

- **Translating the names of God and other special terms**

- Translating the names of God : An important and serious matter in Bible translating
- All Bible translators have to deal with this matter: This issue can be very difficult to tackle for some languages and can be even divisive
- UBS Triennial Workshop in May 1991, Zimbabwe: Theme Translating the Names of God & a number of articles were presented
- In the previous year 1990 in Singapore, I had already presented an article entitled « The Translation of the Names of God into the South Pacific Languages », to the Asia Pacific Regional Translation Consultation
- Statement by the « Names of God » Study Group, UBS Triennial Workshop at Victoria Falls, 1991

= NT: God (Theos) & Lord (Kurios)

= OT: God (El, Elohim), YHWH, Lord (Adonai)

= «Theos» in Greek & «El / Elohim» in Hebrew: generic terms, also used to refer to pagan gods

= « Kurios » and « adonai » can both refer even to human beings

= YHWH – the Tetragrammaton: really serious translational problem with the name YHWH for the God of Israel. It is a proper name

= It has a meaning, even explicitly stated in EXO 3.14-15. Its exact pronunciation is still uncertain

- Possible Solutions

(1) Transliterate / Transcribe phonetically

= YHWH: Scholars generally believes that the original pronunciation may be « Yahweh ».

= « Jehovah » and its other forms of similar pronunciation in other languages have become an established tradition for many bible versions, are even retained in recent revised versions, though they are to be avoided and no new translation follows the model of « Jehovah ».

= « Jehovah » dates back to the second half of the 16th century and early 17th century, with the Spanish translations of Reina (1569) and of Valera (1602), then in the English King James Version (1611).

(2) Translate by the term « Lord »

= This is to follow the model of Septuagint

= This is also to follow the practice of the Jews who avoid pronouncing YHWH and replace it always by « Adonai » meaning the « Lord ».

= However, this solution has the disadvantage of making no distinction between the rendering of the Hebrew word « adonai » for lord and that of YHWH.

= Some versions adopt the solution of rendering YHWH by « LORD » and Adonai by « Lord », but this practice of font use makes no difference in reading.

= Furthermore, there are over 300 occurrences of the doublet expression « YHWH Adonai ». It is impossible to render « LORD Lord ».

= Some translations opt for rendering « YHWH Adonai » by LORD God. But there are six occurrences (PSA 38.16; 86.12; 98.17; DAN 9.3,9,15) of « Adonai Elohim »; their rendering by « Lord God » makes no difference, when read orally, from “LORD God” (YHWH Adonai).

(3) Translate the meaning of YHWH, e.g., « the One who is », « the One who exists », « the Eternal »

(4) Use a name from target language with suitable meaning.

Arguments for rendering YHWH as such

- = This is a proper name, a personal name of God and it should be rendered as such. Personal name should not be translated, but rather be transliterated or transcribed.
- = If the root YH of the name is preserved, it may serve as a link to other names and words containing this root.

Arguments for rendering YHWH as « Lord »

- = This name has a meaning (EXO 3.14-15) and it is not just a cluster of consonants and vowels. Its meaning indicates the nature of God.
- = The Septuagint provides an example of rendering by « Lord ».
- = This « Lord » in OT provides link to « Lord » in NT
- = Since the biblical text becomes canonical, YHWH is never read and is always substituted by Lord.
- = It is out of respect for the Jews who never pronounce this name nor transliterate it.

- YHWH Seba'ot

- = The expressions « YHWH Seba'ot » occur 284 times, mostly in the prophet books.
- = God's kingship is highlighted here. God is portrayed as a heavenly king who reigns over the universe, upon the council of heavenly beings (JOB 1 / PSA 82)
- = « Lord of hosts / armies », « almighty / all powerful Lord »

- 'El / 'El Shaddai

- = Hebrew word for God 'El as « God of the fathers » and is used in combination with some other words to refer to God
- = 'El Shaddai is one of them (7 times) or only the word Shaddai (mostly JOB) occurs 48 times.
- = A very ancient expression, probably dating back to before when Israelites' ancestors lived in Palestine.
- = LXX renders by « Pantokratôr » (Ruler of all)
- = Shaddai – sdd: destroy, or « ikanos » = the one who is sufficient, or sadu in Accadian = mountain
- = 'El Shaddai = Almighty or all-powerful God

- 'El 'Elyon / 'Elohim 'olam

- = The first expression occurs 9 times, meaning « God most high »
- = The second expression occurs 4 times, meaning « God eternal »
- = A variant expression 'El 'olam occurs once: GEN 21.33
- = Also with the same meaning « God eternal »

- « Jesus Christ » (152 times) needs to be translated differently from « Christ Jesus » (92 times, basically in Pauline Epistles).
- « Son of Man » if rendered literally may need a footnote to clarify its meaning: synonym of human being, stressing humility and future glorification (LUK 9.58; MAT 25.31; MRK 8.38)
- Key Terms, Special Terms
- Terms such as Leviathan, Rahab, Thannin, Lilith may be rendered literally as proper names and supplied with footnotes or included in a glossary to explain their meanings and connotations.
- The Greek term « drakôn » has been a controversial matter for translating the Chinese bible.

- Absolute need of consistent orthography when rendered phonetically
- The « Mini Dictionary for the Bible », found at the end of various editions of CEV, either arranged alphabetically or semantically, can serve as a model for glossary.
- Another model is the « Word List » found at the end of various Good News Bible editions. The one found at the end of the « Good News Study Bible » contains 269 entries.
- Such glossary may contain words not necessary from the Bible text, but may help reader understand the history of the transmission of the Bible text, e.g. Septuagint, DSS, Masoretic Text