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TRANSLATORS' INSTITUTE IN BOBO DILOULASSO: A NEW APPROACH TO THE HELPING OF TRANSLATORS

WILLIAM D. REYBURN

We are glad to print below an account of the first Translators' Institute. This is an important new aspect of the help which the Bible Societies endeavour to give to translators. It is hoped to hold such Translators' Institutes at various strategic centres in the world, so that ultimately virtually all translators will have the opportunity of attending such an Institute. Dr. Reyburn's account is followed by the impressions of one of the participants, who, like most missionary translators, had previously received very little training in many of the highly technical matters dealt with at the Institute. Ed.

A Translators' Institute was held in Bobo Dioulasso, Voltaic Republic of West Africa, from the fourth through the twenty-eighth of September, 1962. This Institute, the first of a series planned for various parts of the world, was made possible through the co-operation of the British and Foreign Bible Society and the American Bible Society. The purpose of such Institutes or workshops, is to bring Bible translators together for an intensive month of study in Biblical backgrounds, theory and practice of translation, and linguistics. The term workshop is used to underline the fact that considerable time is devoted to the practice of translation, applying the principles set forth in lecture periods.

Languages and participants

Participants at the Bobo Dioulasso workshop numbered approximately forty persons representing nine countries, twenty-one languages and nine missions. Countries with their languages represented were the following: *Ivory Coast*: Baouli, Gagou, Agni, Senoufo (Tyebara and Senadi dialects), Kulango and Gouro. *The Voltaic Republic*: Moré, Bobo Fin, Lobi, Red Bobo, Birifor, Gourma. *Mali*: Senoufo (Suppire dialect), Dogon, Bambara. *Guinea*: Maninka. *Ghana*: Dagbani. *Dahomey*: Pila Pila. *Sierra Leone*: Temne. *Senegal*: Wolof. *Niger Republic*: Zerma.

Missions represented were: Free Will Baptist, Gospel Missionary Union, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Worldwide Evangelization

Crusade, Sudan Interior Mission, Assemblies of God, Conservative Baptist, Wesleyan Methodist, Evangelical Baptist, and one independent.

The lectures on Biblical backgrounds which dealt with a wide range of exegetical problems and difficult passages were given by Dr. Robert Bratcher. Dr. Eugene Nida provided the lectures on the theory and practice of translation. Linguistic lectures were presented by Dr. William Reyburn. Mr. André Wilson of the University of Accra participated in the linguistic lectures and assisted in the linguistic workshop. The conference was particularly fortunate to have the secretarial assistance of Miss Dorothy Vincent of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

Daily schedule

The activities of the day were divided into morning lectures and afternoon work sessions. The day began with a devotional half hour at 8:00. This was followed by the first hour lecture on Biblical backgrounds from 8:30-9:30. After a morning coffee break came the lecture on the theory and practice of translation, from 10:00-11:00. The final morning hour was given to the presentation of practical linguistic subjects. The afternoon sessions were resumed at 3:00 with an hour spent in the exegetical and linguistic examination of a particular selection from one of the local translations. From 4:00 until 5:30 translators with linguistic problems in individual languages were given an opportunity to explore these with the help of the three linguists present. At the same time other translators were engaged in the translation of assigned selections with the collaboration of an African assistant. Translators faced with exegetical problems availed themselves of help from Dr. Bratcher during this part of the day. At 5:30 all participants were encouraged to participate in recreational activities, which served a wholesome function in the intensive schedule of the month.

Content of the lectures

Biblical studies

The lectures on Biblical backgrounds dealt first with the theological basis for translation based upon John 1:1-14. The necessity of understanding the historical situation was presented as a requirement for our reception of God's revelation which took place in history. Since Jesus Christ lived in history it is necessary that we deal with the accounts of this revelation in terms of history. Dr. Bratcher then continued to present lectures on the problems related to the texts of the New Testament, variant readings and their explanations, principles of textual criticism. When presenting the problems of the preferred readings various recent English and French translations were cited. Next Dr. Bratcher dealt with the use of Old Testament quotations in the New Testament. This was followed by problems of pronominal

reference, the meaning of *dikaïosunê* in the gospels, the problems of the synoptic parallels, principles of exegesis, and semitic terms in the New Testament. Finally, a number of sessions were devoted to Biblical word studies, many of which were suggested by the translator participants. Some of these were the following: Son of man, Jehova, Lord, free, ransom, holy, Holy Spirit, atonement, forgiveness, sin, justify, tabernacle, church, law, faith, grace, demon, gehenna, conscience, pray.

The science of translation

Dr. Nida's lectures were based upon the materials which he presents in his forthcoming book on the science of translation. He dealt with symbolic systems, problems of meaning in terms of semantics, syntactics and pragmatics. He then demonstrated various ways of analyzing meaning in terms of situational, behavioral, linguistic, non-linguistic, extraorganismic and intraorganismic factors. The derivational approach to meaning whereby one maps out the areas of meaning was demonstrated and shown to be a questionable method as it is not possible to be sure how a word has extended its meaning. A method for studying meaning known as componential analysis was presented. By this method the various components of the meaning of a term are listed, then numerous expressions containing the term are examined. By indicating the presence or absence of the component in each expression one arrives at a graph of the meaningful components which indicates the presence or absence of the components in various usages of the term. The term "spirit" was analyzed by components, using the term in twenty English contexts. Chain as well as hierarchical analyses of meaning served to show how languages differ greatly in the way in which they set up generic categories. It was demonstrated how the same grammatical constructions contain very different meanings. These differences are revealed by the use of transform techniques. All words likewise may be categorized in one or more of four semantic classes: objects, events, abstracts (i.e. qualities abstracted from objects and events) and relationals. Some translations of the Bible are examples of "overloading" in communication. The content is too difficult and the form of the message not sufficiently idiomatic nor statistically representative of speech as to be easily decoded by the reader or hearer. The principles of formal versus dynamic equivalence in translation were presented. Types of correspondences between languages, as well as techniques of adjustments between source and receptor languages were dealt with in terms of additions, subtractions and alterations. The procedures of translation and revision, formation and function of committees were dealt with at the end.

Linguistics

Linguistic lectures presented by Dr. Reyburn were oriented mainly to the common difficulties faced by missionaries in the writing of

African languages. These began with some background lectures in articulatory phonetics and then proceeded to the level of phonemics. Graphemics was then presented and discussed. Since one of the major problems related to the use of vernacular languages in French-speaking Africa is the influence of French, Dr. Reyburn dealt to some extent with these matters. He contrasted the attitude toward the vernaculars in English and French speaking Africa in terms of educational policy and colonial orientation. Also discussed were the role of the world languages in the transitional African society, limitations imposed upon secondary and minor vernaculars by major vernaculars and world languages, the non-African pressures for the rapid acquisition of the world languages, the function of the vernaculars and world languages at various levels of life, the future of secondary and tertiary vernaculars. Specific problems in the adoption of a French-based orthography were presented in terms of the writing of vowel quality, length, tone and nasalization.

During the linguistic lecture hours Moré and Baouli orthographies were presented to the group and various advantages and disadvantages in their adaption to French were examined. Methods of tonal analysis and the writing of compound and multimorphemic words were discussed. During several of the linguistic lectures Mr. André Wilson presented an analysis of emphatics in Mandinka and discussed procedures for the tabulation of consonants and vowels in phonological gathering and analysis. Mr. J. M. Riccitelli presented a very lucid description of a four-level tone analysis of Red Bobo. Other missionary participants who presented language analyses were Mr. Ralph Herber who discussed Senoufo (Suppire) tone and Mrs. Richard Mills who discussed vowel length analysis in Senoufo (Tyebara).

Work sessions

In order to bring the morning lectures to bear upon specific translations, various participants were asked to prepare a selection of their translation giving a word-for-word interlinear translation. These were then mimeographed and distributed among the participants. The selections in the languages used were: Senoufo (Tyebara) Mark 1:1-15; Maninka Mark 1:16-34; Gouro Mark 1:35-45; Dogon Matthew 5:1-16; Gourma Matthew 5:17-30; Zerma Matthew 5:31-48; Bambara Romans 1:1-15; Moré Romans 1:16-32. Dr. Nida conducted the translation checking sessions with Dr. Bratcher assisting as exegetical source. During the beginning of the third week the participant translators were asked to supply a list of points to watch for when checking a translation. The following list was suggested. *Linguistic*: long complex words, anomalous orthographic forms, borrowed words, transliterations, use of capitals, inconsistencies of spelling and punctuation. *Format*: general format, versification, use of capitals, paragraphing, synoptic parallels, consistency with O.T. in quotations, liturgical

passages and poetry. *Exegesis*: too great a consistency, obvious inconsistency, exegetically difficult passages. *Translation equivalence*: literal word order, literal clause order, literal translation of figures of speech, simplified translation of doctrinal terms, too close equivalence of the conjunction "and", long sentences, over-simplified sentences, too great conformity in word clauses, cultural discrepancies, weights, measures, flora, fauna, omissions and additions, rhetorical questions, direct and indirect discourse, linguistic vs. historical order. These categories were used as points of reference as translation checking continued. Translation checking revealed to the participants the superior value of a dynamic equivalent translation against a formal equivalent translation.

A special series of discussions with African informants attending the conference was held by Dr. Reyburn. These sessions which lasted a week were conducted at the same hour as the translation checking. The purpose of these informant sessions was to help the informants to understand the nature of the lectures presented in the mornings and to assist them in developing better working procedures with their missionary colleagues. Since most of the informants had very little formal education it was not possible to go into as much detail as was desired. It is, however, the intention of the Bible Societies to encourage and develop African translators wherever possible. It is to be hoped that future conferences in this area will be attended by more qualified African personnel who can share in the full load of the lectures and work.

Each afternoon at 4:00 the translators resumed their translation assignments in collaboration with their African language helpers. Translators accompanied by informants were given an opportunity during this period to examine with the help of one or several linguists some linguistic problem in their language. Linguistic problems were principally of four kinds: 1. orthography, 2. tone analysis, 3. word boundaries i.e., when to write words and word elements together and when to separate them, and 4. morphological analysis. Languages which were studied during these sessions were *Baouli* orthography, *Senoufo* (Tyebara) vowel length analysis, *Senoufo* (Suppire) tone classes, *Agni* orthography of palatalized stops, *Pila Pila* compound words, *Zerma* word boundaries, contractions, auxiliary verbs, orthography of palatalized velar consonants, *Dogon* tone, word boundaries, orthography of labialized and palatalized consonants, *Moré* present orthography versus suggestions made at the Ouagadougou conference in 1958, *Bambara* orthography, *Gouro* orthography, *Gourma* word boundaries, *Red Bobo* tone classes, *Maninka* orthography.

Conclusion

Mr. Ralph Herber, speaking on behalf of the translator participants at the close of the sessions, expressed the feeling of the group by

saying that the month had been one of the highlights in a missionary career. He stated that the methods of translation work and the concept of a dynamic translation equivalence had opened up new visions for future translation work for all. Special thanks were expressed to the cooperating Bible Societies for financing a good part of the conference. Thanks were also expressed to Mr. and Mrs. Howard Beardslee of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Bobo Dioulasso who handled the physical arrangements both before and throughout the conference.

The next four-week translators' conference scheduled for Africa will be held June 18—July 12, 1963 in Cameroun.¹ Translators in west and equatorial Africa desiring to attend are requested to contact W. D. Reyburn, B.P. 1133, Yaoundé, Cameroun.

THE IMPRESSIONS OF A PARTICIPANT

DAVID B. WOODFORD

Looking back on the first of the month-long Translators' Institutes that was held in Bobo, Haute Volta, last month, I feel that the first comment could well be the one made on Uzziah long ago; "he was marvellously helped." I imagine this would be said by all who were there.

The second reaction is harder to explain but is perhaps best expressed by the response of someone whom I asked how they felt at the end of the month. They pointed to within a foot of the floor and said simply, "About so high."

Before I went I wondered, as probably others there did, "Will it be worth the whole month away from my station? Can I afford the time?" Yes, it has been worth it because it has been a good investment; it will continue to pay off for years yet to come. By any standards the T.I. was a success. This success was assured I feel by the very fact of bringing such able and dedicated men to meet the help-hungry translators.

We appreciated the scholarship of the men that taught us... Drs. Nida, Bratcher, Reyburn, of the ABS, and André Wilson from the University of Accra. They ministered to us of themselves as well. And for this I know everyone would thank them. We learnt from them, and we *enjoyed* them. The month was packed full of study and discussions, but their help was always there, willingly given. According to Dr. Bratcher they were simply obeying the Scriptural injunction to "Comfort the feeble minded"! We thank God for the "comforting" and for the example of personal dedication.

¹ Another Translators' Institute, to be held in the Philippines, is planned for the spring of this year. Full information may be obtained from the Bible House, P.O. Box 755, Manila.

One way in which God's blessing was evidenced was the very fact of some forty missionaries being able to come together from all parts of West Africa for the whole month. They represented over twenty languages, one or two of them having the whole Bible translated, and others in which the first book is still to be done.

You can imagine the host of differing problems that were brought along! I think the success of the month can also be measured in the great number of those problems that were solved. Problems of phonemic analysis, and even of phonetic realities! Orthography problems; exegetical, translational, grammatical... they were all dealt with by the team both in lectures and then in the personal workshop sessions. Most of the missionaries brought their informants with them, and of course this meant that it was sometimes a bit hard to pull the wool over the eyes of the experts! So problems *did* get solved; some of them ones that had been known or simply lurking unrecognised for decades!

Each afternoon an hour and a half was set aside for individual informant work and problem-solving with the experts. The scribble of note-taking of the lecture hours gave way to a subdued Babel of interchanges in upwards of twenty languages as little groups huddled around desks in the school rooms. Now and then one wondered at the considerable bird life in the big town, only to realise that the songs were the whistles of an informant helping a missionary solve his tone problems.

Throughout the month for an hour each day a missionary submitted a translated passage to the eagle eye of Dr. Nida whilst we all followed the questions and comments helped by a duplicated copy of the translation with interlinear English. It was during these times that many of the principles of the morning theory lectures were put to work. I think we all sympathised with the one on the "hot spot" for the day—but we all learnt!

I hope I have convinced you that the T.I. was of very *practical* help. But I have valued most of all the effort that was taken to provide the theoretical background to sound Biblical exegesis and to adequate translation. (Incidentally I never imagined that problems of texts and exegesis could be so interesting until I listened to Dr. Bratcher.) I cannot begin to explain all that Dr. Nida said, even if I hope I understand it! I have over 60 pages of notes! Under such headings as, Theory of Communication, Componential Analysis etc. there are the underlying principles that must govern any worthwhile translation work. We learnt that the hardest themes must get the easiest treatment in terms of language. We were shown ways of getting at the insides of meanings. So although I still don't know what term to use for "conscience", or all the implications of the Birifor words for spirit, yet I have a far better idea now of how to look for the one and to go about investigating the other.

Along the way one became aware of the considerable quantity of "Protestant Latin" on which the Mission Church is rather shakily built. These lectures on the theory of meaning, communication and so on made very clear that the failure of translation lies not only in introducing a wrong meaning but in failing to produce *any* meaning. We saw too, that our Message comes to us, and is to be conveyed, not in words, one by one, but in Meaningful Mouthfuls (Nida's phrase).

I must confess that some of the passages I wanted to translate had seemed much more mouthfuls than meaningful. But we have been re-assured that they were once written to carry a clear message to the heart and mind. I believe that this past month will help a great deal in discovering in many ways just how to tell out the Word to more than eight million West Africans.

PEACE FEATHER

Ernest and Marjorie Richert have been translating into the Mid-Waria language of New Guinea. In translating "He is our peace" of Ephesians 2:14 they found that the literal rendering was not readily understood. After the context was explained to the chief native translation assistant, he suggested the use of the term *soota*, in place of the word "peace".

The *soota*, a 12-inch wing feather of the white cockatoo, is the peace symbol of the Mid-Warias. Using a sharp bamboo knife, the peace-king would painstakingly split the feather in an intricate herringbone design right down to the hollow quill. At the appropriate time the peace-king would appear at the scene of battle wearing the *soota* in his hair. Thereupon the fighting would immediately cease and the warring parties would unite in celebrating a feast which thus ushered in a new era of tranquility.

The use of this term *soota* in the translation of this text proved to be most satisfying and meaningful to the Mid-Warias.

LIONS UNKNOWN

A problem was presented in translating 1 Peter 5:8: "Your adversary the devil, as a *roaring lion*, walketh about seeking whom he may devour." In New Guinea there are no vicious feline animals like the lion. The wild boars, however, are very vicious and greatly feared by the people. Therefore the verse was tentatively rendered, "Like a champing *wild boar* the devil who is your enemy is going about seeking someone he may destroy." This has been found to be a graphic and effective cultural substitute for a lion.

(From Translation, organ of the Wycliffe Bible Translators)