

WHAT TRANSLATIONS SHOULD THE BIBLE SOCIETIES SUPPORT?

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The United Bible Societies has been forced to ask itself how it should spend the money available for translations. The demands on the money are always greater than the money available. Dr. William A. Smalley, Translations Coordinator for the Asia-Pacific Region, attempted to work out some answers to this question. The results of his work are contained in the Table of Priorities which is found at the end of his article. There follows another document entitled Goals and Priorities which arose in the Executive Committee of the Asia-Pacific Region and which sets forth a "Basic Working Plan for the Seventies" involving translation, production and distribution. This document has been endorsed by the United Bible Societies Executive Committee. Finally, the various terms used in describing translations are examined by the Rev. Paul Ellingworth, Regional Translations Coordinator for Europe, who draws attention particularly to that brand of translation called "traditional ecclesiastical language version", the one which merits the lowest rating on the table of priorities.—Ed.

In 1970 United Bible Societies' translations personnel were cooperating with some 570 different translations projects all over the world. The number is increasing. Sometimes this cooperation means that a Bible Society expects to publish the translation when it is finished and therefore keeps in touch with the work through a Translation Consultant or Translation Secretary but does not pay any translation costs. In many other situations, however, the Bible Societies are paying all the cost or part of the cost of the translation work itself.

In order to help translation projects, in 1971 the Bible Society put aside over one million dollars as budget for translation. This was to pay for administrative costs, Translators' Institutes, Consultants' salaries and travel, as well as to help translation projects directly. Even this very large sum of money, however, was 40 per cent less than what we saw as being the likely needs for translation throughout the world during that year. When we added up the needs of all the different translation projects in all areas of the world, together with other costs, we found that there was just not enough money. Like most organizations and ordinary individuals, we were short of funds. There was not enough money to do all the important things we wanted and needed to do in the translation of the Scriptures.

The cost of translation to the Bible Societies is growing quite fast for several reasons. There is, of course, the normal increase in cost which everybody feels because prices go up each year. But the need for Bible Society support for translations is increasing for other reasons as well. For one thing, in most areas there are not so many missionary translators as there used to be. Years ago almost all translation was done by missionaries who received their salaries from mission boards or supporting churches. The Bible Society may

or may not have contributed something toward the expenses of the committee meetings. Today in many of the major translations there are no missionaries involved at all, and when the Bible Society asks a man to leave his work and give time to the task of translating the Scriptures, it must support him in that important translation work.

Another reason for an increase in expense is that so much more emphasis is being put on "common language" translations these days. Such translations require greater skill and care and more writing ability than did the more traditional translations. This means that the Bible Societies have to seek the best, most qualified people for the task, sometimes inviting them from rather well-paid positions. Also, if common language translations are to be of any value for this generation they must be done rather quickly, which means that some translators must give full time to the task, rather than stretching it out over fifteen or twenty years of part-time work.

To the greatest degree possible the Bible Societies invite and encourage the churches which will use a translation to give financial support to the task of translation. Sometimes churches pay salaries of some of the key translators. But even so, costs are going up rapidly, and in 1971 the money available was 40 per cent less than the money that we felt was needed.

Where Should the Money be Used?

So what happens when there is not enough money for translation? Should we reduce the money for all translation projects 40 per cent, or should we decide which translation projects are the most important for the moment, support them fully, and then reduce others even more? This was the question we faced.

At the time when the 40 per cent shortage came to our attention we did not have any set of guiding principles for such an emergency, and had to cut the budget of almost all translations. We also delayed and postponed many translations which were scheduled to start soon. All these decisions had to be made quickly, regardless of the value of the translation, and they left us with a very unsatisfied feeling. Some translations which we knew to be very strategic had to be slowed down or limited, whereas others which seemed less significant were not limited to any great degree.

We determined, then, to try to work out a policy for the future to answer the question: "When money is insufficient, where do we spend what we have?" To put it another way, how should \$5,000 be divided between ten translation projects which need \$20,000? Should all the money go to two or three of these? To which ones? Should it be divided equally between them? Should there be some other arrangement? We felt that we must have principles by which to be able to answer such questions as these as the need arose. We began calling these principles "Priorities for Translation".

However, as soon as we began to think in terms of priorities for translation (encouraging one translation by giving it full support and holding back support from another project), some people quite naturally objected. They thought we felt that people in some situations were not as much in need of Scriptures as those in other situations. This is not so. We remain

convinced that every person is in need of God's revelation. Our dilemma is that if we cannot do everything that needs to be done, what shall we do? How can we spend our money to be of greatest value to Christ and the Bible cause? How are we to be responsible for our stewardship?

Priorities for Translation

We worked out four categories of translations, as follows:

Top Priority. Top priority translations, we decided, were ones which should be supported at all costs. We felt that if necessary we should spend more than our budget or eliminate something else in order to support them.

Medium Priority. Medium priority translations, we felt, would be of such importance that we should try to find the money for them if at all possible. However, if a new translation was about to start, we might sometimes have to postpone it until the next year in order to get it into the budget.

Low Priority. Low priority translations, we felt, would be subject to reduced budget support if the funds were insufficient to maintain top priority and medium priority translations at a full level. In other words, every effort would be made to help low priority translations, but when higher priority translations were in need, low priority ones would have to be reduced.

No Priority. It was felt that there are some translations to which no new funds should be given without very special consideration. As will be seen when we come to look at the various bases for the different priorities, these are usually translations which are not meeting UBS standards in some way. They are not the kinds of translation which are generally recognized as valid, or their quality is not satisfactory, or in some other way the money is not really being well used.

In order to place translation projects within one of these four levels of priority, we ask the following questions:

What kind of translation is it? How good is it? At the present time the Bible Societies feel that their major work in translation must go to translations which communicate widely to all people, not simply to Christians. Literal or hard-to-read translations should be given low priority.

How can we be sure of the quality of translation? In order to help translators achieve the type of translation needed, Bible Society Translation Consultants visit many translation projects regularly, working with the translators and making sure that things are going as they should. We feel that such an arrangement is essential before a translation can have high priority.

How much will the translation be used when it is done? How many copies can be printed and distributed meaningfully in one to three years? How will the translation help the growth of the church, communicate to non-Christians, etc.? The main principle involved here is that a translation which is going to be widely used gets high priority over one that is not.

What standards will be applied to the translators themselves? In order to have the kind of translation which we feel is so important in today's world, translators have to be trained in the principles of "dynamic equivalence"

translation. Translators must have the skills required for this very difficult task.

How is the program organized? How fast is the translation being done? It has been our experience that translations which are poorly organized turn out to be very expensive. We find, for example, that too many translators can make a program very slow and cumbersome, taking many years to complete. Often the work can be done faster and better by a limited number of people, though of course not too few.

Table of Priorities

Keeping in mind the four priorities discussed earlier, we then tried to see how the answers to these questions would relate to them. To do so we made out the Table of Priorities which comes at the end of this article. Across the top of the table you will see that there are columns for each of the priority levels. Down the left-hand column are headings related to the various questions that have just been asked. At the bottom is the information concerning the meaning of the priorities in terms of the United Bible Societies' budget. Then, in the central part of the table come the descriptions of different types of situations by which different translations can be identified and related to the priorities.

You can see how a top priority translation is defined by going down the top priority column and seeing the characteristics of such a translation. You will see that top priority and medium priority, in many instances, have the same characteristics but differ somewhat in the kind of translation or in how widely it can be used. This chart was also prepared with the following ideas in mind:

- (a) If we have one translation which is adequate for a particular need, another to meet the same need would not have as high priority.
- (b) No salaries or honoraria will be paid to missionaries.
- (c) If a church wants a translation in an old-fashioned style or one that is hard for people outside the church to understand, we should show them that the Bible Societies at present do not have funds to support such a translation.
- (d) The suggested priorities have to do only with supporting translations. We are still glad to give as much technical help as we can, and invite the translators to training programs.

Definitions

The Table of Priorities has some terms which need defining:

1. *National languages* and/or *Official languages* are usually so named by the government.
2. *Primary languages* are ones in which:
 - (a) There is some education in the language medium.
 - (b) There is literature, including some periodicals.

(c) The language is spoken by 25 per cent of the population of the country or at least one million people.

(d) Many people learn it as a second language (at least 10 per cent of speakers non-native), or it has at least one million speakers.

3. *Secondary languages* are any languages not included above, but with 500,000 or more people, or, if less than 500,000:

(a) There is limited education in the language itself (e.g., three years).

(b) There are at least a few books.

(c) The language has limited use as a second language.

4. *Tertiary languages* are languages where:

(a) There is little or no education in the language.

(b) There are no books.

(c) Nobody learns the language as a second language.

5. *Traditional ecclesiastical languages* are the special forms of a language used by Christians and either not understood or sounding strange to non-Christians.

This priority system which has been worked out may, of course, be altered and improved. It is being used to classify all translations supported by the United Bible Societies, and changes in the system have been made and probably will continue to be made until something fully useful develops. In the meantime, we wanted to share this information with translators so that they would realize the difficulty the United Bible Societies may have at times with regard to funds and to help them to understand the basis upon which any reduction of financial help may be necessary.

GOALS AND PRIORITIES

Basic Working Plan for the Seventies

The Executive Committee of the Asia-Pacific Region of the United Bible Societies re-emphasizes the ultimate goal of all Bible Society work: to provide the Scriptures for the world, in the world's languages, communicating effectively to the people of the world. For Asia and the Pacific in the 1970s this means that serious consideration must be given to our plans and objectives for the years ahead. We must not simply seek to meet a statistical goal of seventy-five million annual distribution by 1975 (or even any much larger number), but must seek *significant* distribution. Such significant distribution includes distribution suitable to various groups of potential readers, with publications designed specifically for youth, for the new reader, for the varied classes of human beings who are far more than mere figures in a population explosion which brings an increase of one million individuals to our region each week.

Our concern for significant distribution has its implications in the various aspects of Bible Society work, as follows:

Translation

1. In the social and linguistic composition of Asia and the Pacific today, we would define certain elements of the vast potential readership as being particularly crucial to reaching our goals effectively. With limited resources, we must give such elements greatest priority. We suggest, therefore, the following criteria to delimit in a broad way what we feel them to be.

- (a) The size of population using a particular language.
- (b) The role of the language, whether it be an official language, national language, or primary language, etc.
- (c) Christian opportunity in the language, in terms of evangelistic outreach, response of the people to the message of the gospel, existing sense of need.
- (d) The fact of widespread literacy, often without corresponding extensive education among the masses speaking the language.
- (e) The emergence of youth as the dominant population because it constitutes the majority in the region, and because of its major role in bringing change.

2. We see our purpose in providing Scriptures for the world to be that of communicating the message of the Bible to the reader. We are concerned that the reader understand God's Word readily. For this reason, we suggest that the primary thrust of Bible Society translation work be directed to producing common language and popular language translations, with adaptations for new literates, as needed.

3. Our commitment to the Scriptures requires us to maintain a high quality of translation which will enable the reader to understand the true meaning of the original. This, in turn, requires the effective training and supervising of translators by qualified UBS translation personnel.

4. Our sense of urgency requires that if our translations are to meet the needs of the 70s they must be done quickly. Translation projects must therefore be organized by qualified translation personnel so as to be completed efficiently and in time. Translation programs should follow a reasonable schedule of two to three years for a New Testament and four to five years for an Old Testament.

5. We recognize that we have present commitments to existing translation programs which do not match the priorities which are being set forth here. We suggest that such programs be modified to meet these requirements wherever possible. The Regional Translation Consultation should make specific recommendations concerning projects if they cannot be so modified.

6. The emphasis on the rapid development of common language and popular language translations will require some re-allocation of UBS funds. We suggest that when there are concrete and valid proposals to fulfil translation priorities, but insufficient funds in the translation share of the World Service Budget to pay for them, the UBS temporarily make available to

translation a larger share of the World Service Budget, even if corresponding economies must be made elsewhere.

Production

1. As we plan Scriptures for the populations of Asia we recognize that in addition to publications required for existing Church needs, editions should also be designed specifically for such groups as new literates, children and youth.

2. We endorse the principle of coordinating the production of selections, portions and other special publications, on the one hand, with the progress of translation, on the other, along the lines set forth in the paper "Suggestions for an Order of Translation".* We suggest the wider application of this approach to all common language and popular language translations.

3. In line with the progress of common language and popular language translation projects, we suggest that during the years from 1971 to 1975 we emphasize the production of selections (including literacy selections) geared to that progress. From 1975 to 1980 the emphasis should then broaden to include the mass production of inexpensive paperback New Testaments as these translations become available.

4. A suggested standard format and artwork should be prepared to parallel the sequence of translation in order to facilitate the rapid and convenient production of selections and groups of selections as texts are approved.

5. Scripture production should be carefully planned to achieve the lowest cost combined with satisfactory quality, while taking full account of the requirements of local situations and the desirability of developing the printing capability of several locations in the region.

Distribution and Supply

1. We suggest that the forward thrust of the extensive expansion of distribution which will take the new translations to the reader be organized under the slogan of "Target '75—Youth and the New Reader".

2. The enormous scope of our task of achieving significant distribution to the people of Asia requires us to enlist the fullest participation of the entire Christian community.

3. Because people can communicate most effectively to their own peer groups, we should systematically develop distribution programs for youth to distribute to youth, women to women, businessmen to businessmen, etc.

4. As interconfessional translation projects advance, more texts will become available for the production of editions with a wide inter-church distribution potential. Plans need to be made well in advance to insure effective supply and distribution.

* See *TBT* Vol. 20, No. 3, July 1969.

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.

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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;