

Elsewhere in this issue there is an article about the development of a standard alphabet for **Romani**, the language of the Gypsies. So a few notes about the beginnings of Bible translation in that language may be appropriate.

Gypsies are scattered all over Europe, and beyond. They have often been forgotten, even by the Bible Societies. They are sometimes discriminated against; and, under Hitler, they were persecuted as mercilessly as the Jews. There are at least 65 dialects of their language, Romani, spoken by groups ranging in size from hundreds of thousands down to just a few families. Scriptures are few: a selection or two here, a gospel there, at most a New Testament in preparation. The problems are enormous, with many non-Christians and many non-readers. But UBS translation and distribution consultants are working to fix priorities, to meet needs, and most of all to encourage those Christian Gypsies who are already engaged in translating the Scriptures, or who are keen to begin.

## TRANSLATION WORKSHOP IN SHILLONG

*(We do not normally publish reports of Translation Workshops, seeing that these are held frequently in many places around the world. However this report from India seems to be a particularly interesting and useful one, and so we are including it here. Editor)*

For two weeks in May and June of 1979, a UBS translation workshop was held in the city of Shillong in Assam, North-east India. The venue was the Translation Centre of the Bible Society of India—a large wooden building which sits on the brow of a hill in this bustling city.

Dr. Mathew John was in charge of this important workshop; and he was assisted by Mr. Benjamin Rai and two UBS Translation Consultants, Dr. Howard Hatton and Mr. Norman Mundhenk. The purpose of the workshop was to train fifteen translators, representing nine languages in north-east India, in basic translation principles and to help them in translating the entire book of Philippians during the two week period.

The first two days of the workshop were spent chiefly in review of translation principles. Then, on the third day, the translators began to translate the book of Philippians. For this purpose the main table in the large classroom was covered with a representative sampling of English translations of the Bible, commentaries, UBS translation helps and other materials which would be helpful to the translators. Working from the Greek text, Dr. Mathew John broke the text of Philippians down into basic English sentences which were written on the blackboard by one of the other consultants. A sample text is the following (1.12):

My brothers, I want you to know that  
 the things that have happened to me  
 the things that I am suffering  
 the painful/difficult situation I am in  
 my imprisonment and suffering  
     have/has been good in the long run  
     will prove helpful

It has helped the spread/progress of the Gospel  
 resulted in more people accepting the Gospel  
 caused/led more people to accept the Gospel

After a paragraph from Philippians had been written on the blackboard in a fashion similar to the verse above, Dr. John discussed the problems of interpretation and translation which are involved in the passage. At this point the other translation consultants were free to inject their own opinions too. Often, quite animated discussions arose between the three consultants. This helped the translators to think how their own languages might express a certain idea. For example, in the sample text given above (1.12), the translators were presented with three different ways of expressing the meaning of Greek:

- (a) helped the spread/progress of the Gospel
- (b) resulted in more people accepting the Gospel
- (c) caused/led more people to accept the Gospel

Solution (a) is the one which the GNB uses. But in many languages we must indicate more clearly what the “spread” of the Gospel involves. So, in some languages the solution (b) will be picked. However, there is also a basic “causative” idea underlying this sentence. Therefore, other languages may need to express this causative clearly by using the third alternative.

Other typical problems, either in interpretation or translation, were dealt with in a similar fashion. They fall under the following headings:

**1. Too much dependence on the GNB.** There is a tendency on the part of translators to depend too heavily on the English style of the GNB. The GNB is an excellent English translation for English speakers at all levels, but when it is used by translators as their basic English text, there is a temptation to follow rather slavishly the form of the English. In doing this, translators often ignore the resources of their own languages. An example of this is found in Philippians 2.11, which says:

and every tongue will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord.  
                     person                    confess  
                                     declare

The Greek says literally that “every *tongue* will confess that Jesus is the Lord”. But GNB renders this in good modern English as “every *person* will . . .” There are languages, however, which would keep the metaphor of *tongue* for *person*. Translators who speak a language like this should keep the form of the Greek here. The same would apply in 1.24 where the text says:

but to remain in this body is more useful  
                                     alive

Some languages will keep the expression “in this body” rather than “alive” which is found in the GNB. Many more examples of this type were discussed in the workshop.

**2. Long sentences broken down into shorter ones.** One of the very important

principles which is taught in any UBS workshop or seminar is that translators should break the text down into “kernel” or simple sentences before the process of translation begins. Philippians 3.5-6 has two long sentences in the Greek, but the GNB has four. And even this is too complicated for many languages. So this passage was broken down on the blackboard into eight shorter sentences as follows:

I was circumcised when I was eight days old.  
 I belong to the people of Israel.  
 I am a member of the tribe of Benjamin.  
 I am a Hebrew-speaking Jew.  
 I am a Pharisee  
     so I obey the Jewish Law strictly  
 Because of my zeal for the Jewish faith  
     I persecuted the Christians.  
 By the standards of the Jewish Law I was faultless.  
 Everything which the Jewish Law required, I did.

An analysis such as this helps the translator to understand the passage more clearly. After this step has been completed, the translator can begin to translate, using whatever number of sentences would be normal style in his languages.

**3. Cultural equivalents of endearment terms.** Examples in Philippians are “brothers” (1.12, 4.8), “my beloved ones” (2.12), “my brothers” (3.1, 4.1). In many languages of Asia adjustments need to be made with these terms. In such languages *brothers* means actual family members. So it is necessary to translate these terms as “my dear friends”, “my dear elders and youngers” or, in some cases, as “my dear fellow Christians”.

**4. Alternative interpretations.** This has already been mentioned briefly. Philippians, like other New Testament books, has many passages where the Greek can be interpreted in more than one way. If the majority of scholars are agreed on a certain interpretation, the translators at this workshop were told this, and the preferred alternative was put on the board. However, in cases where two or more interpretations are equally possible, both alternatives were presented to the translators. After careful discussion, the translators were told that they had to choose between the alternatives themselves. An example is found in 2.17, where there are two possible interpretations:

- (a) On the contrary, if my life is to be spent as an offering to God . . .
- (b) Your life is a sacrifice and an offering to God. If my life is to be spent like a liquid offering as part of that sacrifice . . .

In (a) the interpretation is that Paul’s life is a sacrifice. But in (b) the sacrifice refers to the life of the Philippian Christians, and Paul’s life will be poured out as an offering on their sacrifice.

To translate a whole epistle of the length of Philippians would be an impossible task for people who had received no previous grounding in translation principles. However, these translators in Shillong had already studied in a UBS translation workshop. So, after a review of basic translation principles they were able to tackle a book of the size and difficulty of Philippians. We feel that the success of this workshop in Shillong should encourage people in other parts of the world to attempt a similar sort of thing.

—Reported by **Mathew John** and **Howard Hatton**