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A History Of The Hausa Bible: 1980 Edition

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The Hausa Bible of 1980 is a notable publishing event in the history of Bible translation. The author tells the story of the leading personalities responsible for this translation and recounts the many challenges faced. The author also points out that this landmark achievement should not obscure the fact that the sub-groups under Hausa hegemony have mother tongues that should not be neglected. "No language can substitute for the mother tongue . . . [In] the case of the 1980 edition of the Hausa Bible, care was supposedly taken to express the message in a way that non-Hausa speakers can readily understand, since for the non-Hausa in Northern Nigeria the Hausa language is his second or even third, if not fourth language. Real Hausa, whether Sokoto, Bauchi or Kano, for most of them is often out of reach."

Introduction: Mastering the Hausa Language

This publication is a landmark in both the history of Christianity among the Hausa speaking communities of Nigeria and the history of literature written in Hausa....inevitably evangelism lies at the heart of the missionary impulse; and, in the process of Christian proselytisation...the rendering of God's recorded word into the relevant local language, the history of translations of the Holy scripture is now approaching nothing less than its 150th anniversary - a remarkable record in the context of the African continent. (*West Africa*, 15th June, 1981. p. 1356)

Thus ran an excerpt from a review of the new Hausa Bible which appeared in 1980.

Unlike the Yorubas, Igbos and perhaps other major tribes in Nigeria, the Hausas, predominantly in the northern part of Nigeria, had no Sierra Leoneans of Hausa origin to initiate missionary work among them. The two Hausa ex-slaves emancipated in Trinidad who came to Badagry in

1837 were apparently more interested in trade than Christianization of the Hausa people.¹ The first written Christian material in Hausa was the Lord's prayer translated in 1843 by J. F. Schön, described as an "assiduous and yet subsequently neglected linguist."² James Frederick Schön had worked in Sierra Leone before joining the team on the ill-fated 1841 Expedition. Schön, a man "with special linguistic gifts,"³ would receive "the D.D. of Oxford in 1884 for his linguistic work."⁴ This honour was conferred on him at the initiative of Robert Cust, Britain's leading African language scholar at that time and also the author of *Modern Languages of Africa* (1883), and honorary secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society.⁵

However when the Niger Mission was founded in 1857 and headed by the Rev. Samuel Ajayi Crowther (later Bishop), the desire of Crowther was not to evangelize the Hausa people primarily but to bring the Gospel to "the large heathen population in the North"⁶ Nonetheless in 1877 he sent to England, to work with Schön on Hausa, a Sierra Leonean clergyman of Hausa-speaking parentage, T. C. John, who had joined the Niger Mission in 1865 at Lokoja. Earlier Crowther had sent £100 to Schön to meet part of the cost of publishing a Hausa dictionary.⁷ It is reasonable to suggest that Schön had published portions of the New Testament by 1857, which was helpful in the publication of the whole New Testament in 1880.⁸ It is also possible that Schön's work in Hausa, as with his translation work in Igbo,⁹ became unsatisfactory because of the manner in which he learnt his Hausa, that is from ex-slaves in Freetown.¹⁰

A further thrust in the study of the Hausa language began with the first serious attempt to evangelise the Hausa people of Northern Nigeria by the Sudan Party who came to Nigeria in the 1890's under the leadership of G. W. Brooke. Brooke had calculated "that within six months much of Northern Nigeria would be converted."¹¹ The Sudan Party failed to achieve its objective, and could not record any conversions before members of the party either resigned or died or were invalidated home. However, the Sudan Party bequeathed to subsequent missionary groups a rather significant legacy: the notion that the conversion of the Hausas was the key to the evangelisation of Northern Nigeria.

The view in vogue at that time about the Hausa people was that they were nominal Muslims, a view that was further authenticated by Canon Robinson, a "Professor" of Hausa at Cambridge University after he had visited Kano in 1895. Robinson had reported to the CMS Headquarters at Salisbury Square in 1895 a "favourable view of the readiness of the Hausa to receive Christian teachers; in Kano the Emir had met him at the gates with gifts; the most learned malams were

put at his disposal and the latter were, of their own volition, anxious to translate the Bible which, they said, the people would most gratefully buy."¹²

Before this time, in 1891, the Hausa Association had been formed for three reasons: 1) To enable Englishmen to study Hausa; 2) to make available to the Hausa copies of the translated works which included the Gospels; and 3) to establish a college in Liverpool where Hausa could study English and Englishmen, Hausa.¹³

This Association was formed in honour of J. A. Robinson, an important member of the Sudan Party who is said to have translated some portion of the Bible into Hausa before his death.¹⁴ Out of the Hausa Association came the Hausa Party in 1895 with the aim, apparently, of translating the Bible into Hausa and the establishment of a missionary college in Kano.¹⁵ This explains the march of the missionaries to Kano in 1900.¹⁶

The Hausa Bible of 1932

Prominent among members of the Hausa Party was Dr. Walter R. S. Miller, described as "the best known white man in Northern Nigeria" until his death in 1952.¹⁷ He it was that began, with the help of other missionaries, to translate the whole Bible into Hausa in 1910. By 1920 the whole of the New Testament had been translated.¹⁸ Dr. Miller moved out of Zaria City, having been compelled by varied circumstances to found Wussa about two kilometers away on a piece of land donated by Limand,¹⁹ a Muslim teacher. Afterwards, Dr. Miller was transferred to Kano, and with him went his typist Mallam J. I. Umaru. Here Dr. Miller finished the translation of the whole Bible, which was published by the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1932.²⁰ This was the first Hausa Bible.

As can be seen, the 1932 edition of the Hausa Bible was almost entirely the handiwork of European missionary translators using local informants, such as Mallam Fate, a Hausa Christian, and Mallam Bello, a Muslim. Among European missionaries who helped Dr. Miller were the Revs. W. A. Thompson (a West Indian), C. Wedgewood and C. P. Bargery.²¹ This team of translators used the Revised Version to translate from, while the informants used the Arabic Bible to give the appropriate words in Hausa. There is no indication that the Hebrew or Greek texts were used.²²

Due to this glaring deficiency of the 1932 edition of the Hausa Bible, a team of translators was set up by the United Bible Societies in conjunction with the Nigerian Bible Society in July 1969. The translation work was done section by

section. Firstly the Old Testament, excluding the Psalms and the Apocrypha, was done by a team of translators in Zaria (where Dr. Miller began his translation). The Psalms and the New Testament were translated by Mr. Sanderson, an SIM (Sudan Interior Mission) missionary then in Kano, while the Apocrypha was translated by Rev. Fr. Joseph Kenny, O. P.

Translating The Old Testament

The Old Testament books apart from the Psalms and the Apocrypha were translated by a team made up of young Nigerian church leaders and theologians, namely the Rev. D. N. Wambutda (who was Secretary of the team until his resignation in 1973), The Rev. Chisawa Kaburuk, who joined the team in 1969, and Mallam Paul Yusufu, the Sarkin Wusasa, who was the chief informant.²³ H. Peacock represented the United Bible Societies.²⁴ The team was stationed in Wusasa. It was set up to do direct translation from the original languages using other assistance. It aimed at producing an equivalent of the English *Good News Bible* (then only in New Testament form) both in its faithfulness to the Hebrew and in its simple and natural but up-to-date Hausa.

By the time the Rev. D. N. Wambutda left to take up an appointment with the Institute of Church and Society at Ibadan, the bulk of the work had been completed except for a few chapters in I Kings and II Samuel, parts of Isaiah and Song of Solomon.²⁵ Wambutda's departure almost ruined the work, not only because he was the secretary and later treasurer of the group, but more importantly because of his knowledge of the biblical languages and his good "middle belt Hausa."²⁶ Peacock described the work after Wambutda had left as having been "in an awful mess now" and he added "Wambutda's leaving has put us in quite a bind." He even suggested scrapping the project unless someone was found capable of replacing Wambutda.²⁷

The project was not scrapped after all. Wambutda agreed not only to help in the translation but to serve as a revising editor while continuing in his job at the Institute of Church and Society.²⁸

Meanwhile a Review Committee had been set up in Kano made up of two experienced SIM missionaries, Miss Helen M. Watkins and Miss Ruth Warfield. The Committee was to insure that an up-to-date, quality (Kano) Hausa was maintained and that the whole of the translation work was in line with the recommendation of the Hausa Language Board.²⁹

The whole operation with respect to the Old Testament followed a well organized but complex plan. The Hausa translation team at Wusasa would do the draft, check through for possible errors, then send it to the Review Committee in Kano. That Committee would see to the quality of the Hausa. Then Paul Yusufu would read the Reviewers' comments and make suggestions, and pass it to Wambutda in Ibadan who would read everything as a reviewer himself. Wambutda would write his suggestions and changes on the text before sending the work back to Paul Yusufu at Wusasa. Yusufu would note Wambutda's comments and suggestions periodically. From such a discussion, the final draft would emerge which would be typed and prepared for the printers.³⁰ No doubt this was a cumbersome exercise but it was essential to ensure accuracy and a satisfactory work.

The Rev. Maikudi Kure of Tofa Bible School joined the Wusasa Old Testament team in 1974 to replace the Rev. Wambutda, even though the latter continued to assist as an editor until 1975. An asset to this team was Emmanuel Nandi, an Ibo typist who typed all the drafts and copies that were finally sent to the printers.³¹

The work of the Old Testament translators came to an end on 31 December 1975.³² By this time the Rev. Chidawa Kaburuk had left for the United States for further studies.³³ Meanwhile Yusufu continued to assist Kure in making the final draft until October 1974.³⁴ In the same month Kure and Nandi moved to Kano to join the Review Committee to put the finishing touches on the OT drafts.³⁵ The OT books were not ready for the printers, however, until 1977.³⁶

The Psalms And The Apocrypha

The work on the Psalms was begun by Mr. Sanderson using *Today's English Version* as a model.³⁷ But like his work on the New Testament (see below), Sanderson's work on the Psalms was unsatisfactory. The Rev. Fr. J. Kenny, O.P., who had just finished a Ph.D. in Islamic studies at St. Andrew's and who at that time had been designated by the Roman Catholic Church to take charge of the Hausa translation, had Sanderson's draft sent to him to revise.³⁸ He completed this job in 1970.³⁹

In 1971 the Roman Catholic Church began arranging with United Bible Societies to undertake the translation of the Deutero-canonical books.⁴⁰ Fr. Kenny was to lead the team. On Fr. Kenny's team were Mallam Musa Nahann Danjuma and Emmanuel Musa, both Hausa (Maguzawa).⁴¹ The conditions laid for the final publication of the Apocrypha were as follows: 1) They would appear

between the Testaments; 2) Additional cost of publishing the Bible with the Apocrypha would be born by the Church/Churches requesting the publication, namely the Catholic and Anglican Churches; and 3) The churches concerned should make a formal request to the Bible Society of Nigeria for the publication.⁴²

The implication of this was that two editions of the Hausa Bible would be published, one with the Apocrypha and the other without it.

The draft of the Apocrypha was finished in 1975 and sent to the team of editors in Kano who made the following suggestions and recommendations to Joseph Kenny for final corrections: 1) That the meaning should always be preferred to the form. The translation should be meaningful to a 25-35 year old person who had exposure to Christian religious terminology; 2) Words having Arabic derivation should be translated with native Hausa words; 3) In Tobit 1:1 the Hausa word for lineage and descent should fit the situation - Words like *Tsatson, gida, kabila, Kaka, Jika* should be used with the context in view; and 4) Kano Hausa should be preferred to any other Hausa.⁴³

Finally Fr. Kenny suggested the publication of 5,000 - 10,000 copies of the Hausa Bible with Apocrypha, with costs borne by the Roman Catholic Church and other churches interested.⁴⁴

The New Testament

Mr. Cyril Sanderson was mainly responsible for the new translation of the New Testament called Linjila,⁴⁵ which was published in 1971 with a green cover.⁴⁶ Due to disagreements over the translation of many important concepts a committee of reviewers was appointed by the churches in Northern Nigeria. Prominent among the reviewers were the Rev. Peter of the SUM (Sudan United Mission) and Mallam Paul Yusufu.⁴⁷ A new Linjila emerged out of this committee's effort and was published with a black cover in 1974. This translation made some improvements on Sanderson's but it also contained controversial renderings. Perhaps the first person to challenge the translation renderings was G. Bishop, an SIM missionary in Zinder, Niger Republic. One such rendering was the retention of the word *Hanzari* for "defense" instead of Kariya, as is contained in the Old Testament. Another word translated wrongly was Sea of Galilee, rendered *Tabki*, a pool.⁴⁸

The new Linjila was sent to the Review Committee in Kano for re-working. After going through this edition, Watkins discovered further inconsistencies and

shortcomings which she reported to Philip Stine thus: 1) Much of the text is so worded as to depend on intonation for understanding. Elliptical sentences abound, and many words are left out. To a Hausa, reading with proper intonation this would cause no difficulty, but to many readers either newly literate or those whose mother tongue is not Hausa it will cause much difficulty; 2) Words spelled in different ways, i.e. *Saan nan* (correct) is also spelled *Sannan* and *Sanan*. The latter ones are heard in slurred informal speech only, never written; 3) Kano dialect is not maintained, mixed with other dialects in some passages e.g. *Kashegari* (Kano) and *Washe-gari* (another dialect); 3) Different plurals for the same word *laifi* written both *Laifofi* and *Laifuffuka*; both are correct but must not be mixed; 4) Inaccurate idioms e.g. Hausa does not say "God can"; they say that carried the sense of the possibility of inability. Instead they say "God has the power." The first is used all throughout the Linjila. Additionally, Hausa do not begin a sentence with *Kuma* (and) a feature found in the linjila; 5) Old spelling brought up to date e.g. *nan danan* for *nan da nan*; 6) *Komai* for *Kome*. The Hausa do not usually write *Komai*. In spoken Hausa it is reserved for anger and disgust; 7) Some obsolete and unusual Hausa words are used which only a native born Hausa can detect; 8) Many English words or Anglicized words are used, which are common in Nigeria but not in other West African countries where Hausa is spoken. They are unnecessary where there are common Hausa words understood by all.⁴⁹

There were many other mistakes or mistranslations but perhaps of less fundamental importance. On receipt of the report, Stine directed that all the comments made by Watkins be incorporated before the New Testament was printed with the whole Bible.⁵⁰ This was done and the Hausa New Testament manuscripts reached the printers in London on 1 November 1977.⁵¹

The Rev. Maikudi Kure further rendered an invaluable service by preparing the glossary (with the help of Mrs. Maryamu Ishaya, a "middle belt" person) and the index for both Old and New Testaments and putting hooked letters in these texts.⁵²

Finally, when the work on the Hausa Bible was finished it was recommended that 20,000 copies should be published with the Apocrypha and 100,000 without them.⁵³

The Unfinished Task

The 1980 Hausa Bible was a great achievement. But it cannot be the whole story of Bible translation for Northern Nigeria. While the translation was originally meant to facilitate proselytization in the particular cultural context of the Hausa, we know for certain that by 1960 most of the Christians in Northern Nigeria were from the "middle belt" peoples, not the Hausa. There is no doubt that such cultural groups desired the Scripture in their mother tongues. This desire can be seen in individual attempts, one of which was that of Barnabas Gwa Gwompwel, called "Barnabas Gowon" by G. F. Hansford of the Technical Studies Department, Institute of Linguistics, Jos. Gwompwel is said to have translated the whole of the New Testament into Ngas shortly before his death in 1973. In 1974 the United Bible Societies were considering publishing 3,000 copies of Gwompwel's Ngas New Testament.⁵⁴ It was published by the Nigerian Bible Translation Trust in 1977.⁵⁵

By 1980 when the new Hausa Bible was published, only three 'middle belt' languages had the whole Bible or portions of published.⁵⁶

Language	Date of Publication
Igala	1970
Nupe	1953
Tiv	1966

Northern Nigeria Languages in which only the New Testament has been published include those listed below:

Language	Date of Publication
Agatu	1984
BaatonunKwara	1977
Berom	1984
Bura	1937
Ebira	1981
Eggon	1975
Gbagyi	1956

Idoma	1970
Igede	1980
Jju	1982
Jukun (Takun)	1980
Kamnwe (Higi)	1975
Kuteb	1985
Longuda	1978
Mambila	1977
Ngas	1977
Rubassa	1972
Tangale	1932

There is no doubt that the “middle belt” languages were neglected for a long time. This perhaps may be due to the obsession of early missionaries with the conversion of the Hausa Muslim as pointed out by Meyer.⁵⁷ The consequence of this neglect, to our mind, was the delay or absence of an indigenous Christianity in these areas. Sanneh has pointed out the importance of the development of vernacular language for indigenization; “missionary adoption of the vernacular, therefore was tantamount to adopting indigenous cultural criteria for the message, a piece of radical indigenization....”⁵⁸ This is because the mother tongue is the language of the heart in which culture and religion are expressed and assimilated, as Smith has said:

Men need two kinds of language, in fact: a language of the home, of emotion, of unexpressed associations and a language of knowledge, exact argument, scientific truth, one in which words are world-current and steadfast in their meanings. Where the mother tongue does not answer both needs, the people must inevitably become bilingual; but however fluent they may succeed in being in the foreign speech its words can never feel to them as their native words. To express the dear and intimate things which are the very breath and substance of life a man will fall back on the tongue he learnt, not at school, but in the house - how, he remembers not. He may bargain in the other or pass examinations in it,

but he will pray in his home speech. If you wish to reach his heart you will address him in that language.⁵⁹

Conclusion

It may be safe to postulate here that a close study of the effects of the use of Hausa language as a language of catechism and liturgy in the “middle belt” might be revealing. It might show the degree of superficial Christianity in this area. Thus it is possible that the missionary selection of Hausa was to unify many of the tribal groups in the North, but the extent to which that resulted in the creation of a monolithic North is another matter. For example the Plateau tribes have always asserted their independence from Hausa/Fulani hegemony.⁶⁰ Thus Hausa language hegemony in this vast area may not necessarily be in the best interest of these other peoples. How far do the local pastors who are perhaps trained in Hausa Bible Schools really understand the Hausa to communicate in it effectively is difficult to say. But we may conclude that, no matter what, no language can substitute for the mother tongue. In spite of this fact, in the case of the 1980 edition of the Hausa Bible, care was supposedly taken to express the message in a way that non-Hausa speakers can readily understand, since for the non-Hausa in Northern Nigeria the Hausa language is his second or even third, if not fourth language. Real Hausa, whether Sokoto, Bauchi or Kano, for most of them is often out of reach.

Notes

- ¹ Christopher Fyfe, *A history of Sierra Leone*. (London:1971) p.8.
- ² *West Africa*, 15th June, 1981. p. 1356.
- ³ Eugene Stock, *The History of the Missionary Society, its environment, its men and its work*. (London:1899) Vol. I. p. 455.
- ⁴ G.O.M. Tasié, "Igbo Bible Nso and evolution of the 'Union-Igbo' 1905-1913" in *Journal of Niger Delta Studies*. 1:2 p.63.
- ⁵ *West Africa* op cit.
- ⁶ F.K. Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857-1914* (London:1971) p.8
- ⁷ P.E.H. Hair, "Niger Languages and Sierra Leonean Missionary Linguists 1840-1930" in *Society for African Church History. Bulletin* No. 2.p.131.
- ⁸ Bible Society of Nigeria Hausa file, Jos.
- ⁹ G.O.M. Tasié op cit.
- ¹⁰ E.P.T. Gramton, *Christianity in Northern Nigeria* (London:1979) p. 18.
- ¹¹ E.A. Ayandele, *The Missionary impact on modern Nigeria 1842-1914* (London:1966) p. 121.
- ¹² *Ibid.* p. 124
- ¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 125.
- ¹⁶ For details see Ayandele op cit. pp. 132-144.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 126.
- ¹⁸ D.N. Wambutda, "A very brief history of Hausa Bible" in *Nigeria Christian*. 5:3. p. 5.
- ¹⁹ Crampton op cit. p. 133.
- ²⁰ D.N. Wambutda. op. cit..
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² *Ibid.*
- ²³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ Philip Stine to U.B.S. A/12 Hausa. 29 Jan 1973.
- ²⁵ Heber F. Peacock to Dr. Soremekum. 6 Feb 1973.
- ²⁶ H. Peacock to P. Stine. 7 Feb 1973.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*
- ²⁸ Stine to U.B.S. A/12 Hausa. 29 Jan 1873.
- ²⁹ Stine to Kaburuk, Yusufu, A/12 Hausa. 29 Jan 1973.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*
- ³¹ Stine to E. Nandí. 17 Oct 1974.
- ³² E.W. Bunkowske to M. Kure. 27 Aug 1973.
- ³³ P. Stine to B.S.N. 23 July 1974.
- ³⁴ M. Kure to Bunkowske. 24 Oct 1974.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.* See also P. Stine to Nandi. 17 Oct 1974
- ³⁶ Bunkowske to B.S.N. 16 May 1977.
- ³⁷ Stine to Fr. Kenny A/12 Hausa. 15 Aug 1971.
- ³⁸ P. Stine, Heber Peacock report A/12 Hausa. Aug 1971.

- ³⁹ Father Bede Jagoa to Dr. Peacock. 1970.
- ⁴⁰ P. Stine to Fr. Kenny A/12 Hausa (5). 15 Aug 1971.
- ⁴¹ P. Stine, Peacock report A/12. Aug 1971.
- ⁴² P. Stine to Fr. Kenny A/12 Hausa RC 55. Aug 1971.
- ⁴³ Eugene W. Bunkowske to J. Kenny. 29 Sep 1975.
- ⁴⁴ Report by Eugene W. Bunkowske, Peacock, Federau and P. Stine to Bible Hausa (London).
- ⁴⁵ P. Stine to Mr. N.L. Krarup of Radio Voice of the Gospel, Jos. 1972.
- ⁴⁶ P. Stine, Heber Peacock report A/12 Hausa. Aug 1971.
- ⁴⁷ P. Stine to Krarup. op cit.
- ⁴⁸ Mr. G. Bishop to Helen M. Watkins. 6 June 1974.
- ⁴⁹ Watkins to Stein. 5 Jan 1975.
- ⁵⁰ P. Stine to Old Testament translators. 4 Feb 1974.
- ⁵¹ Bunkowske to M. Kure. 22 Nov 1977.
- ⁵² Stine to Watkins. 24 July 1974
- ⁵³ Richard Faith to Bunkowske. 1977.
- ⁵⁴ G. F. Hansford to Rev. David Cohen. 14 Feb 1974. See also the Rev. Cohen to G. F. Hansford. 5 Mar 1974.
- ⁵⁵ Nigerian Bible Translation Trust (N.B.T.T.) publication. 1986.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid.
- ⁵⁷ Lysle. R. Meyer "T.J. Bowen and Central Africa: a Nineteenth Century Missionary Delusion," *The International Journal of Africa Historical Studies*. 15:2 (1982).
- ⁵⁸ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message*. (New York:1987)p.3.
- ⁵⁹ Quoted in Lamin Sanneh. op cit. p.108.
- ⁶⁰ See J.H. Harrison. "Plateau Societies' Resistance to Jihadist penetratism" in Elizabeth Isichei (ed) *Studies in the History of Plateau State, Nigeria*. (London:1982).