

The Value of Using Several Translation Helpers

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"Who will eventually be our ideal language helper for actual translation work?" During our first year among the Chol Indians of Chiapas, Mexico, we often asked ourselves the above question. Several men were used as informants to learn and analyze the language of these monolinguals. One or two of these were expected to develop into an ideal helper for translation work.

James and 1, 2, and 3 John have since been translated, but the ideal informant has not yet been discovered. We have found that each informant has worthwhile contributions to make. Strangely enough, it has become apparent also that each informant has, as it were, a specialized keenness for certain aspects of translation problems. While this keenness does not entirely confine itself to its particular area, the value of each informant lies in the area in which he excels. For this reason five or more informants have been used to check each verse of translation material.

Francisco pays keen attention to the details of word structure. As he reads the first draft with pencil in hand, he crosses out pronouns where they do not belong and inserts suffixes indicating an indirect object or an unpossessed noun or a negation, which have been overlooked. In translating 1 John 4 : 18 where the word "fear" is attributive to "love" and "torment" respectively, the noun "fear" was in the first draft made attributive to "love" and "torment" respectively. In Chol syntax both nouns and verbs may be made attributive to nouns by suffixation. In this case, however, since both a noun "fear" and a verb "to fear" exist in the language, it was not correct to attributivize the noun to another noun. All the other men had passed over this fine grammatical detail; but when it was corrected by Francisco, all were in agreement that the previous form was not correct.

Another fellow whose name is also Francisco is most helpful in finding an equivalent for technical terms. For example, in translating the noun "judge", it was found that the Spanish word for judge, which is known and used by the Chols, conveys only the idea of one who records marriage and birth statistics. The person who actually judges any violations of the law is the town president. Francisco was able to see the problem involved and gave a word indicating not only the person who judges, but also a word for the process and another for the place of judgment.

Pedro is especially adept in explaining the meaning of a verse without wandering or rambling from the text. In translating the phrase of James 1 : 4 "that ye may be entire", Pedro pointed out that our first rendering meant that there should be no persons missing at the services. This was then changed. "That your hearts may be entire" conveys the meaning intended by the text.

Again, in translating the phrase "the pride of life" (1 John 2 : 16) it was immediately pointed out that in their way of thinking the pride of

life is personal evangelism and preaching. "The pride of the world" became the final choice in translating this phrase. Additional examples could be multiplied. While other informants must ponder and study before explaining the meaning of a verse, Pedro, even though lacking special background studies of the Scriptures, is able to give quick, and often times surprisingly spiritual, explanations of a passage.

Nicolas is the only informant whose attention goes beyond the sentence. He is concerned with the train of thought and has therefore suggested many valuable syntactical changes as well as shifts in sentence order. The question in James 2 : 14 as first translated was obscure and awkward, "Faith that is not seen in works, can it save this man?" Nicolas suggested a revised form, which was preferred by all the other informants, "Can this man obtain salvation with faith which is not seen in his works?"

Pascual is an earnest fellow and anxious to be of help. However, a text to him is a pretext to wander and ramble. He cannot confine himself to a simple, direct explanation. In learning the Chol language we could not use him at all. He talked too much. Now, however, we find his ramblings helpful as a source of idiomatic expressions. After a translation has been checked by the others, Pascual is finally called in to polish it up. A verse is read to him and then our ears are alerted to sift out of his discourse some idiomatic expression to substitute for an awkward, prosaic statement. When his discourse goes too far afield, another verse is read to give him a fresh start.

In translating 1 John 5 : 10 the phrase, "he that believeth not God hath made him a liar", was not satisfactorily translated until Pascual began explaining it. The other fellows were of not too much help. They merely pointed out that to make God a liar was an impossibility. Pascual in his discourse used an idiom which meant to "represent as" or "consider God to be a liar". The problem was solved by one to whom at first we gave no consideration as a translation helper.

In mastering the text before beginning a translation it is helpful to refer to several versions. Likewise, in the actual translation work, we have found it preferable to refer to several informants.

Questions Arising in Connection with the 1950 Edition of the Marathi New Testament

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Students of the Marathi New Testament have the great advantage of having access to three different translations in this language of Western India. In order of time they are that of the British and Foreign Bible Society, Pandita Ramabai's translation, and Rao Bahadur Athavle's translation. The Bible Society's version has been revised from time to time, a specially important revision being made in 1907. The 1950 edition is a partial revision.