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EDITOR: Wilfred J. Bradnock

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT: Lesley Walmsley

EDITORIAL BOARD: C. Arangaden, John J. Kijne, Eugene A. Nida

WILLIAM A. SMALLEY

THE PLACE OF LINGUISTICS IN BIBLE TRANSLATION

Every translator of the Bible brings to his task a whole complex of assumptions about his work. These assumptions range from those concerning the very nature of the Bible itself to those concerning the nature of translation. Every article which has ever appeared in *The Bible Translator* is the product of the author's own combination of assumptions. Of some of them he is aware. Others he has never clearly formulated.

The presuppositions of one translator will often differ from those of a neighboring translator. Two members of the same committee may be working with partially different sets of assumptions, and be unaware of the fact that constant differences of opinion on details of the translation reflect different mind sets. The presuppositions of a translator in turn may differ from those of the Bible Societies' translations consultant who is responsible for working with him, and two consultants may at times differ in their bases for decisions. The translation policies of different Societies differ at points because of the differences of presupposition between their respective translation secretaries and/or their translation committees.

With the enormous emphasis on the role of descriptive linguistics in Bible translation which has developed over the last twenty years, it is an increasingly rare translator who does not bring to his task some assumption or other about linguistics. If he reads *The Bible Translator*, or studies many of the UBS books in the 'Helps for Translators' series, or hears of the activities of such groups as the Wycliffe Bible Translators or the Translations Department of the American Bible Society, or reads much of the popular missionary literature, he forms a conscious or unconscious judgment about the place of linguistics in translation.

For some such people the assumption is that linguistics has no particular relevance for them in their task. They see it as a matter for 'primitive'

languages, or usable in areas where the Church is insufficiently developed for well-educated national pastors and teachers to take the leadership in translation into their own language. What possible relevance could it have in a language with hundreds of years of literary tradition, with dictionaries and grammar books abounding? At the other extreme there are people who seem virtually to equate linguistics with translation. They feel that training in linguistics is equivalent to training in Bible translation, that linguistic analysis is a necessary prerequisite to translation no matter who is doing it, that translation techniques are much the same as the techniques of eliciting linguistic information from a naive informant.

Both of these presuppositions about the place of linguistics in translation interact with scores of other presuppositions which the translator holds about other aspects of Bible translation work, about the place of the original languages, about exegesis, about the use of translational helps, about the roles of nationals and foreigners, about style and idiom. No two people come to the task with exactly the same combination of assumptions, and most cannot formulate very many of their own, but every man's work is a product of the particular combination of points of view which he brings to it.

Unwarranted presuppositions about language itself are particularly rife. They are gained from the linguistic folk-lore of one's culture, and the traditional teaching of the schools, plus judgments based on limited experience. Some of these have become less frequent recently because of the influence of linguistics. Such for example is the assumption that 'primitive' languages have 'little or no grammar'. Linguistic studies have shown us that there are no 'primitive' languages today, using the word in any of its normal meanings, and that all languages, no matter what the culture of the speakers, are structurally very complex, although they vary in difficulty for an alien learner.

Other such presuppositions are still strong, however, and plague Bible translation. They include assumptions that words have 'exact meanings' and that by studying the 'exact meaning' of a certain word in Greek you automatically have a greater understanding of what the Biblical writer meant than you can get by reading the English translation. Or they may take the form that by studying the meaning of a word in Ugaritic you learn what it meant in Hebrew. Or they may see the translation task in terms of finding the right 'vocabulary' to convey Biblical concepts, oblivious to the fact that concepts are not carried in vocabulary, but in sentences, paragraphs, and discourses, not to speak of smiles, frowns, and/or looks of terror associated with speech in a child's training.

As a part of an attempt to make explicit many of the assumptions which I bring to my task as a translations consultant, I have developed the diagram which follows.¹ My own training is in linguistics and anthropology. The problems with which I have had to deal as a translations consultant have been on all levels from practical alphabets to Biblical exegesis, to literary style, although I am not equally competent in them. This experience, and the

¹ An adaptation of the points of this article is planned as the first chapter in a book on the ethnolinguistic presuppositions of Bible translation.

experience of my colleagues, forms the bases for my presuppositions and my presuppositions in turn mold the detail of the advice and help I give to translators.

Stages of translation

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Pre-translation</i>	<i>Translation</i>	<i>Post-translation</i>
	'Understanding the nature of the code'	'Code switching'	'Checking and improving the encoding'
	'Decoding the message'		

In this diagram the progression is chronological, from left to right. By this we do not mean that all pre-translation is done before all translation, and all translation before all post-translation, but for any given passage this will be the order. In some cases post-translation on one passage will be done before some of the pre-translation work on another.

In the pre-translation stage belong all of those activities which in one project or another are prerequisite to translation proper. These will vary according to the translator and the language. Some translators have to learn the language as adults, others are native speakers from childhood. Some must write the language for the first time while others work in a long literary tradition. But to this pre-translation stage belongs everything that has to do with the languages, and with the meaning of the material to be translated. 'Understanding the nature of the code' has to do with the nature of language (whether Biblical language or the receptor language of the translation), while 'decoding the message' has to do with the understanding of the Biblical message.

In the translation stage the actual process of transferring the message from the source language to the receptor language takes place. The message should remain substantially the same, but the code is changed. This is what we mean by 'code switching'.

In the post-translation stage are grouped those activities which have to do with checking, correcting, testing and polishing a translation.

Broad and narrow focus activities

The various activities under the headings for each of these stages of translation can be divided into two groups labeled 'broad focus' and 'narrow focus'. Broad focus activities have to do with the total task in its widest perspective. Narrow focus activities are concerned with the handling of details, the hour-by-hour activity as seen from the standpoint of the total translation. Broad focus activities may involve detailed work, like learning Greek conjugations, but they are related to the task as a whole (in our example, learning Greek), not to the translation of specific passages (the exegesis of John 1: 1).

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Pre-translation</i>	<i>Translation</i>	<i>Post-translation</i>
	'Understanding the nature of the code' 'Decoding the message'	'Code switching'	'Checking and improving the encoding'
<i>Broad focus</i>	Language learning Linguistic analysis Orthography preparation Literacy Cultural preparation Biblical preparation languages text and exegesis culture	Creative writing	Checking reader reaction committees consultants informants use in classes, etc.
<i>Narrow focus</i>	Understanding of immediate text; semantic analysis	Selection of equivalents	Checking consistency exegesis parallel passages readability frequency counts Intuitive polishing

Not all of the possible activities involved in the total translation task are listed in this chart, nor are all of those listed necessary to every translation project. They are by way of illustration, for the most part. Broad focus activities in the pre-translation stage are any activities which prepare the translator for his task, or in some cases prepare a writing system as a vehicle for the translation, and literacy to give it an audience. They set the stage for translation. Each of the types of activity may be essential to some situations, but the Biblical preparation is essential to all translation projects. By it the translator learns the Biblical languages or substitutes for them by learning to use exegetical helps, concordances, commentaries, lexicons, which guide him in finding the meaning of the Biblical message in its original setting.

In translation proper the only broad focus activity is creative writing. We are not using the term 'creative writing' in the sense of the writer who produces something out of his own mind and imagination, but in the sense of gifted, lucid, effective, satisfying writing. Only the gifted literary artist is capable of it. Few translations of the Bible show it, but some do, and they are the only ones I would consider really great translations. It marks the superiority of the New English Bible over the Revised Standard Version, and it is in this respect, and no other, that the Phillips translation is superior to every other English version including the New English Bible. It is the most difficult of all good qualities of a translation to capture, but without it there is no really good

translation. Only by means of it are the full resources of a language being used as a vehicle to carry the Biblical message. Only through it can the spirit and mood of the Scriptures be captured.

In the post-translation stage broad focus activities have to do with the adjustment, correction, and improvement of a manuscript as people of various kinds react to it. It takes into consideration the random comments of readers and users in any useful way possible.

Narrow focus activities in the pre-translation stage include all processes involved in the direct study of the immediate text to be translated at the time—reading it in English, studying it in Greek, reading the commentary helps, etc. Narrow focus activity in the translation stage is the actual selection of the wording to be used in the receptor language. Narrow focus activity in the post-translation stage includes detailed checking of specific features of any kind. It also includes the intuitive literary polishing of a native speaker.

The core of translation activity

In the different activities we have been listing, only a few are essential to every good translation. All are needed in one situation or another, but the ones which are characteristic of all good translations are the following:

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Pre-translation</i>	<i>Translation</i>	<i>Post-translation</i>
<i>Broad focus</i>	Biblical preparation	Creative writing	
<i>Narrow focus</i>	Understanding of the immediate text	Selection of equivalents	Intuitive polishing

These are the processes, in varying degrees, of a J. B. Phillips¹, or of the translators of the New English Bible. Most translations are marred, however, by the absence of one or more of these components. Most translations, even when done by people into their own language, are not polished, literary pieces of work. Literal renderings and semitisms still show their wooden heads. Faithful translation is still equated with dull style.

Other translations are weak on the selection of equivalents. There may be fear of expressions rooted in the culture of the receptor language, so that borrowed or manufactured terms are constantly used for Biblical ideas. Or there may be uncritical use of terms from the receptor language so that they are sometimes misleading, and even deny the Biblical message.

Still other translations are marred by the translator's inadequate Biblical preparation and inadequate study of the text. Even today there are translators who rarely use an exegetical commentary, but rely for their exegesis on the sermons they have heard or the Bible courses they took years ago.

¹ See J. B. Phillips, 'The Problems of Making a Contemporary Translation', *The Bible Translator*, Vol. 16 (1965), No. 1, pp. 25 ff.

The nature and scope of linguistics

What then is the field of 'linguistics'? In its broadest terms it is the study of language as a mechanism for human intercommunication, its nature, its internal structure, its history. The study of language as a social phenomenon of course involves the analysis of actual languages, which provides the data from which linguistic generalizations can be made. It involves the comparison of languages and of various aspects of languages. It involves observation of the social context in which language is used.

Some parts of the field of linguistics are more amenable to scientific study than others. Certain parts, in fact, have been so highly developed that they have provided models for other aspects of the social sciences in their elegance and precision. Such, for example, have been the study of language sound systems and the study of systematic sound changes which produce different pronunciations in different dialects and related languages.

Some of the areas in which linguistic techniques have been most highly refined have been those parts of linguistics which had to do most practically with the needs of missionaries learning and trying to figure out the structure of hitherto unanalyzed languages. The analysis of sounds, sound systems, and grammatical systems was simplified enormously and rendered greatly more precise and effective for many missionaries by linguistic technique. Missionary linguists, on the other hand, through the application of these techniques to new languages all over the world, and frequently through the discovery of new facts, techniques and structures, contributed to the development of the broader linguistic study.¹

In our diagram of the translation processes, strictly linguistic activities are found in the broad focus pre-translation stage. Here lies the preparation of the foreigner who is seeking to understand the intricacies of an alien tongue, of the pioneer who is preparing a writing system so that the translation can be given form, and can be read.

To a lesser degree the techniques of linguistics have contributed to the post-translation task also in that they have given sophistication and insight into the analysis of the structure and nature of texts in little-known languages, and this textual analysis provides a basis for evaluating the 'fit' or 'match' between the translated materials and native materials.²

As a linguist, therefore, I see no strictly linguistic activities in the core of translation, none at all in translation proper. My diagram would seem to support those who assume that linguistics is relevant (if relevant at all) only to the pioneer translator.

But nothing could be farther from the truth, for I see linguistics in translation not so much as a set of techniques or activities, but as contributing to a set of presuppositions, of assumptions, a viewpoint on language. This is the real place of linguistics in translation. The linguist's view of language affects

¹ William L. Wonderly and Eugene A. Nida, 'Linguistics and Christian Missions', first published in *Anthropological Linguistics*, January 1963 (pp. 104 ff.); reprinted in *The Bible Translator*, Vol. 15 (1964), Nos. 2-4, and available as an offprint, price 2s. 6d. or 35 cents.

² See Joseph E. Grimes, 'Measuring "Naturalness" in a Translation', *The Bible Translator*, Vol. 14 (1963), No. 2; Bruce R. Moore, 'Second Thoughts on Measuring "Naturalness"', *The Bible Translator*, Vol. 15 (1964), No. 2.

his understanding of the source language¹ and of the receptor. He doesn't see Greek as some kind of fixed language ideal for the presentation of Christian teaching, but as a language among languages, with its niceties and its ambiguities, its vagueness and its preciseness, a product of its history and its culture. The linguistic point of view does not see all of the meanings of a Greek word in every occurrence of that word² but sees meanings selected and delimited by context. The linguistic point of view is suspicious of attempts to represent the same Greek word the same way in different contexts of the receptor language, suspicious of the literal translation of idioms, suspicious of grammatical structures which follow those of the base from which the translation is made. All of these traits are characteristics of most translations in varying degrees. From the linguistic point of view one sees that in fact many translations produced by native speakers are not superior to those produced by missionaries, because the native speakers slavishly follow the details of the Biblical language structure rather than engaging in thorough code switching in a creative way.

The linguistic point of view sees little value in the Revised Version or the American Standard Version beyond that of an 'interlinear translation', because they stand primarily in the pre-translation stage. Code switching has been only partially done. It sees this fault in many other translations around the world as well.

The linguistic point of view emphasizes the reader and his understanding of what he reads as the crucial diagnostic key to good translation. No translation is faithful which does not produce an understanding of the original meaning in the average reader at whom it is aimed.

Significant as the technical contributions of linguistic science are to parts of the total task of translation, far more significant to translation proper is the philosophy of language which may result from linguistic study. What is the nature of language, and how does it work? How did communication take place in the original Biblical languages, and how can that communicative event best be duplicated in modern languages? How do the different aspects of the communicative system we call language fit together into an integrated whole, and succeed in carrying a message from one person to another? A person's answer to these questions will have a profound influence on the kind of translation he produces.

Linguistic presuppositions in perspective

Anyone with a little historical perspective who has read certain articles in *The Bible Translator*³, or who remembers discussions of translation tech-

¹ James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, London: Oxford University Press, 1961.

² A common fallacy of such different pieces of work as the Amplified New Testament and many weighty tomes of Greek word studies.

³ For example, Hilaire Belloc, 'On Translation', *T.B.T.* Vol. 10 (1959), pp. 83 ff., reprinted from *On Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931); Hugh Ross, 'Principles of Bible Translating in the Year 1727', *T.B.T.* Vol. 10 (1959), pp. 22 ff. See also Eugene A. Nida, 'The Tradition of Translation in the Western World', *Toward a Science of Translating*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964; pp. 11-29.

nique from his study of the history of literature or the prefaces to various translations of the Bible, will know that many of the assumptions discussed above did not originate with linguistics, and are not exclusive to people with linguistic training. In what sense can they be linked with linguistic science?

Linguistic science gives them body and form, makes them explicit, provides a theoretical base for them and the means of discussing them in less subjective and emotional terms than was possible before. By showing the range of actual language phenomena it demonstrates the arbitrariness and relativity of the structure of language, and provides the evidence which can contribute to a more thorough, less subjective theory of translation. In doing so linguistics joins with the broader study of human culture as well, with insights drawn from cultural anthropology, from psychology, from the mathematical theory of communication. The result of the mixture has seemed a hopeless hodge-podge of scientism to some, but efforts to formulate the translational implications of the study of linguistics in this broader context are maturing.¹ The results are being taught at Translators' Institutes and in the process of teaching are being clarified, and methods of presentation improved.

We are learning to take untrained translators, or translators with other presuppositions than those we feel are valid, and in a short period of time train them in much more thorough translational procedures based on much sounder understanding of the translation task. This is being done through the use of concepts formulated primarily in linguistic terms and based on ethno-linguistic knowledge. This, I believe, is the significant place of linguistics in Bible translation. I believe that some translations of the Scriptures are sounder, more readable, more faithful because of the effort.

J. N. SCHOFIELD

'RIGHTEOUSNESS' IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The following material is taken from Mr. Schofield's book Introducing Old Testament Theology, and is printed here by kind permission of the author and the publisher. Ed.²

The Hebrew word (root: SDQ) usually translated as 'righteousness' is one of the most fascinating and important words to express the revolutionary theology of the Old Testament. In modern English 'righteousness' is seldom used outside the churches and even there it often has a derogatory sense, coming from the thought of self-righteousness, the attitude of someone who, in his own opinion, is always in the right and living by the right standard; one who, to his own satisfaction, can always justify himself. We often speak of 'my

¹ The most complete and important discussion of this field is Nida, *ibid.*

² J. N. Schofield, *Introducing Old Testament Theology*, London: SCM Press, 1964; 9s. 6d. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964; \$2.75. Extracts quoted here are from pp. 41 ff. and 93 ff.