

FOCUS ON TRANSLATORS

[This report on a project for revising a previously published Bible has been condensed from a longer and fuller report which was prepared for the Bible Society and its supporters. The writer is Dr Daud Soesilo, a UBS Translations Consultant based in Indonesia. - Editor]

Revising the Malay Bible

The Bible Society of Singapore, Brunei and Malaysia (BSSBM) printed the first Malay Common Language New Testament *Perjanjian Baharu: Berita Baik Untuk Manusia Moden* ("New Testament: Good News for Modern Man") in 1974. It was mainly the labor of love of one translator who was a West Malaysian pastor of Indonesian background. The revised New Testament was released in 1976. The same translator went on with translating the Old Testament. Although the translation of the Old Testament section was completed in 1981, Today's Malay Version (TMV) Bible *Alkitab: Berita Baik Untuk Manusia Moden* ("Bible: Good News for Modern Man") was published by BSSBM only in 1987. It was unfortunate that they had to wait so long. Among other things the Bible Society of Malaysia (BSM) was waiting on the Malaysian churches to take a stand on the use of the name *Allah*. As a result, however, when it came out in 1987 the translation no longer reflected the current and standard usage of Malay or Bahasa Melayu (BM). Thus, not long after this TMV Bible was released the BSM was asked to consider revising this translation. A meeting was held with the BSM Language Committee. It was then decided that a revision would be carried out to take care of the following problems:

- spelling errors and misprints;
- patterns which follow the English Good News Bible (GNB) too closely, often word-for-word;
- wordings which reflect Indonesian usage rather than Malay usage;
- mistranslations.

In December 1989 a revision workshop was held at the BSM office. During the workshop we agreed on a set of guiding principles to be followed by the revision team. Then at the end of the workshop, we recommended a team of revisers, reviewers, and readers representing West Malaysia and also East Malaysia, since 78% of the users of Malay Bible live in East Malaysia. The revision work itself did not begin till May 1990. Once we began, we realized that in addition to the above problems we needed to work on key terms and theological terms, and the names of God as well.

The Revised Malay New Testament and Psalms *Perjanjian Baru Dan Mazmur* was published in 1995, and 5,000 copies were printed. Toward the end of 1996 the Revised Malay Bible (TMV96) *Alkitab Berita Baik* ("Good News Bible") came off the press together with the first ever BM Deuterocanon. It was launched and dedicated on 25 January, 1997. By

April 1997 BSM reported that it had less than 9,000 copies left in stock from the printing of 35,000 copies (10,000 copies of the Deuterocanon edition plus 25,000 copies without the Deuterocanon). Thus BSM is now ready to reprint TMV96.

Organization of the revision team

The revision team consisted of three revisers, a number of reviewers and readers, plus a stylist, representing various denominations from across the nation. The reviewers ranged from church leaders, faculty members from theological seminaries and *Universiti Malaya*, plus some language specialists, to numerous BM school teachers and lay persons.

In terms of exegesis, our revision team made full use of the following resources: *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* for the Old Testament, *The UBS Greek New Testament* (4th edition) for the New Testament, Alfred Rahlfs' *Septuaginta* for the Deuterocanonical books, many translations in English and Indonesian, UBS Handbooks for translators, exegetical commentaries on the Bible, plus other linguistic resources.

It is important to point out that TMV96 is not a new translation, but it is a fully revised one. As far as the style of translation is concerned, since the earlier edition (TMV, 1987) was a translation which emphasizes meaning rather than form, so the present revised version is to improve on the previous edition using the same principles of translation. (It is important to stress that the revision team was not commissioned by BSM to produce a formal translation like the English RSV or the Indonesian formal translation TB. Indeed BSM has planned for a formal BM translation project, but it will only commence in 1997 or 1998.)

Revision details

Book titles. In the first edition, the title of each book was, for example, simply *MATIUS* "Matthew". But since this could give the idea that the book is about a man named Matthew, we are now using the title *BERITA BAIK YANG DISAMPAIKAN OLEH MATIUS* "The Good News as Matthew wrote it". Similar adjustments have been made for the other gospels.

Introduction to bible books. In the introduction to every book, we have changed *Kata Penerangan* "Explanation" to the more appropriate expression *Kata Pengantar* "Introduction". *Garis Besar Kitab Ini* "Outline of this book" has been changed into the more idiomatic term *Kandungan* "Contents".

Footnotes, cross references, and parallel passages. In the first edition there were neither footnotes nor cross references. We have now added footnotes (alternate renderings, exegetical, cultural, historical and geographical notes) plus cross references following GNB and the Indonesian Common Language Version (TIV, new layout). At the request of those who would like to see certain formal features of the original texts, we have introduced one more level of footnote to indicate the literal rendering for key terms such as "Kingdom of God" or "Kingdom

of Heaven". In addition, we also double-checked the parallel passages both for the Old and the New Testaments.

Illustrations. Based on the comments we received from readers, we are now using the more realistic Bible illustrations from John Lear and Horace Knowles as in the TIV. These replace the Annie Vallotton line drawings used in the earlier TMV, which are quite abstract for average Malaysian readers.

Cover. The Christians of East Malaysia voiced their concerns that in the first edition of TMV the maroon hard cover with a modern design displaying the letters *ALKITAB* in orange and silver colors was not acceptable. Some have rejected this earlier version just because it does not look like the Bible. They have been using the Indonesian Bible for so long that for them the black or blue flexible plastic cover with *ALKITAB* in gold letters is the mark of a "real" Bible. They also said that the soft cover Bible fits well into their traditional bags to take along to the paddy fields and to the farmers' market. In this particular context, the most sensible thing to do was to honor their request for a change.

Typographical matters

The revision team was most grateful to the Computer Assisted Text Processing center in Singapore who recovered the text of the first edition of the TMV *Alkitab* (1987) from diskettes of what is now obsolete and incompatible equipment. However, the recovered text is plagued with all sorts of typographical problems such as wrong word breaks, wrong hyphenation, wrong punctuation, incomplete quotation marks, wrong verse numbers, and many spelling inconsistencies.

Word breaks. The following are some examples of wrong word breaks and their respective corrected forms:

Gen 20.17-18 *perempuanabdinya* corrected to *perempuan abadinya*

Lev 26.16 *tanam an* corrected to *tanaman*

Heb 3.8, 15 *nenekmoyang* corrected to *nenek moyang*

An extreme example is Gen 9.29:

dan mati dalamusiasembilanratuslimapuluh tahun (a 36-letter word?)

corrected to *dan mati dalam usia sembilan ratus lima puluh tahun.*

Hyphenation. Hyphenation is also a major problem. On the one hand, when it is necessary to have hyphens, some words are not hyphenated:

Ezek 6.4 *mazbahmazbahnya* corrected to *mazbah-mazbahnya*

Nahum 3.10 *kesana sini* corrected to *ke sana-sini*

On the other hand, hyphens are used when it is not necessary to do so:

Gen 31.50 *mengetahui-nya* corrected to *mengetahuinya*

Acts 27.12 *barat-daya* corrected to *barat daya*

Punctuation. There are all sorts of problems with punctuation. It is interesting to point out that most if not all of the places where errors were found in the NT were correct in the second printing of the Common Malay NT (1976), that is, prior to the publication of the complete Bible in 1987. Besides such things as missing commas and capital letters missing

after a full stop, there are many wrong quotation marks, either double or single quotes. There are also instances of wrong verse numbers such as Gen 9.2 which was printed as Gen 9.21, and the number for verse 2 of Joshua 4 which was printed at the wrong place.

Spelling. There are numerous spelling inconsistencies between the OT and the NT. For example:

OT	NT
<i>orangramai</i>	<i>orang ramai</i> (Luke 1.10; 8.36)
<i>matair</i> (Gen 36.24; Exo 15.27)	<i>mata air</i> (James 3.11,12; 2 Pet 2.17)
<i>mengeciwakan</i> (Hab 3.17)	<i>mengecewakan</i> (Rom 5.4)

There are also numerous cases of misspelled words, some of which change the meaning completely:

Isa 40.9 *Allan* instead of *Allah* "God"

Dan 3.21 *mengikut* "to follow" instead of *mengikat* "to tie up"

Dan 9.25 *jalan raja* "king's road" instead of *jalan raya* "highway"

Acts 15.15 *Nabi-babi* "pig prophet" instead of *nabi-nabi* "prophets"

Among the words misspelled there were some proper names; for example:

Gen 36.5 *Korakh* which should be *Korah*

Judges 16.31 *Rora* which should be *Zora*

Isa 37.1 *Hazkia* which should be *Hizkia*

Matt 10.2 *Andrias* which should be *Andreas*

Mark 2.14 *Alpius* which should be *Alfeus*

Heb 11.4 *Habe* which should be *Habel*

Based on the responses to our questionnaire to the heads of BM-speaking churches, we decided to make changes to the spelling of certain personal names (these were not cases of misspelling):

Ibrahim changed to *Abraham*

Yahya changed to *Yohanes* "John"

Simun changed to *Simon* "Simon"

Yakub changed to *Yakobus* "James"

Zabidi changed to *Zebedeus* "Zebedee"

In addition, following the prevalent usage among BM-speaking Christians in Malaysia, we have changed some geographical names in the text as well as in the maps:

Baitani to *Betania* "Bethany"

Yahudiah to *Yudea* "Judea"

Nazaret to *Nasaret* "Nazareth"

Last but not least, in accordance with the standard Malay spelling, pronouns for deity should be capitalized. We decided to follow this; however, we still observe the principle that what is heard is more important than what is written.

kuasanya becomes *kuasa-Nya* "his power"

nyawanya becomes *nyawa-Nya* "his soul/life"

pengajarannya becomes *pengajaran-Nya* "his teaching"

Over dependence on the Good News Bible

Although Malaysians tend to translate English expressions almost word-for-word, there are some constructions in the first edition of TMV which are quite cumbersome due to over dependence on GNB. In TMV96 we have tried to come up with more idiomatic expressions. For example, in Mark 1.7 the old rendering *Aku tidak layak bahkan menunduk dan membuka tali kasutnya* "I am not worthy even to bow down and untie his thongs" has been adjusted to *Aku tidak layak membongkok untuk mengurai tali kasut-Nya* "I am not worthy to bend down and untie his thongs."

The following verse (Mark 15.10) was rendered literally from the GNB:

Dia tahu dengan terang-terang bahawa imam-imam besar telah menyerahkan Yesus kepadanya kerana mereka cemburu "He (Pilate) knew very well that the great priests had handed Jesus over to him because they were jealous."

This has been revised to:

Pilatus tahu betul bahawa ketua-ketua imam telah menyerahkan Yesus kepadanya kerana iri hati "Pilate knew very well that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him because they were envious."

Indonesianisms

The meanings of words. Although Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Melayu are both Malay based, these two languages differ significantly not only in certain grammatical constructions, but also in their choice of vocabulary. Often the same word is used in BI and BM but with completely different meanings, such as *percuma* which in BI means "useless", and in BM "free". Some other examples are:

rencana Allah: in BI the phrase means "God's plan", while in BM it means "God's article".

tebusan in BI means "redeemed", while in BM the word means "hostage".

keselamatan means "salvation" in BI, but in BM it means "security".

pajak means "tax" in BI, but in BM it means "pawn" (as in "pawn shop").

Thus Indonesianisms in TMV more often than not convey a different meaning to average Malay readers than what is intended.

Pluralization. In Bahasa Indonesia reduplication or doubling of a noun results in its plural form; however, in BM this is not necessary. The Indonesian doubling of nouns will be taken by average Malay readers as redundant or ungrammatical. Therefore this revision has removed the Indonesianisms and uses the Malay pluralization as follows:

dosa-dosa kamu replaced by *dosa kamu* "your sins"

guru-guru Taurat replaced by *guru Taurat* "teachers of the Law"

Spelling. Though the Indonesian and Malaysian governments adopted a common spelling system in 1972, in reality problems of the spelling of certain words in these two languages linger on. Here are some examples; the left column is BI, and the right column is BM:

<i>mulai</i>	<i>mula</i>	“begin”	(Mark 1.21)
<i>coba</i>	<i>cuba</i>	“try”	(John 5.7)
<i>jawaban</i>	<i>jawapan</i>	“answer”	(1 Cor 11.16)
<i>Terkalah</i>	<i>Tekalah</i>	“Guess”	(Mark 14.65)

Mistranslation

Generally speaking there are not very many mistranslations in the first edition of TMV. However, there are some renderings which are quite annoying to the more perceptive readers of the translation. Here is one interesting example of a mistranslation in the Old Testament (1 Sam 24.3): *Dia tiba di satu gua, di dekat kandang domba di tepi jalan. Dia masuk ke dalamnya dan berehat.* “He came to a cave close to some sheep pens by the road. He went in and took a rest.” Compare this with GNB “... he went in to relieve himself” and also TIV ... *dan Saul masuk untuk buang hajat* “and Saul went in to relieve himself”. In the present revision it reads ... *dan Saul masuk untuk membuang air besar* “... and Saul went in to have a bowel movement” (1 Sam 24.4, TMV96).

Besides mistranslations there are also some instances of omission, such as Luke 15.4: *Ditinggalkanya sembilan puluh sembilan ekor padang* “He leaves ninety-nine pastures” which should be ... *sembilan puluh sembilan ekor di padang* “He leaves the other ninety-nine in the pasture”.

Key terms and theological terms

Translating theological terms always requires a study of the components of meaning. Problem terms range from a common term like *Sabat* “Sabbath” to *ramalan* “prediction, forecast” and *doa selamat* “muslim prayer of thanksgiving, or prayer for protection” which convey wrong meanings and are therefore misleading.

For instance, the Hebrew term “Sabbath” has three important elements, namely (a) the seventh day in the Jewish calendar (b) a day of rest for the Jews, and (c) a day of worship. To translate Sabbath as *Sabtu* “Saturday” is definitely missing two of these essential elements. Sabbath ought to be translated in its original meaning and function, that is, “the Jewish day of rest and worship”. The following examples show how some other key terms and theological terms were translated in the first edition of TMV (left column) and their respective changed renderings in TMV96 (right column):

Ketua orang Yahudi

Pemimpin masyarakat Yahudi
“Jewish elders”

Imam-imam besar
Bait Allah “house of God”
Kusta “leprosy”

ketua imam “chief priests”
Rumah Tuhan “house of the Lord”
penyakit kulit yang mengerikan
“dreaded skin disease”

Dia Yang Diutus Allah
“the One sent by God”

Anak Manusia “Son of Man”

Juruselamat (conveys the meaning of “security guard”)

Penyelamat “Savior”

To be true to the meaning-for-meaning translation method, we have translated “Kingdom of God” or “Kingdom of Heaven” meaningfully according to its context. Thus, in the body of the text, these phrases are translated either as “the rule of God” (Matt 6.10, 33) or “becoming God’s people” (Matt 11.12; Luke 18.24), or “God’s New World” (Mark 14.25; Luke 18.25). However, as mentioned above, to help readers who are looking for the formal features of these terms, we have added footnotes (literally “Kingdom of God”, or literally “Kingdom of Heaven”). In addition, we will also add similar footnotes for other theological terms such as truth, righteous, faith, grace, peace and so on.

A further complication in our situation is the fact that in a formal Indonesian or Malay translation, the two Greek words *alētheia* (“truth”) and *dikaïosunē* (“righteousness”) are both translated by one word *kebenaran*. In our translation, which renders meaning rather than literal form, the term *alētheia* has been translated meaningfully according to its context in a number of ways; for example:

“trustworthy” (John 5.31);
 God himself, or what God is really like (John 1.14; 8.32; 14.6);
 what is true about God (John 4.23, 24);
 God’s will (John 3.21);
 God’s faithfulness (John 1.17);
 “purity” (Gal 2.5).

However, in each instance we will add a footnote “literally ‘truth’”. And we will do likewise with *dikaïos* and *dikaïosunē*.

Names of God

In the first edition of TMV, the four letter name *YHWH* is usually translated as *Allah* – the revealed name of God. On the basis of responses from the heads of BM-speaking churches, they would prefer to preserve the Old Testament usage which has been the long term practice of the BM-speaking churches (following the Indonesian Bible). Thus, *Allah, Tuhan (kita)* “God, (our) Lord” now becomes *TUHAN, Allah (kita)* “LORD, our God” (for *YHWH Elohîm*) in the Old Testament passages. Mark 12.29 *Dengarlah, bani Israel! Allah Tuhan kita ialah Allah yang Esa* “Listen, children of Israel! God our Lord is the only God” is in TMV96 *Dengarlah, hai bangsa Israel! Tuhan Allah kita, Dialah Tuhan Yang Esa* “Listen, O nation of Israel! The Lord our God, He is the only Lord.” In Deuteronomy 6.4 the rendering of this creed is *Ingatlah, hai Israel! TUHAN – dan TUHAN satu-satunya – ialah Allah kita* “Remember, O Israel, the LORD and the LORD alone is our God.” It is interesting to point out that in Exodus 3.13-18 (TMV) the revealed name is translated as *Tuhan* (instead of *Allah*) as follows: ... *aku, Tuhan, Allah nenek-moyang mereka, Allah Ibrahim, Ishak dan Yakub* “... I, the Lord, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” In the present version it is rendered ... *AKU, TUHAN, Allah nenek moyang mereka, Allah Abraham, Ishak dan Yakub* “... I, the Lord, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (TMV96).

We decided to translate the names of God as follows:

YHWH (Yahweh) as TUHAN "LORD"

Adonai as Tuhan "Lord"

Adonai Yahweh as TUHAN Raja "LORD King" (GNB "Sovereign Lord")

Adonai Yahweh Zebaoth as TUHAN Raja yang Maha Kuasa "LORD Almighty King" (RSV "Lord of Hosts")

Elyon as Allah yang Maha Tinggi "Almighty God"

One last word on translating the names of God: considering the unanimous decision of the Heads of Malaysian Churches both in the 1985 meeting (sponsored by the Bible Society of Malaysia) as well as in the 1989 Kuching Consultation of the Heads of Churches (sponsored by the Christian Federation of Malaysia) for keeping the name *Allah*, BSM as the servant of the Malaysian churches is obliged to honor this decision. This name *Allah* has been used from the time of the first printed Malay portion of the Gospel of Matthew (1629) and the first Malay Bible (1733) until now. Some have tried to argue that we should have two versions, namely "Allah" and "Tuhan" versions, just as in the Chinese Bible translations they have one Catholic and two Protestant versions with their respective sets of names for God, the Holy Spirit, prophets, and so on. However, we cannot use this argument as a justification for two Malay versions. The different Chinese versions reflect the usage of three distinct communities who refer to God by different names. By contrast, there is no genuinely BM-speaking church that is using only *Tuhan*: all BM-speaking churches are using *Allah* when referring to the Creator God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Naturalness

Under this topic two things should be mentioned: the need for a stylist, and the use of the language of the court. The end result of a translation or a revision project depends to a certain extent on the availability of a well-rounded stylist who can look at the discourse, readability, and naturalness of the translation. This is especially true in the case of the national language BM which has many dialects not only within Peninsular (West) Malaysia but also in East Malaysia. And there is also a big difference between the dialects of West and East Malaysia; for instance, Sabah Malay is influenced by Brunei Malay, and in addition, the religious language of the Christians of East Malaysia was greatly influenced at an early stage by Indonesian pastors, evangelists, and Bible teachers. There is one thing in common, however, between West and East Malaysia: that is the fact that in all areas people have access to the national radio and television. Thus, finding a stylist who is in this field of communication proved to be the best thing to do. A newscaster with a national TV network enthusiastically accepted our invitation to serve as a stylist for our revision project. With this person's experience in mass communication we now have a readable translation which will

be acceptable in the West as well as in the East. This person also served as one of the translators of the BM Deuterocanon.

The other important issue was how to reflect the language of the court in a common language translation. By definition the language of the court is not common language. Unlike BI which is gradually getting away from the old language of the court due to its more democratic form of government, BM retains and develops its language of the court because monarchy and sultanate are still alive and well in Malaysia. As a matter of fact, all oral and printed literature (including the daily newspapers and magazines which use common language) preserve and glorify the language of the court. Considering that the language of the court is part of Malay common language, and after lengthy discussion with our revisers and stylist, we decided to go along with this usage every time we have texts relating to palace life. However, we use it sparingly. (In fact, the old Malay translation of 1879 also reflected this kind of language.) All in all, TMV96 has tried to be more consistent than TMV in its usage of the royal terms as average Malay readers would expect them to be.

Computer Assisted Text Processing

Typographical errors were able to be minimized because the copy editing and proofreading have been handled professionally by the revision team, from the commencement of the project up to the final stage of manuscript processing and typesetting. With the advent of computer software such as Fiesta, Wordlist, Spelling Checker, and other Computer Assisted Text Processing programs, this revision project has truly benefited from computerization. Indeed this revision team has had much better tools than the previous generation of translators. Typographical errors and inconsistencies could be kept to the minimum. Of course there were still a few minor details that had to be worked out with the typesetter to ensure that nothing else was changed in the final typesetting process. All in all, however, this was one of the fastest projects in the Asia Pacific region in terms of the time between the completion of the translation project and its actual publication. As a matter of fact the Bible came off the press in less than one year.

Conclusion

The following are a few comments that BSM has received from our external reviewers and users of this Revised BM *Alkitab* (TMV96):

“I completed the reading of Markus and found the translation generally satisfactory and acceptable.”

“In August last year, you sent me the translation for St Mark and St Luke Gospels. I asked my catechist, who studied in Indonesia for 4½ years, to read through them. He remarked that this translation was much better than the one in *Perjanjian Baharu: Berita Baik untuk Manusia Moden*.”

“I bought the TMV: BM New Testament (Revised) a few months back and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Bible Society for its ‘efficiency’. Since receiving it, I’ve been reading it with an open heart. I must praise the translation team because not only did the team

succeed with the spirit of the Word but with its grammar and spellings as well. Indeed, I've never, and I repeat never, read such good BM in any Christian literature before. Thank you Bible Society, and thank you translation team, for delivering a NATIONAL Bible into our hands, the national Church."

"I have already received the Malay version of the history of the Revised BM *Alkitab*. I will use it to explain and promote the BM *Alkitab* to a lot of people, so that they will love and use their BM *Alkitab* even more. Personally I feel that the Revised BM *Alkitab* is very helpful. So far, I have not found foreign expressions, they are in common language. So it is only right that Malaysians should use the BM *Alkitab*."

As the Malay proverb goes: *Tak ada gading yang tak retak* (literally "There is no ivory without cracks", that is, "Nothing is perfect"). So this fully Revised BM *Alkitab* is not unlike other translations; it is not perfect, and it can still be improved. So BSM cordially welcomes comments, corrections, and suggestions for improvement. As BM is a living language, we know that choice of words, grammar, discourse, and style are never stationary. They change from time to time, and it is the usage of BM native speakers that brings about such change. At this time we want to give the revised translation a chance to be used for the nurture of the Malaysian churches nationwide, especially for those people who are first- or second-language speakers of BM, and those who continuously use the national language at school, at work, at home and at play, in worship as well as in other church functions and activities. In the final analysis, the effectiveness of a Bible translation will be determined by the users, as it communicates the good news of Jesus Christ to the Christian communities, in this case especially the BM-speaking pastors, teachers, and members of Christian churches who live and worship in BM day in and day out.

NOTES

Seventy-seven times or seventy times seven times?

The translator is faced with a difficult choice in Matthew 18.22. Did Jesus say that we should forgive **seventy-seven times** (as in CEV, NIV, NRSV) or **seventy times seven times** (as in TEV, RSV, NLT)? In one way, it doesn't make a lot of difference, since even seventy-seven times is an enormous number of times to forgive. However, the translator still needs to make a choice.

Most modern translations have chosen one option and put the other option in a footnote. So, which rendering should be the one in the text and which in the footnote? The question is: What do the Greek words *hebdomēkontakis hepta* actually mean? Since the Greek word for "seventy" is *hebdomēkonta* and the suffix *-kis* at the end means "-fold" or "times", we know that the first word *hebdomēkontakis* means "seventyfold" or "seventy times". The second word *hepta* means "seven", and "seven