

TRANSLATORS' INSTITUTE IN THE PHILIPPINES

J. L. SWELLENGREBEL

1. Introductory

From April 15 through May 17, 1963, a Translators' Institute was held in "Faith Academy", Taytay (Rizal), a few hundred feet high in the hills east of Manila, with a wide view over Manila, Quezon City and Laguna lake. The Institute was organized by the American Bible Society and the Philippine Bible House, with some assistance in matters of finance and personnel by the Swiss and Netherlands Bible Societies. Principal lecturers were Dr. Eugene A. Nida (semantics, science of translation), Dr. Robert G. Bratcher (Biblical background), Mr. Donald Larson (distinctive grammatical features of Philippine languages), and Dr. William A. Smalley (general linguistics, translation procedures). The group of delegates was rather homogeneous, linguistically speaking: with only one exception (Chinese) all of the languages represented were members of the Malayo-Polynesian language family, viz. 30 Philippine languages, 3 Indonesian languages, 4 tribal languages of Taiwan (Formosa). National translators were in a more than 2 : 1 majority, the exact figures being 35 Filipinos, 4 Indonesians, 1 Chinese, 18 western missionaries or missionary linguists.

The purpose of this and similar Translators' Institutes may be summarized as follows, (1) to teach translators not to keep to the words of the text they are translating but to penetrate to the concepts these words are conveying, (2) to help them to render these concepts idiomatically, i.e. to express them in accordance with the structure and genius of the receptor language.

The general method and program of this Institute were similar to those of the Institute in Bobo Dioulasso (for which see *TBT*, Jan. 1963, pp. 1-8). Therefore, I prefer to discuss some specific subjects and features of the Philippine Institute, hoping thus to avoid repetition as well as to give an impression of the very valuable new insights and methods this Institute has been able to convey to the delegates.

2. Some subjects of discussion

(a) "Focus" in Philippine languages

In the lectures of Mr. Larson much attention was given to the fact that Philippine languages have syntactic devices to indicate "focus".¹ The sentence as a whole gives the general description of a situation, but the speaker has the possibility of selecting one feature in that situation, or background, to be specifically highlighted or put into focus.

¹ See also G. Henry Waterman's interesting paper on "Problems of Syntax in the Translation of the Scriptures in Philippine Dialects", in *TBT*, Oct. 1960, pp. 162-172.

The choice affects both the form of the verb and the construction markers going with the components of the sentence, sometimes the word order also. Take for instance the Tagalog sentence *Kumuha na siya ng libro sa mesa*, 'He (*siya*) got (*kumuha*) the book (*libro*) from the table (*mesa*)'. In this sentence the infix *-um-* (in the verb *k-um-uha*) and the form of the pronoun *siya* show that the agent, or source, is in focus; an approximation of this in English would be: 'He is the one who got the book from the table'. The focus, however, can be shifted (1) to the goal, or object, by saying *Kinuha na niya ang libro sa mesa*, 'The book is what he got from the table'; (2) to place: *Kinunan na niya ng libro ang mesa*, 'The table is the place where he got the book'; (3) to the beneficiary: *Ikinuha na niya si Pedro ng libro sa mesa*, 'Pedro is the one for whom he got the book from the table'; (4) to the instrument: *Ipinangkuha na niya ng libro sa mesa para kay Pedro ang kawayan*, 'The bamboo (*kawayan*) is what he used to get the book from the table for Pedro'. Shift in focus may carry important difference in meaning, e.g. *Gupitan mo ako*, lit. 'Place-of-cutting you me', puts 'me' (*ako*) into focus as the place where something should be cut, and is in a barber's shop the normal form to convey the request "Give me a hair-cut"; *Gupitin mo ako*, however, would sound ridiculous in such a situation, as it puts 'me' in focus as the goal and, accordingly, would mean something like 'Cut me' or 'Give me a cut'.

It will be clear that only after careful scrutiny of the original in its wider context will the translator be in a position to decide which one of the components of the sentence can best be taken as being in focus. This decision will often be a difficult one, as the Greek does not indicate focus by clear formal means. Simply to put the subject of the original into focus or to follow the word order of the Greek usually will not do, or even may result in a sentence structure which puts the reader on the wrong track, and causes him to misinterpret the intent of the message.

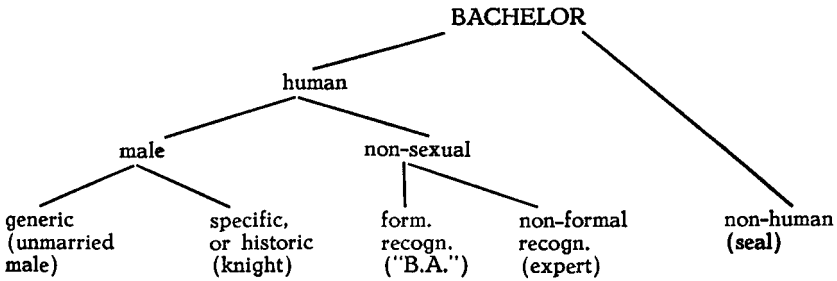
In the hours of collective or individual checking of translations in Philippine languages this matter of focus naturally formed an important item of investigation; often it was felt that rather rigorous changes were required in order to bring out the real intent of the original author.

(b) "Right hand and left hand meaning"

Speaking on semantics Dr. Nida pointed out that we always have to look at meaning in terms of fields, i.e. groups of semantically related concepts, and of contexts, i.e. linguistic and cultural situations in which the term occurs. He discussed rather extensively a new theory of meaning² which combines both aspects, and is based on a close inspection of ambiguities in the use of a word. Take for instance the word "bachelor", which has at least five different meanings, (1) unmarried

² An exposition of this theory, by Professors Katz and Fodor of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology will appear in this or next year's volume of "Language".

adult human being, (2) college graduate, in "Bachelor of arts", (3) expert—a specific meaning the word has in the Philippines, probably influenced by Spanish, (4) young knight, (5) young male fur seal. In the sentence "I heard of a bachelor", taken by itself, the word can potentially have any of the five meanings, but "Yesterday I saw a bachelor" excludes (4) and makes improbable (5); "I saw a bachelor on the rocks along the coast", however, strongly suggests (5) and "The bachelor lives in that house" leads us to take (1) as the most probable meaning, and so on. By these and other contexts we are led to discover four distinctive oppositions, viz. human vs. non-human; male vs. non-sexual; formal vs. non-formal recognition, generic vs. specific, or historic. These may be organized in a systematic pattern as follows:



In this pattern the left-hand side in every split is the meaning which is the first to occur to the hearer when the word is used out of context, or, stated in other words, the meaning a hearer will suppose to be the one intended unless the context clearly indicates another, more specific one. This meaning is usually close to what traditionally is called the literal meaning. Hearing "We saw a bachelor" the hearer will naturally choose the left-hand meaning, taking the word to refer to a human being, unless the addition "on the rocks" makes the meaning "seal" more probable. Similarly "a bachelor" will normally be taken to be an unmarried male person, otherwise one would speak of a "bachelor girl"; or, when the term has been restricted already to "unmarried male person", the hearer will not take it to mean knight unless he is reading a book on history, neither will he take it to mean B.A. unless the context points to the world of learning and universities. The right-hand meaning, therefore, can be called the marked meaning, i.e. the meaning that is only understood when it is marked by some contextual conditioning. The left-hand meaning is the unmarked one.

For a translator it is of utmost importance to decide which meanings of a receptor language term are marked and which are unmarked. The pattern may be different from that of the corresponding term in the source language. In some western languages, for instance, the term "spirit" has "centre of vital and conscious functions of man" as its unmarked, and "ghost, apparition, evil spirit" as its marked meaning.

In other languages it is sometimes possible to find one term combining both meanings, but the relation marked vs. unmarked may be reversed. In such languages a literal rendering of "the spirit drove him out into the wilderness" naturally will convey the idea that it was an evil spirit who drove Jesus, especially so because in many cultures the wilderness is the abode of evil spirits. In such cases the translator will be wise to clarify the context in such a way that the meaning is restricted to "God's Spirit".

This theory, by the way, is useful also in exegetical matters. Once the splits in marked and unmarked meanings of a Greek or Hebrew term have been established, that interpretation of a text will be the soundest, or most probable one, which is based on the unmarked meaning in a generic, non-marking context, or conversely, which does not try to press the generic, unmarked meaning (which sometimes may be thought the "deepest" or theologically most attractive one) into a verse where the contextual conditioning makes a marked, righthand meaning more probable. An example of the latter case is found in the last phrase of Lk. 2:1. There the contextual conditioning of *oikoumenê* seem clearly to point to the marked meaning "Roman Empire", whereas the unmarked meaning is probably "the inhabited world" in general. The phrase, therefore, is better rendered "a general registration throughout the Roman world" (NEB) than "all the world should be enrolled" (RSV). Many exegetes prefer the latter rendering, which can be said to underline the world-wide importance of the birth of Jesus, the Savior of all mankind. This interpretation, however, is, semantically and stylistically speaking, unsound in this context; it would only have validity if the wider context had clear features pointing to the unmarked meaning and so as it were counterbalancing the contextual conditioning of this particular verse.

(c) *Word studies*

Such systematic study of the meaning of words and phrases can, of course, only be made when they are viewed in their widest possible relevant, Biblical context. It was exactly this view that characterized the lectures Dr. Bratcher gave on matters of text and exegesis. His expositions were a constant reminder to keep to the relevant data and, therefore, not to mix styles and usages, e.g. by interpreting the term *dikaïosunê* in Matthew on the basis of the usage in Paul's epistles. They were a constant warning never to lose sight of the fact that the New Testament makes extensive use of Biblical Greek as coined by the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, keeping in mind H. B. Swete's statement: "It is not too much to say that in its literary form and expression the New Testament would have been a widely different book had it been written by authors who knew the Old Testament only in the original, or who knew it in a Greek version

other than that of the LXX." The Greek (*apo*)*lutrôsis* (usually rendered "redemption"), for instance, can often best be interpreted on the basis of those O.T. passages that tell us how God freed Israel from slavery in Egypt; used in this sense the term, of course, does not suggest the concept ransom, i.e. a price paid to effect the release. In a passage such as Lk. 2:38, therefore, the rendering "deliverance", or "liberation" (NEB) is to be preferred to "redemption". At the same time the lectures demonstrated clearly that the exegete should take into account the usage of his author in the widest possible sense. An interesting example of this principle came up in a discussion of Mk. 2:5, "My son, your sins are forgiven." When it is impossible to use a passive form here, as is the case in several receptor languages, the construction has to be shifted to the active, which implies the mentioning of the agent. On the basis of this particular story only, especially vs. 10 ("that you may know that the Son of man has authority . . . to forgive sins") it seems warranted to take "the Son of man" or "Jesus" as the agent in vs. 5. This conclusion, however, is contradicted by two facts from the wider context: Mark makes extensive use of passive constructions as an indirect way of indicating God as the agent; and he never reports Jesus as saying, "I forgive your sins."

In close connection with Dr. Bratcher's exegetical explanations Dr. Nida discussed the translational problems to which these terms might give rise in many receptor languages. As to the rendering of Greek *katallagê*, "reconciliation", for instance, he pointed out that in many versions God has been taken as the object of the verb; such renderings may suggest a hostile God who must be appeased by man, whereas the Biblical view is that God has taken the initiative in reconciling man to Himself, and it is therefore now only man who has to be reconciled to Him. Other renderings meaning 'cessation of mutual hostility' also suggest hostility on God's side. Often, therefore, such traditional renderings have to be discarded for terms or phrases such as 'to remove what separates people from God', 'to make men friends of God', 'to bring men to God'.

A few of these terms Dr. Nida discussed at length, making use of Philippine material produced by delegates, e.g. "forgive" and "save/savior/salvation". Material and discussions would warrant a special article in *The Bible Translator*, but in this general survey they can only be mentioned in passing.

(d) *Meanings of constructions*

Constructions that are formally the same may differ semantically. The difference can often be made clear by so called transformational techniques, tracing the construction back to its kernel or kernels, i.e. to their simplest form. Take for instance the English possessive pronoun. In "his ruler" (kernel: "he rules him"), the word *his* refers to the person

ruled; in "his son" it refers to the father or progenitor; in "his failure" to the person who failed. Often one construction can be the transformation of two kernels, or, in other words, is patient of two interpretations, e.g. "The Lord is my shepherd," which may mean "The Lord is the one who takes care of my sheep," or "The Lord takes care of me." A translator has to render the construction of the original in such a way that the receptor is led to the right kernel. Similarly "my people" (Is. 40:1) should be rendered in such a way that it clearly means "the people ruled by me", not "the people I belong to". The matter may become still more intricate when a construction originates from the combination of two kernels, e.g. "their beloved ruler", combining "They love him" and "He rules them." In such cases a shift to another construction may be imperative in the receptor language.

Other English constructions that often cause trouble are those with the preposition "of" (e.g. the phrase "the will of God", "words of truth", "Jesus of Nazareth", "forgiveness of sins", in which the second noun refers respectively to the agent, the quality, the place of origin, and the object), or those using a verbal noun which is the transformation of a verb (e.g. "his baptism", from "he is baptized/baptizing") and in many receptor languages must be rendered as such.

This is one of the reasons why a good idiomatic translation simply must be syntactically different from the original. If the word classes and word order are the same in original and translation, the latter is strongly suspect. This rule of thumb was extensively used in the afternoon sessions, during which translations were checked in the same way as was done in Bobo Dioulasso (cp. *TBT*, Jan. 1963, pp. 4f.).

(e) "Saint Ambiguity"

Many translators of traditional versions seem to have had a predilection for ambiguous renderings. So the translator avoids part of his responsibility; where he feels uncertain he tries to leave the decision to the reader. But this is unfair to the reader, who is less qualified to make decisions than the translator is. (If the qualifications of both are the same, the translator is not fit for his job!) This practice is often defended by the theoretical argument that the translator should faithfully reproduce the ambiguities of the original. Thus, for practical and/or theoretical reasons passages, especially in translations of the Bible, are often rendered ambiguously; many Bible translators are devoted worshippers of "Santa Ambigüidade" (Saint Ambiguity), to borrow a phrase used by a Brazilian translation committee.

The theory just mentioned actually confuses two basically different things, viz. ambiguity in terms of the source language and in terms of the receptor language. The first is an exception. An author may, by oversight, use an expression that is ambiguous for his hearers or readers. If he does so he seriously hampers the communication of his message.

Being keenly interested in such communication, as good authors usually are, he normally tries to avoid unintentional ambiguities. In some special cases, however, he may intentionally choose an ambiguous expression, e.g. to make possible a pun, or play on words. This is a conscious stylistic device, not hampering but enlivening communication, provided that the context gives the reader the necessary clues how to solve the problem of communication and how to interpret the ambiguous expression. In such a case the translator certainly has to try to imitate the ambiguity of the source by using an equivalent ambiguity in the translation. If he cannot reflect such a play on words, he can explain the problem briefly in a marginal note. But, as said before this is an exception.

At the same time, what is unambiguous for users of the source language because of their familiarity with its linguistic structure, the stylistic form, and the source culture, may sound quite ambiguous in the ears of the users of another language. E.g. the absence of formal pluralization in many languages does not trouble the users of those languages but may result in ambiguous sentences in the judgement of users of English or French. The structure of English or French simply requires the explicit choice of singular or plural, in the same way as the structure of Philippine language usually requires the absence of such indication, ambiguous as the result may sound in the ears of non-Filipinos.

This leads to the general rule that the translator has to shun ambiguity in terms of the receptor language, unless the context points to the intentional use of ambiguity in terms of the source language. Thus the worship of Santa Ambigüidade is declared to be a heresy that has to be relentlessly persecuted by translational inquisition!

(f) *Procedures*

During the second half of the Institute much time was given to the discussion of matters such as procedure and organization, text to be followed, and so on. Again I shall have to restrict myself to a few points.

A translator always has to keep in mind the difference between his base and his model. His *base* must provide him with the concepts he has to express in the receptor language as faithfully and idiomatically as possible. He is bound to these concepts, but not to the source language words and forms in which the original expresses them. In the case of the Philippines the base will often be an English version. As such the American Revised Standard Version (1946) was recommended. Elsewhere the base may be the official version in the national language, or in the lingua franca of the region. Even when the translation is made from the original text in Greek and Hebrew, translation committees usually do well to take such a version, one that is well known and respected in the region, as the standard of their exegesis

and interpretation of the original. In order to understand the concepts found in the base as clearly as possible, it should be studied with the help of commentaries, other versions, handbooks, concordances, and so on. There may be cases, of course, where the translator is led to disagree with the exegesis found in his base or standard. In such cases he should refrain from taking an individual decision, but should refer the matter to a wider group of consultants.

The translator's *model*, on the other hand, embodies as it were his ideal in translational matters; it is his guide in the decisions he has to make as to standards of equivalence (leaning towards formal or towards dynamic equivalence), to style (rather archaic, literary, colloquial, or simplified), to communication load, dependent on the categories of readers and hearers he is envisaging (rather high for church leaders, theological students etc., or medium for the normal church members, or rather low for new readers or for groups on or beyond the fringe of the Christian community). Good models in English are the New English Bible (1961), and C. Kingsley Williams' "A New Translation in Plain English", (1952) both only the New Testament.

The translation, when ready in a preliminary draft, has to be checked as to its readability and usefulness. Criteria in judging these are (1) efficiency: maximal reception for minimum effort of decoding; (2) comprehension of the intent of the original; (3) potential equivalence of response: the reader should be able to respond to the translation in essentially the same way as the original readers were able to respond to the original text.

The first point is largely a matter of "transitional probability", i.e. of the extent to which a form is determined in its probability of occurrence by other forms in the context. One of the ways to test this is by the "Cloze" technique.⁴ A group of persons is given a passage of a text, e.g. a draft of the translation of a Bible portion, in which every fifth or tenth word is left blank, the frequency being dependent on the decoding ability of the test persons. These persons are asked to fill in the blanks as best they can guess. This technique can profitably be used to compare two or more renderings of the same original with each other—at the sessions such a comparison was made between a RSV and a NEB passage—or a translation with a selection from a native text of similar style, in order to assess their relative ratio of transitional probability.

These and other methods of testing a translation are important helps for a basic translator or a translation committee to check the reactions to their translation amongst their constituency, in the first place amongst their consultants and the members of their advisory

⁴ Cf. Wilson L. Taylor, "Recent Developments in the Use of 'Cloze Procedure'", *Journalism Quarterly*, 33/1, 1956, and the same author, "Cloze Procedure: A New Tool For Measuring Readability," Fall, 1953.

committee(s). Dr. Smalley discussed the set-up of such committees, their task, and relationship to the translator(s), especially in the case of revision work. In doing so he gave many important advices, based on the wide experience the Bible Societies have gathered in the course of some 150 years, and giving proof of sound judgment of persons and circumstances. I can only mention a few of his remarks, such as the need of providing strong counterbalance(s) to dominating committee members; the necessity to be constantly on the look out for new junior translators amongst interested church members, elders or pastors; the danger of too individual a style when one basic translator is in charge, the usefulness of a consultative committee, in the first place for establishing a relationship between the translator(s) and their constituency, but also as a place to test persons on their possible value as translators or advisors; the condition that such a committee should give advice by correspondence only and that the final decisions should remain in the hands of the translation committee; the importance of investigating the desire for a revision, the reactions to the old version(s), and the particular wishes as to details, in interviews and conferences with knowledgeable church members and interested non-christian authorities; the necessity to work out rather detailed rules about text, style, orthography etc., to be followed by all, and the disastrous results of allowing one person (translator, advisory specialist, or committee member) to let his individual views prevail over those rules; the checks and balances necessary in case of the cooperation between a national translator not knowing Greek, or Hebrew, and a missionary specialist versed in Biblical languages. On the latter point, one of the guests from India present at that particular lecture ventured the opinion that such cooperation is nearly always unsatisfactory, because in his experience the national translator's plea for idiomatic wording and dynamic equivalence usually has to yield to the missionary's predilection for formal equivalence and the wording of the original. In his reply Dr. Smalley pointed out that such a clash between translator and Biblical expert will not occur when both have a clear insight into the theory of translation.

3. Evaluation, criticisms, and desiderata

The really important results of such an Institute will show only in the long run. A few things, however, can be said already, partly on the basis of remarks made by delegates, either in a questionnaire handed out to all of them on one of the last days of the Institute, or in more extensive evaluations written down by some of them.

Several delegates pointed out that the lectures had helped them to obtain a clearer insight in the Biblical message, and critically to evaluate the Biblical foundations of their particular brand of theology. One of them, after having heard certain lectures, remarked that he would have

to change his sermons! Apparently he had been stressing aspects which now he felt to have been accretions to the message as it had existed in the mind and had been written down by the hands of the Biblical author. Another delegate wrote: "(The Institute) has strengthened my belief that 'inspiration' is more associated with the content of the message, than with the form, although the form as such is important as a medium or as a vehicle. I came from a conservative background and I was exposed to the belief that the content and the form are one and the same."

The suggestion had been made to the delegates who in turn led the morning devotion that they might include a personal testimony about the spiritual riches the work of translation had caused them to discover. In some cases this led these speakers to dwell at length on rather technical matters, on the history, location, problems and circumstances of their translation work. One of the delegates wrote that in his opinion the devotional periods should not be used in this way, but that speakers should concentrate on the message of a Biblical passage. Of course, they may apply that message to the work of translation, viewing their work in the light of the Bible, but it is that light and not the details of their work that should predominate in a devotional period.

Some delegates felt that lectures such as those of Mr. Larson should have been given by a Filipino, a foreigner not being able to teach a Philippine language to Filipinos. There is, I think, some truth in this criticism: the native speaker can combine systematic grammatical exposition with a feeling for idiomatic detail to an extent no foreigner can ever reach. Yet, when translations were checked it often became apparent that the crux of the matter actually lay in one or more of the grammatical features discussed by Mr. Larson, and insufficiently recognized by the native translator. This was clearly demonstrated when, at the end of the Institute, two native translators produced a revision of their translation, which at an earlier session had been discussed and rather strongly criticized on the basis of Mr. Larson's exposition. Their revision showed that they had found these criticisms to be valid, and had corrected their renderings accordingly.—Other delegates felt that the first part of the lectures on communication and on semantic analysis had been too theoretical; at a later stage the students would have been in a better position to comprehend and appreciate this theoretical background.

Some desiderata were expressed for future 'Translators' Institutes:

1. A textbook giving an outline of the material to be discussed, in order that in the lectures more time and attention could be given to detailed explanation and classroom discussion;
2. Parallel lectures on parts of the material for national and missionary delegates separately, in order better to meet their respective needs and experience;

3. A more strict organization of the linguistic and translational workshops.

Some of the best translators amongst the delegates probably often had the feeling that they were hearing things, not new to them, yet approached from a new angle, or put in a new light and therefore gaining in clarity and revealing unexpected aspects. They will have appreciated a characterization Dr. Smalley gave of the prospective result of the lectures on linguistics and translation: "Intuition made explicit." Without such intuition any outstanding translation is impossible. Yet the job will be more effectively done, when prejudices can be corrected, methods rationalized, insights exchanged, and the common goal clearly envisaged, as was done in this Translators' Institute.

THE TRANSLATION OF SACRED TEXTS

SPECIAL ISSUE OF BABEL

The most recent issue of *BABEL*, *International Journal of Translation* (no. 1-2/1963), is specially devoted to the translation of sacred texts. This issue, which was produced under the editorship of Dr. Eugene A. Nida, contains the following articles:

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| E. A. Nida | The Translation of Religious Texts (Preface) |
| W. Schwarz | The History of Principles of Bible Translation in the Western World |
| W. J. Bradnock | Religious Translation into Non-Western Languages within the Protestant Tradition |
| J. Wils | Aspects of Sacral Language |
| L. Hurvitz | The Problem of Translating Buddhist Canonical Texts into Chinese |
| J. M. Kitagawa | Buddhist Translation in Japan |
| D. Rahbar | Aspects of the Qur'ān Translation |
| W. Perston | Borrowing from Sanskrit into Kannada |
| R. H. Milner | The English Bible 1611-1961: Some Literary Considerations |
| A. R. Hulst | Bible Translating into Dutch |
| K. Thieme | Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig's Translation of the Old Testament |
| E. Cary | The Word of God into the Languages of Men |
| J. E. Grimes | Translating Incommensurables |
| F. L. Battles | Englishing the Institutes of John Calvin |
| E. A. Nida | Bible Translating and the Science of Linguistics |

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