of potential key translation terms?
- Will a multiple-choice test result in a better total set of key translation terms?

- Will such a test provide the translator(s) with more confidence in currently used terms?

### **1.3 Hypothesis**

The guiding hypothesis of this thesis is:

A multiple-choice test instrument is a systematic, objective and useful approach to evaluating previously selected key translation terms.

This hypothesis will be established if: 1) it leads to a better total set of key translation terms and 2) it leads to more confidence in currently used key translation terms. It is not claimed this is the best method, only that it is a useful approach. An accepted and established method is used to identify these key translation terms.

### **1.4 Objectives of this Study**

The primary aim of the thesis is to test a proposed method for choosing key translation terms. This thesis will be divided into two parts. The first part addresses methods for key translation terms discovery in Bisu. In the second part, these terms will be tested using a proposed multiple-choice test. These methods will be tested using Bisu, a language of the Tibeto-Burman family, Lolo-Burmese branch, spoken in northern Thailand as well as China, Myanmar and Laos. This method will focus particularly on key concepts in the semantic domain of religious terms.

The first part will focus on terms discovery and begins with worldview interviews focused on the receptor language group's religious beliefs. Other methods for key terms discovery are also reviewed. Next, a word study of these terms using componential analysis is conducted. The usefulness of componential analysis in key terms discovery are also evaluated.

The second part of this thesis will evaluate a list of ten potential terms from part one, using a multiple choice test. Ultimately, the aim is to test the usefulness of this method for choosing key translation terms. This test will be pilot test using a relatively small population sample of native speakers. Should the test prove useful, a larger population sample may be used in the future. This test will include short selected passages from the New Testament in which these terms occur, followed by a question asking the native speaker to define a particular term in the text. Four possible answers will then be listed.

There are two sets of tests. The first test will use the key translation terms currently used in these New Testament passages. The second test will attempt to integrate knowledge gained from worldview interviews and componential analysis by replacing or modifying term using the same passages as the first test.

Again the overarching goal is to determine whether or not the proposed test is productive. The pilot test will be evaluated according to its ability to accomplish its aims. The three aims of the pilot test are to 1) to determine the native speaker's understanding of the terms, 2) to identify potential problems with terms and finally, 3) to determine if replacement or modified terms improve upon the original terms.

### **1.5 Limitations and Scope**

The sources of data in this thesis will be limited to two worldview research questionnaires and the results obtained from two different multiple-choice tests which attempt to evaluate these key translation terms. Terms or phrases that could not be obtained from worldview questionnaires or as a result of multiple-choice tests are not evaluated. Artificially created phrases or terms are included for comparison only. This thesis presents a preliminary method for evaluating key translation terms. The method will be tested on a limited number of participants. If this method proves useful, it may be tested on a larger pool of native speakers in the future. The method will also test only ten key translation terms, not all key translation terms found in the New Testament.

### **1.6 Rationale**

The rationale behind testing a method for choosing key translation terms is to advance research in the area of key terms study. Little previous research exists on methodologies for choosing terms and no formal system exists for evaluating them. This thesis attempts to adapt an objective multiple-choice style test for the evaluating translations, proposed by Stephen H. Doty, for the purposes of key terms evaluation.

This thesis will focus on religious terms from the Bible. The background behind the choice to use the semantic domain of religious terms to test a proposed method for choosing key translation terms has two parts. Firstly, at the request of one dialect group, the New Testament is being translated into the Bisu languages. Therefore, this choice serves the community's felt needs. Secondly,

the semantic domain of religious terms proves to be a most challenging domain to translate between unrelated languages. Religious terms often involve abstract concepts that require a greater understanding of the receptor language and culture than concrete terms. In this case, the source language is Koine Greek and the receptor language is Bisu; thus each vocabulary set emerges out of vastly different worldviews. The greater the differences in worldviews, the greater the difference in semantic categories at higher levels. In fact, this study provides examples that perfect matches or complete equivalency are almost impossible when the source language and receptor languages are so linguistically and culturally different.

### **1.7 The Bisu People**

The Bisu people are located in 5 countries in mainland Southeast Asia (Thailand, China, Myanmar and Laos). They are closely related to the Pyen of Myanmar, the Phu Noi of Laos and the Coong of Vietnam. Similarities in language and in traditional women's costumes of the Bisu, Coong and Phu Noi indicate that there was once a very close relationship between these three groups (Schliesinger 2000:184-5). In Thailand, the Bisu are located in 3 villages in Chiang Rai Province, with the total Thailand population estimated to be around 700. The three villages are Doi Chompu located in Mae Lao district, Doi Pui Kham located in the Phan District and Pa Daeng, Phan district.

In China, the Bisu are located in Xishuangbanna Prefecture of southwestern Yunnan Province, with the most recent edition of the Ethnologue estimating their population at 6,000. This group is known as the Lao Mien, i.e. 'Old Burmese' in Yunnanese (Grimes 2009<sup>1</sup>). They are located in the villages of Mengzhe in Menghai County, in the villages of Zhutang, Laba, Donglang and Fubang in Lancang County, in the villages of Jingxin, Fuyan and Nanya in Menglian County and in parts of Ximeng County. In Myanmar, there are approximately 700 Bisu living in two villages near Mong Yang, Shan State, with outside groups calling them by the name Pyen (Person 2007). The total population of the Bisu in all countries is estimated to be between 7,000 and 8,000.

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<sup>1</sup> The 2009 version of the Ethnologue contains major errors in the reported population of the Bisu in China. The numbers here actually reflect earlier versions of the Ethnologue.

The Phunoi people live in the Phongsali area of Laos (Schliesinger 2003). A subset of the Phunoi, calling themselves the Lao Pan, live in one village near Mung Sing in Luang Namtha Province. The Lao Pan people report themselves to number around 1,200. The Bisu people of Thailand report that their dialect has a “98%” mutual intelligibility rate with Lao Pan. The total population of the Phunoi including the Lao Pan is approximately 35,600 (Grimes 2009).

Little is known about the history of the Bisu people, but the Bisu claim their ancestors lived in the Xishuangbanna area of southern Yunnan province before being taken as captives to Thailand by the rulers of Chiang Rai during the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries (Schliesinger 2000:184). Later, the Bisu of Thailand resided in several places in northern Thailand before settling in the village of Doi Chompu in Mae Lao district about 90 years ago (Person 1999a). Wherever they went, they tended to be harassed by Northern Thai people who they say stole from them and cheated them. They settled in the Doi Chompu area because the mountainous area at the edge of the jungle was not suitable for rice paddy farming. Thus the Bisu believed the Northern Thai would not covet their land or possessions and leave them in peace. They tended cattle and water buffalo and survived on what they could find in the forest. Consequently, they gained some respect from their Northern Thai neighbors because of their knowledge of the forest. Only in the past 20-30 years have the Bisu begun planting rice as well as other crops.

Due to a sense of shame at being Bisu, the group abandoned their traditional clothing some 50 years ago, though some old costumes still exist. Recently, copies of the old garments have been made for use on special occasions. The traditional Bisu outfits in Thailand and Yunnan are similar to the traditional outfits worn by the Phunoi in Laos.

Similarly, the Pyen of Shan State abandoned their traditional clothing generations ago. Part of the group is said to have fled their Lao masters and took refuge among the Plang people of Shan State. As part of an agreement between the groups, the Bisu had to exchange their Bisu clothes for Plang clothes and become the “younger siblings” of the Plang and would not be allowed to intermarry with the Plang. Thus when the Lao master pursued them, the Plang told the Lao masters that there were no Bisu around, only “Pyen”, meaning to “change clothes”. The Bisu of Shan State still go by the name “Pyen” to this day (Person 2007).

The Bisu people are traditionally animist. In Thailand, the Bisu have adopted Buddhist practices. Bisu people in Thailand participate in most Buddhist festivals and many Buddhist rituals. However, on a day-to-day level, their animist beliefs and rituals are seen as important for group solidarity.

The Pyen in Shan State became Christians around 35 years ago. They claim to have abandoned their animist rituals and beliefs at the time of their conversion. Both villages have built churches and have designated pastors. However, these men have never received any formal religious training. In fact, few Pyen have ever attended school, religious or otherwise. These pastors must rely on their limited understanding of the Bible translated in the neighboring languages of Shan and Lahu. For this reason, they have expressed a strong desire to have the Bible translated into their own language.

Far less is known about the religious history of the Bisu in China or of the Phu Noi of Laos.

### **1.8 Bisu Cultural Factors Relevant to Biblical Key Terms Translation**

The Bisu people share certain cultural beliefs and concepts with the New Testament period. Their lives revolve around the agricultural cycle and the spirit world. They are deeply concerned about the unseen world of the spirits whom they believe exert control over their lives. They easily relate to experiences with spirit possession, and they are interested in manipulation of spirits and spiritual power. They have experienced discrimination, both religious and political as well as oppression, poverty and economic insecurity. They often encounter social problems like caring for widows and explaining the existence of the disabled.

However, like many traditional peoples, the Bisu are predominantly animistic and egalitarian. The Bisu see their religion and its terminology as specific to the Bisu only, though their religion may appear to have much in common with that of other linguistically related ethnic groups.

Another complicating factor in understanding the Bisu religious system is the influence of Buddhism. The Bisu of Thailand, live within a larger society where the majority religion is Buddhism. Many Bisu, particularly younger people, are heavily influenced by Buddhist philosophy. This is largely due to the presence of Buddhist temples in each village, the significant role Buddhism plays in Thai public schools and the felt need to fit in among their Northern Thai peers.

### 1.9 The Bisu Language

This section describes relevant linguistic features of the Bisu language, including its language family classification, and a brief overview of its sound system, word order and other notable grammatical features. At the end of this section, the writing systems of the Thailand Bisu as well the Pyen of Shan State are described. This thesis uses the Pyen script currently employed by the Bisu of Shan State to cite key translation terms. The Thai script currently being employed by the Bisu of Thailand is given at each term's first mention. Each term is transcribed in a roman-based script and glossed into English.

The Bisu language is classified in the *Atlas of the World's Languages* (Bradley 2007) as Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Burmese-Ngwi, Ngwi, Southern Ngwi, and Bisoid. Figure 1 represents the language classification of Bisu and shows which languages are most closely related to Bisu.

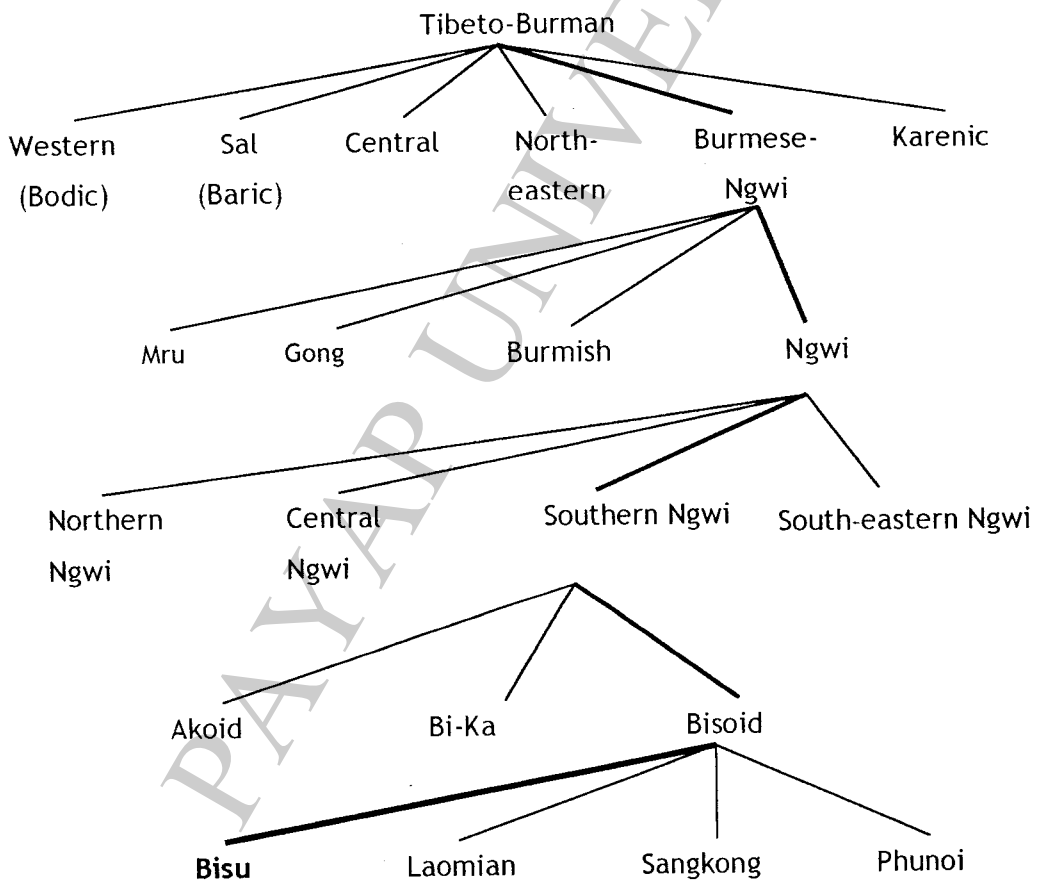


Figure 1. Bisu Language Family Chart.

As is seen in the chart above, the Southern Ngwi languages are divided into three branches, Akoid, Bi-Ka and Bisoid. Bisu, Laomian, Sangkog, and Phunoi are under the Bisoid group of languages. <sup>2</sup>

The Bisu language has SOV word order. It is a mostly isolating language. Like other Ngwi (a.k.a.Loloish) languages, particles are numerous and play an important role in the grammar, but often contain little lexical meaning (Person 2003:1). A native speaker will call a sentence without proper particles either ungrammatical or unnatural. Multiple particles, as many as six, may appear in the sentence final position immediately following the verb (Person 2003:9).

The sound system of Bisu has three contrastive level tones: low, mid and high, as illustrated in the following words (Person 2007:6).

**Table 1: Bisu Contrastive Tones (Person 2007:6)**

Tone	Bisu (phonemic transcription)	Pyen (phonemic transcription)	English Gloss
High	hja <sup>3</sup>	hja	Hill Field
Mid	hja <sup>2</sup>	hja	Chicken
Low	hja <sup>1</sup>	hja	To Itch

Bisu and Pyen both have nine phonemic vowels, as shown in figure 2. Phonetic vowel length differences are present, but noncontrastive. Two diphthongs /aw/ and /aj/ occur frequently in both Bisu and Pyen (Person 2007:5).

**Table 2: Bisu and Pyen Vowels**

	Front	Central	Back
High	i	ɪ	u
Mid	e	ɔ	o
Low	æ	a	ɔ

Bisu has 29 initial consonants. Pyen has 23 initial consonants. Pyen seems to have merged voiced nasals. This is also true among younger Bisu speakers in Thailand (Person 2007:2). Table 3 illustrates the consonant system of Bisu.

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<sup>2</sup> . Linguists disagree as to whether there is even enough data available on these languages to form a 'family tree'. Some linguists have instead proposed a 'falling leaves' model.



**Table 3: Consonants in Bisu**

		Labial	Alveol.	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
<b>Stops</b>	VI.	p	t	c	k	ʔ
	VI.	p <sup>h</sup>	t <sup>h</sup>		k <sup>h</sup>	
	Asp.					
	Vd.	b	d		g	
<b>Fricatives</b>	VI.		s	ʃ		H
<b>Affricates</b>	VI.		ts			
	VI. Asp.			tʃ <sup>h</sup>		
<b>Laterals</b>	Vd.			l		
	VI.			hl		
<b>Nasals</b>	Vd.	m	n	ɲ	ŋ	
	VI.	hm	hn	hɲ	hŋ	
<b>Approx.</b>	Vd			j	w	
	VI.					

In the table 3 above, lightly shaded elements are present in Bisu but absent in Pyen; darkly shaded elements are present in Pyen but absent in Bisu. According to Person,

Both native Bisu and native Pyen syllables (as opposed to Daic loan words) have the canonical form C1 (C2) V T (C3), where C1 represents an obligatory initial consonant, C2 an optional second element in a consonant cluster, V an obligatory vowel, T an obligatory tone, and C3 an optional final consonant (2007:2).

Table 4 below lists the 15 consonant clusters that Bisu orthography recognizes. Eleven of these are also found in Pyen. Consonant clusters only appear in syllable initial position (Person 2007:4).

**Table 4: Bisu and Pyen Consonant Clusters (Person 2007:4)**

C2	l	j	w
C1			
p	x	x	
p <sup>h</sup>	x	x	
b	x	x	
k	x	x	x
k	x	x	x
hm		x	
h		x	

Both Bisu and Pyen feature six final consonants: /p, t, k, m, n, ŋ/. The presence of these final consonants is notable; many other languages of the Southern Yiphoish/Loloish branch no longer have final consonants (Person 2007).

In this thesis, the Romanized Pyen orthography will be used to transcribe Bisu terms. The Bisu orthography, as used in Thailand, is based on a modified Thai script. Thai has multiple characters to represent the same sound to indicate changes in tone rules. However Bisu has only three tones, so only one character or set of characters is necessary to represent each phoneme. The Pyen and Bisu alphabet are phonemic.

**Table 5: Bisu Consonant Chart with Matching Phonetic Symbols**

		Labial	Alveol.	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stops	Vl.	p 𑄢/p	t 𑄣/t	c 𑄤/ch	k 𑄥/g	ʔ 𑄦/?
	Vl. Asp.	p <sup>h</sup> 𑄧/hp	t <sup>h</sup> 𑄨/ht		k <sup>h</sup> 𑄩/hk	
	Vd.	b 𑄪/b	d 𑄫/d		g 𑄬/ <sup>3</sup>	
Fricatives	Vl.		s 𑄭/s	ʃ 𑄮/sh		h 𑄯/h
Affricates	Vl.		ts 𑄰/c			
	Vl. Asp.			tʃ <sup>h</sup> 𑄱/ch		
Laterals	Vd.			l 𑄲/l		
	Vl.			hl 𑄳/l		
Nasals	Vd.	m 𑄴/m	n 𑄵/n	ɲ 𑄶/ny	ŋ 𑄷/ng	
	Vl.	hm 𑄸/m	hn 𑄹/n	hnɲ 𑄺/ny	hnŋ 𑄻/ng	
Approx.	Vd	v <sup>4</sup>		j 𑄼/y	w 𑄽/ <sup>5</sup>	

The chart above shows the Bisu and Pyen characters matched with their respective phonetic pronunciations. Not all variations in pronunciation among speakers are represented in the script.

Table 6 below demonstrates how both the Thai based Bisu script and the Romanized Pyen script represent the nine vowels. Table 6 demonstrates the comparison between Bisu and Pyen diphthongs. Table 7 demonstrates tone markings in Bisu and Pyen.

**Table 6: Bisu Vowel Chart with Matching Pyen Symbols**

Phonetic	i	ɨ	u	e	ə	o	ɛ	a	ɔ
Thai	เ็	เื	ุ	เ-อ	เ-	โ-	เ-อ	-า	อ
Pyen	i	ui	u	e	eu	o	ae	a	aw

<sup>3</sup> Letter exists in Bisu Thai based script, but does not exist in Pyen Romanized script.

<sup>4</sup> Letter exists in Romanized Pyen script, but not in Bisu Thai based script.

<sup>5</sup> Letter exists in Bisu Thai based script, but does not exist in Pyen Romanized script.

**Table 7: Bisu Diphthong Chart with Matching Pyen Symbols**

Bisu Diphthong	Pyen Diphthong	IPA
ᄁᄃ	Ai	a <sup>i</sup>
ᄁᄄ	Ao	a <sup>w</sup>
ᄁᄅ	Oe	o <sup>i</sup>
ᄁᄆ	Eo	e <sup>w</sup>
ᄁᄇ	Aeo	ɛ <sup>w</sup>

**Table 8: Bisu Tone Chart with Matching Pyen Symbols**

Bisu Tone Mark	Pyen Tone mark	Tone
ᄁ̄	σ'	High
σ (unmarked)	σ (unmarked)	mid
ᄁ̇	σ,	Low

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