

Catholic missionaries and lexicography among the Sidaama, Ethiopia

The Sidamo-English dictionary

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This article focuses on mission linguistic practices conducted by Catholic missionaries among the Sidaama, Ethiopia. The paper especially addresses mission linguistic practices found in the bilingual *Sidamo-English dictionary* published in 1983 (Gasparini 1983). First, the paper will provide a short introduction to mission linguistics. Next, it will provide information about the historical context of the Catholic mission among the Sidaama. The main content covers the period from 1964 to 1983. In 1964, Catholic missionaries from the Comboni order started mission work among the Sidaama. The article will analyse entries in the dictionary and discuss examples of linguistic practices applied when translating religious concepts from the Sidaama religious worldview such as the reuse of concepts, extension of meaning, and loan words. The paper will discuss how the composition of the dictionary had both practical and ideological concerns. It will discuss examples concerning the interpretation of central concepts such as the concept of God, attributes of God, and spiritual being (s). A closer analysis of the translation of central Sidaama religious concepts shows how the translation of Sidaama beliefs and practices were interpreted and evaluated within a Christian framework.

Keywords: Mission linguistics, Catholic mission, lexicography, translation, Highland East Cushitic, Sidaamu Afoo, Ethiopia

1. Introduction¹

The topic of this article is linguistic practices conducted by Catholic missionaries in the Sidaama National Regional State, Southern Ethiopia. The Sidaama² National Regional State is located

¹ I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for critically reading the draft and for suggesting improvements of the manuscript.

² It was formerly known as the “Sidama zone.” It was part of the multi-ethnic regional state, the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ Regional State (SNNPRS). On 18 June 2020, the Sidama zone attained status as a regional state in Ethiopia.

approximately 275 km south of Addis Ababa. The main ethnic group in this region is the Sidaama, speakers of Sidaamu Afoo, meaning ‘the mouth of the Sidaama.’ Sidaamu Afoo is a Highland East Cushitic language, a linguistic subgroup of Cushitic, and part of the Afroasiatic language family. Within the Highland East Cushitic languages, Sidaamu Afoo belongs to the Hadiya-Sidama language cluster, which, in addition to Sidaamu Afoo, consists of closely related languages such as Alaba, Burgi, Gedeo, Hadiya, Kambata, and several minor languages (Leslau 1952: 64-66; Leslau 1959: 1; Hudson 1989: 1-2; Kawachi 2020: 543-545).

This article is primarily concerned with lexicographical practices. Catholic Comboni missionaries started mission work among the Sidaama in 1964, and the article focuses on the content in the *Sidamo*³-*English dictionary* published in 1983 (Gasparini 1983). It will use the dictionary as a primary source and analyse entries in the dictionary. The paper will discuss these examples, showing how the mission linguistic practice applied existing religious concepts from the Sidaamu Afoo language to transform religious meaning. Furthermore, the paper will discuss practical and ideological motives for creating the dictionary. It will show how ideological motives were related to the proselytising of the Christian faith and the attempt to convert the Sidaama religious belief system. The practical reasons for producing a dictionary were related to recording the language to facilitate religious translations for proselytism.

The recording of the language and the compiling of a dictionary were based on mission linguistic practices. Linguist Even Hovdhaugen explains missionary linguistics as the writing of grammars and books in which a specific language is described by non-native missionaries and based on an oral corpus. These grammars and books are written as pedagogical tools for language learning (Hovdhaugen 1996: 15). As such, mission linguistics seeks to describe and formalise languages to create literacy practices as an instrument for religious proselytisation. As a result of such activities, missionaries have made significant contributions to the description of languages and the creation of language boundaries in the course of the history of missions (Irvine 2008: 324-325; Errington 2008: 15-17; Zwartjes 2012: 1-2).

Further, the article will address how ideological concerns influenced the mission linguistic practices. In this regard, mission linguistic practices reflect the relationship between language, ideology and power relations. Linguist Paul Kroskrity defines language ideologies as the perception of language constructed in the interest of a particular social or cultural group (Kroskrity 2000: 8). As

³ The name “Sidamo” is a former nomenclature used in the research literature. However, this term is not precise for describing Sidaamu Afoo, since “Sidamo” refers to the name of a former administrative region. There are several other languages spoken in this region.

translation theorist André Lefevere points out, translation is a rewriting practice that changes reality into terms created by the translator and translation context. Therefore, rewriting involves innovation by introducing new ideas but it also reduces and omits (Lefevere 2004: vii).

Translation activities as part of missionary linguistic practice are closely connected to proselytizing and a rhetoric of persuasion. In this sense, Christian theological ideas are terms of art with specialised meanings that refer to empirical and supernatural realities (Burke 1961: 1-7, 104). In this sense, mission linguistic practice uses codes from different semiotic systems intending to change language experience and practices. A notion of semiotic ideology is relevant in this context. Anthropologist Webb Keane explains semiotic ideology as underlying assumptions about signs, how signs function and what consequences may be produced. Semiotic ideology is part of a representational economy, which refers to the totality of institutions, technologies, media and practices in a social and historical context and their mutual effects on each other (Keane 2007: 17-21).

Furthermore, mission linguistic practice contains an inherent relationship between translation and power and may lead to asymmetrical relations between the parties involved. There are examples of such asymmetrical relations observed in several African contexts. As pointed out by anthropologists John and Jean Comaroff, the linguistic activities of missionaries were closely related to colonising projects and resulted in the imposing of hegemony on cultural exchanges (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 229). On the other hand, such an approach may imply a somewhat determined analysis. As Landau (1995) and Peel (2000) have pointed out, mission practices and Christian discourse may also be perceived as part of an intercultural dialogue with indigenous religions. Therefore, the encounter between mission activities and local belief systems creates new transformations. Similar observations are made in broader African contexts, e.g., Walls (1996) and Meyer (1999), where mission linguistics practice has resulted in compromises between the beliefs of the missionaries and the local belief systems that the missionaries intended to change (Walls 1996: 7-9; Peterson 1997: 257-258; Meyer 1999: 58-59, 80-82).

The next sections of the article are organised in the following manner. First, the paper will provide a background on the Catholic mission among the Sidaama, focusing on mission linguistic practices that resulted in the compilation of the *Sidamo-English dictionary*. The central part of the article analyses entries in the dictionary. The analysis will investigate linguistic strategies to translate Christian concepts into Sidaamu Afoo, and discuss how the translation reused Sidaama religious concepts.

2. A short history of the Catholic mission among the Sidaama

During the 20th century, there was an influx of global missions into Southern Ethiopia. In 1928, a Protestant mission organisation, the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), established mission stations among the Sidaama. The SIM missionaries became the pioneers of religious literature in the Sidaamu Afoo language and made translations with the assistance of local Sidaama assistants. This mission encounter produced the earliest written sources in Sidaamu Afoo, eventually translating the Gospel of St. Mark into Sidaamu Afoo (Fargher 1996: 133; Balisky 2009: 231). The text was written in Ethiopic script and was published in 1933 as *St. Mark's Gospel in Sidamo* by the British and Foreign Bible Society (Hudson 1976: 235).

In 1931, a Catholic mission station was established at Bera, south of Yrga Alem, Sidaama. The mission was an outreach from the Catholic mission in the adjacent regions of Kambata and Wolayta (Alberto 1998: 333; Alberto 2013: 178-179, 185-187). In 1935, Italy invaded Ethiopia, and in October 1936, the region encompassing the Sidaama was conquered (Del Boca 1969: 116-118). Due to the hostilities, the mission station at Bera was destroyed and the station was abandoned. Catholic mission among the Sidaama was reestablished in the 1960s. In 1961, the Catholic Comboni missionaries of the Heart of Jesus entered the mission field, and in 1979, the area became the Apostolic Vicariate of Hawassa (Alberto 2013: 234-236, 239-240, 502-504).

After the reestablishment of Catholic mission in the 1960s, one of the initial tasks of the Comboni mission was to start a school in the city of Hawassa and rural locations (Alberto 2013: 503-505). In the educational context, the Comboni schools were obliged to follow the Ethiopian national curriculum. The national curriculum was supposed to be taught in Amharic, the national language of Ethiopia. Amharic was the language used in national literacy campaigns, and it was also the primary language used by other foreign missions at their mission schools and practice (Sjöström and Sjöström 1983: 34-37).

3. Comboni missionaries and mission linguistics

In practice, Amharic was not widely understood among the rural population. Therefore, one practical concern for the Comboni missionaries was to learn Sidaamu Afoo to proselytise. In this regard, the Catholic missionaries continued an established practice of learning local languages in the Ethiopian mission context. During the first decades of the 20th century, Catholic missionaries engaged in mission linguistic practice in Southern Ethiopia (Alberto 2013: 178-180). The Catholic missionaries Gaetano de

Thiene and Andrea Jarousseau compiled a dictionary of the Galla (Oromo) language (de Thiene 1939), and Pascal de Luchon compiled a grammar of the Wolayta language (de Luchon 1938).

After re-establishing the Catholic mission among the Sidaama, the Comboni mission employed a catechist from the Catholic Church in Kambata to proselytise in Sidaamu Afoo (Alberto 2013: 503). In this learning context, the missionaries became involved in learning and practising the language. As a part of language learning, the missionaries documented Sidaamu Afoo by taking notes and making wordlists when encountering new words. These wordlists became accumulated into vocabulary and grammar. Gradually, the accumulation of linguistic knowledge resulted in the production of texts. These texts were intended for other missionaries, so these texts were copied and remained unpublished as booklets at mission stations or the library of the Vicariate in Hawassa.⁴ The local Catholic Bishop Armido Gasparini wrote a booklet titled *Phrases, Proverbs and Idioms in the Sidaamu Afoo language* (Gasparini 1977). He also wrote a Sidaamu Afoo grammar in Italian *Grammatica Pratica della Lingua Sidamo* (1978). Later, the missionary Bruno Maccani wrote *A small grammar of the Sidamo language* (1990).

References in these booklets indicate that the Comboni missionaries used previous linguistic studies on Sidaamu Afoo to develop their language skills. Examples are the studies focusing specifically on the Sidaama by the historian Enrico Cerulli (1936) and the linguist Mario Martino Moreno (1940). Enrico Cerulli's study *La Lingua e la Storia dei Sidamo* (1936) contains a basic description of the linguistic features of Sidaamu Afoo, with sections on phonetics, pronouns, and verb conjugations. This study applies Latin script to codify Sidaamu Afoo and contains a comparative lexicon and an Italian-Sidaamu Afoo vocabulary (Cerulli 1936). Mario Martino Moreno offers a more detailed description of linguistic features in *Manuale di Sidamo*. His study presents exercises, texts written in Latin script, and a bi-lingual glossary (Moreno 1940).

During the 1970s, the Bible Society of Ethiopia started translating the Bible into Sidaamu Afoo.⁵ Furthermore, this initiative raised interest in additional linguistic studies of Sidaamu Afoo. The Bible Society cooperated with the United Bible Society and various Christian missions, and there was a need for language learning material to support this work.

However, another factor that influenced the study of Sidaamu Afoo was the linguistic situation after the 1974 Revolution. In 1979, the Ethiopian government initiated a National Literacy Campaign

⁴ These sources can be found in libraries at these locations.

⁵ In 1984, the New Testament translation, *Haaro Gondooro* (Good News), was published. In 2015, the complete Bible Translation, including the Old Testament, was published.

that included local vernaculars in education to encompass ethnic plurality (Bahru Zewde 2004: 313-314). In 1992, after the transition of the Ethiopian government, the new policy of ethnic federalism supported ethnic groups to use their languages in primary education. Currently, Sidaamu Afoo uses Latin script. Nevertheless, linguists still discuss problems regarding the relationship between orthography and phonology in Sidaamu Afoo (Yri 2004: 11-12; Yri 2011: 159-160).

Furthermore, since the 1970s, there has been increased scientific interest in linguistic studies of Cushitic languages. A publication in 1976 about a subgroup of Cushitic languages in Southern Ethiopia written by linguist Grover Hudson (Hudson 1976) inspired additional linguistic work.

In this context, the linguistic practices conducted by the mission linguists during this period produced a text corpus. These texts were used as source material by other linguistic researchers. For example, the linguist Klaus Wedekind later reused a story by Gasparini (1978) *Bokkilli, and Arfu* as the data material basis for linguistic analysis (Wedekind 1990). In addition to Gasparini, research was conducted by the linguist Kjell Magne Yri who worked for the Norwegian Lutheran Mission, and who was working on the Bible translation in Sidaamu Afoo (Yri 1998). The linguistic studies initiated by the Comboni missionaries also became a reference for later linguists who wrote a more comprehensive grammar of Sidaamu Afoo, such as Anbessa Teferra (Anbessa Teferra 2012) and Kazuhiro Kawachi (Kawachi 2007). Finally, the dictionary produced by Gasparini (1984) also impacted the later Sidaama-Amharic-English Dictionary (Latamo *et al.* 2007).

4. Description of the *Sidamo-English dictionary* (Gasparini 1983)

In 1983, the mission linguistic practice conducted by the Comboni missionaries resulted in the publication of a bi-lingual dictionary. It was compiled under Bishop Armido Gasparini, the Apostolic Administrator of Hawassa, and edited through the publisher Editrice Missionaria Italiana (E.M.I.) in Bologna. The 1983 dictionary is an extended dictionary of Sidaamu Afoo in English (Gasparini 1983). The aim was pedagogical and intended to create a bi-lingual dictionary for a target audience of non-native learners, both missionaries and translators. In the introduction, Gasparini describes the contents in the following manner:

The dictionary contains more than 9.000 root-words, to which all the derived forms of the verb should be added. All the words and derived forms have been collected from a context of the spoken language, either directly from the mouth of the people or from stories, traditions, poems, proverbs and other written material. It can be said that all the words collected in the dictionary are used by the Sidamo people, although some of them are more commonly used in some districts and only rarely used in other parts of the country. As far as possible, all the derived forms of the verb have

been quoted under its radical simple form; here too, only those derived forms have been quoted that have been collected from the people's spoken language. The commonly used Plural forms of Nouns and Adjectives are also given, as well as the feminine forms of the Adjective (Gasparini 1983: VI).

The dictionary presents a quick-reference system based on alphabetical order and provides headwords with incremented forms. The structure of entries has variations depending on the headword. The headword is derived from the single root base of a verb as the primary citation form. New headwords indicate aspects such as causative, abstract nouns, and derivational formation. The dictionary uses Latin script orthography with English glosses for Sidaamu Afoo lexis and is based on its own system for transliteration of sounds from Sidaamu Afoo. In the foreword of the dictionary, Gasparini (1983) explains this system:

Alphabetical order. The words have been entered in the dictionary in the following order: A - ' - " - B - C - Ć - D - Đ - E - F - G - H - I - J - K - L
M - N - Ñ - O - P - Q - R - S - SH - T - T̄ - U - W - Y.

Notes

1. As it appears, the simple and strong form of the hiatus (' - ") , which is a real consonant, follows the letter A.
2. The letters with an explosive or other peculiar sound are marked with a dash (Ć , Đ , T̄) and follow the corresponding simple letter (C - D - T). Also the letter P has always an explosive sound (P̄). The letter Q is used for the explosive sound, whereas K stands for the simple sound. The letter C corresponds to the English ch, as in child; SSH represents the reduplication of SH.
3. The letter R, beside its normal sound, can have another special sound, between R and D. The R bearing this second special sound is marked with a dash (r̄) and follows the simple R. In the course of the Dictionary the dash under R is often omitted, when the conjugation of the Verb does not require it.

Short and long vowels.

Many words in Sidamo have different meanings according to whether they have a short or long vowel [. . .] In the Dictionary the words with the short vowel precede the words with the long vowel. The sign of a long vowel ^ has been omitted in some verbal forms [. . .]

Verbs with special endings.

Verbs ending in r̄. These verbs deserve a special attention, because of the phonetic changes in their conjugation (r̄ + t = 'd; r̄ + n = 'n). To help distinguish these special verbs from those with the simple R, a grammatical form with the phonetic changes is usually quoted after each verb [. . .] This rule applies to all Reflexive verbs [. . .]

Also for other special classes of verbs, a grammatical form indicating the phonetical changes is given [. . .] Take also note of Verbs ending in double SS or SSH (Causative forms and forms influenced by Oromo) [. . .] (Gasparini 1983: VII-VIII).

In the dictionary, language examples are provided with phrases, sometimes based on phrases with Christian content, such as references to biblical narratives and teachings. The following example shows how the verb *dâma* is explained:

dâma = to send an oral, not written message, to entrust, commit, exhort. Yesusi Hawariôtisira maçarrashu *dânsa dâminonsa*. = Jesus made His last exhortions to his Apostles. *Dâme harino* = after having trusted (his belongings) he went away. Yesusi *Pētrosira sasè higè: gerèwo'ya allâli, ye dâmino*. = Jesus entrusted to Peter his task saying three times: take care of my sheep. *da'ma*, Refl. *dâmisisa, dâ'misisa*, Caus. (Gasparini 1983: 86).

Furthermore, the dictionary contains more than lexical information. As pointed out by linguist Klaus Wedekind, Gasparini's dictionary contains a large amount of information about Sidaama culture on various topics (Wedekind 1990: 25). One example is how the dictionary provides information in entries about religious practices such as ancestor veneration or specific names of venerated ancestors:

woyoo, f. = What deserves honour; a holy place, as the places where the Sidamo ancestors are buried. This name is used to signify the special tree (different for every clan) under which the *gada man*, during the period of *luwa*, lives by himself for a period of time. The meaning in this case is: honoured tree (Gasparini 1983: 353).

Malga, m. indecl. = an ancestor of the Sidamo; name of a clan. *Malga manni* (Gasparini 1983: 361).

Further examples of cultural information in the dictionary are entries describing aspects of the Sidaama lunar calendar:

agana tunicco = 30 days. The Sidamo divide the month in two parts: 15 days of light (*agana*) and 15 days of darkness (*tunicco*). *Tonà ontu barri tuniccohò, tonà ontu barri aganahò. Mittu tuniccinna mittu agani mittowà higè mitto aganâti*. (*Aganà tunicco yâ sajjô barrâti; kaenni tonà onte barrâti; tuniccuna qolê tonà onte barrâti*). *Aganu wo'mino ikkiha iltino* = She has brought forth the child before the ninth month. *Aganù bûda lèllino*. = It is a new moon. *Aganù qâqqohò*. = It is a crescent, waxing moon. *Aganù dukkâdurino*. = It is a full moon. (Gasparini 1983: 6).

This entry included information about the author's observations on the Sidaama calendar system. In this system, the moon's phases start when the new moon becomes visible, followed by waxing and thereafter full moon. Furthermore, the Sidaama calendar divides the days of the month into 'days of light' and 'days of darkness.' Moreover, this calendar is the basis for an astrological system with divinatory practices related to observing and interpreting celestial cycles as divine communication

concerning human affairs. In this regard, the dictionary contains several entries describing how the Sidaama interpreted this astrological system:

algâjjimma, m. [. . .] According to the Sidamo astrologers, this is the first day following the conjunction of the moon with the constellation called Bûsa. The conjunction consists in the moon being seen on a straight line with the constellation. The algâjjimma is followed by 26 days, that are either auspicious or inauspicious (Gasparini 1983: 11-12).

basà, f. = Sidamo astrology; two days with the same name follow each other; they are called “mother and daughter.” The child born in such a day will often weep; in such a day it will rain. An auspicious day for sowing seeds and planting plants. These two days are the 4th and 5th beginning from algâjjima (Gasparini 1983: 33).

In addition, the dictionary provides detailed information about aspects of Sidaama astrology related to divinatory practices evaluating calendar days. This belief evaluated how positive and negative qualities for human affairs permeated time and days, resulting in auspicious or inauspicious days for specific actions.

So, why was such information included in the dictionary? Gasparini's introduction provides one explanation. Since the dictionary was intended for pedagogical relevance, it provided cultural knowledge for new missionaries and translators. However, another reason for the choices of cultural content in the dictionary was probably influenced by the contemporary developments of Catholic mission theology. The sessions of the Second Vatican Council were held from 1962 to 1965. One topic that emerged from the Second Vatican Council was rethinking the church's mission activities in the context of global Christianity. One concern was that mission activities promoted increased cultural sensitivity for local cultures in mission encounters. The Second Vatican Council resulted in an official teaching on inculturation. In this perspective, the aspect of culture is given the right to an independent existence within Christianity. Therefore, introducing Christianity into cultures involves adopting cultural values, customs and institutions that preserve the integrity of a culture (Lutzebak 1988: 109-111; Shorter 1988: 11-12; Bevans 2013: 108-109).

The new strategy for Catholic mission work likely influenced the interest in cultural aspects that are found in Gasparini's dictionary. On the other hand, one may question how the official church teachings on inculturation became expressed in practical mission contexts. Nevertheless, a further question is how the mission linguistic practices appropriated Sidaama religious beliefs and practices. Therefore, a further approach in this article is to analyse the interpretations of Sidaama beliefs and practices in the dictionary and analyse how the translation choices were made according to a Christian theological framework.

5. Translation practices: reuse of religious concepts, extensions of meaning, and use of loanwords

The translation of Sidaamu Afoo words into English in the dictionary may be analysed to discover certain translation practices. In this paragraph, the article will discuss some examples of these practices, such as the reuse of concepts, extension of meaning, and loan words. A closer analysis of the translation of central Sidaama religious concepts will show how the interpretation of Sidaama beliefs and practices evaluated certain religious concepts within a Christian framework.

One example of such practice in the dictionary is the concept from Sidaama religious and moral practice related to rules of conduct and forgiveness:

gata = to be left, remain, to be safe. *Godowù ganto* = she is with child. *gatona yâ* (Imper. *gato* and *a*) = to forgive. *gatisa*. Caus. = to cause to remain, hold back (tr.), to save. *gatisira*. Refl. of Caus. *Gatisiri* = he kept for himself. *Mannu gobba wo'manta gatisirè...* = If people win the whole world...*Hanni umokki gatisiri!* = Come, save yourself! (Gasparini 1983: 117).

Following this entry, the dictionary extended the concept of *gata* and ascribed it with meanings within a Christian framework and providing additional entries:

gatisânco, m. = Saviour.
gatò, f. = salvation, forgiveness, pardon [...] (Gasparini 1983: 117).

One meaning of the concept of *gata* denoted public moral acts of forgiveness in judicial contexts where people who had committed transgression towards the community had to beg for forgiveness in public from the Sidaama elder's clan council (Hamer 1987: 114-116). As linguist Kjell Magne Yri (1998) has pointed out, the concept is related to a wide range of meanings of being saved from bad, illness, destruction and pain. It existed as a term in Sidaamu Afoo before the introduction of Christianity, and was re-interpreted for a new context since it covered similar meaning (Yri 1998: 94-99, 130-133, 144-145).

The reinterpretation of concepts and extension of meaning went beyond merely pre-Christian moral practices. In the dictionary, there are also examples of translation of concepts from technical/practical activities extended with Christian meaning:

qullâwa = to be pure, clean (coffee), to be cleansed, purified, holy. *Insa qullâbbanno*. *Ki'ne qullâbbinnirêti* = You are all pure. *qullêssa*, Caus. = to clean (coffee), purify.
qullâwa, Adj. m. f. = pure, holy, purified. Pl. *qullawôta*. = the Saints. (The word is used especially in Wondo district. Its first meaning refers to coffee, that is peeled and cleaned). *Bunà qullâwa assinai*. = Coffee is purified (Gasparini 1983: 270-271).

This example shows how the mission linguistic practice attempted to extend the meaning of *qullâwa* to convey Christian concepts such as ‘purified’ and ‘holy.’ Furthermore, the translation also contains an extension of meaning that personalised the concept by introducing a plural meaning, *qullawôta*, to suggest a term for ‘the Saints.’

Furthermore, the translation practice introduced religious loanwords from Amharic and Latin into the *Sidamo-English dictionary*. The dictionary shows examples of Christian loanwords from Latin:

ferisawicca, m., Pl. ferisawiyâne, f = Pharisee (Gasparini 1983: 98).

Katolike, f. Coll. = Catholic (Gasparini 1983: 191).

Kristiânco [...]

kristianimma, f. = the condition of being a Christian (Gasparini 1983: 199).

During the 20th century, the Sidaama area became incorporated into the Ethiopian state, and the Amharic language had increasingly influenced Sidaamu Afoo. Therefore, the dictionary contains several Christian loanwords from Amharic:

masqala, m. = cross. Masqàlu malate assira = to cross oneself.

mazmurè, f. = Psalm (Gasparini 1983: 226-227).

Other examples of loanwords from Amharic are:

qaddase (Amh.) = to sanctify, celebrate the Mass. Qiddasete hûççatto qaddansemmo = we celebrate the Mass (Gasparini 1983: 253).

Amharic terms were applied to indicate Christian feast days. In addition, loanwords from Amharic were applied to convey Christian rituals and activities:

Fâsika, m. = Easter-feast (Gasparini 1983: 97).

ṭammaqa = to baptise. ṭammaqama, Pass. ṭammaqisisa, Caus. = to christen (said of the godparents) (Gasparini 1983: 322).

Furthermore, the dictionary translated combinations of Amharic and Latin loanwords. For example, the Amharic word *liq* (meaning scholar, expert, learned person) was combined with the Latinized term *pappa*:

Liqâne Pappasicca, m., Pl. Liqâne Papâsete, or: Liqâne Pappasôtu = the pope (Gasparini 1983: 210, se also 252).

Finally, the dictionary used loanwords from Amharic combined with concepts from Sidaamu Afoo related to religious practices:

adwâre, f. (Arabic, Ghe'ez) = a sacred place where sacrifices are offered. In the Sidamo Pr. (Primal Religion) such a place is under big trees.

adwârete haqqicco, f. (see: sadaqa) = the big tree under which sacrifices are made (Gasparini 1983: 5).

6. Translating a singular God

The Sidaama belief system had no generic term for religion but several concepts related to religious practices embedded in domestic and economic relations. One practice was related to ancestor veneration. In addition, there was the belief in spirits and spirit possession practices related to health and disease. Ritual specialists mediated these practices. Furthermore, there was also a conception of the existence of sky gods and creator beings (Vecchiato 1985: 235-238; Brøgger 1986: 71-73; Hamer and Hamer 1966: 393; Hamer 1987: 81-85). In a comparative Southern Ethiopian context, the concepts related to ancestor veneration, sky gods and spiritual beings among Sidaama have similarities with Oromo cosmology (Bartels 1983: 89-92, 120-121).

As the article has pointed out, the mission linguistic practice implied the reuse and extension of religious concepts from Sidaama religious practices. However, extensions became interpreted in terms of Christian theological concepts. This practice implied that some concepts became extended while others became omitted. The following examples show how the mission linguistic practice interpreted the concept of God, the attributes of God, and divine being (s).

One central religious concept reused was the Sidaamu Afoo concept for a divine being, *Magano*. In Sidaama religious practices, *Magano* was perceived as a male sky-god dwelling in heaven (Vecchiato 1985: 235-236; Brøgger 1986: 133; Hamer 1987: 81-82).

In the *Sidamo-English dictionary*, *Magano* was applied to translate God in a Christian context with the following entry:

Magano, m. (cfr. Mangu of Kenya and other countries = God. Pl. Magàanna, f. = the false divinities [...]) (Gasparini 1983: 219).

First of all, the dictionary shows a comparison with deities in other African contexts. However, on the other hand, the translation established a contrast towards a pluralistic concept of divinity ascribed as unfavourable and translated as ‘false divinities.’ A further aspect is that the translation of God was rendered as masculine. The Sidaamu Afoo concept of God was masculine and was easily translated and interpreted according to the Christian ideology of a singular, male, and monotheistic God.

However, this translation practice focused on the idea of an exclusive and transcendent God and thereby opposed the belief of other deities or spiritual beings. As such, the doctrine of monotheism contrasted the Sidaama belief in a plurality of divine beings. For example, the translation practice deemphasised the idea of a female deity inherent in Sidaama belief. *Magano* was believed to have a wife and feminine counterpart named *Bâtto*, goddess of earth, who had religious significance for the fertility of the soil (Vecchiato 1985: 237-238; Jensen et al. 2022: 113). In the *Sidamo-English dictionary*, the concept was retained and translated:

[...] According to Sidamo traditions, Maganu, masculine is the Father, Annu; Bâtto, fem. is the Mother-Earth, Ama (Gasparini 1983: 219).

bâtto, F. = earth, mother earth. Bâttote godowî giddo. = this word is used in sacrificial rites, while blood is sprinkled upwards and downwards. Magano ïllitohe; bātto agi! Bātto ikkitohe (used instead of: Maganu ôhe) = thank you (Gasparini 1983: 35).

Although the concept was interpreted as ‘earth, mother earth,’ the translation underplays the divine significance of *Bâtto*, and the mutual role together with *Magano*. Instead, the interpretation of this concept was restricted to pre-Christian sacrificial contexts and connected to natural phenomena.

On the other hand, the dictionary retained other concepts in Sidaamu Afoo that emphasised the male God in the sense of creator:

Kalîqa, m. (ancient Sidamo word) = Creator. Isi kalîqâti. = He is the creator. Maganu su’mi Kalîqâti. = God’s name is “the creator.” Kalaqi Kalîqî (subj.) = The Creator. Who created. Kalîqira sagadde. = Adore the creator. (Gasparini 1983: 188).

In this entry, the translation interpreted the role of a male creator as an attribute of *Magano* and emphasised the singular male God as an active creator.

In addition, the *Sidamo-English dictionary* omitted other celestial deities present in Sidaama religious practice. One of these was related to sky-deities. For example, according to the anthropologist John H. Hamer, the concept of *Banko* referred to a sky-deity of thunder and lightning (Hamer 1987: 81-82). However, in the dictionary, the concept was retained but merely translated as a natural phenomenon:

banqò, f. = thunder (that can kill) [...] (Gasparini 1983: 30).

As such, examples in the dictionary show that the translation practice reused religious concepts but translated these according to a Christian ideology, emphasising one exclusive God among an ambivalence of deities. The result in the dictionary produced a religious homogenisation of pluralistic concepts prevalent in Sidaama belief and religious practices. The result focused on the exclusiveness of a universal God while denouncing a plurality of Sidaama deities.

7. Interpreting a singular Devil

The Sidaamu Afoo language contained different categories to describe spirit beings. One example was the concept of *shêtâne*, a loanword itself, which represented possession spirits, and *ekera*, that designated spirits of dead ancestors (Brøgger 1986: 60, 86-88; Vecchiato 1985: 244). Spiritual beings were believed to be ambivalent with both benevolent and malevolent qualities. *Shêtâne* was closely related to explanations about disease causation, i.e., being possessed by spirit beings due to an imbalance in the relationship between humans and spiritual beings. Therefore, Sidaama religious practices focused on rituals in order to maintain an equilibrium between human and spiritual beings (Vecchiato 1985: 247-250; Vecchiato 1993: 179-180; Brøgger 1986: 59-63; Hamer 1987: 84-85; Jensen et al. 2022: 124-126).

The mission linguistic translation practice reduced and transformed the meaning of these concepts and their relationship to humans. In the dictionary, the concepts for spirit beings were translated as:

shêtâne, m., Pl. *shêtàanna*, f. = the devil. *shêtànâmo*, m., *shêtânâme*, f. = devilish (Gasparini 1983: 302).

ekerà, f. = ghost, something that frightens, as the image of a dead person that one thinks to see at night. *Ekerâte!* = He is a ghost! It also means that somebody has only a breach of life left. (Gasparini 1983: 90).

In the case of *ekerà*, the concept was translated as a ‘ghost’ of a dead person in general and not related to belief and practices connected to ancestor veneration. Although the concept *shêtâne* had a plural meaning, the dictionary only provided the singular translation as ‘devil’ and ‘devilish’ to refer to the personification of evil according to a Christian ideology. Although the dictionary downplayed the plural understanding of spirits, it retained such understandings by indicating names of demons in Sidaama religious practices and the relation to disease:

âbbò, f. (âbbôti) = name of a demon (Gasparini 1983: 2).

âyyo, f. = name of a demon. âyyukko, F. = disease. (this is an old word that was used by the ancients for a disease that could not be defined). Cfr. Fayya (Gasparini 1983: 22).

The Sidaama belief in *shêtâne* was part of a wider Ethiopian mythology about the origin of spiritual beings. The translation choice of *shêtâne* as God's adversary is probably influenced by a similar meaning in Amharic. The existence of this concept in Sidaamu Afoo is likely a loanword and a result of the historical interaction between Islam and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Southern Ethiopia. This intersection resulted in syncretic religious practices moulding together elements of Christianity, Islam, and indigenous religions (Haberland 1964: 237-238; Reminick 1974: 286; Braukämper 1992: 195-197; Jensen et al. 2022: 107-108.).

On the one hand, the entry in the *Sidamo-English dictionary* used singular concept for God's adversary. On the other hand, entries retained the connection between the spiritual belief system and medical explanations, but also by relating this to the singular 'devil':

shêtânâwa = to be bedevilled. The Sidamo blame on the devil many diseases (Gasparini 1983: 302).

In the Sidaama belief system, these spirits were perceived to materialise in individual persons as possessions and exorcism, and the dictionary described these practices:

hayyâta (cfr. hayyô'ma) = to exorcise a person possessed by the devil. Isi hayyâtanno. = he begins to sing the songs to exorcise. The verb properly means: to consult the devil, who is believed to inhibit certain persons (shêtânâmo), who act as medium. The acolytes of the medium intone songs that provoke a state of excitement in the medium, who gives the responses; at the end he will impose an offering (Gasparini 1983: 152).

However, the dictionary entry focused on possession and the relationship to spiritual beings as 'the devil.' The translation did not encompass the plurality of spirit beings nor the broader Sidaama spiritual and medical understanding of the relationship to spirit beings.

According to anthropological observations made during the same period, the spiritual possession cults were an integrated part of a system of reciprocity and exchange between members of households and spirit beings (Brøgger 1986: 72-75). On the other hand, possession ceremonies were claimed to be in decline in the decades after the Ethiopian occupation of Sidaama in the early 20th century. Later, this process continued due to socio-religious changes such as the conversion to Christianity and the 1974 Ethiopian socialist revolution (Hamer 1987: 84-86). But on the other hand, similar religious

practices became an integrated part of healing rituals performed among Muslims and in Protestant and Orthodox Christianity (Vecchiato 1993: 180-181).

8. Explaining moral relations of good and evil

Other concepts describe spirit beings in the Sidaamu Afoo language. *Shêtâne* is related to possessing spirits, while *ayyâna* is related to an (animistic) conception of life forces believed to permeate material and immaterial forms. It could be transferred between people (from father or mother) or attached to specific physical places (e.g., ancestor graves, mountains, rocks, trees, and rivers) (Hamer 1987: 84).

In the dictionary, the translation of this concept was:

ayyâna, m. Pl. ayyâna, f. = a spirit, good or bad; grace, spirit, feast. ayyânunnire (Acc.) = the things that regard the spirit. Ayyânu jirò = treasure. Shêtânu mulla ayyânahollà; Maganuno hatto ayyâna callahò. = The devil is a simple spirit, and God is a spirit. According to Sidamo astrology, ayyâna is the name given to the auspicious or inauspicious days, that are counted beginning from algâjjima (Gasparini 1983: 22).

The translation shows how the plural understanding was translated into a singular meaning as 'a spirit' with the oppositions of 'good or 'bad.' On the other hand, further translation suggestions also contain ambivalence regarding this concept. One suggested translation is the theological meaning of 'grace' as a blessing or favour. Moreover, the translation included a contrast between good and evil spirits. On the other hand, also suggests 'God is a spirit' and relates the concept to Sidaama astrology. As pointed out, the Sidaama belief was based on the idea that spiritual beings could be both benevolent and malevolent. In this regard, the translation of concepts related to spiritual beings and forces shows how mission linguistic practice attempted to evaluate these entities according to a moral language and the dualism between good and evil.

Furthermore, the mission linguistic practice also imposed moral evaluation of other Sidaama religious activities and several entries in the dictionary attempted to show how good and evil qualities materialised in practitioners and activities:

[...] kîlânco, m. f. = sorcerer. Pl. kîlâno, f. kîlo, m. = witchcraft, magic, guess, estimate (Gasparini 1983: 194).

qâllicca, m., qâlitte, f., Pl. qâllôle, f. = wizard, sorcerer, chief of the clan [...] (Gasparini 1983: 255).

bita = a) to do the work of a wizard, sorcerer, Bitâmu bitanno = the sorcerer does his work. B) to be malicious, to do bad deeds...sometime he exercises medicine [...] (Gasparini 1983: 41).

budakko, m. f., Pl. buda, f. (budate) = a man who, in the people's opinion, brings misfortune by his bad influence. Buda (budate), f. = evil eye, misfortune (Gasparini 1983: 47).

By relating such activities to good and bad qualities, the dictionary attempted to expose moral ideas and ascribe these to evil and sinful activities. However, on the other hand, other concepts related to indigenous Sidaama medical activities were translated and transformed with a positive and modernised role:

ṭaginâte, m.= medicine, what can be used as medicine; medical treatment. Kuni (tini) ṭaginâteho ikkanno (ikkitano). This is good as medicine, can be used as a medicine. ṭaginâtira ikkanno haqqicci. = A plant that is used as medicine. Qarârco ṭaginâte afi'dino. = The plant called q. has medical properties.

ṭagisâncho, m., Pl. ṭagisâsine, f. = doctor (Gasparini 1983: 322).

In this context, the mission activities developed parallel to the introduction of modern medical services. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Catholic mission in Sidaama established several mission stations and clinics in rural localities, such as Tullo, Fullasa, Shafina, Teticcha and Dongora (Alberto 2013: 504-505).

The modern medical facilities introduced medical methods that challenged Sidaama therapeutical practices. Therefore, translating concepts connected to good and bad qualities also downplayed traditional practices. As such, the mission linguistic practice was not merely about theological concepts but also related to an understanding of the healing of the physical and spiritual body. As the article has pointed out earlier, Sidaama practices understood illness as disequilibrium with spiritual beings, which could be secured through negotiation and offerings to spirit beings. On the other hand, modern medical clinics introduced effective medical services as an alternative. In his study of health practices in Sidaama, anthropologist Norbert Vecchiato found that converts to Christianity selected modern medicine more frequently than adherents to Sidaama religious practices (Vecchiato 1985: 506-507). But on the other hand, possession rituals also became an integrated part of Protestant, Moslem and Orthodox religious practices, sustaining continuity (Vecchiato 1993: 180-181).

9. Transforming religious concepts: concluding discussion

The examples discussed in the previous sections raise questions regarding mission linguistic practices. The development of the dictionary took place in the intersections between Sidaama converts, Catholic missionaries, other global missions, linguistic scholars and the language policies of the Ethiopian state. In this regard, the mission linguistic practices were part of a representational economy in a historical

and social context (Keane 2007). First of all, the dictionary was primarily intended for other missionaries and translators as an attempt to constitute a Christian discourse in the Sidaamu Afoo language. Therefore, the dictionary shows how the mission linguistic practice attempted to produce knowledge for the missionaries' requirements. However, consequently, these practices also entailed framing ways of perceiving aspects of Sidaama religious worldviews. By doing this, the construction of the dictionary created a standardised and static arrangement of words. As such, the dictionary is a reification of meaning, but still it provides interesting insight into how missionaries rationalised language and attempted to transform religious concepts.

Furthermore, as discussions in comparative African contexts suggest, mission linguistic activities (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Landau 1995; Walls 1996; Peterson 1997; Meyer 1999, Peel 2000) contains asymmetrical power relations between the involved parties. Following this, it may be questioned how similar issues surfaced in the production of the *Sidamo-English dictionary*. This asymmetry relates to the imbalance due to social, economic and institutional capabilities and how these factors influenced the understanding and knowledge about religious beliefs and practices. From the outset, members of the Catholic mission as an institution initiated the collection of material for the dictionary. There were Sidaama converts who worked as language assistants, but their role in forming the content was outside the scope of this enquiry.

The mission linguistic practice occurred at the intersection between different languages, resulting in the dictionary as a hybrid language construction. The dictionary attempted to introduce a religious vocabulary to bridge the knowledge and linguistic gap between the Sidaama religious practices and Christian discourse. As such, the dictionary promoted linguistic innovations, introducing new word lexemes and meanings for practical reasons related to proselytisation. In addition, the focus on cultural knowledge in the entries indicates that the mission linguists were observant and sensitive to aspects of Sidaama religious practices. In this regard, the development of the dictionary took place in the decades after the Second Vatican Council. This influenced sensitivity to cultural contexts as part of global Catholic mission practices.

Although such working principles may have been prevalent in the interreligious encounter, the article has indicated that the construction of the dictionary indicates asymmetrical relations. As pointed out, the work on the dictionary was initiated by an institutional agent with intellectual resources and financial capabilities to produce literary materials. Moreover, although the idea of inculturation in mission practice attempts to adopt Sidaama religious knowledge and explanations, the idea of inculturation ultimately seeks to transform the religious and philosophical system of a target culture and language.

The analysis of entries reveals that the translation of religious concepts was theologically situated. As such, meanings were rationalised and interpreted according to Christian theology. In this practice, religious, non-religious, and philosophical concepts were applied from the Sidaamu Afoo language and reworked to accommodate Christian concepts. Such translation practice points to the power of definition in a dictionary. Structural differences between Christian and the Sidaama cosmology had to be compensated. In this process, concepts were translated according to the Christian understanding, while others were disregarded. The article has pointed out how central concepts, e.g., the Godhead, *Magano*, was appropriated in the Christian context and translated into the idea of a celestial, monotheistic God. Another translation practice constructed a contrasting cosmology, and the Christian understanding evaluated spiritual forces as good and evil. The evil forces were merged into the idea of Satan, God's adversary, and attributed with evil. On the other hand, spiritual entities were related to blessings emanating from God, rendered with positive qualities, and transformed into a moral economy of good and evil.

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