

From the Editor's Desk

From September 10 through 27 the Translations Department of the American Bible Society held its second biennial "workshop," a program designed primarily for our overseas staff and those who travel out from New York as translation and linguistic consultants. However, in one way or another all of the eighteen members of the Translations Department staff were included, since the various aspects of our work are so highly interrelated.

During the three weeks of discussion we naturally covered a wide range of topics: from details of processing manuscripts to the implications of information theory, and from techniques of editing concordances (a far more complicated process than one usually imagines) to plans for a new Greek New Testament text being prepared by an international committee of leading New Testament textual scholars especially for the use of translators, students, and exegetes.

Throughout the phases of our workshop program four constantly recurring themes came to our attention: (1) how best to acquaint the translator with scholarly resources concerning the meaning of the Greek and Hebrew texts, (2) how to supply much-needed linguistic assistance on problems of alphabets, complex grammatical structures, or ethno-linguistic equivalents, (3) how to encourage translators to plan adequately for the proper use of the Scriptures once they are published, and (4) how to provide translators with insights into the latest developments in the field of information theory, which is having such a profound effect upon modern life—from automation in factories to the guiding of intercontinental missiles.

Commentaries for Translators

In order to help provide missionary translators with the results of contemporary Biblical scholarship, the ABS Translations Department has on loan more than 1,000 volumes of Bible commentaries from our Translators' Library. These have been sent to various translators, revisers, and consultative committees, throughout the world. However, we have discovered that as helpful as such volumes may be they are often not adequate, for they tend to take for granted much that a translator needs to know. For example, in treating Romans 1:1-7 a commentator may describe the passage as an epistolary formula—and so it is. But how is a translator preparing a text for some nonliterate people going to work out an equivalent type of introduction, when of course the people know nothing about the writing of letters? Moreover, Paul speaks of himself in the third person (something quite common in Greek and English), but in many other languages one must use the first person. Only a translation such as 'I Paul am a servant of Jesus Christ' would be understandable. Similarly, for many languages the long string of appositives and modifiers must be broken up into several sentences, but how? What is to be done with the elliptical expressions in the last verse in which there are third person subjects but no verbs?

Such constructions must be radically altered in most languages if one is to make sense of the passage.

It is quite obvious that one cannot expect such information in the usual commentary, for there is much that can be left quite implicit in any English text without danger of misunderstanding. Accordingly, a commentator writing for the English reader need not mention such details. On the other hand, one who is translating into a language with an entirely different structure from Greek, Hebrew, or English cannot afford to take such things for granted. He must communicate the meaning of the original or he has not properly done his work. If, therefore, we are to supply the type of notes which the average translator needs, it has become quite evident that we will have to work out a series of commentaries especially designed to give exactly the required information. According to present plans a commentary on Mark, which is almost half completed, should be finished and published some time next year. It will then be offered to any Bible translators who may wish to have it.

Linguistic Assistance

The supplying of technical linguistic assistance is a complex matter, for when the problems are sufficiently difficult as to demand help they are often so intricate as to require a good deal of on-the-spot study—there is nothing so dangerous as long-distance advice on some language matters.

There are, of course, a number of schools where missionaries may obtain an orientation in descriptive linguistics (e.g. the Kennedy School of Missions and the School of Oriental and African Languages), and several institutes specifically designed to instruct missionaries in these practical phases of linguistics (among these the various branches of the Summer Institute of Linguistics have offered the most practical and thorough introduction to descriptive linguistics). But what is to be done for the numerous missionaries who have had no opportunity for such instruction and who at the same time are called upon to assume important responsibilities for some phase of a language program? Moreover, what can be done in those highly complex circumstances in which an introductory study is not sufficient? To help in this second type of situation we will continue to make available our field staff for study and help (and even enlarge certain aspects of this program, which has been more and more requested). But for the first kind of difficulty—namely, in the case of the person who needs to understand something about the nature of languages and how he may proceed to acquire some elementary knowledge of linguistic structure and analysis—we are setting up a program to produce (1) an elementary book on language, called *What Makes Languages Tick* (copiously illustrated and in laymen's language), and (2) a textbook on linguistic analysis which will develop a unified procedure for linguistic investigation, whether one is dealing with phonemes, syntax, or the meanings of words. The first volume we hope to complete sometime within the next year or two, but the latter will take somewhat longer.

The Use of the Scriptures

It may seem incredible, but there are instances in which translators proceed with their work with little or no concrete plan for guaranteeing that their translation is going to be used by the people. In a sense, they translate in a sort of a vacuum, not unlike the manufacturer who heedlessly goes on making articles without testing them to determine whether the public will buy and use them and without helping to create a demand for the finished (and, we trust, improved) product. On one field literacy has been almost completely neglected by one mission in the conviction that in some way or other the people will learn to read. Now it is true that some of the books prepared by this mission are purchased and a number of the people appear to be able to read, but more accurate checks of such presumed reading ability have revealed some startling facts. For example, in several instances people who were regarded as good readers were found to have turned over two pages, rather than one, but they kept right on reading the proper text. Rather than reading the primer, story books, and even the few Scripture portions, they had simply memorized them. The turning of the leaves of the book was just about as much a ritual as counting the beads on a rosary—both just aids to memory.

In still other circumstances reading is only a kind of religious exercise, for it has never become a vital part of the indigenous culture. Of course, people may have hymn books, a catechism, and a Gospel or two, but here the writing and reading of their language ceases. This does not mean that the books they possess lack prestige. Quite the contrary, they may have a good deal of prestige, but they are more like ritualistic symbols (even fetishes) than means of communicating a message of life.

If, then, we are to help people avoid equally fatal extremes: (1) presuming that a New Testament will automatically produce a New Testament church or (2) assuming that a group of believers can be adequately grounded in the faith without the Scriptures in a language which they can thoroughly comprehend, we realize that we must encourage scientifically constructed primers, adequate reading campaigns, sufficient transitional reading matter, and plenty of supplementary literature so that the printed page may be a vital means of communication within the life of the people.

The Latest Scientific Findings in the Field of Communication

Information theory, which lies behind all automation, is based essentially on the second law of thermodynamics, namely, entropy, or the dissipation of energy. Though the precise manner in which this law of entropy affects all matters of communication is much more than we can touch on here (a future article in *The Bible Translator* will be given to a consideration of this subject), yet this is the underlying principle which unites into one basic formula such apparently diverse observations as (1) the textual dictum that the harder reading is the better one, and (2) the more frequent a word is used the less it means

in any one context (for the more frequent it is, the more predictable it is; and the greater its predictability, the greater its redundancy).

One must not imagine that information theory (or communication engineering, as this field of science is also often referred to) will completely upset all basic principles of translating as employed in the past. On the contrary, what information theory provides us is a scientific basis for describing and justifying the fundamental principles used by all good translators throughout the centuries.

Our present circumstances are somewhat similar to what happened when the physicists began to study music, on the basis of analyses of the vibration frequencies of various musical notes, the system of harmonics involved in such series of vibrations, the relationship of certain types of sound timbre, and the bases of harmony (in terms of mathematically describable relationships between frequencies). This does not mean that music is now any less of an art. We are, however, better able to understand the scientific basis of this art, and anyone who desires to develop skill or proficiency in the production of music will profit materially from the insights which come from the scientific analysis of this artistic medium. The same is true of language. Not only may writers become more proficient in the use of language as they understand its scientific basis more thoroughly, but those who must deal with multiple-language communication (pre-eminently the translators) can both discover the basis for the principles which they have been employing intuitively or as rules of thumb, and also can refine their techniques, generalize their principles, and produce with greater consistency more satisfactory results.

In order to develop such a program of research and writing in the Translations Department, it is quite obvious that we cannot expect any overnight results. In fact we have now set up a fifteen-year schedule to include continued study, renewed appraisals in future "workshop" sessions, and the enlistment of others who are interested in joining in the exploration of one of the most fruitful fields of contemporary research. Through the pages of *The Bible Translator* we shall from time to time try to keep our readers and co-workers informed of progress, and at the same time we would deeply appreciate comments from those on the field, for only in this way can we hope to focus our attention on the most relevant areas of mutual concern.

E. A. N.

'I Know' Equals 'I Can'

In French there is an interesting use of 'to know' (*savoir*) in the sense of 'to be able'. (*Connaitre* is used primarily of persons.) *Savez-vous nager?* = 'Know you to swim?' = 'Can you swim?' There are examples of this usage in the Greek New Testament, some of which have been overlooked. Moreover, one is surprised that neither Abbott-Smith (*A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*) nor Souter