

Biblical languages and Bible translation practice

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For all who are part of the world of high level theological education, one may wonder why the question even needs to be addressed. One would not think otherwise for all major European language translations. For those who work with Bible translators across Africa and in many other parts of the world, a 'yes' answer is not so unanimous, and many times accompanied by numerous cautions.

Actually the practice of translating the Bible from an intermediary language text rather from the original languages is quite ancient. This chapter will look at a bit of the history of Bible translation practice in reference to Biblical languages, and seek to understand the issues involved. In conclusion, it will propose how we can overcome the challenges of translation from Biblical languages and achieve higher quality and respected translations across Africa.

An historical overview of translation practice

The original manuscripts of the Bible are in Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. Copies of these ancient manuscripts have been collected over the centuries and very carefully conserved and studied in order to establish the most original reading of the both the Old and New Testaments. The first known translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, was a translation from Hebrew to Greek for the Jews in Egypt in the third and second centuries before Jesus Christ¹. Early in the Christian era, most translations were made from this Greek translation (called the Septuagint) into languages such as Old Latin, and Coptic. However, in the 4th century, Jerome was commissioned by Pope Damasus I (366-384) to improve upon the Old Latin version. Jerome considered it important to translate the Old Testament directly from the original Hebrew, and applied himself to learning Hebrew. As a result, Jerome produced a Latin translation directly based on the Hebrew text, (later called the Vulgate) in 309-405. This does not mean that he disregarded the current Greek and Latin translations available at that time. In fact, there is evidence that he was influenced by these other versions (Würthwein 1988: 97).² According to Würthwein (1988: 96), Jerome was the only western Christian at the time qualified to undertake such a task. Since then, the Catholic and Protestant churches have looked to ancient Hebrew manuscripts as the most authoritative and faithful rendering of the Old Testament, while at the same time taking into consideration the Septuagint readings, which could sometimes reveal possible alternative readings in the ancient Hebrew manuscripts that the Greek translators may have accessed.

So right from the beginning of Bible translation history, there were translations of translations. The reasons are probably multiple: First, the translators may not have had good knowledge of the

¹ For more information see Würthwein (1988: 50-54).

² See also: Wegner (2006: 95-77).

original language, but second, the Septuagint was considered inspired and canonical by many church leaders, including Augustine, in the time of Jerome (Würthein 1988:96) .

With the invention of the printing press in 1450³, Bible translation activity picked up, and Protestant scholars such as Martin Luther translated directly from the original language manuscripts available to them at that time. The King James Version and, later, the Louis Segond Version in French are some of the results of these efforts. Within the Catholic Church, however, Jerome's Latin translation became so authoritative that for a long time, it was the intermediary source text for Catholic translations. This is ironical, given Jerome's own principle of translating from the original language texts. However, in modern times, the most authoritative translations of both the Catholic and Protestant churches are from the Biblical texts in the original languages.

With the explosion of Bible translation and mission activity in the last two centuries, many people have applied themselves to the task, both Biblical language scholars, as well as ordinary missionaries who simply used the King James Version as their source text. This was especially true in the African context where Africans, endowed with the rich knowledge of their own languages, were variously trained first in European languages, and only rarely, in Biblical languages so as to contribute to the task of Bible translation.

The first secondary school in Africa, Fourah Bay College, was founded in Freetown in 1827 in order to train Africans for missionary work. Based on the European model of that time, Hebrew and Greek were taught so that Africans could be trained to translate the Bible in their languages and in the languages of the people that they would be sent to evangelize (Schaaf 2000: 52)⁴. Out of this college came the first African Anglican Bishop, Reverend Samuel Ajayi Crowther (1809-91). He supervised the translation of the Bible into his own language, Yoruba, completed in 1884 (Noss 2004:14). According to Walls (1992), Yoruba was the first translation in the modern era in which a mother tongue speaker took a leading role.

In 1843, The British and Foreign Bible Society published the gospels of Matthew and John in the Gã language. This translation was done by a speaker of that language, the Rev. A. W. Hanson, who had been educated in the United States. Ekem (2010: 54), shows evidence that these two Gospels may "have been translated from the original Greek, based on the available Textus Receptus readings."

In 1847, the Basel mission started a seminary in Akropong, Gold Coast. In 1858, a higher level institution was founded. But the mission truly wanted well educated Africans for the mission and specialized language work, so starting in 1854, sent 4 people for seminary training in Europe (Faure 1978: 171-172). Out of the training at the Basel mission came Jakob Nikoi who also became a teacher of Hebrew at the seminary and collaborated with Johannes Zimmerman, the head of the Gã translation project (Ekem 2010: 59).

David Asante was one of the first five students who graduated from the seminary at Akropong, where he had learned German, Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. He taught at seminary himself for some

³ In Europe that is. The Chinese had their own printing press at a much earlier date.

⁴ See also Faure (1978: 194-197).

time before going to Europe in 1857 for further studies. He is also known for working with Johann Gottlieb Christaller who headed up the Twi translation work (Ekem 2010:79).

However, for the most part, it was the missionaries only who had mastered the Biblical languages and the mother-tongue speakers were limited to providing the rich information about their own languages. As Ekem (2010: 168-169) states:

“The missionaries could not have chalked up these achievements on their own. Teams of indigenous co-workers contributed in giving shape to the draft translations that were finalized for printing. In terms of the Old Testament books, the following comment is illustrative of the translation procedure adopted by Binder⁵ and possibly, other missionaries, “Evidently, the helpers translated from English and Binder is most likely to have corrected from the Hebrew.”

“This procedure is similar to the one adopted by the Basel missionaries, some of whose indigenous partners were, as noted at in previous chapters, found wanting in the biblical languages. If more of these indigenous translators were given the opportunity to study the biblical languages—like Onipayede who could discuss New Testament Greek texts with Weyhe—the quality of their translations would have improved and thereby, reduced the burden on Binder and his fellow Bremen missionaries.”

Modern Translation practice

In the 20th century, United Bible Societies became very active in developing resources to facilitate translation from the Biblical Languages. This has included scholarly editions of the Biblical texts in the original languages - The United Bibles Societies Greek New Testament 4th Edition and Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS) – as well Louw and Nida’s Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains (1988) and research and publications on textual variants of the ancient Greek and Hebrew manuscripts.

Eugene Nida’s book, *Bible Translating*, published in 1947 and revised in 1961, states clearly what Hebrew and Greek texts are to be followed when translating (1961: 50). He also adds that “previous translations in the same language should not be overlooked,” and that good ideas can come out of translations in “cognate languages”. He also warns about the importance of knowing the Biblical languages well and being careful about interpretations that diverge from the respected English translations (KJV, English Revised Version, American Standard Version, and the Revised Standard Version). Then he adds,

“This does not mean that the English versions cited are necessarily to be the basis for the translation into an aboriginal language. This would be to defeat the purpose of the Bible Society in emphasizing the use of the original languages. It does mean that when the translator’s interpretation of the Greek differs markedly from the more accepted English versions, such an interpretation should be checked with the utmost care.” (p.52)

⁵ Ekem states that German Bremen missionaries worked on the Ewe translation starting from 1858. It was finally published in 1914 after many revisions. In the later years, missionary translators were accompanied by Ewe speakers such as Ludwig Adzalko, well educated in Hebrew and Greek at Tuebingen University. (Personal communication and Ch.5 of Ekem’s book).

At the time the book was written, it was assumed that most ‘translators’ would be missionaries, and that the indigenous speakers would be ‘informants’. However, he did have a section in his book that outlines procedures for indigenous translators, in which he gives the qualifications for such a translator:

“The translators must have a thorough knowledge of both languages: the source language and the receptor language. If possible, the translators should have a working knowledge of Greek and Hebrew. But this is frequently not the case. ..” (p.96)

The first two handbooks for translators, published by UBS, clearly pointed in the direction of helping translators translate using Biblical languages. The Handbook of Mark was published in 1961 and Luke in 1971. Both handbooks provided careful exegesis of transliterated Greek words and phrases before giving translation advice.

Moving on into the 1970’s, however, mother-tongue translators increasingly took on the task of Bible translation. For instance, work on the “the first Bible in Swahili translated by East Africans themselves” began in 1973 and was completed in 1995 (Mojola 2004: 99). These translators included New Testament scholar and retired UBS Translation consultant, Dr Peter Renju and as well as Dr Leonidas Kalugila, a former professor of Hebrew at Makumira University in Tanzania, who had a PhD in Old Testament Studies (Aloo Mojola, personal communication).

However, it appears that this shift towards indigenous translators also coincided with a shift in orientation of the Translators Handbooks, where the assumption was made that more and more translators would not have adequate knowledge of the Biblical languages. From 1972 on, with the publication of the Handbook on Acts, the Greek transliterations were kept at a bare minimum, and discussion of the Greek text was done with the help of a literal translation into English. With the help of the literal translation into English, the Acts handbook compared the Greek with the dynamic TEV translation. As the introduction clearly states, this change was an intentional policy change using the following rationale: “Those who know Greek can readily determine the Greek equivalents and those who do not know Greek are not helped by the heavy use of transliteration.” (Newman and Nida 1972: v).

Later Handbooks eventually adopted the format of presenting the RSV and the TEV versions side by side before providing a commentary and translation advice for the passage. This was in line with what was to be called the base – model text approach to translation (see Fehderau 1979). One translation, considered closer to the Hebrew or Greek (such as NRSV or Louis Segond), would be chosen as the *base source text* in terms of exegetical and textual decisions, and the second, a more dynamic translation such as TEV or BFC would be considered the *model* in terms of style and simplicity. Thus the handbooks served to encourage this approach.

This *base-model text* approach to translation through an intermediary language was really the only viable solution for many translation projects, where mother-tongue speakers did not have knowledge of Biblical languages. It did provide a certain stability in the accuracy of the translated text, and it allowed the translation work to move ahead at an acceptable speed. These handbooks are quite helpful for those who speak English. However production of handbooks in other languages

such as French or Portuguese is still lagging far behind⁶. As a result, translators with little or no knowledge of the Biblical languages or adequate English are susceptible to committing many more interpretation and translation errors than an Anglophone translation team.

In the 1990's began a movement towards expressly training translators at University level biblical studies, translation, linguistics and Biblical languages courses. UBS and SIL collaborated with institutions across Africa to provide Biblical language training for translators and exegetes. These have included translation programs at Nairobi Evangelical School of Theology (begun in 1989), Faculté de Théologie de l'Alliance Chrétienne in Abidjan (begun in 1999), and Faculté de Théologie de Bangui (begun in 2000). The Centre of Bible Translation in Africa was founded in 1995 at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa because of their concern "that in most Bible translation projects, English, French or Portuguese are used as source texts" and "that indigenous translators are seldom sufficiently trained in Biblical languages and cultures."⁷

Off the continent, an intensive Hebrew for Translators program, organized by the Home for Bible Translators in Mevasseret Tzion, Israel, was begun in 1994 and has since trained over 60 African translators (personal communication, HBT).

Translators have also come out of other theological schools with training in Biblical languages. And since 1996, both SIL and UBS have initiated courses in workshop settings in Biblical Hebrew, and a few individual consultants have provided Greek and Hebrew training for translators. As a result, the number of translators competent in Biblical languages is steadily growing. Don Slager, the current editor of the UBS handbook series states that the current handbooks being produced in English do allow more direct reference to Greek and Hebrew, thus recognizing the increasing knowledge of the original languages among the translators (personal communication).

Most Bible Society and SIL translation teams today do have at least one member who serves as an exegete for the translation project and has at least some knowledge of a Biblical language. Sometimes this exegete is a not a first language speaker of the language, but more and more, a first language exegete has been trained to help his co-workers in the translation task.

However, the impact of this training has not yet been fully evaluated, and there are indications that we still have a ways to go before the current Biblical languages training can be effectively used in the translation task. We will discuss this more below.

Translating from Biblical languages: the advantages

There is really no debate on the value of translating from the Biblical languages especially if one knows the Biblical languages well.

⁶ The Translation Handbooks in French, to date, are : Gen, Lev, Ruth, Jonah, Daniel, Micah, Mark, Luc, Jean, Philip, Heb, I, II Thess. In preparation are Joel, Hab, Eph, Gal, Philemon. (personal communication, Lynell Zogbo). Portuguese handbooks are even further behind with 12 unpublished drafts of handbooks being prepared for publication (personal communication, Vilson Scholz).

⁷ Quoted from the website of the Centre for Bible Translation in Africa: www.cebta.org.

- 1) It can help a translator avoid semantic interference of the intermediary language
- 2) It can facilitate the understanding of textual and interpretational problems.
- 3) And in general it can produce a higher quality and critically acceptable translation.

We discuss each of these points here.

Avoid the interference of the intermediary language

Dr. Harold Fehderau and others who have promoted the base – model approach have fully recognized the limitations of this model. Fehderau (1984:5) states : “Since many teams are not able to translate directly from the original languages, secondary language bases are needed (French, English, etc.) as source texts. This gives rise to special THIRD-LANGUAGE PROBLEMS”.

When one is translating, it is extremely rare that one can find an exact semantic correspondence between the terms of the two languages. Therefore translation is always an approximation of the original. Thus when translating from an intermediary language, one is producing an approximation of an approximate translation. The effect is similar to that of trying to count on the veracity of second and third hand information, where the information is more likely to be distorted, misleading, or just plain false! In the case of Bible translation, the challenge is even greater as the translator attempts to understand Biblical language and culture through the lens of a European language, both of which are likely to be quite different from one’s own culture and language. Let us take a look at a few examples.

One problem is what the word in the intermediary language may trigger in the mind of the translator. In Genesis 26:17, an African francophone translator with no knowledge of Hebrew or Israel geography rendered the verse “Isaac left there and set up camp in the valley of Mount Gerar.” The NBS and TOB say ‘wadi of Gerar’, and the Louis Segond, PDV and BFC say ‘the valley of Gerar’. The word in Hebrew *naxal* is a waterway or river valley that is dry most of the time except during rains, at which time it can become a rushing river. The word *wadi*, or *oued* in French, has become a technical term borrowed from Arabic which is a very close semantic correspondence to the Hebrew *naxal*, and is used frequently in the Israeli context. Unfortunately, though, anyone unfamiliar with that context is unlikely to understand this word. In fact our translator thought he was making the text more clear and explicit by saying ‘Mount Gerar’, because in his mind, the word for ‘valley’ in his language necessarily evokes the image of a mountain, and not a rolling plain through which snakes a river valley which is dry most of the year. When he better understood the word *naxal*, he was able to make a direct correspondence with his own language (*water-road*), because there are plenty of *naxal* in his own physical environment.

But the problem does not stop there! The word ‘valley’ in English and in French is used to translate at least three terms in Hebrew. So the translator cannot count on translating *water-road* everywhere he sees the word *valley*! For that reason, it would be quite advantageous for the translator to know what Hebrew word is used in each context, and of course, to better understand the geography of Israel.

A second problem is the occasional apparent conflict between the base and model texts. In Ruth 3:2, the NRSV translation says that Boaz will be *winnowing* barley on his threshing floor. However the Good News translation (GNT) states he will be *threshing* barley on the threshing floor. BFC apparently copies the GNT and says that Boaz will be *beating* (battre) the barley. I do not know how a Frenchman would understand this expression, but I know that an African in the Sahel area of West Africa would be fully confused if he looked at his base and model texts, knowing very well the distinction between winnowing and beating during the harvests of millet and other grains. However, if he simply clicked on the Hebrew word for 'winnow' *zarah*, he will get the concordance for this word (using Bible Software such as Paratext for translators) and check it quickly in other contexts to see if it could really mean 'thresh' or 'battre' and he will find that nowhere else is this word translated as 'thresh'. Not only that, the dictionary of man-made things (Pritz 2009) linked to the Hebrew word can lead the translator directly to its description.

Now an African may wonder why the dynamic translations would make such a 'mistake'? In the modern western world, all harvesting and threshing and winnowing is often done by a single machine. Many people have little familiarity with the harvesting process all hidden away in the threshing machine, and even less of the ancient methods used by the Israelites. Many rural Africans, on the contrary, are perfectly familiar with ancient Israelite notion of winnowing: the tossing up of the grain so that a light breeze can blow off the chaff and let the grain fall directly to the ground. Access to and proper knowledge of the Hebrew text and resources would most quickly clear up the confusion.

These two examples show that sometimes the semantic correspondence between an African language and the Biblical languages is more direct. When this is the case, an intermediary language serves only to muddy the waters, so to speak. A good understanding of both the original languages and one's own language will allow the translator to make such discoveries.

The matter becomes even more complicated for the translator when he encounters variant intermediate language translations of key Hebrew words because of the fact that there is no clear semantic correspondence of the Hebrew notion with any word in that language. Such is the case for the translation of *xesed* into French. In Psalm 103:4 NBS and TOB translate this word with *fidélité* (faithfulness), Louis Segond and BFC say *bonté* (goodness), and PDV renders it with *amour* (love). A translator unfamiliar with the rich meanings associated with *xesed* may be slightly confused with the variation between the translations, and then simply choose his favorite translation and translate the French directly into his language. And that translation may or may not adequately reflect the meaning of the Hebrew word. It would be a whole lot better for the translator to be fully aware of the sense of Hebrew word before seeking the appropriate equivalent in his language.

Using an intermediary language may also lead to certain concepts simply being lost in translation. This can happen for certain grammatical and discourse markers especially those that signal emphatic expressions in the language, such as the expression *hinneh* (See Ruth 2:4; 3:2), word order to change to shift focus onto a certain word (See Ruth 2:4; 3:2), or the use of the infinitive absolute in Hebrew (See Exodus 21:15-17) in order to mark intensity on the verb. A translator who understands the function of these markers can first of all identify them in the text, and secondly, understand the

variant translations that result from attempts to translate them. Finally with a better understanding of the Hebrew, he will be able to do the research to find the appropriate term in his own language.

Gain better understanding of the textual and interpretational problems

Another problem which becomes more acute with the increasing variety of translations in the intermediary languages is the matter of textual problems, particularly in the case of the Old Testament. In French, the base text (either TOB or Segond) and the available model text (BFC or PDV) frequently have differing textual and interpretational decisions. This is especially confusing when the base text is difficult to understand and the model text is not at all helpful in providing understanding for the base text, but instead gives a different interpretation. It is true that footnotes can in some cases help out, but this is not always the case. Good French commentaries and translation handbooks are lacking for many books of the Old Testament.

For example, in Isaiah 8:6 the TOB French translation says :

TOB Parce que ce peuple refuse les eaux de Siloé qui coulent doucement et se réjouit au sujet de Recîn et du fils de Remalyahou (also NBS, Semeur, ESV, KJV, NIV) '*rejoice concerning Rezin...*'

And the Français Courant :

FC Ce peuple dédaigne les eaux du canal de Siloé, qui coulent tout doucement; et il perd courage face aux deux rois Ressin et Péca (also Jérusalem, PDV, NET, NRS, GNT) '*lose courage before ...*'

A little knowledge of Hebrew and use of the resources will lead the translator to realize that the Hebrew words for *joy* and *melt* have essentially the same pronunciation, *masos*, but different spellings, since there are two letters for the sound 's' in the Hebrew language. The Hebrew Massorettes text, which is the base Hebrew text for translation, uses the spelling for *joy*, but the context and other factors have led a number of translations to interpret the sense of *melt in fear*. Knowledge of Hebrew and skills in textual criticism will more quickly allow the translator to understand the problem.

Even if a francophone translator does know English and uses English commentaries, he could become further confused to learn that in many cases, the English translations have a different interpretation from the French translations, especially since English handbooks comment on English translations not on French ones.

Let us take one simple example in Judges 9.31. A number of English versions follow the interpretation of NRSV: "He sent messengers to Abimelech at *Arumah*, saying.." (also GNT, NET, NJPS, NLT). All French versions at my disposal as well as a number of English versions and the Septuagint have the following interpretation of TOB : "Il envoya *en secret* des messagers à Abimélek pour lui dire..." *he sent in secret...* (also FC, PDV, NBS, Jérusalem, Semeur, Segond 21, LS1910, KJV, ESV, NIV) instead of 'Arumah'. Interestingly, the Paratext English and the French Bible Society French interlinear texts separate out along the same lines! So in this case, not even the

interlinear texts help out. However, knowledge of Hebrew along with an understanding of the divergent interpretations will help to clear up the confusion⁸.

The more the translator has some understanding of Hebrew and how textual problems and interpretations can be handled, the better he can first of all come to an understanding the issue, and secondly make an informed interpretational choice for his translation.

Produce a higher quality and critically acceptable translation

A competent translator translating from the Biblical languages will produce a higher quality translation, corresponding with the growing expectations of Christians in Africa, as Sterk (2004:182-83) states:

“... the ongoing growth in standards of education will invariably result in a more critical readership. [If the translation has errors] they will not “trust” their translation, and it will be an added temptation for them to turn to a recognized international one. This, too, should be a strong argument in favour of deploying all necessary means to obtain a translation of quality rather than settling for what might appear as make-shift arrangements that, ultimately, are doomed to fail.”

Thus a high quality translation, which uses as a base the Biblical languages, can become closer to attaining the status of translations in an international language, and thus gain the confidence of the African church as a reliable authority. Not only that, quality translations in major lingua franca can be more confidently used as source texts for minority language translation projects, and could be an even better resource than European language translations because of their linguistic proximity to the major African languages.

Translating from the Biblical languages: the problems

While there is no real question as to the value of translating from the Biblical languages, some understandable questions and objections have been raised. And in order to see the way forward, we must consider them seriously.

The **first question** concerns the question of competence in Biblical languages. It has been argued that a little Hebrew/Greek is worse than none at all. It is true that inadequate training can lead to some undesirable results:

1. Translators may assume that a literal translation from the Biblical languages is the best translation, when in actual fact it could produce a less natural and even incorrect translation. This can happen particularly when the translator depends on an interlinear translation for his comprehension of the Hebrew. A better understanding of Hebrew structure and semantics as well as basic translation principles is obviously necessary in order to overcome these incorrect notions.

2. Translators not understanding the complexity of textual problems may simply assume that a translation which does not follow the Hebrew text is incorrect, when in actuality, it may have been

⁸ Fortunately, some English handbooks including the forthcoming Judges handbook, does remark on the variant interpretations between French and English.

the best textual choice. The knowledge of the Biblical languages must be accompanied by a competence in understanding and handling textual problems.

3. Knowing a little Hebrew/Greek also cannot eliminate the potential for misinterpreting idiomatic expressions and cultural information within the text. If a translator is not aware of the differences between his language and culture and the Biblical languages and culture, he could make some erroneous interpretations. While there may be some direct semantic correspondence between the original languages and the receptor language, the translator still must know enough about the language to be able to know when this is not the case.

The **second objection** is the amount of time it would take for translators to acquire adequate competence. Clearly, not only do translators need to know the Biblical languages, they also need to be quite familiar with the content of the Bible and its historical, cultural, and geographical background. They need to know how to handle textual problems in translation. They need to understand the linguistics features of both the original languages and the receptor language, and they need to have a solid competence in principles of translation. For a translator to acquire enough knowledge and competence, he would need several years of intensive training at university level. It is rare that translators are hired with this competence, so if a translation organization is committed to this high level of education, it would have to have the time and money to train the translator.

While institutions are available to provide this kind of training, as mentioned above, this kind of training appears to be beyond the scope of some Bible Societies in Africa for the possible reasons of financial and time restraints, lack of vision, and in some cases, lack of competent candidates.

The **third concern** is the amount of time it could take for a translator to read and pore over the Hebrew or Greek text in the translation process. Since the Biblical languages are nobody's first language, it does take a certain amount of effort to understand the text and process the interpretational and textual difficulties. One consultant told of a translation team who spent a year studying Hebrew in Israel, and when they came back, the translation process initially slowed down considerably in the zeal to understand the text well, and get the translation right. So there is the concern that translators who want to translate from Biblical languages could get bogged down with the details, and process issues that have already been dealt with in other major translations. One does not want to try to re-invent the wheel. In their training, translators will need to sort out what is important or less important, and where they can find answers in the different translation helps.

The **fourth problem** is the potential lack of Biblical language resources and/or training to use those resources for the application to the translation task. In the 1990's, SIL provided Hebrew training for the first francophone translators in West Africa and sent them to Israel for further studies. When they returned they each had Hebrew Bibles, but they were fortunate to be furnished a dictionary. At that time there was no Hebrew-French Interlinear Bible. If they were to use their Hebrew in translation, they had to open their Hebrew Bible and be able to read fluently, which was not the case. As a result, a number of translators and especially those with only elementary Hebrew have not been able to use it at all in translation. As mentioned above, the current translation handbooks, for the most part, have not quoted directly from the Biblical languages. Sending translators to Biblical languages courses does not automatically guarantee that they will be able to use that knowledge when translating.

All of these problems concerning the use of Biblical languages are challenging to the point that one wonders about viability of pursuing the goal of translators accessing the text in original languages, especially in the context of dwindling budgets for Bible translation, and the difficulty of finding translators with high educational levels.

But perhaps we should question further this supposed difficulty in finding highly qualified translators. This may be the case for many minority languages, but is this really so for majority languages? Yorke and Renju (2004: 3) lamented: "It has been usual, for example, to find translations of the Bible into African languages, which have been completed entirely without the personal and prolonged participation of African theologians and biblical scholars *amongst themselves*." (Italics mine). The question needs to be seriously addressed: Why are these scholars not engaged in the translation enterprise? Why has it been slow for the African church to mobilize and support their scholars for the priority task of Bible translation? Or are these scholars becoming so removed from their mother tongues that they do not have at heart an engaged commitment to the translation into their own languages? Are there too few scholars for the task of the church? Is translation a lower priority than pastoring, seminary school teaching, writing and research? Or are translation organizations unwilling to finance highly qualified translators? It seems to me that if these questions can be resolved, the obstacles for translating from Biblical languages will literally come tumbling down.

The way forward: how to be practical in seeking the ideal

As we have been saying all along, the ideal is that translators be able to translate directly from the Biblical languages. This, however, does not mean that they do not need other respected translations, dictionaries, commentaries, or translation handbooks to help them along. A brief survey of interpretation choices in French and English translations shows that even highly acclaimed translations were done by Hebrew and Greek experts who were keeping an eye on the other versions, and in many cases, followed them. This shows up when one observes the divergence in interpretation between English and French versions. The English versions tend to follow each other, and the French versions tend to follow each other. In the same vein, the dynamic versions tend to borrow ideas from each other, as we noted above for the Français Courant and the Today's English Version. Therefore even the most erudite Hebrew and Greek scholar will need to learn translation principles and will want to consult works by other scholars when doing his translation.

But let us return to the reality of our translation projects in Africa, where, with few exceptions, there is still a long way to go before we reach that summit. For the problems above to be addressed, the following factors need to fall in line:

1. Adequate training and qualified personnel
2. Resources to facilitate access to the Hebrew text and exegesis
3. Enough time
4. Enough finances
5. A mobilized support base at the heart of the church structures

A church constituency mobilized for Bible translation is perhaps one of the most important key factors. If churches are motivated to invest their best qualified personnel and their finances into Bible translation projects, then it will be much easier to achieve the goal of translating from the

Biblical languages. Bible Societies will not be complaining that they do not have the money for hiring university trained persons as translators, and neither will churches resort to offering candidates with 'free time' and few qualifications. Bible translation programs have been working in the last few years at raising awareness of the capital importance of Bible translation in African languages, through developing courses to be used in Bible schools⁹, and through speaking at church organized conferences and workshops at the local, national, and regional level. Bible translation organizations partnering with Theological Faculties in different parts of Africa also contribute to this awareness raising. For example, one student who went to FATEAC, (where there is a Bible translation training program) for theological and pastoral studies ended up joining a Bible translation team when he graduated. Proximity to translators in training can raise interest in other students who could either become translators themselves or who will promote translation among the people they will eventually serve.

Training is absolutely essential for all translators, even those who come with a high level of education and plenty of Hebrew and Greek. While it may not be possible for all translators to participate in a four year long training program, there are numerous ways to build up a translator's competence so that they can effectively use any knowledge of Biblical languages, whether small or great, for the benefit of a higher quality translation.

Guided reading and exercises, and workshops can be very helpful in building up competence. Once a translator has a basic notion of a Biblical language, each workshop can serve to enforce his competence, with frequent reference to words and phrases in the Biblical language. For example, a PowerPoint presentation on geographical features can include the Greek and Hebrew names for those features, along with a discussion of the meaning of those words. Quotation from scripture can occasionally be made in the original language, in particular if it is the focus of the subject being taught. For example, a lesson on the structure and translation of oaths will include the actual structure in the Biblical languages. Likewise manuals on translation principles need to directly cite the Biblical languages and help the translator apply principles in translating from the Biblical languages to his own language. At this point in time, I know of only one such manual, which is still in draft form.

Source language software has become a very useful tool, enabling translators to do their own word studies based not on the words of the intermediary language but rather on the Hebrew or Greek word. Training in the use of this concordance feature and the use of dictionaries¹⁰ will help the translator discover the meanings of the words for himself, which will enable him to think directly of possible translation solutions in his own language. This technique will bring him to look beyond the interlinear gloss as he seeks to understand the text.

According to Don Slager, editor of the UBS translation handbooks series (personal communication), current handbooks now coming out allow for more transliteration of the Biblical languages in the

⁹ The most recent effort was to produce a book on the translation and the church (Kenmogne, 2009), and to train teachers to teach a course on this topic in Bible schools across francophone Africa.

¹⁰ This includes specialized dictionaries on fauna (Hope 2005) and man-made Things (Pritz 2009), which are very helpful in describing and distinguishing in detail specific semantic domains.

recognition of the growing competence among translators. He hopes that a new series of handbooks in the future will be geared to those with knowledge of Biblical languages, commenting directly on the Biblical language word or expression in question. Perhaps one intermediate solution could be to create an electronic version of the current series where original language expressions could show up in a hyper linked pop-up window. Even if the translators use primarily the intermediary texts when they translate, they need to understand how the meaning was expressed in the original text. Comprehension of the Biblical languages would be greatly increased if the original language were inserted in the handbooks.

As the translator builds up his knowledge of Hebrew or Greek and applies it to translation, he will initially need guidance in how to most efficiently use his knowledge for the translation task, in accordance with the demands of time, finances, and quality. In fact, as Biblical language training becomes more and more an integrated part of the translation training program and resources, the translator will continue to build on his understanding of these languages and on his competence in translation.

Concluding thoughts

With proper training and tools, a translator can effectively use Greek and Hebrew knowledge in translation even when his knowledge of the languages is minimal. However, all other factors being equal, the more Hebrew or Greek a translator knows the better his translation will be. Bible translation organizations should develop a firm policy of full Biblical language competence for translation programs and revisions in major languages.

The call for training is even more urgent for lusophone and francophone translators because of the few resources available to them. With training in Biblical languages and Biblical studies and application to the translation task, translators can do some of their own research in particular in the area of terminology, and develop their exegetical skills so important for the comprehension of the text.

The key to encouraging orientation towards translating from Biblical languages is the development of resources that empower the translator in this direction. This is a large challenge, but if translation organizations move ahead with this goal in mind, one can envisage a revolution in the practice of Bible translation across the continent of Africa and beyond, a revolution that will produce Bible translations that will be treasured for many years.

My hope and prayer is that the coming generation of Bible translators will not only be highly skilled Biblical scholars but that they will also keep in close touch with their language roots and effectively communicate God's word to their brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles.

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