

## GRAMMAR SPOT-CHECKS OF TRANSLATION

For several years in the Peru Branch of the Wycliffe Bible Translators, a committee of three checked the translation of at least the first gospel and first epistle of each translator. During the check, one member usually concentrated on conformity to the Nestle text and matters of exegesis, another on conformity to the Spanish version followed (generally the Nacar-Colunga version, with some exceptions listed as deviations), and another on comparison of the grammatical constructions<sup>1</sup> in the translation with those found in vernacular text material. As many more linguists satisfactorily met the basic requirements for language analysis and began translating, it became necessary to streamline the checking techniques.

Since 1962 only one member of the Translation Committee is assigned to check any given translation. To facilitate the work of the checker each translator takes much of the responsibility. In preparation for the check, he fills out a form stating each exegetical problem, his rendering, and supporting references; another form stating each cultural problem in the receptor language, his solution, and the basis for it; and another form stating each deviation from the Spanish version and the basis for his choice of rendering. These forms are given to the checker before he makes his check, but prior to this they have already served a major purpose in helping the translator think through his own problems, thus lightening the load for the checker.<sup>2</sup>

The responsibility for evaluating the conformity of the translation to the grammatical structure of the receptor language is assumed by a grammar consultant. This consultant spot-checks the first translation presented by each translator before it reaches the translation checker.

The grammar consultant, in preparing his check, studies in detail the description of the grammar. This description is prepared in order to meet the basic requirements of language analysis before the translator begins full-time translation. The following analytical goals are met in the description:

A. Analysis of all levels of grammatical structure up through the sentence. (The Grammar Committee recommends tagmemic and matrix theory<sup>3</sup> for

<sup>1</sup> The procedures for checking the grammatical constructions in the translation were largely the work of James Lorient and included checks of paragraph structure, identification of actors and objects, logical sequences, and sequence of events. Lorient's mimeographed manuscript, *Translation, Vernacular Texts, and Linguistic Structure*, includes many of his contributions along this line.

<sup>2</sup> A by-product of filling out these forms is that they are then available as helps to other translators.

<sup>3</sup> Tagmemic theory was developed by Kenneth L. Pike in *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior*, Vols. 1-3, Summer Institute of Linguistics, Santa Ana, Calif. The basic concepts of the theory are a functional *slot* in a

the analysis, but the analysis is not required to be based on tagmemics or in publishable form.) A brief statement on style should be included.

**Morphology goal:** A presentation of all word classes with their affixes. The order of affixes should be indicated in charts, with illustrations justifying the placing of the affixes in these particular orders. All affixes with their allomorphs should be listed. There should be a separate chart for each word class that fills a distinct slot in the sentence structure.

**Syntax goal:** Charts, diagrams, or formulas of the various clause types, with an indication of the word classes or morpheme classes which come in various slots in each clause type. Supporting illustrations should be included. Similarly, on a lower level, phrase types, and on a higher level, sentence types, should be described. A brief description of paragraph and other higher-level structures should be given.

**B.** The analysis should be based on the equivalent of a minimum of 50 pages of double-spaced typewritten text including narration, description and conversation. After detailed analysis of this corpus, it is suggested that a larger body of texts be used to check for filling in gaps.

**C.** The equivalent of ten pages of double-spaced typewritten text should be submitted to the Grammar Committee with the analysis. These should be analyzed syntactically with morphological analysis at least complete enough to show slot markers and other morphological items which are significant in the syntax. A literal translation should be given beneath each word. A free translation with sentences numbered to match numbers in the text should be given at the end.

Using analyses which had been completed in conformity to the above goals, trial grammar spot-checks were made in two languages. As a result of this trial, a further section was added to the analytical goals. It includes a number of questions which are not necessarily covered in the grammar analysis,<sup>1</sup> e.g., how is the subject or actor of a sentence identified as being the same or different from the subject or actor in preceding sentences? When are pronouns used to refer back to a noun of a preceding sentence? How are the actors and objects kept straight in such sentences as 'he hit him' and 'they told them'?

As the consultant studies these materials along with the analysis, items construction and the *class* of items which can fill that slot. For example, in a given language there may be an object slot which may be filled by one of the following class of items: a noun, a noun with its modifier, or a noun with its appositive. The slot plus the class of items filling it comprises a *tagmeme*.

Matrix theory, as developed by Pike in 'Dimensions of Grammatical Constructions', *Language*, Vol. 38, No. 3, 1962, is built on tagmemic theory. A matrix chart is the grammatical equivalent of a typical phonemic chart in which contrasts in point of articulation are listed horizontally and contrasts in manner of articulation are listed vertically. Thus contrastive modes (such as indicative, imperative, and interrogative) may be listed vertically. An advantage of this type of analysis is that one is able to see quickly the salient features of the grammar.

<sup>1</sup> Lorient's manuscript, cited above, was one of the sources of the questions. Others were adapted from John Beekman's 'A Questionnaire for Translators', *The Bible Translator*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1961. Since over half of the questions in Beekman's article are answered in the basic grammar description, a selection of the items to be studied was made from his questionnaire.

are noted which could be effectively checked by a comparison of the frequency count of a particular construction in the text with the frequency in the translation. For example, in one language the translator is asked to count the number of sentences out of a hundred which are in direct quotation form, since many concepts are expressed by quotation in that receptor language which would be regular narrative sentences in Indo-European languages. The translator is asked to make these counts<sup>1</sup> in addition to others which are required for each language, e.g. frequency of nominalized verbs.

After the consultant studies all of the material, he chooses verses in which certain constructions he wishes to check against the grammar analysis are likely to be employed. It has been helpful to choose several different verses for each point since one or more might be translated in such a way as to avoid the construction in question. Usually about 80 passages checking about 40 constructions are utilized. The following are illustrative of the passages chosen in Mark:

First, the translator is asked to read a literal translation of Mark 4: 35–40 in order for the checker to get the ‘feel’ of the translation as compared to text. In this paragraph he also checks the frequency of connectives and compares it with text; checks the positions of subject, object, and other clause-level tagmemes; and checks to see how reference is kept straight when third person plural and third person singular pronouns are the same. When third person plural and third person singular pronouns differ, Mark 5: 1–20 is checked first, since the principal actors mentioned are both third person singular.

Mark 1: 9 and 3: 8 are useful for checking complex fillers of a location slot and the relative positions of general to specific location or vice versa. Mark 2: 18 is useful for checking two subjects of a single verb, and 3: 35 for checking three subjects of a single verb. Mark 3: 21–35 is used for checking identification of speakers in dialogue. Mark 1: 7 is used for checking two verbs of saying in a single sentence, i.e. ‘preached, saying’.

Since many of the same items are checked in each translation, a new list of verses does not have to be made for each check. The verses chosen often have their first three chapters checked before completing the rest of Mark. The way in which an item is handled is, of course, expected to be different from language to language.

Since only nine of these grammar spot-checks have been made at the time of writing (June 1963), the procedure is continually being modified. To date, however, the checks have served to cut the time spent in checking the grammar of a translation to three days of preparation by the consultant and three to six hours of checking with the translator. Through the use of selected verses in which particular grammatical constructions occur, a large proportion of the types of grammatical constructions can be checked in a few hours.

The requirements for beginning translation are admittedly quite stiff. But the consistent results of the grammar spot-checks justify the long months—

<sup>1</sup> For help in making frequency counts, translators are referred to ‘Measuring “Naturalness” in a Translation’, Joseph E. Grimes, *The Bible Translator*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 1963.

or years—spent in analysis. The translators become so aware of the constructions in the receptor language and of the kinds of changes which must be made from the Greek constructions that a wrong construction is seldom found. The translator usually discovers it before the translation is checked.

One translator discovered, while answering the additional questions, that two verbs of 'saying' never occur together and changed expressions such as 'answering, he said' in his translation to 'he said'. In another translation the grammar spot-check showed that location occurs after the subject more frequently than in text; the translation was modified accordingly. In still another translation, a frequency count showed more short sentences and sentences of only one clause than occur in text. Consequently, longer sentences with more complex structures (through more frequent use of subordinate clauses and verb phrases) were suggested.

After a grammar spot-check is completed with satisfactory results, the grammar consultant recommends that no further detailed grammar checks of translation be made by a consultant, but lists items which need to be watched if the check has pointed out problems which consistently occur. The translation is then ready for exegetical check by a translation checker, who does not need to concern himself with the grammar except as a particular construction affects the exegesis or to watch certain problem constructions which the grammar consultant pointed out in his report. The translator will, of course, continually check his translation against the grammar analysis of the receptor language.

## BOOK REVIEW

**New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures, Rendered from the Original Language by the New World Bible Translation Committee. Watchtower Bible and Tract Society Inc., Brooklyn, N.Y., 1950, pp. 792, six maps; \$1.00. (Frequently reprinted with occasional minor alterations.)**

This rendering of the New Testament was released on August 2, 1950, during the eight-day international Theocracy's Increase Assembly of Jehovah's Witnesses, held at Yankee Stadium, New York City. According to a key statement in the Foreword, 'It befits the significant time of transition from the old world to the righteous new world that translations of the Scriptures today should as far as possible eliminate the misleading influence of religious traditions which have their roots in paganism' (p. 7).

The Greek text chosen as the basis of the New World Translation is that prepared by Westcott and Hort (1881). Besides this text, those prepared by Nestle, Bover, and Merk, as well as Legg's two volumes of Matthew and Mark, have also been utilized. At various passages footnotes provide information from individual Greek manuscripts as well as ancient and modern translations. The principles of translation have been, in the words