

FOCUS ON TRANSLATORS

(The following has been adapted from a report by the manuscript expert for the Africa Region, Miss Jill Smith.)

Since 1981, a series of seven “manuscript workshops” has been held in different parts of the Africa region: Nigeria, Ethiopia, Zaire, Ghana, Uganda, Cameroun and Kenya. The number of participants has ranged from about eight (Ghana) to about fifty (Nigeria). The effectiveness of these workshops has varied greatly, and can usually be assessed some time later, when manuscripts which have been prepared or completed after the workshop begin to be sent in for publication. They have on the whole been well-received at the time, the usual reaction being: “Why were we not given such a workshop much earlier on?”

The main aim of a manuscript workshop is to show that “manuscript preparation” is concerned with all aspects of a translation: the format in which it is presented is of great importance, but the details it contains must be carefully controlled, too. Many of these have to be dealt with entirely by the translator: the Translations Consultant does not have time to follow through in detail on many of the finer points, and much thorough checking is therefore needed in manuscript centres later. The more the translator can be encouraged to do, however, the better, and the manuscript workshops are designed not only to show him the full range of what goes into a final manuscript, but also to give him some ideas about arranging his schedule and finding effective ways of handling these details. Some translators, in fact, have been discouraged by such workshops—they discover that there is so much to attend to as well as making the translation itself!

A typical programme for a manuscript workshop, which can be anything from four to eight days in length, depending on the amount of practical work planned for, is as follows:

1. Manuscript quality
2. Translation and manuscript stages
3. Production processes
4. Presentation of the manuscript (format)
5. Preparation of preliminary and supplementary materials
6. Orthography
7. Translation of poetry
8. Poetry format
9. Consistency
10. Glossaries
11. Illustrations
12. Preparation of “New Reader” manuscripts
13. Corrections to manuscripts and proofs

Each programme has been modified according to the needs of the area in which it was held. For instance, the Cameroun workshop (March 1983) included a session on the monitoring and general handling of translation drafts through computer print-out stages. This item will become more necessary as more areas become involved in the use of word-processors. Item 12 will not always be needed. And with the increased use of word-processors, less time will

be needed for teaching how to make corrections by hand in manuscripts and proofs (item 13). (However translators will still need to know the proof correction signs for use in the later typesetting and composition stages, and some will continue with typewritten manuscripts anyway.)

Practical work has been an important feature of all the workshops. This has included typing; however the amount of practical typing work included in the schedule has varied greatly from area to area. This has been determined largely by the number of new or relatively untrained typists, who have needed either to be taught right from the beginning, or to be shown how to do their work better. In Nigeria and Kenya, where a number of typists needed training, they were taught, as a separate group, by local manuscript examiners or project typists who were already proficient and able to train others. The only disadvantage in this is in separating the typists from the translators, as ideally everyone involved in a translation project needs to hear all the requirements. A good typist who also knows something about the kind of general consistency checks the translator must take care of, for example, can be of great help in a project. However, one recommendation arising from this series of workshops is that if for any reason the number of participants from any project has to be limited, preference should be given to the translator rather than the typist. The translator, on the whole, is in a better position to teach the typist what to do, than the typist is to tell the translator about all the overlapping translation factors to be considered in finalizing a manuscript.

The other kind of practical work, which is necessary if a manuscript workshop is to be effective, is the participation of the translators in discussing the programme items in relation to their own translations and manuscripts. In other words, the teaching is not simply a matter of telling them what to include in a manuscript, or how to space out the typewritten text, but of helping them to see how the various aspects relate to each other, and how their own and other people's checking must take care of the final product. The contribution of the local Translations Consultant is of great importance in this, as he is in a better position than a visiting "manuscript" person to know about the particular problems and points of interest which arise for individual projects out of some of the items under discussion. And the Translations Consultant can give stimulus and direction very effectively if he/she is prepared to do so. Examples of this have been excellent presentations on orthography (Ethiopia), and the translation of poetry (Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia), where the Consultants demonstrated clearly that the question of how poetry is being translated and phrased has to be faced up to before the question of how to type it in lines on the page can be answered. It's no use just translating a poetry passage straight through and then trying to force it into the conventional line-divisions and indent patterns (meaningless for many projects), but this is what may happen unless adequate attention is given to it early in the project.

Manuscript workshops are just one part of our attempt to raise the quality of the work submitted for publication in the Africa Region. Another aim is to raise the standard so significantly that we can reduce the amount of final checking and processing at present being done at the Regional Centre in Nairobi, and eventually eliminate it except as a formality for final approval.

Manuscript examination, at its best, is done most effectively by and with the translators; and it is not really a good thing to have a more or less permanent control office for handling many of the details which could better be dealt with by the Translations Consultant (aided by a local manuscript examiner if he has one) together with the translator. It is obviously better to centralize this work in Africa than to have it done overseas, as used to be the case, and for the operation to be directed by someone with first-hand field experience, but even so it is far removed from the ideal. Workload of the average Translations Consultant, however, does not permit him to give time to check out all relevant points in detail for all his projects; and fully competent local manuscript examiners are in very short supply indeed. So a centre whose work is exclusively to check manuscripts is probably still the only answer for the present. Manuscript workshops, however, are a very useful way of dealing with the problem from the other end, and of helping those translators who don't know what to do, or don't know how to do it, or who do some of it and assume that someone else will take over and complete it anyway.

HOW WAS THAT?

In revising the New Testament in one American language, the translators made an astonishing discovery when they came to Hebrews 9.5. That verse refers to the cherubim whose wings were "overshadowing the mercy seat" (RSV) on top of the "ark of the covenant". At this point the earlier translation had carried the meaning: "whose wings were vigorously flapping up and down over the mercy seat"!

Was this perhaps a mechanized model rather than a carving? Or an early type of fan?

* * * * *

Some Greenlanders were working on a new translation of Micah. In 1.6 the text says that God will "make Samaria a place for planting grapevines". The problem which these translators found here was not just that there are no grapevines in Greenland. It was that their readers would have entirely the wrong idea about what the words meant.

For people who live in Greenland a place for planting grapevines must be a fertile, warm, pleasant place, *not* the kind of cold and barren country they are familiar with. But Micah's meaning was that Samaria would be just open fields, *not* a city where people live. So the translators decided that they had to put "I will make Samaria a place with no houses in it".

Sometimes the meaning of our translation will be worked out from the opposite of what we say, as much as from the words we actually use!