

5. So long as there remain significant populations which cannot read or which do not have access to published Scriptures because of political isolation, we should seek to coordinate our efforts with broadcasters and to use other non-printed media, within the limitations of our special commission to supply the Scriptures themselves rather than machinery.

Methods of Operation

1. An effective, long-range plan should be worked out in each Society for a period of at least five years ahead. Coordinated with the priorities of translation there should be parallel long-range plans for production and distribution. These, in turn, should be related to the programs of the churches and should enlist their support.

2. To sustain the kind of planning outlined above, there needs to be a program of systematic training. In particular, we would mention the need for further sub-regional training seminars for senior staff, and for regional training consultations for General and Executive Secretaries.

3. We request that the Regional Centre staff and appropriate committees prepare concrete proposals for implementing the plans suggested in this document as quickly and effectively as possible.

* * *

PAUL ELLINGWORTH

TALKING ABOUT TRANSLATIONS

“Words”, wrote T. S. Eliot,

“slip, slide, perish,

Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still.”

This is true of the words used by translators and linguists in describing the language of Bible translations. They are ordinary words, the common property of us all, but they are sometimes used in special ways. They can be used by different people in different situations and in different senses, and so it is not surprising that they are sometimes misunderstood. The only way of avoiding this would be to invent completely new words or symbols, and then we might not be understood at all! The best we can do is to go on using these ordinary words, but to explain them as carefully as we can. We may find that they are not the best words. We shall certainly find, at some time in the future, that both the meanings of the words themselves, and the things to which they refer, have changed. When this happens, we shall need to find other ways of talking about translations. All I shall try to do in this article is to take some of the words we are using at present to describe Bible translations; to mention some of the ways in which they have been misunderstood;

TABLE OF PRIORITIES

	<i>A</i> Top Priority	<i>B</i> Medium Priority	<i>C</i> Low Priority	<i>D</i> No Priority
Kind of translation and quality	Assurance of good quality popular or common language (as defined by Wonderly) or adaptation to new literates.	Same as <i>A</i> or Good quality "literary" translation for the educated, or otherwise specialized translation with demonstrated need (but not a translation in traditional ecclesiastical language).	Same as <i>A</i> or Same as <i>A</i> , except that quality is less than "good" but still usable by important constituency. No significant improvement possible in the situation. (Not a translation in traditional ecclesiastical language).	Traditional ecclesiastical language version or Unacceptable quality translation.
Distribution potential	Good distribution potential in terms of: (a) backing of local Bible Society; (b) urgent sense of need; (c) distribution possibilities because of Church or Bible Society ethos (in terms of thousands of Scriptures annually).	Smaller distribution potential in terms of <i>A</i> , but National language, Official language or Primary language or Secondary languages in which there is compelling circumstance created by church or sociolinguistic factors. Should often be translated from primary language of area. If mutually intelligible with another language with more Scripture potential, bridge material only, if needed.	Distribution would be decidedly limited, but program is otherwise same as <i>A</i> or Tertiary language where there is strong desire to read own language and ability to do so because of education in another language, plus moderate distribution potential.	Anything less than <i>C</i> or Other tertiary language.
Christian opportunity	Great evangelistic potential or Church sense of need and involvement.		Some evangelistic potential or Church sense of need and involvement.	Anything less than <i>C</i> .
Nature of Bible Society supervision	Organized by translation personnel designated by UBS and supervised regularly by them with a working visit at least once a year—more if needed. Adequate and responsible periodic reports from some responsible person in program required, including UBS Progress Report.		Organized in relationship with UBS translation personnel and supervised, with other requirements as in <i>A</i> .	Anything less than <i>C</i> .
Number, selection and training of translators	No more than: 3 full-time translators 5-10 Review Committee. Translators and review committee chosen for proven ability and trained for their task, including training in UBS translation principles and procedures.		Untrained, but this factor is being remedied or Too many translators, but number is being reduced, or commitments are too great to do anything about it.	Anything less than <i>C</i> .
Principles and procedures	Effective structure capable of efficient work. Good coordinator. Balanced team, including good style, good exegesis, etc. Rapid schedule; NT manuscript completed in no more than 2-3 years, OT in no more than 5-6 if translators full-time.		Program is slow, but nothing can be done under the circumstances or Translators are less than "good" but best under circumstances, and result is usable.	Poor translation principles being followed.
Economic efficiency	Reasonable costs, often aided by incentive bonus, and piecework or point system for part-time work. Maximum of 3 members of review committee receiving any payment. No payment to consultative committee.		Program is uneconomical, but otherwise of <i>A</i> or <i>B</i> priority, and nothing can be done about the cost.	Anything less than <i>C</i> .
Treatment in UBS budget	Support at all cost. Overexpend or eliminate something else. Do not delay for a later budget year.	Money should be found if at all possible, and at any time in fiscal year, but might have to wait until the next year if ready near end of year.	Budget subject to curtailment if funds insufficient for <i>A</i> and <i>B</i> projects.	No new funds (either new projects or increase in old) without special action. Existing ones should be remedied or phased out.

and to suggest ways in which we may help ourselves and other people to understand them more clearly. I shall say nothing new, and I shall therefore refer at times to books and articles in which these matters are studied in greater detail.

One word which has caused great confusion is the word *Common*. Bible Societies and others have used this word in two quite different ways:

(a) A "*common Bible*" is a Bible translated by members of two or more churches or denominations: for example, by Protestants and Roman Catholics. There are other ways of describing this kind of translation, and it would be better if we used them. "Joint translation" is clear and simple. "Interconfessional translation" is longer, but perhaps even clearer. "Ecumenical translation" can be misleading, since for some people the word "ecumenical" refers either to a particular form of Christian belief or to a particular organization, the World Council of Churches.

(b) The second way of using the word "common" is quite different. To speak about a "common Bible" in sense (a) tells us nothing about the translation itself: it simply tells us that the translators come from different churches. To speak of a "common language translation", on the other hand, says something about the translation itself. Dr. W. L. Wonderly, in his book *Bible Translations for Popular Use*,¹ has defined "common language" as "that part of the total resources of a given language common to the usage of both educated and uneducated".² It is *not* vulgar language, which would be unworthy of the Bible. It is *not* language which educated people would think incorrect. It is *not* an artificial language like "Basic English". It is *not* language intended only for those who do not speak it as their mother tongue. But neither, on the other hand, is it language which could only be understood by highly educated people.

In English, and in some other languages, there are good translations of the Bible both in common language (language acceptable to all kinds of people) and also in literary language, the language of highly educated people. It is interesting to compare Today's English Version (TEV), a common language translation, with the New English Bible (NEB), a good literary translation. Even by looking quickly through the Psalms in NEB, we discover many words which are not part of everyday speech in all classes of society: for example, "myriads" (3:6), "profligacy" (12:8), "acclaims" (27:6), "calumnies" (73:8). In TEV, all these disappear.

Sometimes a literary translation may use groups of words which are all simple and well-known, but which are used together in a special sense. For example, in Psalm 4:1, NEB translates: "thou didst set me at large". A common language translation will avoid such expressions: TEV has "you came to my help".

Again, a literary translation may use sentences which not only contain uncommon words, but which are long and complicated. Educated people

¹ UBS. 1968, page 3.

² Dr. Wonderly published a summary of his book in *The Bible Translator*, vol. 21, no. 3 (July 1970) under the title "Some Principles of 'Common-Language' Translation".

may have no difficulty with them, but less highly educated people will. Compare, for example, the NEB and TEV translations of 2 Cor. 8:3-5a, noting particularly the words which we have printed in italics:

NEB

Going to the limit of their *resources*, as I can *testify*, and even beyond that limit, they begged us most *insistently*, and on their own *initiative*, to be allowed to share in this generous service to their fellow-Christians. And their giving *surpassed our expectations*.

TEV

I assure you, they gave *as much as they could*, and even more than they could. Of their own free will they begged us and *insisted* on the privilege of having a part in helping God's people in Judea. *It was more than we could have hoped for!*

Both translations are modern in their language, and in the methods by which the translators have worked. The difference between them is that NEB is intended mainly for well-educated readers, and TEV, like other common language translations, is intended, as far as possible, for everyone who reads English.

There are several important things which follow from what I have said so far. *First*, a common language translation must use language which is up-to-date; that is, language spoken by people not more than about 35 years old. "Everyone who *reads* English" (or Spanish, or Hiligaynon, or Azumeina, or whatever language it may be) does not mean "everyone who ever read these languages in the past". The Authorised (King James) Version of Psalm 5:6a is "Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing". This does not mean that God will destroy people who talk about renting land or houses, but an English reader in 1972 would find it hard to make any other sense of this sentence. TEV puts it much more plainly: "You destroy all liars." A common language translation is intended for people to read now: it is, for example, "*Today's* English Version", "Good News for *Modern* Man", "The New Testament in *Current* French". Not all modern translations, as we have seen, are common language translations, but all common language translations must be in modern language. They are not made either to keep up a tradition, or to last for ever: they are made in order to pass on a message *now*.

Second, a common language translation cannot use language which will be understood only by people who go to church. People who do not go to church may not *accept* the message of the Bible, even in a common language translation, but they should be able to *understand* the language in which it is written. In an article in *The Bible Translator*,³ the Rev. J. C. Margot notes that the French expression "Heureux les pauvres en esprit" (Matt. 5:3) ("Happy the poor in spirit") is sometimes used in speaking of a naïve or stupid person. This is certainly not what Jesus meant. In Mr. Margot's own translation of the New Testament into current French,⁴ he translates this sentence by "Heureux ceux qui se savent pauvres en eux-mêmes" (literally: "Happy those who know that they are poor in themselves"). The older translation would

³ Vol. 20, no. 3 (July 1969), p. 101.

⁴ Bonnes Nouvelles Aujourd'hui. Les Sociétés Bibliques, 1971.

not, perhaps, be misunderstood by people who had been brought up in the fellowship of the church, but others need a much clearer translation. Common language translations are intended, not only for church people, but for everyone. This is what translators mean when they say that they are not using "traditional church language", or "traditional ecclesiastical language". We shall come back to this question in a moment.

Third, a common language translation must be written in language which is natural to those who speak and write it as their mother tongue. There are many translations which follow as closely as possible the form of the Greek or Hebrew text. They are called "*formal correspondence translations*". Let us take a very small example, but one which has annoyed many readers of older translations, even if they have not always realized what was annoying them. In the Authorised Version of Mark 1, there are 32 sentences which begin with the word "and". All these "ands" are in the Greek text. It was quite natural for a Jewish writer like Mark to write this kind of Greek, since it was normal also in Hebrew and Aramaic. It was less normal in classical Greek, and it is very unnatural in English: indeed, some people would call it incorrect. NEB has only five sentences in this chapter which begin with "and"; TEV has only two. All good modern translations must have sentences which are completely natural. Their form must not be Hebrew or Greek (unless they are translations into languages very closely related to Biblical Hebrew or Greek),⁵ but English, Spanish, Hiligaynon or Azumeina. They must be what are called "*dynamic equivalence translations*". All dynamic equivalence translations are not common language translations (NEB is an example), but all common language translations must be dynamic equivalence translations.⁶ To call a translation "formal" does not necessarily mean that it is stilted, and to call a translation "dynamic" does not mean that its style is intended to keep the reader awake (though that may also be true). It means that the second type of translation uses forms different from its original, in order to produce, as far as possible, the same effect.

The Table of Priorities in Translation printed on page 220 of this issue mentions translations in "traditional ecclesiastical language" (column D, first section). You will see that Bible Societies are now usually giving the lowest priority to this kind of translation. Since Bible Societies never have enough money for everything, this means that it is unlikely that they will in future support translations in "traditional ecclesiastical language".

What does this mean? It does *not* mean that Bible Society translators have left the Church! It does *not* mean that Bible Societies have stopped producing translations which are fit to be read in church. (Church leaders, not Bible Societies or translators, decide that question.) It certainly does not mean that Bible Societies tell the churches what is best for them.

It means that Bible Societies translate, not for churchgoers only, but for everyone who speaks a given language. Every group of people has its own

⁵ See Dr. E. A. Nida's article "Formal Correspondence in Translation" in *The Bible Translator*, vol. 21, no. 3 (July 1970), pp. 105-113, and Dr. J. A. Loewen's "Form and Meaning in Translation", *The Bible Translator*, vol. 22, no. 4 (October 1971), pp. 169-175.

⁶ See E. A. Nida and C. R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, UBS/Brill, 1969, chapter 2.

way of speaking and writing: sailors, teenagers, university professors, businessmen, people who live in a particular area (sometimes a very small area). Churchgoers often have their own way of speaking to one another, and writing for one another. Sometimes, by listening to a preacher, you can tell not only the particular church to which he belongs, but the college at which he was a student! For many Christians all over the world, the Church—their particular local church—is the place at which they feel at home, with people like themselves who “speak the same language”. Many of them have been brought up in the fellowship of the Church, and have lived in it all their lives. The language of their church brings them comfort, quite apart from the message it contains.

If churches wish to make their own translations, in their own special kind of language, no one can stop them. But Bible Societies exist to serve all churches, and those outside the church. Bible Society translations are intended, before anything else, to pass on the message of the Bible so that it can be understood, not by one group only, but by all. Sometimes, when church leaders see a new translation, they say: “This is not the kind of language we have been using, but it is the kind of language we ourselves use outside the walls of the church, the language we understand best, and the language we shall have to use if our congregations are ever to look beyond themselves.”

There is one other word used in talking about translations which is sometimes misunderstood. This is the word *popular*. For most people, it has a good sense: “She’s very popular: she has lots of boy friends.” “This disc is very popular; it has sold a million copies.” For some people, however, “popular” can have a bad sense. That is why those making a common language translation into Brazilian Portuguese have decided to call it, not “Versão Popular”, but “O Nôvo Testamento ne Linguagem de Hoje” (the New Testament in the language of today).

However, translators and linguists use *popular* in another sense, which is neither good nor bad. It describes languages in which, as Dr. Wonderly has put it,⁷ “the differences in the speech of different social classes are not great, since most of the speakers of the language share the same cultural heritage, talk about the same things, and associate with one another without sharply defined social barriers”. Many of these languages (Wonderly mentions Yoruba, Lingala and Kituba in Africa, and Quechua and Maya in the Americas) are not generally used in teaching at higher levels, but some such languages (such as Icelandic) are.

In translating into languages of this type, translators will not need to worry about the difference between the speech of ordinary people and more highly educated people. They will, however, still need to be sure that the language of their translation is up-to-date, that it does not slavishly follow Hebrew or Greek forms, or the forms of any other foreign language; and that it does not include ways of speaking which are used only among Christians.

⁷ *Bible Translations for Popular Use*, p. 3.