

BIBLE TRANSLATIONS AND SPEAKING IN TONGUES IN ACTS 2 AND 1 CORINTHIANS 14: A CASE OF LUO BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

Odek Rabach, PhD

Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies

Introduction

THE TRANSLATION of the phrase “speaking in tongues” in the Dholuo¹ versions the Bible is diverse. There are three versions of Dholuo Bible: The first has the word *dhok mopogore* (different languages) for “other tongues” in Acts 2:4 and *dhum* (speaking in another way or tongue) for “speaking in tongues” in 1 Corinthians 14.² The second version distinguishes tongues in Acts 2:4 as *dhok mopogore opogore* (different tongues) from *dhok mayoreyore* (strange tongues) in I Corinthians 14.³ A more recent version does

¹Dholuo is a language spoken in East Africa countries of Uganda, Sudan, Kenya, and Tanzania. In this study the Bible versions are for Dholuo speakers in Kenya.

²See the Union Bible Society Version of 1952.

³See the Bible Society of Kenya version of 1976.

not make these distinctions, thus has the phrase *dhok mayoreyore* (strange tongues) both in Acts 2 and 1Corinthians 14.¹

The observable development in the translation of the phrase “speaking in tongues” in the Dholuo Bible is the shift from distinctions in the early versions to the phrase “strange tongues” in the recent translation. The key questions here are; is there distinction between “speaking in tongues” in Acts 2 and 1 Cor 14? Is the phrase *mayoreyore* (strange tongues) an adequate translation for “speaking in tongues”?² In the development of the translation of the Dholuo Bible “speaking in tongues” acquire the meaning of strange and unintelligible tongues and not different or other tongues. Is this supported by the original rendition of the text?

The enigma of translating “speaking in tongues” is not unique to the Dholuo versions of the Bible. It is evident in the English versions too. The rendering of the adjective *heteros* as “other” is consistently held in many English versions in

¹The Dholuo Bible translation by the International Bible society of 2000 consistently uses *mayoreyore* (strange) for all the instances of “speaking in tongues.”

²The translators of the International Bible Society hold that this translation uses an informal language and applies meaning based philosophy. They argue that they are meaning –driven, for the purposes of the clearer transmission of the word of God. Nevertheless *mopogore* (different, diverse) and *mayoreyore* (strange) are worlds apart in meaning and thus a shift in the meaning of the text.(See www.biblica.com/bibles/luo/index.php)

Acts 2. A few depart from this and render *heteros* as “strange” for Acts 2. A major departure is observed in 1Cor 14 where several versions insert qualifying phrases or terms that are not found in the original text to tongues. For example King James Version supplies *unknown* in 1 Cor 14:2, 4, 14, 19, 27, the New English Bible uses the term *ecstatic speech* for the instances of tongues in 1 Cor 14. The Good News Bible (TEV) supplies the adjective “strange” every time the word tongue is used in 1 Cor 14. The Jerusalem Bible uses gift of tongues for all instances of tongues in 1 Cor 14, for both singular and plural cases. NRSV uses “languages” for Acts 2 but “tongue” in 1 Cor 14 giving an impression that a different term might have been used.¹

The word *dhok* (tongue) in Dholuo may require an adjective for clarity, however should that adjective be *mayoreyore*, which means strange? The word tongue in Acts 2:4 is modified by the adjective “other,” which is further clarified as dialects and languages in 2:8, 11. There is debate about the nature of tongues in 1 Cor 14, and distinctions have been drawn between the tongues in Acts 2 and 1 Cor 14. These distinctions are based a missing qualifier, “other,” in instances of speaking in tongues in 1 Cor 14. There is also need of an interpreter for the speaking in tongues and its use

¹The case of English translations for speaking in tongues both in Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 14 show the distinctions between the formal translations which usually go for word for word and dynamic translations which go for thought translation. The latter at times becomes even an interpretation.

in prayer in 1Cor 14. Therefore the term tongues in 1Cor 14 is deemed to be an ecstatic language, which is unintelligible. Do the above reasons warrant the distinctions and qualifying of the term tongue as “strange,” (*mayoreyore*) in 1 Cor 14 as found in Dholuo translation of the Bible?

The purpose of this paper is first to investigate whether the word “strange” *mayoreyore* in dholuo is the appropriate word to modify tongues in Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 14. Does the distinction between speaking in tongues in Acts 2 and 1 Cor 14 as *mopogore opogore* (different, diverse) and *mayoreyore* (strange) respectively reflect the original language used? The philosophy followed in this paper is that while the word of God should be communicated in the most understandable language of the times it should remain faithful to the rendering of the original text.

Tongues Terminology in the New Testament

There are 23 instances where the word ‘tongue’ is used for the gift of speaking in tongues (Mark 16:17; Acts 2:4, 6, 8, 11; 10:46; 19:6; 1 Cor 12:31; 13:1; 14:2, 4, 5, 6, 13, 18, 19, 21, 23, 27, 39). It appears five times as singular without modifiers (1Cor14: 2, 4, 4, 13, 19, 27), nine times as plural without modifiers (1 Cor 13:30; 14:5, 6, 18, 23, 39) and appears in five passages with modifiers (Mark 16:17; Acts 2:4, 11; 1Cor 13:1; 14:21). The usage of the term tongue when it is not associated with speaking in tongues is consistently as tongue, the organ of speech (Luke; 64; 16:24; Mark 7:33, 35; acts

2:26; Rom 3: 13; James: 26; 3:5, 6, 8; I Peter 3:10; Rev 16:10), or tongues (Rom 14:11; Phil 2:11; Rev 2:11; 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11: 9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15) in the sense of languages as a normal means of communication or in a figurative sense (Acts 2:3).¹

In all the above occurrences the term ‘tongues’ is consistently used for the organ of speech or language and not for unintelligible ecstatic speech. The distinctions between the tongues in Acts 2 and 1Cor 14 are highlighted in some Greek–English Lexicons. Edward Robinson’s Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament of 1858 observes that there are those who draw distinctions between the speaking in tongues of Acts 2 and I Corinthians 14, however recognizes that only some accept the distinctions.² The situation changes a century later when in Louw and Nida’s Lexicon it is indicated that most scholars accept an ecstatic speech as referred to in 1 Cor 14 is influenced by the Hellenistic religions.³ Bauer’s current standard lexicon notes a special problem in addressing tongues in 1 Cor 14

¹Walter Bauer, *A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG), 3rd ed., rev. and edited by Frederick W. Danker (2000), s.v. “glwssa”; Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans., rev., and enlarged by Joseph Henry Thayer (1977), s.v. “glōssa.”

²Edward Robinson, *A Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament* (London, UK: Longman, 1858), s.v “glōssa.”

³Johannes P. Louw, and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, vol. 2 (1989), s.v. “glōssa.”

and categorically notes that ecstasy is implied in the passage.¹ Some have observed that this change has been influenced by History of religion school, which views the religion of the bible as a development among other religions and so the phenomena of speaking in tongues is explained from an extra biblical perspective. Some like Hoekema observes an influence of Hellenistic religions on the use of tongues in 1 Cor 14.² However a survey of the term *glosa* outside the New Testament does not indicate an ecstatic speech.³

The word tongue is modified only once by the adjective “other” (*heteros*) in 1 Corinthians 14: 21.⁴ Could the majority of cases missing modifiers be a sufficient proof for differences between speaking in tongues in Acts 2 and 1Cor 14? We now turn our attention to some reasons why distinctions have been suggested for the phrase “speaking in tongues” in Acts 2 and 1 Cor 14 and why it is held to be a “strange language.”

¹Bauer, BDAG, s.v. “*glôssa*.”

²Anthony A. Hoekema, *What about Tongue Speaking?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 85, 86.

³Gerhard F. Hasel, *Speaking in Tongues: Biblical Speaking in Tongues and Contemporary Glosolalia*, Adventist Theological Society Monographs, vol. 1 (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1994), 54-55)

⁴The context of the quotation indicates an intelligible language not known only to the Israelites.

The Adjective “Other” Missing in 1 Corinthians 14

The adjective “other” modifies tongue only once in 1Cor 14. It is therefore held that tongues in 1 Cor 14 is different from the one in Acts 2. The word ‘tongue’ appears modified five times in the New Testament. In Mark 16:17 it is modified by the word ‘new’ in Acts 2:4 is it modified by “other,” in Acts 2:11 by “our own,” in 1 Cor 13: 1 ‘angels,’ and in 14:21 ‘strange.’ In all other instances it appears unmodified. Is this argument adequate enough to render the meaning of tongues in 1 Cor 14 different from that of Acts 2? In book of Acts the modifier ‘other’ *heteros* is used only in 2:4 and does not appear in the rest of the occurrences of speaking in tongues in the rest of the book.¹ In spite of the missing modifier the other two instances of speaking in tongues in Acts refer to same experience. In Acts 10: 47 Peter refers to the Pentecost experience in the clause “just as we have received the Holy Spirit.” In Acts 19:1-6 “speaking in tongues” has some new elements to it such as the laying on of hands, and its pairing with the gift of prophecy and baptism. Nevertheless, these are not unique such elements could be found in Acts 2 such as the phrase “they gave glory to God.” It seems that in the later usage of the phrase “speaking in tongues” it is understood and assumed to be “other” as used in Acts 2:4. This could be the case in 1Cor 14.

¹See Acts 10:46; 19: 1-6.

Speaking in Tongues and Speaking Mysteries

Does the term “mystery” in 1 Cor 14:2 imply speaking in tongues is speaking unknown secrets to God? The usage of the term mystery in the New Testament indicates otherwise. The term is used 22 times in the New Testament. Majority of the usage is in Pauline letters, 17 out of all the occurrences. The term “mystery” indicates something that can be understood (1 Cor 13:2; Eph 3:3,4), it can be made known (Eph 6:19; Col 1:27), made manifest (Col 1:26 1Tim 3:16) and can be spoken of (Col 4:3). Mystery therefore is not a secret, “but truth about God once hidden but now revealed.”¹ Therefore by means of the spirit these tongue speakers are speaking mysteries of God. Paul’s concern is that the hearers do not apprehend these mysteries that are meant to be understood.

The Need of Interpretation

The fact that the gift of speaking in tongues in I Corinthians 14 required an interpretation (1 Cor 14:13, 27) has been used to buttress the argument that it is different from the one in Acts, which did not require an interpreter. Is this argument sufficient enough to suggest an ecstatic speech? It is not indicated in the passage that the interpretation was necessary because of an ecstatic speech. The usage of the term “interpret” in the LXX and New Testament indicated

¹A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1914, 306.

that the term is used usually to interpret intelligible languages.¹

Speaking in Tongues Use in Prayer and Personal Edification

It has also been suggested that speaking in tongues in 1Corinthians 14 is used in prayer for personal edification. The basic argument of Paul in 1 Cor 12-14 is that gifts are for the edification of the church and it is apparent that this argument is about the proper use of the gift of tongues in the church. He allows an exception, though when he says the gift is for prayer and personal edification he continues to discount it by saying that one needs to intelligibly done, as the prophets did.

Conclusion: Mayoreyore and I Corinthians 14

Does *mayoreyore*, strange therefore fit as an appropriate adjective for tongues in 1Cor 14? First, the absence of 'other' as an adjective does not imply differences from Acts 2. The adjective 'other' was understood as implied in the expression "the gift of tongues." Speaking in tongues was speaking in 'other' languages and not 'strange' languages. Secondly the usage does not indicate an ecstatic speech but one, which is intelligible. The term tongue in the Bible consistently is

¹The verb is used in 2 Macc 1:36 for translating the Hebrew language into Greek. In the New Testament in Acts 9:36 it is used for translating a normal language. The passage which Paul is referring to in 1Cor 14 is a reference to Isa 28:11 in which tongues is used not for an ecstatic language but a foreign tongue.

a reference to language or the organ of speech and not an ecstatic unintelligible speech.

Though the purpose of Bible translations is to communicate the word of God with clarity. Some translations supply words, which do not reflect the meaning of the original text. The word strange, *mayoreyore* in Luo, is not an equivalent of “other” in Acts and it is inserted in I Cor 14. A survey of the usage of the term ‘tongues’ indicates that there is no distinction between the gift of tongue in Acts 2 and I Cor 14 therefore if an adjective is to be supplied for clarification purposes then the adjective “other”, *mopogore*, *mamoko*, in Luo would be the appropriate.