

Chapter 2

Review of Relevant Literature

2.1 Previous Research on the Bisu Language

The Japanese linguist Tatsuo Nishida (1973) conducted the first linguistic research into the Bisu language. Nishida briefly studied the sound system of Bisu from 1964 to 1965. The Bisu orthography was first developed in 1998 in cooperation with villagers with the assistance of Kirk Person and was sponsored by the Foundation for Applied Linguistics (FAL) in cooperation with Payap University's Applied Linguistics Training Program (PYU-ALTP) (Person 1999a:5). Today, two orthographies exist for Bisu. An orthography based on the Thai Alphabet was created for the Bisu living in Thailand and later a Romanized orthography for the Pyen living in Shan State (Person 2007).

There are also two works by Person on Bisu particles, "Sentence final particles in Bisu narrative" (2000) and an article entitled "Text type and particle usage in Bisu discourse" (2003). As these titles suggest, Person investigated the use and frequency of Bisu particles in various Bisu discourses including folktales, life histories and expository texts. He concluded that Bisu particles vary according to text type.

Person also wrote a paper called "The Kinship System of the Bisu of Chiang Rai" (Person 1999b). He reports that Bisu has a similar pattern as Hawaiian terminology for siblings and cousins and that there is no cross-cousin marriage.

Ji (2005) conducted a sociolinguistic survey of the Bisu language. Her study investigated Bisu language vitality through studying language use and attitudes among Bisu speakers in China and Thailand. In all, six villages were investigated. Ji's analysis divided these villages into 'strong villages' (Laopin and Zhutang in China, and Doi Chompuu and Doi Pui in Thailand) and 'weak villages' (Cimizhu and Nanya). The 'strong villages' have strong Bisu language vitality, and the weak villages to have low vitality. In the *strong* villages, Bisu is acquired as a mother tongue, and it is used with frequency in the home domain and within the group itself. Speakers in these villages also tend to have a positive attitude

toward their language and a literacy program. The *weak* villages demonstrated a language shift to Lahu or Chinese. In those villages, Bisu was used less frequently at home, and it tended to be used mostly by older speakers of the language. Speakers in *weak* villages tended to have a negative attitude toward the Bisu language and showed less interest in its development.

Xu (2001) wrote a description of the Bisu language that describes the phonology, lexicon, grammar, dialects and the position of Bisu within its language family based in research conducted in China.

Gillian Day also wrote a thesis entitled, the Doi Chom Phu Bisu Noun Phrase (2009) in which she describes the noun phrase in Bisu.

2.2 Biblical Key Terms and the Rationale Behind Contextualization

This section reviews literature concerning key terms choices particularly focusing on articles regarding terms for spiritual beings, demonstrating a strong argument for using local terms, especially for spiritual beings, in the receptor language rather than borrowed or newly created terms.

In “The effect of key terms choices on local theology”, Hill describes the results of her research on biblical key terms conducted among the Adiokrou people of the Ivory Coast (2005). The purpose of Hill’s research was to determine the effect of using local terms for divinities and spiritual beings versus non-local terms for these beings mentioned in New Testament that she had been involved in translating.

According to Hill, the effect of using local terms for God and the devil in Adiokrou was that the traditional meaning, which did not originally have a one-to-one correspondence with source language concepts, was transformed through the use of these local terms in the Scriptures. After repeatedly hearing the terms used in new ways and in new situations, people began to understand, through context, the source language concepts of these beings.

The non-indigenous term for ‘evil spirits’ used in the Adiokrou New Testament was a combination of the words for ‘spirit’ and ‘evil’. This created word had no real referent for the Adiokrou people. A literal translation of “evil spirit” in Adiokrou meant that this term also did not fit into any category in the Adiokrou worldview.

Hill concludes, "By developing new expressions to refer to angels and demons in Adioukrou, rather than increasing the correctness of the comprehension of the categories, comprehension was arrested and these terms have remained disconnected from Adioukrou reality, and that after eighty years." (2005:9)

Loewen (1985) recounts the case of the Maquiritare New Testament translation in Venezuela. In this language the western expatriate translators involved claimed that there was no adequate local term for 'God' in that language. They had instead chosen to use a borrowed term from Spanish. The local translators did however mention that there was a culture hero called *Wanaari*. "He was spoken of as having done some of the things the Bible ascribes to God, but he was also the 'lyingest', 'cheatingest' and most immoral character in tribal folklore and hence totally unfit for the divine name in the Bible" (1985:201).

However, it was soon discovered on a visit with a group of local evangelists that the name *Wanaari* was being used for God instead of the Spanish term. They explained, "The only name for God they know is *Wanaari*" (1985:201). When asked about the immoral characteristics associated with this personality, the evangelists chalked up such stories to gossip and rumor. Loewen explains, "With one bold stroke a whole tribal mythology of the now 'bad' stories about *Wanaari* had been reinterpreted. And the end result was that the church decided to use *Wanaari* rather than *Diyo* to express God in the New Testament about to be printed"(1985:202).

Loewen notes that even in situations where a local term may have negative characteristics associated with it, "... we should not reject such names outright; first of all, because we need to recognize that the Bible will put this name in its own context, and the influence of the context can eliminate many of the negative things that were earlier associated with that name"(1985:203).

In "Translating the 'gods'", Mundhenk (2002) noted that in Hebrew, Greek and many other European languages, the same word can be used for 'God' or 'a god'. Mundhenk noted that in the biblical languages, one could only tell the difference by the context. He also noted that the word 'gods' denotes a variety of different ideas and in each case the term must be addressed individually.

Mundhenk remarks,

In some languages there are a large number of different spirits being recognized, each with their own characteristics and significance in the culture. If there are many, then it will probably be the case that only a few of them will actually be used in the translation of the Bible. Some will be so specific to the culture that they will not match anything that the Bible talks about (2002).⁶

Because of this, Christians may be confused about important areas of their life, since they believe these spirits to have a powerful influence in some aspect of their lives. Mundhenk recommends including these spirit beings when translating key biblical passages that are meant “to give a list which is all-inclusive of the domain of ‘spirit beings’” (2002:224).

2.3 Methods for Key Translation Terms Discovery and Checking

In John Beekman’s article entitled “Anthropology and the Translation of the New Testament Key Terms” (1980), he emphasizes “the necessity of understanding the receptor language culture, as it relates to religious beliefs and practices, is most critical when it comes to the translation of New Testament key terms.”

Beekman outlines methods of discovery, ways to validate the receptor language meaning of potential terms and how to choose or adjust these terms if necessary. His suggestions for the discovery of key terms include four methods. Beekman lists these methods in order of probable usefulness. The methods are: 1) the native-text method, 2) the hypothetical example method, 3) the question method and 4) listening to others’ converse.

The native-text method, involves investigating the local mythology concerning the origin and description of the world. However, the Bisu have no creation or origin stories and few of their native texts discovered to date discuss mythological stories that would prove useful.

In the hypothetical example method, several plausible hypothetical situations concerning the same general subject are created.

⁶ Electronic Version on Translators Workplace DVD, no page numbers listed.

The question method involves asking questions of respondents that will elicit, for example, for the names of supernatural beings. One might also discover a potential term for 'Holy Spirit', by asking what the personality components of a human being are.

Lastly, Beekman suggests that one may discover potential terms by simply overhearing native speakers converse with one another.

Once potential key terms have been collected, Beekman suggests two procedures to validate their adequacy, the cycle check and componential analysis. The cycle check method is simply the reverse of the procedure used to discover the term.

Beekman also mentions using componential analysis as a method of verifying terms. The componential analysis method is defined by the Online Random House dictionary as:

The analysis of a set of related linguistic terms, esp. word meanings, into combinations of features in terms of which each item may be compared with every other as in the analysis of *man* with into the semantic features 'male', 'mature', and 'human', *woman* into 'female', 'mature' and 'human' and *girl* into 'female', 'immature' and 'human' and *bull* into 'male', 'mature' and 'bovine'.

The hypothetical method was useful for eliciting words that were not generated from the questionnaires. The over-hearing method may prove useful in the future as understanding of the worldview and religious beliefs of the speakers increases, but it seems that it is also not the best place to begin. The question method via worldview questionnaires and the componential analysis method were implemented in this thesis. An alternative to the cycle check method is discussed below.

Stephen Doty's (2006) "The paradigm shift in Bible translation in the modern era, with special focus on Thai" offers an alternative to the testing method that Beekman has suggested. In his work, Doty reviews the most common method of checking translations for comprehension used by translators in SIL. This type of checking is called 'the oral method'. It involves having the speakers read a passage and having them answer questions or re-tell the story in their own words. This method is used to find out what a person understands from the translation or how he or she interprets the text.

Doty points out that this type of comprehension checking has several disadvantages. Firstly, it is subjective in that the translator decides 'on the fly' whether or not the answer is good enough to be correct. Secondly, mother-tongue speakers often find the process intimidating and threatening. He points out that translators must work to gain the trust of speakers before using this method. Thirdly, this method is a very time-consuming process. Lastly, the result often demonstrates only one point of view. The results are skewed depending on how bright the subject may or may not have been.

In his dissertation, Doty uses a multiple-choice test to determine which of three types of translation styles Thais understand best. Doty notes that this type of test for checking translations had not been used before. In his test, subjects were asked to read a passage from Luke and then answer questions based on the text. Questions were followed by three possible answers from which to choose in addition to a fourth alternative of "I don't know". The translation with the highest number of correct answers from subjects was considered the best understood translation. However, this method only works with literate subjects

Doty asserts that this method for testing translations is more objective than other methods often used by translators in that it can only be graded for correct and incorrect answers. Another advantage is that the test can be administered anonymously, meaning that subjects did not need to give their names and that they did not know the tester personally. Another advantage in a written test is there is a record to consider ones answers more thoughtfully than oral responses.

Research in this paper will make use of Burnett's (2000) *World of the spirits: A Christian perspective on traditional and folk religions* in which he describes common threads in traditional and folk religions in various parts of the world. It is used to help explain or compare the religious beliefs of the Bisu people. Burnett's book provides a starting point for the discussion of Bisu religious terms and conceptual categories.

Research in this paper also relies on Louw and Nida's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on semantic domains* (1988) as the source language domain. The domains of Supernatural Beings and Powers (domain 12 in Louw and Nida), and Religious Activities (domain 53) are used. Additionally, Katherine Barnwell,

Paul Dancy and Anthony Pope's work, entitled "Key Biblical Terms" (1995) is used to further define terms or componential features, when helpful.

PAYYAP UNIVERSITY