

- Luke: "Peter . . . addressed them:"
 Peter: "Men of Judea . . ."
 Joel: "It will be"
 Luke/Peter: "In the last days, God declares" (an addition to the OT quotation)
 Joel: "that I will pour out my Spirit . . ."

I have been informed that the transitions between different speakers in a current narrative represent no greater problem for a trained signer. But how should we treat the OT material, especially if there are longer or shorter interruptions or additional commentaries?

The Swedish SL translators have tried to solve the problem by introducing a new signer, dressed in something with a slight likeness to an Israelite priestly robe. This appearance may sound comical when it is explained in words and writing, but it works very well in the performance of the SL translation. Of course this method can only be used when the quotation is of a certain length, as in some OT quotations in Acts and Hebrews. And it is also recommended that the OT priest signs the whole quotation. That means that we cannot mark out the Luke/Peter addition, which is clearly visible in GNT as well as in the actual source text—the Swedish Bible 2000 (but in very few English translations).

As with all translations, so also SL translation is the art of making the right sacrifice.

JOHN ELWOLDE

SPANISH SIGN LANGUAGES PROJECT

The author is a UBS translation consultant based in Spain.

Part I: Introduction and acknowledgements

This article begins by outlining a project that aims to translate parts of the Bible into two or more of the sign languages (SLs) employed in Spain. The project is still at an early, even embryonic, stage, despite significant input from a translation consultant (TC). One of the innovative aspects of the project is the attempt to use (digitized) animated signing rather than human signers. The article goes on to present various topically-arranged examples (taken from TC-checking and employing English back-translation, followed by NRSV equivalents) that indicate some of the more striking elements of SLs as compared with spoken languages (although few of these could be regarded as really distinctive). Most of the examples are taken from the two gospel birth narratives, which were produced by Sociedad Bíblica Española (SBE) as a "Christmas Story" DVD in late 2007. The final section of the article is a short extract from a draft of Mark 5, prior to TC-checking, with an English rendering of the translators' back-translation into Spanish, done as literally as possible, in order to give readers an impression of the expressive qualities of a SL. For

this material, I am obviously dependent on the work of others, specifically, Steven and Dianne Parkhurst (SIL), José Ignacio Bonacasa Fernández, Rut Roldán Cintas, Estrella Camacho Moreno, Eloy Lobato Álvarez (translators).

Project structure

The project is a partnership between SBE and SIL, who have two SL specialists based in Spain. In practice, our SIL partners have responsibility for the day-to-day coordination of the project, for basic linguistic and exegetical checking, and for the selection of translators, etc. SBE has general oversight of the project, represents the projects to the churches, publishes products as they become available, and, via the UBS Service Organization for the Europe-Middle East Area, also provides translation consultancy for the project. At the moment, translators are based in two locations. One translator lives in Madrid (central Spain); the others are in a small town not far from Barcelona (Catalonia, in the northeastern corner of the Iberian peninsula). Over the lifetime of the project thus far, the coordinators have been based at times in Madrid, at times in Catalonia. One innovative way of overcoming the problem of distance between translators and coordinators has been the use of webcams.

Medium-term project goals

The hope is to produce SL translations of substantial portions of the NT and of OT portions that are especially helpful in understanding the NT. So far, draft translations have been begun or completed for the following material: Genesis, Matthew 1–2, Luke (Madrid), and Mark (Barcelona).

Languages

The plan is for teams in the different locations both (1) to produce translations of particular books or portions into their local SL, and (2) to adapt the translations of the other group(s) into this local SL. In principle, this should allow for near-simultaneous publishing of products in two or more of the different SLs of Spain. Although no significant amount of adaptation work of this kind has yet taken place, it appears to be quite feasible in the case of Madrid- and Catalonia-based SLs. Moreover, because of the relatively high degree of inter-dialect intelligibility needed to make this model of production feasible, the advice of our SIL partners is that joint work with teams based in Portugal or Central and South America would not fit easily into such a model. Note as well, that some of the differences between Madrid- and Catalonia-based sign languages are not purely linguistic but reflect, rather, interpretative preferences. For example, the sign used for “messiah” in the Catalonian group can be interpreted as “coming saviour,” whereas in Madrid “messiah” is rendered as “the one awaited from God.”

Language level

At least four factors of a sociocultural, linguistic, and literary nature point to the tendency of SL translations to be situated at the Simplified and Common Language end of the language level spectrum: (1) the relative lack of literary material authored in sign languages; (2) the more highly educated a Deaf

person is, the more competence he or she might also have achieved in the local spoken language (and the less need he or she might feel for a sign language translation); (3) the effective, if unintentional, exclusion of many Deaf people from the church life of the hearing means that many biblical/theological concepts that are reasonably familiar to hearing people have to be repackaged in simple (and sometimes simplistic) signs and sign combinations; (4) the general tendency of sign languages to coordination (and recapitulation) rather than subordination (and ellipsis). (For examples, see the next main part of this article.)

Translation medium

Our SIL partners employ a form of graphic representation of signs entitled SignWriter, which the translators also use. Written material using this system can be published in paper form and, as it were, “signed out” by a reader in church, etc. In most SL translation projects, a live signer is videorecorded and the recording then stored electronically, typically in DVD format, so that it can be replayed. Using electronic reproduction of such recordings, it is possible to view/hear a spoken language translation at the same time, to access a glossary of difficult words, key terms, etc. A particular innovation of the Spanish project is its use of an animated computer model for signing, in place of a live signer. In principle, such a model could be programmed to interpret the SignWriter sequences and “sign them out,” but at present the animation is being done manually. Although this method is extremely costly in terms of the time required for such specialized graphic input, especially at the beginning of a project, it should allow for easier changes to the product at a later stage. The inherent anonymity of the animated signer is also claimed to be an advantage for various reasons. In any case, SIL is investing significant resources into developing the method.

Publication products

The plan is to publish DVDs of translations, using SignWriter and the animated model, and with the possibility of switching between Catalanian- and Madrid-based sign languages. At the same time, there will be a limited printing of the written form of the translation in SignWriter (which will correspond, effectively, with the “script” of the animation on DVD).

Interconfessional

The Roman Catholic Church in Spain has a particular institutional interest in the Deaf and is actively involved in the development of the project. The Madrid-based translator is a senior figure in the Roman Catholic Deaf community. The two sisters-in-law who comprise the nucleus of the team in the Barcelona area are evangelical Christians. Once the project produces tangible results, the intention is that SBE will apply to the different churches for the translation to be officially accepted for use, and to formalize the interconfessional character of the project.

**Part II: Points of translational interest (mainly taken from
the biblical Christmas story)**

Regular use of “sign-names” for characters, places, etc.

A. Occasionally, these allude to well-known artistic representations:

- Mary (typical pose for statues and artwork, with arms folded over chest)
Moses (cf. the Michelangelo sculpture, with horns).

B. Sometimes a person is defined through relationship to a better-known person:

- Elizabeth [cousin of Mary]
(cf. Abijah [eighth (in a list)]).

C. Typically, the “nickname” refers to some element especially (if not uniquely) associated with the person or place:

- Aaron [stones on chest plate]
Elijah [whirlwind]
Gabriel [angel announce]
John [baptize]
Naaman [army general]
Judah/Judea [lion]
Passover [pass through, miracle].

D. However, many of these associations are questionable for various reasons:

- Jesus [nail prints]
Pontius Pilate [wash hands]
David [king sling]
Bethlehem [town star]
Abraham [hold back arm].

E. Others are rather obscure:

- Asher [tree (symbol of tribe)]
Joseph [staff (used by Joseph)]
Galilee [heat (as in Israeli SL)]
Sidon [rowing]
Capernaum [town base camp]
Rachel [eyelashes (see below, in the vague category)]
Isaac [laughter]
Boaz [sandal]
Jacob [Israel/Jew].

F. Yet others are simply vague:

- Caesar Augustus [laurel crown]
Theophilus [Roman]
Zechariah [beard (the sign for a patriarch) mute]
Simeon [old prophet]

Rachel [shepherdess. This sign name was regarded by the translator as too vague and replaced by “eyelashes,” apparently a common contemporary sign name for females with beautiful eyes. The rationale behind the application of this sign name to Rachel is however obscure, being based on the contrast with Leah and her “weak eyes”!]

G. Other sign names are anachronistic:

Nazareth [town Jesus (based on Israeli SL)]
 Syria (the modern Syrian sign for the country, representing the three stars on the Syrian flag)
 Jerusalem [kiss wall]
 Babylonia (of the exile) [ziggurat].

H. Occasionally, no obvious sign name emerges:

Quirinius (no sign name).

Comment

Sign names by their nature focus on just one element in the story of the person or place, which is often not the most significant one, from an exegetical or theological perspective. In this way, sign names help shape (albeit unintentionally) the perceptions of the users of the translation, and in the worst cases can perpetuate and reinforce negative stereotypes. For example, the sign name for “Judas Iscariot” is “hooknose,” and the nickname for Jews/Jacob/Israel is also questionable. In these cases, the best option might be to use Israeli Sign Language forms, as the project sometimes already does. For example, the sign name for “Pharisee” was “hypocrite,” later changed to a sign based on the wearing of the tallith. But even where the use of sign names does not foster offence, prejudice or simplistic understanding, there clearly is a perceptual issue to be addressed. For example, to identify Pontius Pilate as “wash hands” in Luke 3.1, twenty chapters before the Lucan passion narrative (in which, moreover, the hand-washing incident is not even found!) goes significantly beyond what the original text, or a standard spoken-language translation, expresses.

Hear/Listen

In a limited number of cases, “hear/listen” is rendered by a different verb of perception (see the examples below), but in general there appears to be no problem with the use of the sign for “hear(ing)” or that God the Father and the Son are presented as hearing beings, as are the people among whom Jesus moves in the Gospels. (Thus, at Matt 2.3, 9, 18; Luke 1.41, 44, 58; 2.18, 20, 47; 4.21, 23, 28 “hear,” “heard,” “listen,” etc. is found, at least in the back-translation prepared for me.) However, problems might arise in connection with verses that imply or state that, for example, salvation or correct religious practice depends on hearing (human or divine) and the making of spoken responses.

Examples:

Luke 1.13: Your petitions in prayer **God has understood you.**
 NRSV: your prayer has been heard.

- Luke 1.66: All the people **saw** and remembered very well, and it was stamped on their hearts.
- NRSV: All who heard them pondered them and said
- Matt 2.22: Joseph **understood** that there in Judea was a new king named Archelaus
- NRSV: But when he heard that . . . Archelaus was now ruler of Judaea

Culturally-specific elements

There are some interesting elements specific to Deaf culture in the account of Zechariah's sudden dumbness:

- Luke 1.22: Zechariah **used gesture** (the kind of signing a hearing person might use to communicate with a Deaf person) and remained mute.
- NRSV: He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak.
- Luke 1.63: Zechariah: Bring me a tablet for writing (mimed using signs that a hearing person might use).
- NRSV: Zechariah asked for a writing tablet.
- Note also:
- Luke 5.7: "HEY! (waving arms) Come help us!"
- NRSV: So they signalled their partners . . . to come and help them.

The first draft of the translation rendered the magi of Matthew 2 as the *tres reyes magos* "three king-magicians" whose messengers appear in tinselled finery every Christmas season outside Spanish department stores and toy shops, eliciting requests for gifts from small children, whose parents are thus encouraged to enter the shops and add to the festive spirit of a truly materialistic Christmas.

Tendency to provide additional, introductory actions

- Matt 1.24: Joseph woke up, he obeyed **and went and did** what the angel told me.
- NRSV: When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him
- Matt 1.20: Joseph thought about it **and fell asleep. He had a dream, inside his head an angel said:**
- NRSV: But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said
- Matt 1.12: During this time **they were shackled and to another country they went in a column** to the place Babylonia. There in Babylonia was born
- NRSV: And after the deportation to Babylonia:
- Matt 2.1: Now, some wise bearded ones **lived far to the east, they came from the east to Israel and went to the city of Jerusalem**
- NRSV: wise men from the East came to Jerusalem
- Matt 2.14: At night Joseph got up **and picked up Jesus, called his wife Mary: "Come on, hurry."** They escaped to Egypt.
- NRSV: Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt

- Luke 4.38: Jesus **left the synagogue and walked to** the house of Peter.
NRSV: After leaving the synagogue he entered Simon's house.
- Luke 4.39: **Jesus leaned his head over the mother-in-law who was lying on the bed**
NRSV: Then he stood over her and rebuked the fever
- Luke 5.18: **They tried and tried to get near. The people were so bunched together in a crowd that the men with the stretcher couldn't get through. There inside the house was Jesus.**
NRSV: They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus.
- Luke 5.19: So they went **around and up** onto the (flat) roof, **the tiles they took out and made a big hole** and lowered the stretcher down near to Jesus, **lowering him by ropes.**
NRSV: they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus.
- Luke 5.24: Get up! Pick up your stretcher, **roll it up, put it on your shoulder** and go home.
NRSV: Get up! Pick up your mat and walk home.

Tendency to use dialogue (rather than report)

- Matt 1.18: **How was Jesus the Messiah born?**
NRSV: Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way.
- Matt 2.6: **Are you, Bethlehem, . . . the smallest of all the cities of Judea? That is not true.**
NRSV: And you, Bethlehem . . . are by no means least among the rulers of Judah . . .
- Luke 4.22 **But is this Joseph's son, yes or no?**
NRSV: They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?"

Tendency for main character to sign in first person

- Matt 1.24: Joseph woke up, he obeyed and went and did **what the angel told me.**
NRSV: When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him . . .
- Matt 2.18: Rachel weeping for her children: People **try to comfort me** but no comfort is possible because **my children** have already died.
NRSV: Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.
- Luke 2.21: Also he was given the name Jesus, the same that before **Gabriel told me I should put down.**
NRSV: he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.
- Luke 2.26: **He came to understand** in a vision because of the Holy Spirit **that until I see** the coming of the Messiah, **I will not die.**
NRSV: It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.
- Luke 4.38: Peter said: Please cure the sickness and make it disappear from **my mother-in-law.**
NRSV: and they asked him about her.
- Luke 5.7: "HEY! (waving arms) Come **help us!**"

NRSV: So they signalled their partners . . . to come and help them

Tendency to use direct speech

Matt 2.4: He asked them all to investigate, "Where is the Messiah to be born?"

NRSV: he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.

Matt 2.7: Herod . . . privately talked with them. "When exactly did the star appear? When did you see it?"

NRSV: Then Herod secretly . . . learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared.

Luke 1.63: **Zechariah: Bring me** a tablet for writing.

NRSV: Zechariah asked for a writing tablet

Tendency to externalize thoughts, feelings, etc. as direct speech

Matt 2.16: Herod was furious, pacing the room. "**The wise bearded ones deceived me!**" He sent an order: "**Kill all small boys in Bethlehem . . .**"

NRSV: When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in . . . Bethlehem . . .

Matt 2.18: Rachel weeping for her children: **People try to comfort me but no comfort is possible because my children have already died.**

NRSV: Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.

Luke 4.38: Peter said: "**Please cure the sickness and make it disappear from my mother-in-law.**"

NRSV: and they asked him about her.

Luke 4.39: Jesus said: "Sickness, be gone!"

NRSV: and rebuked the fever . . .

Tendency to avoid passive constructions

Luke 2.26: **He came to understand in a vision** because of the Holy Spirit that until I see the coming of the Messiah, I will not die.

NRSV: It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

Luke 4.21: Then Jesus said: "**Today I fulfil/obey this writing** that you all have just heard."

NRSV: Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Part III: Mark 5.24-34: Literal as possible back-translation of SL into English

Jesus accompanied man called J-a-i-r-u-s and also many people, crowd pressed Jesus. But woman ill 12 years, red blood falls, woman suffered much doctor, money all spent, better nothing, worse, when woman heard Jesus, crowd pressing behind, (she) came Jesus, cloak touched. Woman was thinking: "For example, I can clothing touch, (then) healthy." Then quickly red blood falls stopped, (she) felt body healthy. Jesus knew, felt gone out of him power, sight turning behind crowd saying: "My clothing, touched who?" Disciples answered: "You, Jesus, look, many people, can't fit, press you, you say: 'Me touched who?!'" But Jesus was looking around at people, who touched him to know. Woman knowing,

fearing, shaking, came to meet in front, knelt, said, explaining truth. Jesus said: “Daughter, faith changed healthy, you be calm, go, peace, your illness ended, continue healthy.”

ROBERT BASCOM

BIBLE TRANSLATION INTO AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE

The author is a UBS translation consultant based in the United States of America.

Deaf culture

Helen Keller has been quoted as saying, “Being blind may separate you from things, but being deaf separates you from people.” This is an important distinction, often unrecognized outside of the Deaf community. It leads to a continuing misunderstanding of Deaf culture largely in terms of disability rather than (cultural) difference.¹ Blind persons speak English or Spanish or some other spoken language, but need help (Braille) in reading it. Deaf people do *not* sign any form of English or Spanish or any other spoken language, and to the extent that they learn to read, they learn to read a foreign language. If American Sign Language (ASL) (or any other sign language) were to have a writing system, it would likely have to be ideographic, directly representing the signs (or images) themselves. An alphabet makes no sense to a Deaf person, as its basic components represent sounds, which by definition are outside of a Deaf person’s experience. In fact, finger spelling actually represents a visual code unrelated to sound to a profoundly Deaf person; since the spelled letters refer to sounds (for speakers) the Deaf person will never hear.²

While the Deaf community faces many obstacles, many in that community would prefer to see themselves (and for others to see them as well) not so much as challenged or disabled or handicapped, as much as simply another linguistic and cultural minority, one which has been marginalized by the dominant (speaking/hearing) society wherever it has found itself in the world. (ASL signers want to be called deaf and hard of hearing, not hearing impaired, for example).

1 Fortunately, this is rapidly changing in the U.S.A., thanks to activist Bible translators like Debbie and Noah Buchholtz in Olathe, Kansas, and support organizations like Deaf Missions in Council Bluffs, Iowa. The Deaf Mission Bible Translation Project has completed the NT in both DVD and MPEG formats (besides the VHS video format). The OT is in Process, with Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Judges, Ruth/Jonah, Ezra/Nehemiah, Daniel completed.

2 The Jesus film was sub-titled (in English) first, but in that form it was still a foreign film for ASL deaf signers, even if they could read English. Now it has been signed within an inset corner frame. Problems in combining products for the blind and for the deaf can be seen even in Bible Society projects such as the American Bible Societies’ “Ministering to the Challenged” television broadcast, which combined the ministries to the blind and deaf in one segment. Information on ABS television programs and video clips are available at www.abspresents.com.