

TECHNICAL PAPERS FOR THE BIBLE TRANSLATOR

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INTO THE FOURTH DECADE: AN EDITORIAL SYMPOSIUM

*As **The Bible Translator** enters with this issue its fourth decade, it is natural for our thoughts to be turned mainly towards the future. Yet the celebration of our thirty years' survival is a reason for looking back, not only with thankfulness but with some apprehension. How do our efforts compare with those of the giants of old, who wrote for and edited **The Bible Translator**?*

Rather than presume to answer this question ourselves, we put it to all the previous editors, with the exception of the late Rev. Wesley J. Culshaw (editor 1967–1968). The following responses were received.

THE BIBLE TRANSLATOR—HOW IT BEGAN

The history of *The Bible Translator* had its beginning during a luncheon conversation in a New York hotel in the fall of 1946, when Dr. Herman Rutgers, General Secretary of the Netherlands Bible Society, suggested that an international conference of Bible translators be organized in the fall of 1947 to study how in the post-war world the Bible Societies could meet the pent-up demand for more and better translations of the Word of God. But rather than wait for administrative deliberations by the newly-formed United Bible Societies, Dr. Rutgers invited representatives from a number of societies to send delegates in October, 1947, to Woudschoten, Holland, where in YMCA facilities recently abandoned by the Canadian Occupation Army the first international meeting of Bible Translators was held. How the Netherlands Bible Society was able to host such a gathering, considering all the problems of rationing in post-war Europe, will always remain a mystery to those who attended and enjoyed so much the fine hospitality and the stimulating contacts with Bible translators and scholars representing Africa, Latin America, Europe and Southeast Asia.

The conference was only half over when Dr. Rutgers suggested that the wide-ranging papers presented at the conference should be published at the expense of the Netherlands Bible Society—a typical response from a society with such a long tradition of scholarly efforts in Bible translating. But hardly had the suggestion been made and enthusiastically accepted, when Dr. Rutgers suggested privately that this should only be the first number of a journal for Bible translators.

The idea of a journal to assist Bible translators in their task ran into opposition from certain persons, who asked why, since no such journal had been published during the almost 150 years of Bible Society history, one should undertake to introduce such a new thing. Were not the old ways perfectly satisfactory? Finally, Dr. Rutgers arranged with typical diplomatic expertise for the approval of a trial period, but only after one UBS official insisted that he would agree to the publication of *The Bible Translator* only because he was sure the editor could not keep it going for more than six months.

Now *The Bible Translator* enters its fourth decade, as robust as ever, although divided into two editions, one practical and the other technical, but both dedicated to meeting the range of problems which Bible translators constantly face as they work in hundreds of languages throughout the world. *The Bible Translator* is not a typical scholarly journal, in that it is designed to help a specialized constituency of the United Bible Societies, namely, the translators who are now working in over 500 languages representing more than 80 per cent of the world's population. Nevertheless, this journal has found ready and enthusiastic acceptance by numerous scholars and students in both biblical and nonbiblical areas of scientific investigations.

The Bible Translator is distinctive because it is directed to a very special audience having particular concerns and needs; and insofar as it responds to those concerns and needs, it will have succeeded in fulfilling the dream and plan of Dr. Rutgers, whose foresight and leadership made this journal possible.

Eugene A. Nida

Editor 1950-1952, 1957-1959

OUR CHANGING READERS

I have been away from the centre too long to be sure of the value of my judgements. But it seems to me that our main difficulties with *The Bible Translator* still spring from the problem of achieving wide enough agreement amongst translators and UBS personnel (perhaps also other interested groups, such as professional academics, theologians, technical linguists) as to the main function of the journal. The field is so great, and the interested parties so many and varied in their skills and requirements, that there is room for at least a dozen stances.

Only one or two things are reasonably certain. In its original form, *The Bible Translator* was intended to serve a type of translating community (missionaries with "native" assistants) that has largely disappeared. What has taken its place? It became evident from the start of *The Bible Translator* that in terms of function, the whole range of technical interest and concern was far wider than many of its senior promoters had conceived. Broadly speaking there were then five distinguishable types of Bible translation and revision work going on:

(1) Private ventures, mostly in western countries, of the Moffatt, Basic English and J. B. Phillips type.

(2) Major projects such as RSV and NEB, together with certain mission- or church-sponsored translations such as the Baptist revision of D'Almeida.

(3) The largely pioneer work of various evangelical missions working amongst Central and South American Indians, and later consolidated and

transformed by the emergence of the Wycliffe Bible Translators and its sister body the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

(4) Pioneer missionary work, mainly in "new" languages in Africa and Polynesia.

(5) Major revision work and new translation of whole Bibles in India, Ceylon and South-East Asia, in which areas the Bible Societies had been intensively at work for well over a century.

The interests and concerns of the "translating Bible societies" (ABS, NBS, and BFBS) were centred almost completely on (4) and (5).

It is important to remind ourselves of these facts if we are to understand what sort of men and women were actually engaged in translation work under the direction of the Bible Societies. There were many first-class linguists amongst them, both missionary and national. There was also available what may be described as an "élite corps" of national pastors, students, linguists, and theologians—many of them laymen who, if entirely innocent of the comparatively new western science of linguistics and socio-linguistics, were profoundly interested in tomorrow's Bibles, and in ways and means of making them fully comprehensible as God's Word for modern man. It was essentially this community which was uppermost, certainly in BFBS thinking, when *The Bible Translator* was first mooted.

If there were new and exciting approaches to the art and science of translation, it was these people with whom they must be shared. This meant that the language used in *The Bible Translator* would have to be intelligible but not unduly simple, jargon-free if technical, scholarly but not patronising or authoritarian. Are these not the people from whom modern Bible translators are still recruited?

The main shortcoming of *The Bible Translator* is its continuing failure to come to terms with the needs of this all-important though very reticent section of our task-force. Our one "raison d'être" is to teach and demonstrate the art of communication. Are we still missing one of our best opportunities if we overlook the simple fact that the findings of technical research, as of biblical studies in all fields, *must* be mediated to those who make the first draft translations, in terms which are genuinely within their educational experience and intellectual grasp?

Wilfred J. Bradnock

Editor 1953–1956, 1964–1966

TWO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST

In my copy of Goethe's *Faust*, the text of the tragedy itself is preceded by an "Urfaust", a basic version.

In front of me on my desk lies a copy of what I would like to call the "Urbibletranslator". It is called *Bible Translating*, and is described as being a "Specimen copy of a proposed periodical for the assistance of Bible translators."

Looking back on my years of editorship, and my much longer period of membership of the editorial board, two items come to my mind which ran through our discussions like the proverbial red thread.

The first was the problem of how to get contributions from our readers. The successive editors kept on hammering away at that subject. Already in the "Urbibletranslator" it was stated that "the editors of the journal are most anxious that missionary translators throughout the world submit to the journal articles which deal with any and all matters directly relating to translation problems". In the introduction of the first numbered issue of *The Bible Translator*, it says: "The success of this quarterly will depend very largely upon the response of translators, as they contribute articles and submit to the editors their questions and comments about various problems."

Again, the opening article of the first issue of volume 2 had the title: "This is your journal." When I took over the editorship, in January 1960, I embroidered on the same theme, and so did following editors. Did it help? I doubt it. In looking through, not thirty volumes, but a fair number of issues chosen at random, I have come to the conclusion that the main body of contributions of late, both in the technical papers and in the practical papers, was written by UBS staff. I can well imagine that some readers hesitate to submit articles. I would not be surprised if their reaction to requests for contributions were: "Those fellows do it so much better than I ever could, so let them do it." Yet now, the UBS staff has far greater possibilities to either incite translators to write about their work and its problems, or to write such articles themselves, using material from their contacts in the field and their own research.

Another problem in the past was the question: For whom do we publish our journal? There were two opinions, which now and again collided in heated discussion. It was mainly a matter of interest. One side wanted to lay the main emphasis on the scholarly qualities of *The Bible Translator*, and consequently to find the journal's readers and contributors in the academic world. The other party contended that the scholarly world was sufficiently served by the existing learned journals, and that *The Bible Translator* should pay special attention to the type of problems which were not treated elsewhere.

The editorial board was the battlefield, and I remember many discussions about articles considered too scholarly by one side, and not scholarly enough by the other! The editorial board had the last word, but the editor's influence was naturally great.

I do not remember who had the brainwave of proposing the splitting up of *The Bible Translator* into two series, technical and practical. With this masterstroke, the controversy described above was solved by a most happy compromise.

J. J. Kijne
Editor 1960-1963

FOR THE COMMON TRANSLATOR

My place in the succession of editors of *The Bible Translator* is at the end: I am one of the editors of the present. So my thoughts and concerns for this journal are very much those of present needs and possible future developments. And as editor of the *Practical Papers* (having become editor after the division of TBT into its two separate series) my particular concern is for the role of this series as an instrument of help for Bible translators round the world.

The decision to reorganize TBT, and to establish the *Practical Papers* series, was taken out of concern to provide material which would be of direct practical help to translators working in the field. This concern is expressed in the editorial notes which announced the change, at the end of 1971 and the beginning of 1972. Now it seems to me that the concept of having one series of TBT specifically for the purpose of providing help for translators in the field is really the same as the original concept for the journal which, in the words of the introduction to the first issue, "it is hoped will prove of great value to Bible translators all over the world". And certainly the range of content in the issues of the first few years of TBT would seem to me to be a good model for me to follow for the *Practical Papers* today.

There is one great and fairly obvious difference between the body of translators TBT seeks to serve today and those for whom it was first produced 30 years ago. It is clear from the early issues that the first readership consisted mainly, if not entirely, of "missionary" translators—expatriates translating into what was for them a foreign language. But over the years missionary translators have become fewer in number as more and more people in the different countries have become qualified and trained to translate the Bible into their own languages. If anything this new generation of translators who do not speak English as their first language needs practical help *more* than those for whom TBT was first produced. And my prime concern for the *Practical Papers* is to make the series something which gives that help to even the least qualified among them.

Some time ago I undertook a survey, with the help of United Bible Societies translations personnel, to get some sort of picture of the average translator we are trying to help, and hence of the person who is our "target" reader of the *Practical Papers*. Briefly, the profile which I obtained was of a translator who

- has attended one basic translators' training program,
- has limited experience of translation work,
- speaks English as an acquired language, being able to handle the common language level of the Good News Bible reasonably well,
- has received a general education reaching to secondary level but not necessarily a complete secondary course.

This profile of our target reader has certain important implications for the *Practical Papers* series and the material which is published in it. It indicates first of all that the language level must always be simple, common language English: what the Good News Bible is as a Bible text, *Practical Papers* must be in writing about translation. Then it shows that the presentation of material must be non-technical, as far as possible. It is not always possible to be completely non-technical; but at least technical terms must be limited to those that are really essential to the topic, and careful explanations of their meaning given. The profile also suggests that the style of presentation should be clear and straightforward, and that there should be a limit on the length of articles.

In the development of *Practical Papers*, therefore, I feel that my chief aim must be to make it a more effective instrument for the provision of help to translators. This means in the first instance bringing the material which is published in it more into line with the ideals set out above. It also means, I think, being able to be more selective in the material presented, so that every-

thing is practically relevant to translators as they carry out their task—and this will require a greater pool of material from which to select than has generally been available to me. (Here I am hopeful that a more vigorous policy of conscripting authors and commissioning articles may improve the situation.)

As a final thought for the immediate future, I think I would like to see TBT, and the *Practical Papers* in particular, develop in character, to become even more of a journal with which translators can identify as *their* journal, and which can help to give them a greater feeling of fellowship with other translators round the world. In part this hangs on the relevance and usefulness of the material presented, I know. But I think it may also depend on giving greater opportunity for contribution by practising translators, who are prepared to share with others out of their own experience in the task. So I would hope that in the future TBT might assume a bit more of the character of a forum, with space being given in it to contributions, comments and questions from ordinary translators in different parts of the world.

Euan Fry

Editor, Practical Papers, 1972—

PLUS ÇA CHANGE . . . ?

“The more things change,” say the French, “the more they stay the same.” The words are usually spoken cynically, with a Gallic shrug of the shoulders, as if to say that the changes are superficial, and only the sameness is real; or that the changes would have been good if they had succeeded, but the bad old establishment always won in the end.

Reading the contributions of older and wiser editors has led me, however, to take both halves of the proverb with equal seriousness. Some important things, in the thirty years of *The Bible Translator’s* life, have changed permanently and for the good. Things can never be the same again.

It is simply unthinkable, for example, that the standard picture of the Bible translator should ever again be that of a white foreigner sitting at this desk, with a black “native” “informant” standing respectfully at his side. It is unthinkable that translations made *from* something other than the original texts, or *into* something other than the translators’ mother tongue, should be considered anything but a second best. It is unthinkable that Bible translators should ever again begin their task without learning something of linguistic theory, and of the practice of secular translators. It is unthinkable that decisions about a translation should ever again be taken outside the area in which the translation will be used. There have been real changes; and good ones.

Yet as the earlier editors have pointed out, some old questions are still unanswered. To take the most important first, what is *The Bible Translator* for? Mr. Kijne suggests that the division into *Technical* and *Practical Papers* was a “masterstroke” which solved earlier tensions between scholars and pragmatists on the editorial board. I am happy to say that in this area, there has been great improvement. The relationship between the editors and the other members of the editorial boards is close and creative. No longer could it even remotely be compared with a “battlefield”.

Yet the problem of *The Bible Translator’s* purpose remains. On the one

hand, there are contributions which, though written in clear and non-technical language, raise questions of far-reaching theoretical interest. On the other hand, there are articles which require detailed knowledge of biblical languages, or of technical terms, yet which directly and "practically" affect translations. The opposite of "practical" is not "technical" but "impractical", and no one wants impractical articles in either series of *The Bible Translator*.

A closely related problem is that of contributors. In *Technical Papers*, we are now receiving plenty of material, much of it unsolicited, and much from non-UBS staff. Here, too, things seem to have changed for the better. But does either series of *The Bible Translator* adequately reflect the fact that almost 90% of UBS-related translation work (654 projects out of 736 at the last count) is done in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific? Or that a majority of the people in the world are women? These are not rhetorical questions. We really want to know where *The Bible Translator* is going in the 1980s, and if you have still not returned the questionnaire included in the October 1979 issue, please do so without delay.

Thirty years ago, *The Bible Translator* was founded against the background of pessimistic voices saying that it would not last. There is also the converse danger: that everyone, readers, contributors, and editors alike will assume that the show will go on, and suddenly discover that no one is reading *The Bible Translator* any more, because there are no articles worth reading in it.

If this prospect alarms you, do something about it. Make sure that everyone in your area who would benefit from *The Bible Translator* knows about it and sees it. And if you ever come to think that *The Bible Translator* is not worth recommending any more, send us ideas about how to put things right.

The fourth decade of *The Bible Translator* is in your hands.

P.E.

GORDON D. FEE

THE MAJORITY TEXT AND THE ORIGINAL TEXT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Dr. Fee is Professor of New Testament at the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts. This paper is a condensed and considerably revised version of a paper published in the *Westminster Theological Journal*, Spring, 1979.

The first concern of Bible translation must still be the textual one. Before one decides on the appropriate word or idiom for the receptor language, one must be sure that he or she is translating the actual words of the original language. For many years the Westcott-Hort (W-H) or Nestle-Aland (N-A) texts served as the starting point for most translators of the NT. In more recent years we have been well served by the critical edition sponsored by the United Bible Societies (UBS³), with its accompanying textual commentary by Professor Metzger.

In certain sectors of the Protestant world, however, there has been something of a backlash over modern critical texts, with a growing ground