

- Age of the trainees: 23-40 years.
- Content: the trainer should have a written training syllabus available; at the beginning it should be explained carefully to the trainees so that they know what is to be covered. The written material is also for their further and future reference.
- Tools: the trainer should prepare a written list of all necessary tools such as a computer, and helps such as a range of dictionaries, translation theory and linguistic materials, and exegetical tools, including the series of UBS Handbooks.
- The team coordinator:
 - his/her age should be close to that of the translators;
 - he/she needs to be particularly good in human relationships within a team;
 - he/she should be able to organize and chair a weekly meeting with the team;
 - English language skill is necessary;
 - as to the monitoring of the team, he/she is specifically trained by the training officer. The team coordinator must be reliable in the performance of their duties.
- The monitoring by the TO will be conducted face to face (in some sessions of the meetings between the TC and the team) as well as by email (exchanging messages that contain a scheme pre-established by the TC and sending it, filled, as a weekly report).

ESTEBAN VOTH

TRAINING PROGRAM FOR TRANSLATORS IN LATIN AMERICA

The author is a UBS translation consultant residing in Argentina.

The translation program for Bible translators in the Latin American region is an exciting endeavor. It is a multifaceted program that features matters of culture, exegesis, communication, diverse religious backgrounds, different levels of academic training, and last but not least, a tremendous desire to learn so as to communicate the message of the biblical text in the best way possible.

History

During the year 2000, at the request of Dr Bill Mitchell, I began to pursue translator training alternatives that might be implemented in the Latin American region. I had already been Academic Dean of two theological seminaries in the previous 20 years. During 2001, I did extensive research on available training programs that existed in other parts of the world. Subsequently I began a dialogue with the leaders of the Universidad Bíblica

Latinoamericana (UBL) in Costa Rica. The UBL is a well-known and very reputable university that offers various degrees in Bible and Theology.

Throughout that year a number of meetings were held with the UBL authorities and faculty, and these resulted in an agreement to offer a certificate degree on a joint basis. Both UBS and UBL would be the sponsoring institutions. Once the agreement had been reached, along with other UBS consultants I began developing a curriculum for the course of study. It had been decided that a program of 12 courses would be developed. I presented the curriculum and course of study to the UBL authorities and this was subsequently approved. The program of study began officially in March of 2002.

Philosophy of education and methodology

The theoretical framework that guides the translation training program is that education is not merely the transfer of information. The professors are encouraged to look at students not as banks where one deposits information, but as persons who need to interact with ideas, concepts, and tools. As such, the goal of the entire program is that real transformation takes place in each student and faculty member. This presupposes that for learning to take place the student must be able to appropriate material in order to transform it and be transformed by it as well.

This approach means that certain elements must be present throughout the entire educational process. First of all, it is of utmost importance that the student develop critical thinking skills. In order for the student to appropriate the information and to evaluate it, she or he must exercise a degree of engagement with the material so that it can then be part and parcel of the person's experience. If and when this happens, one can suggest that no person is the same after a learning experience. At the same time we recognize that this kind of learning most often leads to an identity crisis. And yet, this is also viewed as positive and necessary in the whole educational process.

Secondly, the whole learning process is eminently practical. The goal is to provide theory and concepts that can in turn be put into practice. In this sense we might view learning as being instrumental. Knowledge becomes an instrument to be used, not a commodity to be accumulated. There is constant concern that whatever theoretical basis is considered, it be developed in such a way that the student can perceive the practical outcomes of the theory.

Finally, it is hoped that the learning process will transform the student and in turn reality itself. There must be change effected in the person as well as in the environment if indeed true education takes place. In this particular case, when the translator is transformed by the educational process, his translation work is affected, which finally has a different effect on the community who receives the translation.

The methodology that has been implemented, though not ideal, has been one that has been viable for the various Latin American contexts. Each course is taught during a one-week intensive course. Students gather in San José, Costa Rica at the UBL, for two-week sessions, twice a year—March and

October. This system pulls the translators away from their projects a total of only one month per year. At times, this educational process has delayed the completion of certain aspects of a given project. However, the enrichment attained far surpasses the frustration caused by an occasional delay.

Program of study

After much discussion between UBS translation consultants and the UBL authorities, the following 12 courses were chosen to form part of the program of study that leads to a certificate in Bible Translation. The course titles were expressed in more popular and understandable terms:

- What is the Old Testament?
- What is the New Testament?
- Daily Life in Biblical Times
- Reading the Bible in Latin America
- How to Study the Bible
- The Bible: a Literary Work
- How to Understand Language
- Language and Society
- Person and Community
- Orality and Visuality in Bible Translation
- Bible Translation Principles
- Bible Translation Practice.

The program has no formal educational pre-requisites. Though open to students of the UBL, the course of study is primarily directed to the indigenous translators who already work on projects sponsored by UBS. In fact, 95% of the students are related in some way or another to UBS translation or publication projects. This means that the training is designed to help specific needs that these translators have.

As can be seen from the list of courses offered, there is theological training as well as linguistic, anthropological, and translation training. At this level, and given the methodology of course work, it is not possible to offer instruction in the biblical languages. The reality in Latin America is that most indigenous translators translate from Spanish translations that already exist in their contexts.

Thus far, all classes have been conducted on the campus of the UBL. Students come from at least ten countries and stay in the dorm rooms of the UBL. In this way, the students also participate in the life of the university which is very helpful. A significant advantage of holding classes at the UBL is the very good theological and social sciences library that is made available to the students by the UBL. This allows us to guide the students in developing reading and research skills while they are on campus. It also means that at least one month out of the year, these translators are in an academic context where they are exposed to other lectures in the evenings. As well they are able to interact with other students and faculty. This certainly is a way of opening up

new horizons for the translators, which in turn helps them do translation work from a more interdisciplinary perspective. All teaching is done in Spanish, even though the level of Spanish fluency varies among the indigenous translators.

The professors for this program have come primarily from the team of UBS TOs in the Americas. However, two professors from the UBL have taught courses in this program. We are committed to having professors from the UBL participate in teaching certain courses. There is a good spirit of cooperation and partnership that enriches the program tremendously.

The entire program is coordinated by one person who acts as a kind of academic dean. The coordinator appoints the professors for the different courses. A degree of coherence is sought so that duplication is avoided. An emphasis on practical matters is part of each course. Once the theoretical framework is set forth, the professor seeks to involve the students in group discussions and projects. Oftentimes this is done by grouping together those working in the same language or on the same translation project. Whether it is a task of exegesis, of discerning linguistic characteristics, of discovering literary genres, or the translation of difficult passages, much time is spent working in groups and applying what has been taught. This helps the students discover their own shortcomings and then find ways to overcome them as they work together. This process also helps them see how other cultures and language groups have solved the same problems they are facing. The interaction between them is one of the most important outcomes of the training program. Students realize that they are not alone in their struggles to communicate a foreign text into their own language. They begin to feel part of a much larger family of translators that faces the same kinds of struggles. In addition they learn significantly from each other, and thus discover new and exciting alternatives for their work.

Challenges

In a training program such as the one described and practised in Latin America there are a number of challenges. It must be said that none of these challenges need to be considered as negative in nature. On the contrary, the fact that these challenges exist means that alternatives need to be offered. In this way, the challenges serve as catalysts for change, for improvements, and for excellency.

One of the most important challenges that we face in training a group such as the one we have is the diversity in educational background and training that exists among the students. Most of them only have primary education, whereas a few have master's level degrees. In addition, we have gypsies who have never had any formal education, that is, they have never gone to a local government approved school. Though the gypsy translators are quite intelligent, they are not aware of technical grammatical terminology. We have been fortunate in building a community spirit whereby those who are more advanced academically are willing to be patient and help those who are less prepared. Nevertheless, this kind of diversity poses a challenge both to the

professor and to the program in terms of its content and curriculum development.

A second challenge is the diversity present in terms of theological persuasion and confession. Some students are from communities that have been profoundly influenced by very conservative evangelical denominations. Others come from Protestant groups who are more open in terms of their interpretation of Scriptures and lifestyle. Finally we have students who come from a Catholic background whose experience of the Christian faith is quite different from the groups mentioned previously. However, once again this challenge can be turned into something very positive. An atmosphere of dialogue has been created and very significant and enlightening discussions emerge. This then leads to developing more mature attitudes of acceptance and of tolerance among the students. We believe that this will have a positive effect in their communities as they share the experience of having interacted with Christians who think and act differently.

A third challenge is the development of materials that can be used in other contexts. We have not been successful in writing up teaching materials that others could use in different contexts. The one-week intensive course goes by so quickly, that it is very hard to develop and write up a subject matter. This is because the teaching is so contextualized to the group and to the context in which the subject matter is taught. Nevertheless, a written course still remains a goal and challenge to be met by the various professors involved in the training program.

A fourth challenge that we face is the logistical and financial matter. Some students come from quite a distance to San José, Costa Rica. This can be very costly and we have to insist that students stay for the two-week period. For some this is costly because they carry other responsibilities. A related challenge is the programming. Not all students attended the first courses or were able to take all of the courses offered thus far. This means that we will graduate six students this academic year, and will have a number of others who are missing different kinds of courses. Matching their course needs with scheduling restrictions will be a new dimension that will be a reality in 2005.

Dreams and future plans

As we come to the end of the first cycle of 12 courses in three years' time, we indeed are looking forward to new possibilities regarding the training of translators.

The most immediate plan to be implemented (November 2004) is the opening of a new site. Summer Institute of Linguistics leaders approached us asking about the possibility that UBS offer a similar program in Perú, thinking primarily of the large group of translators that SIL has in Perú. A meeting was held in April of 2004 between SIL personnel and UBS representatives, and after extended discussion it was decided to launch the same training program in Lima, Perú in November of 2004. The program will be very similar, though the professors will vary inasmuch as some of the specialists from SIL will participate actively in the program under the coordination of the UBS translation officer. The cycle will be run during the months of May and

November of each year. The teaching in Lima will be done on the premises of the local Bible Society (Sociedad Bíblica Peruana). The Bible Society in Perú offers excellent classroom space with all the modern capabilities.

This program will serve a number of purposes. First of all, it will help train more indigenous translators in the Americas. Secondly, it will help to decentralize the program in Costa Rica. This will help reduce costs particularly in reference to translators who come from the southern cone of South America. Thirdly, it will add flexibility to the program in terms of courses being offered at different venues and at different times of the year. On November 15, 2004 the first class of the training program in Lima began. A group of 30 students gathered together to study Socio-Cultural Anthropology and What is the New Testament? The launching of the program has been a real success.

A second dream that we have worked on already is the possibility of offering full academic degrees in Bible translation. Conversations have been held, and preliminary plans have been drawn up with the leaders of the UBL. In the near future, we hope to offer an equivalent of a Bachelor's degree in Bible translation. This degree would be fully accredited by the government in Costa Rica and would open up important doors for any person who successfully finished the program. Our plan is to build upon the experience gained with the certificate program and then launch the academic degree program.

Our most ambitious goal is to finally offer a Master's degree in Bible translation. Once again, this would build upon the Bachelor's degree. We hope that one day, we can offer the most excellent training for future translators of the Bible in Latin America. We are very fortunate to have a very good relationship with the UBL. They have been very cooperative and are open to dreaming about new endeavors.

Preliminary evaluation

The effectiveness of the overall training program is ultimately measured by the quality of Bible translations produced. In other words, has anything changed? Has transformation taken place? Have the translators been challenged by new ways of interpreting and translating the biblical text? Has methodology been affected by the course work?

Even though we cannot measure outcomes in every case with absolute preciseness, we can report that in many translation projects the quality of work has increased quite significantly. We constantly receive comments and information regarding the changes that have taken place on the field as a result of the training received. The quality of translations has improved in a remarkable manner. In fact, one of the consistent comments we receive from the students and their project coordinators is that they have to return to previously translated texts to make sure that they are more faithful to the source text and to insure that they communicate more effectively in their own languages.

One of the goals that we have achieved is that students now realize how important it is to "study" a biblical text before proceeding to translate it. A careful exegesis of the text prior to translating it gives the translator more

confidence, more freedom, and ultimately a better *sense* of the source text. This process has been enhanced tremendously by becoming aware of the cultural background of any given text. The students comment over and over again that understanding the cultural setting of the biblical text illuminates the meaning of that text and gives the translator greater confidence.

We have also seen that translators have become somewhat more objective in their evaluation process. For example, when there are “textual difficulties” and many valid options are available, the translator does not merely choose on the basis of personal preference, but takes into consideration what would be most acceptable in his or her own community at large. In addition, the sense of teamwork has been enhanced in the program. Students in our program have realized that working as part of a translation team helps them find better words for the translation, helps them with speed, and once again infuses them with more confidence in the overall process. This is the outcome of having students work as teams during the entire training program. Most of the assignments are designed so that they must work in teams in order to solve translation problems.

Another positive outcome has been that translators have a renewed passion for their work. They often comment that analyzing a text with the tools that they have learned helps them discover the “power” of the text. This in turn enables them to translate a text with more passion and faithfulness, while attempting to reflect the movements and feelings of the text.

Finally, the training process has provided hermeneutical tools for pastoral and preaching tasks. Students come away renewed both academically and spiritually. Their ability to communicate the text has been enhanced tremendously and they are now more apt to become involved in communicating the text in pastoral contexts than ever before.

A final reflection

For far too long the indigenous groups in Latin America have suffered oppression and much discrimination. Translating the Bible into their own languages has been a way to restore their dignity as human beings made in the image of God. What has emerged in the training program is that indigenous translators are gaining a renewed appreciation for their own traditions, stories, and overall culture. They find that their own worldviews oftentimes are much more closely related to the biblical counterparts than the western dominant cultures that have subjugated them. Discovering this reality through this translator training program has provided a sense of *worth* that hitherto was absent. This program has done much to restore the image of God in each and every one of the translators.