

ETHNOS360/GLOBAL PARTNERS BIBLE TRANSLATION INTRODUCTION

Goals and Definitions

Translation Goals

What do we consider a good translation?

The Global Partners believe that a good Bible translation will meet two major criteria. First, it will accurately convey the meaning of the original text being translated. Second, it will be in the language *actually spoken* by those for whom the translation is intended.

We place a strong emphasis on meaning-based translations. In doing so we recognize the need to be faithful to *both* the source language (the original Hebrew or Greek) *and* the target language of the people who will read, hear and study the translated Scriptures. In other words, we train translators to achieve two equally vital goals: first, determine how the original readers of Hebrew or Greek understood the meaning of a given text; and second, determine the clearest and most natural way to express that same meaning in the target language. When these two goals are achieved, readers of the target language can comprehend the same meaning as the original audience did many centuries ago. At that point, we believe a successful translation of the Scriptures has been produced.

We believe our goal is in harmony with that of William Tyndale, whose heart was heavily burdened for translations that spoke to the common man. He wrote, “*John Ploughman* [a symbol of the hard working, ignorant, desperately poor country Englishman] *must read the Scriptures for himself, in plain ploughman’s English.*” That’s why Tyndale responded to a well-educated priest: “*I defy the Pope and all his laws; if God spare my life, ere many years pass, I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scriptures than thou dost.*”¹

¹ William Tyndale, A.D. 1521, <http://www.prca.org/books/portraits/tyndale.htm>

Translation Definitions

Meaning, Form and Inspiration

This is the nature of translation: the transfer of meaning from one form to another. There can be no doubt that, in the issue of Bible translation, it is the *meaning* that must be in focus. Since the *form* (grammatical structure, word order, etc.) of every language is unique, the form of a language cannot be transferred to another language without distorting the original meaning. Trying to transfer Hebrew or Greek forms to English provides ample proof of this claim.

However, when the issue of *inspiration* comes into focus, the concept of form is very important. God inspired all meaning, and He did so through the form of living languages (actual words, sentences, etc.). Regarding the issue of inspiration in 2 Tim 3:16-17, the term *God-breathed* refers not to the spoken Word **logos**; rather, it refers to the “writing” as *God-breathed* or inspired. By this we know that God intended readers to understand the meaning of the *written form*.

2 Tim 3:16-17

πᾶσα γραφή θεόπνευστος καὶ ὠφέλιμος πρὸς διδασκαλίαν, πρὸς ἐλεγμόν, πρὸς ἐπανόρθωσιν, πρὸς παιδείαν τὴν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ, ἵνα ἄρτιος ᾦ ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ ἄνθρωπος, πρὸς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἐξηρτισμένος.

All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Γραφή (scripture) literally, “the writing”

The point of these verses is NOT that the writing (written form) was inspired and that the meaning was secondary. Our point is that the two cannot be separated. Yet they do teach us an important truth: we know *the meaning of God’s Truth* through the reading of a *written form*. Without this form (and the many reproductions of it, though imperfect) we would not know Truth, and certainly His meaning would soon come to “mean” something else.

We also show that we value this truth by our strong emphasis on producing the written Word of God in the languages of the people groups to whom we minister and through our literacy programs which provide the local communities with the ability to read them. Though the form of the translated New Testament will bear *no* resemblance to the original form, the written translation still does its work of presenting and preserving the meaning of the original text.

Faithful, Meaning-Based Translation

As mentioned, where a translation is needed in a church planting ministry, we intend to translate the New Testament and Old Testament portions faithfully, clearly, accurately and naturally. By *faithfully*, we mean that the translation will be true to the meaning of the original Scripture text. *Clearly* means that we will strive to produce translations that communicate plainly to the people for whom they are intended, reflecting God's nature as a clear and loving communicator. *Accurately* means that as much as is humanly possible, we will work across wide linguistic gaps to match not just the details but the whole meaning contained in each portion of text. *Naturally* means that we will commit to using all the rich patterns of the language spoken by the people of our target group, who were created in God's image and for whom His Word was intended. This involves incorporation of larger discourse features down to the smallest of words and phrases.

Global Partners' philosophy of Bible translation is not unique among Bible translation agencies, nor did it originate within our own ranks. We are indebted to many scholars, translators and translation consultants from other organizations, including the United Bible Societies (UBS) and Wycliffe Bible Translators (WBT) / Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). Several decades ago, these organizations clearly laid out the reasoning and philosophy for producing meaning-based translations.

SIL translation pioneers John Beekman and John Callow stated, "A translation which transfers the meaning and the dynamics of the original text is to be regarded as a faithful translation. ... The question of fidelity thus comes down to the two questions: (1) Does the translation communicate the same meaning as the original? and (2) Does it communicate it as clearly and as idiomatically as the original did? If the answer to these two questions is yes, then it has every right to be called a 'faithful translation.'"²

Similarly, UBS translation consultant Harold Fehderau defined a high quality translation as one having the following features: "(1) Correct exegesis based on the best available manuscripts, (2) idiomatic (natural usage of receptor language), (3) message understood by the target audience in essentially the same way that the original hearers understood it, and (4) accurate linguistic translation (as opposed to a cultural or commentary-type translation) neither adding to nor subtracting from the information provided by the context of the originals."³

² John Beekman and John Callow, *Translating the Word of God*, (Summer Institute of Linguistics, Dallas, TX, 1984), pp. 33-34. Read Chapter 2, "Fidelity in Translation," carefully.

³ Harold W. Fehderau, "Quality Control of Bible Translations," *Notes on Translation* #75 (SIL, 1979), p. 10.

Bible Translation FAQ's

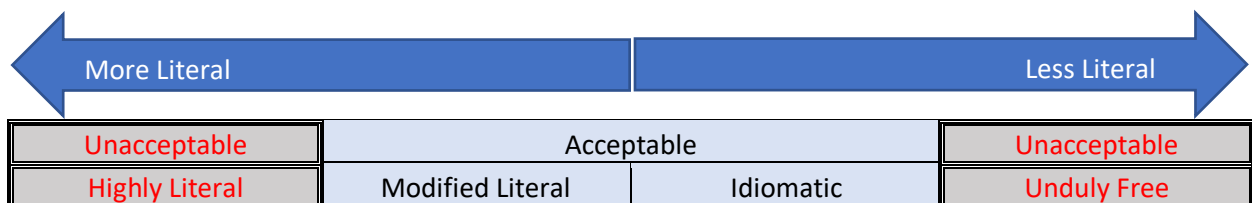
Why not just do a literal translation?

Translating the Bible “literally” can mean several different things to different people, depending on one’s perspective. For example, if a person has the assumption that there is precisely one word in any given language that exactly matches the meaning of every Koine Greek word used in the New Testament, then they are supposing an extremely literal translation is possible, using an essentially mathematical approach to languages. However, it may come as a surprise to some that the translators of the King James Version neither pursued, claimed nor encouraged that type of translation. In their Preface, they even made a point of defending their principle of using various English words with synonymous or near-synonymous meanings to translate a single Hebrew or Greek word. They explained their translation approach in this way in the section, “*Reasons we do not insist pedantically on verbal consistency*”:

[W]e have not tried to be as consistent in translating words or phrases as some might wish. ... Actually, we were especially careful, and we made it a matter of conscience as we were in duty bound, not to introduce inconsistencies as our translation progressed when a word is used in the same sense (for some words are not always used with the same meaning). But we thought it would be more fastidious than wise always to express the same idea with precisely the same word, e.g., if we translate the Hebrew or Greek word once by *purpose*, never to call it *intent*; if once *journeying*, never *traveling*; if once *think*, never *suppose*; if once *pain*, never *ache*; if once *joy*, never *gladness*, etc. ...For has the kingdom of God become words and syllables? Why should we be slaves to them, if we could be free? Why use one word exclusively when another equally accurate word is appropriate? ...We cannot observe a better pattern of expression than God himself; who used different words without distinction in his holy scriptures when referring to the same thing. Unless we are superstitious, we may use the same liberty in our English versions of the Hebrew and Greek, based on the resources he has given us.

Rather than trying to categorize various Bible translations as either literal or non-literal, it would perhaps be more helpful to think of Bible translations as fitting somewhere in a range from “highly literal” to “unduly free.” (See chart below.) This method of classification has been used by Bible scholars for many years as a means of describing how “literal” any given translation is relative to other versions. As with any such evaluation, it is subjective, dependent on the judgment of the evaluator. But it is also much more helpful than thinking of all translations as either “literal” or not.

Types of Translations



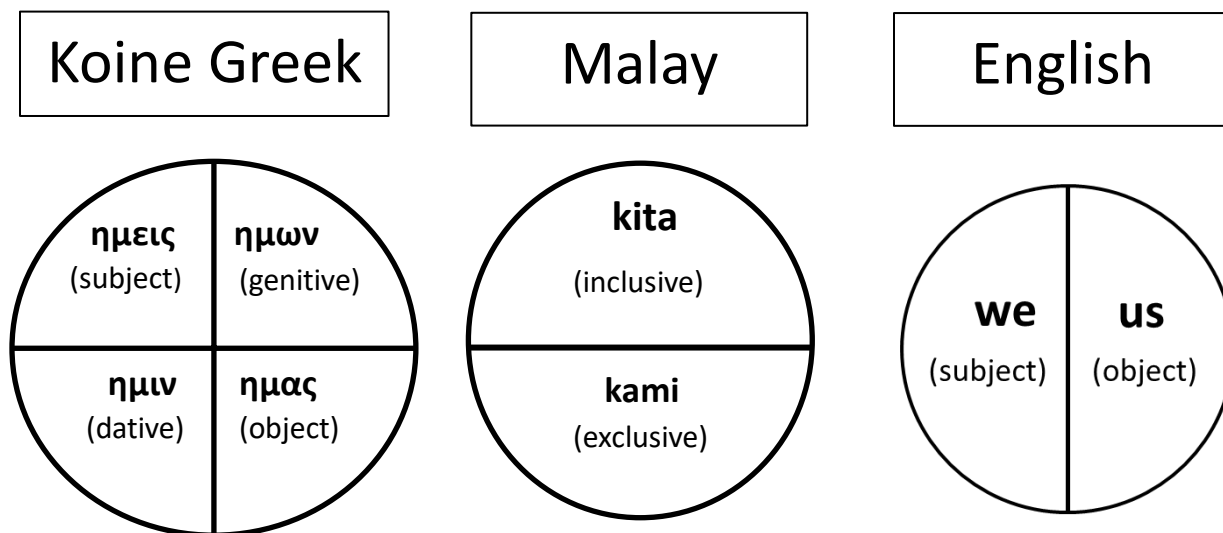
As indicated above, despite common misconceptions to the contrary, not even the KJV is actually a literal translation. Why not? There are at least four primary reasons that translations are not truly literal. In essence, a truly literal translation is not comprehensible due to the vast differences between languages.

- 1) The range of meaning of words in one language seldom match the range of meaning for seemingly equivalent words in another language.
- 2) The grammar of a given language does not line up with that of other languages, from word order to morphology to markers of tense and aspect.
- 3) The discourse patterns vary greatly among languages.
- 4) Every language uses many figures of speech, many of which are culture-specific and therefore unable to be translated literally into another language and culture without losing the intended meaning.

Let's take a closer look at each of those four reasons that meaningful translations cannot be truly literal.

1) Mismatches in the range of meaning of words

Even with a small, "simple" word such as the pronoun *we*, the meaning and usage is not the same from one language to the next. Note in the graphic below that in the Koine Greek of the New Testament, the pronoun *we* has four different possible forms depending on whether it is subject, object, genitive or dative. However, in Malay there are only two possibilities, inclusive and exclusive, and neither correlates to the classifications available in Greek. In English, we can represent only two of the four Greek cases, but those two do not match the pair of options in Malay!



2) Mismatches in Grammar

Consider the three following charts, which highlight just how different four languages can be on a variety of features. If a Bible translator were to follow a strictly literal, word-for-word approach to translation, what would their options be when they encounter some of these major mismatches? How would one find equivalents for Koine Greek nouns, which are marked for three classes and four cases,

when translating into Malay, which does not distinguish ANY classes or cases on their nouns? Or when Koine Greek uses “only” six verb modes, yet the remote Asia-Pacific language uses more than 10?

An evaluation of these charts will show the incredibly challenging nature of translating anything from one language to another. But the primary takeaway may be that the idea of a mathematical, one-to-one correlation between words of different languages is actually a fallacy that is not supported by careful linguistic analysis.

Comparison of Basic Grammatical Features				
Grammatical Feature	English	Koine Greek	Malay (A Major Asia-Pacific Language)	A Remote Language in Asia-Pacific
Noun Classes	No distinction	Masculine Feminine Neuter	No distinction	No distinction
Noun Cases	No distinction	Nominative Accusative Genitive Dative	No distinction	No distinction
“we” pronoun forms	2 forms – subject & object	4 forms – subject, object, genitive, dative	2 forms – inclusive & exclusive	2 forms – inclusive & exclusive
Verbs marked for Person & Number	1Singular, 2Singular, 3Singular, 1Plural, 2Plural, 3Plural	1Singular, 2Singular, 3Singular, 1Plural, 2Plural, 3Plural	No distinction	1Singular, 2Singular, 3SingularMasculine, 3SingularFeminine, 3SingNonHuman, 1PluralInclusive, 1PluralExclusive, 2Plural, 3Plural, 3PluralNonHuman

Verb Tenses / Aspects	Present Progressive Perfect	Present Future Aorist Perfect Imperfect Pluperfect	No distinction	Present Progressive Perfect
Verb Modes	Indicative Imperative Subjunctive	Indicative Imperative Subjunctive Optative Infinitive Participial	Rarely marked	Indicative Imperative Reflexive Causative Reciprocal Unintentional Simultaneous Respective Extreme Instrumentative Etc.

3) Mismatches in Discourse

Discourse can be used to describe how languages function above sentence level — i.e., how languages open and close paragraphs, how paragraphs are grouped within a section, how non-chronological events are marked, etc. As with other aspects of grammar, there is a vast variety of ways that languages mark their discourse relationships, and they differ widely among languages.

For example, Koine Greek uses a feature called “forward-pointing devices” which are seldom found in languages of the Asia-Pacific region. The LDGNT Intro says that these are “... devices that essentially slow down the flow of the discourse by creating a break of some kind. Nearly all of the devices add some unnecessary element to the context that effectively creates the linguistic equivalent of a speed bump.”⁴ The same Introduction speaks of how Koine Greek can use explanation phrases as “meta-comments” which function at a discourse level: “It is important to note that these statements will not always function as meta-comments. It is only when the main discourse is suspended to make a

⁴ Runge, S. E. (2008). [*The Lexham Discourse Greek New Testament: Introduction*](#). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

comment about it. Discernment is needed for determining whether such statements are part of the main discourse or whether they function as comments *about* the discourse.”⁵

Any assumption that discourse markers are the same in the Old Testament as those used in the New Testament would also be a misconception. As Joel Barker points out in his commentary on Joel, “Prophetic literature uses different signals within the text to establish the boundaries of a passage. Joel marks boundaries by shifting its mode of address from directive to descriptive (1:14 // 1:15), repetition of key phrases to conclude a passage (1:19–20; 2:26–27), and literary devices like *inclusio* (2:1–11) and rhetorical questions (1:2; 2:17).”⁶

By contrast, in a remote language of the Asia-Pacific region, one of the principal ways discourse connections are marked is by the use of common directional words such as *up* and *down*. Instead of signaling normal, physical directions, they mark the relative time period of the following paragraph compared to the previous paragraph.

Again, a survey of languages shows how infrequently particular grammatical features line up with one another, revealing the virtual impossibility of a truly literal translation.

4) Mismatches in Figurative Language

It should not surprise us that figures of speech and idioms also do not match among languages, since they are “intimately and integrally related to the cultural contexts out of which they have developed.”⁷ Although we may be quite familiar with the New Testament, how many of us would recognize the wording ζέω τῷ πνεύματι, literally *to boil in spirit* as meaning *to show enthusiasm*? Or πλατύνω τὴν καρδίαν, literally *to broaden the heart* as meaning *to show affection for*? Or ῥαντίζομαι τὴν καρδίαν, literally *to sprinkle the heart* as meaning *to purify*?⁸

There are endless examples of idioms from other languages that English speakers would find difficult or impossible to translate literally. Here are just a few samples: “They twist our knees,” meaning “They trick or confuse us.” “He is layered” means that “He is prevented from doing something by other work/responsibilities.” And lastly, “You are just like a bird!” which in the native language and culture means, “You just don’t obey!” because birds flit here and there without following a predictable pattern.

Obviously, most figures of speech would not be understood easily if they were translated literally. The main challenge in translating a figure of speech found in the source language is to find the meaning behind the figure and make sure that meaning is expressed. The secondary challenge is to retain the “feel” and “fire” of the original — the emotive impact, whether it be humor, rebuke, emphasis, etc.

⁵ Runge, S. E. (2008). [*The Lexham Discourse Greek New Testament: Introduction*](#). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁶ Barker, J. (2020). [*Joel: Despair and Deliverance in the Day of the Lord*](#). (D. I. Block, Ed.) (p. 36). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic.

⁷ Nida, E. A., & Louw, J. P. (1992). [*Lexical Semantics of the Greek New Testament*](#). (D. E. Aune, Ed.) (Vol. 25, p. 24). Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press.

⁸ Ibid.

What is the difference between translating for speakers of a major language and for speakers of a remote language group?

One of the most important things for public speakers to keep in mind, it is said, is to remember who makes up their audience — and then adjust their message accordingly. This principle also applies in the field of Bible translation. Perhaps the most obvious example is found in the abundance of English translations we have available to us. If we consult their respective prefaces, we will find that many mention a “target audience” and state that they tailored their translation style to reach that particular audience.

- The KJV translators spoke of translating in the “vulgar tongue,” meaning the common language, so that the “unlearned” could read it with understanding.⁹
- The Good News Bible was “produced in response to requests from Africa and the Far East for translations suitable for non-native English speakers.”¹⁰
- The Contemporary English Version (CEV) was “designed for early youth ... and utilizes vocabulary familiar to children in grades one through three.”¹¹

A primary distinctive of Ethnos360 and the other Global Partners is that we typically are translating the Scriptures for a unique audience, that is, for a people group not only who speak a unique, (usually) unwritten language but also who have not been influenced by Judeo-Christian society. They have no prior knowledge of Bible stories or basic background knowledge that many of us learned growing up attending Sunday School and hearing sermons. They frequently have no knowledge of the Jewish people, the Egyptians, the Canaanites, the Romans nor the Thessalonians. They do not know what a “testament” is, whether old or new. Nor are they likely to have any commentary or Bible dictionaries available in their language which they could consult to find an explanation of those and many other unique biblical terms. Since certain terms may not even exist in their culture, such as *temples*, *priesthood* and *prophets*, it is very likely that their language has no terminology to describe those things nor for the concepts behind them. In those cases what can be said in one short word in English may require a full phrase in the target language.

For those reasons, a translation produced for such a unique audience will most likely have a noticeable difference in form, although we constantly strive to ensure that the meaning of the original message remains the same as in the source texts.

What is the difference between paraphrase and translation?

Technically, a paraphrase is the rewording or restatement of a text or passage **using the same language**. For example, one could paraphrase the statement “His account was greatly disparaged” as

⁹ KJV Preface, *The Translators to the Reader*, p. 6

¹⁰ *English Bible Translations: An Overview of Current Versions*, Dr. Philip Sumpter, p. 11

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11

“They really criticized his report.” Both are English statements communicating essentially the same meaning. But in the translation world, the term *paraphrase* is sometimes used in a derogatory sense to label a translation as sub-par, not a legitimate translation, as opposed to a quality translation. An example of a legitimate paraphrase is the Living Bible, authored by Kenneth Taylor. Taylor himself was not a translator; he simply paraphrased the ASV so that his children could understand it.¹² So, he took an English translation and reworded it for the purpose of simplifying the message it contained.

Therefore, if referring to a translation where the meaning of a text has been transferred from one language to another, it would be more appropriate to evaluate it using the range of “highly literal” on one end to “unduly free” on the other.

What is the difference between literal translation and dynamic translation?

As mentioned in the FAQ “Why not just do a literal translation?”, it is necessary to define some terminology in order to better understand this important issue in the translation world. Much has been written over the last several decades regarding this question, and here we will quote some of the most highly respected scholars from the United Bible Society and Wycliffe Bible Translators as our answer, since their pioneering work has guided our organization’s approach to translation.

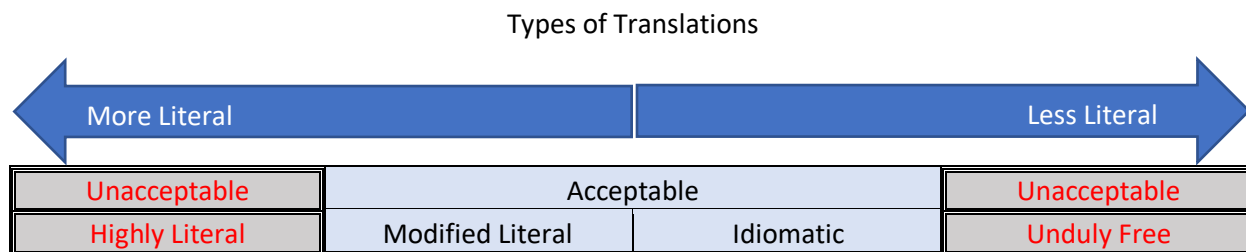
First are thoughts from Beekman and Callow in their book *Translating the Word of God*:

[T]he translation process involves (1) at least two languages and (2) a message. These two essential components of a translation may be called, respectively, (1) *form* and (2) *meaning*. ... One of these two components of translation, that of *form*, is basic to two different approaches to translation. All translators are agreed that their task is to communicate the meaning of the original. There is no discussion on this point. There is discussion, however, concerning the linguistic form to be used. Some believe that the meaning of the original is best communicated by translating into a linguistic form which closely parallels that of the original language. Others believe that by translating into the natural form of the receptor language (RL), whether this parallels the form of the original or not, the meaning of the original is best communicated.

The choice which the translator makes between these two approaches will determine whether his translation will be classed as literal or idiomatic. These two terms classify a translation in regard to its linguistic form; it does not classify a translation on the basis of the meaning that it communicates which, of course, in a faithful translation should always represent the literal meaning of the original text. If its form corresponds more to the form of the original text, it is classed as *literal*; if its form corresponds more to the form of the receptor language (RL), then it is classed as *idiomatic*. Even though there are few, if any, translations that are completely literal or completely idiomatic, each has been produced with one or the other approach in mind.

¹² Ibid., p. 10

Although there are these two basic approaches to translation, they give rise to four main types of translations: (1) highly literal, (2) modified literal, (3) idiomatic, (4) unduly free. These four represent a continuum from one extreme to another. [The chart below] shows that the acceptable types of translation intended for general use lie between two extremes.



The modified literal translation

It frequently happens that the translator who takes a highly literal approach to his task hears sermons or explanations of his translation which misrepresent the sense of the original text. As he comes to appreciate the need to correct his translation at those points where it communicates error, he is prepared to allow for more departures from the form of the original than just those necessitated by the obligatory categories of the RL. Whenever he becomes aware that the meaning diverges from the original, then he makes some lexical or grammatical adjustment to correct the error. These further departures from the form of the original result in a *modified literal* translation.

This type of translation represents a considerable improvement over the highly literal translation. Even so, the same grammatical forms as those that are found in the original are generally used, many occurrences of a given word are translated consistently without adequate regard to the context, many word combinations found in the original are awkwardly retained in the RL, and the original message is only partially communicated especially when relevant implicit information is lost. The resultant translation contains unnecessary ambiguities and obscurities and will be unnatural in style and difficult to comprehend. In spite of these disadvantages, the modified literal translation is acceptable in some situations. For a group of believers who have access to reference works and whose motivation to read and study is high, a modified literal translation is usable. However, for groups just emerging from illiteracy, the disadvantages listed above cannot be overlooked; for these groups, an *idiomatic* translation is much preferred.

The idiomatic translation

In an idiomatic translation, the translator seeks to convey to the RL readers the meaning of the original by using the natural grammatical and lexical forms of the RL. His focus is on the meaning, and he is aware that the grammatical constructions and lexical choices and combinations used in the original are no more suitable for the communication of that message in the RL than are, say, the orthographic symbols of the original. The RL message must be conveyed using the linguistic form of the RL.

Form is seen to be important only as it serves to convey the correct meaning. Thus, the approach to translation which is to be preferred is the one which most accurately and naturally transfers the meaning from the original to the RL. The idiomatic approach to translation does this best. It implies that a particular word in the original text may be translated in various ways in the RL version so as to give the most accurate sense and the most natural word combination in each context. The natural order of words, phrases, and clauses is used to convey clearly the meaning of the original text. It is this approach to translation that reduces ambiguity and obscurity to a minimum, that makes use of the discourse and stylistic features of the RL in a natural way, and that results in a translation that is clear and understandable so that even someone who has had little or no contact with Christianity is able to understand the essentials of the message. The authors of this book advocate the idiomatic approach for translations which are intended for general use.¹³

Next, we will add some thoughts from Ellis Deibler, the noted UBS scholar:

A literal translation (ignoring the fact that there are degrees of literalness) is one which conforms to the forms of the source text. Another way to say it is that producers of literal translations depart from the forms of the source text only when and to the extent that they feel they have to, due to the demands of the structures of the receptor language. Usually, the introductions to our existing English translations do not state this, but that this was their operating principle can be seen in the translation itself.

The opposite of a literal translation is a communicative one. *Communicative* is a better term than *idiomatic* because it suggests that the drafts have been field tested among speakers of the receptor language to determine whether they truly communicate.

My definition of a communicative translation is one which attempts to communicate the meaning intended by the original author. It is not concerned whether forms of the original are retained or not. This is not to say that forms themselves cannot at times convey meaning but that, across languages, we should never expect that we can automatically use the same forms as in the original to convey the intended meaning.

Note one important point in this definition: it does not say "meaning understood by the original audience" or "meaning represented by the forms of the source text"; rather, it says "meaning intended by the original author" in recognition of the fact that meaning originates in the human brain, not on a page of text. Therefore, when we analyze the source text to determine the meaning before translating it, we must do our best to determine the *total* meaning the writer intended to convey — no more and no less. This is extremely important when it comes to the matter of implicit information which, to me, is probably the most outstanding feature by which translations on the literal side differ from those on the communicative side. I might have a hard time proving it, but I estimate that in my checking of

¹³ Beekman, J., & Callow, J. (2002). [*Translating The Word Of God: with Scripture and Topical Indexes*](#) (pp. 19–24). Dallas: SIL International.

translations, 40 percent of the questions I ask of the back-translation have to do with implicit information.¹⁴

What textual base do we encourage translators to use?

Although the Bible has crossed over several linguistic barriers, we believe God has preserved it through the years, and we have received it as it faithfully has been handed down from generation to generation. In spite of our high regard for the work of scholars and translators through the ages, whether they spoke English, German, Spanish, French or another tongue, we do not believe that any one translation of the original Scriptures into any one language stands as perfect. Only the original text in the original language can be considered inspired and without error. We also recognize the conclusions of scholars who have carefully analyzed and compared the *Textus Receptus* with the manuscripts which make up the Majority Text. They confidently assert, “the sum of *all* the variant readings taken together does not give ground for the slightest doubt as to any of the fundamental points of faith and doctrine. In other words, the very Text that could be constructed from the abundant materials available would not disturb any of the great truths of the Christian faith.”¹⁵

Based on these reasons, we do not feel it wise to dictate that our missionary translators use only one particular text or version of Scripture as a translation base. In fact, we encourage translators to read and use several different versions as they convey the message of the original text into the language of the people among whom they minister. For example, in order to get a better understanding of the meaning of the original text before translating it into a local language, a missionary in Mexico whose native language is English should consider not only the Greek text but also the wording of several English versions and one or more Spanish language versions used in Mexico. By the same token, a German national ministering on a remote island in the Philippines should read two or more German versions along with a Philippine national language (Tagalog) version, as well as the Greek text itself. Since all translations are not created equal, care does need to be taken as to what influences final interpretation. Yet we should not use prejudice against a particular textual base as the basis for eliminating potentially helpful resources.

How long does a Bible translation take to complete?

The amount of time required for this task varies greatly due to the following factors: difficulty of the receptor language, degree of mismatch between the source languages and the receptor language, availability of native speakers to help with the translation process, availability of missionary team members, etc. With ideal circumstances for each of those factors, the New Testament could be completed in perhaps a minimum of six years. But of course there are also situations which cause the project to take much longer. Despite that, we want to clearly state our perspective that the quality of the end result is much more important than the time it takes to achieve it. This viewpoint is in line with that of Bible translators from the early 1600's. Here is a quote from the Preface of the KJV, entitled *The*

¹⁴ Ellis W. Deibler, Jr, “When is a Literal Translation Acceptable?”, *Notes on Translation* Vol 10 No. 1 (1996): 1-6

¹⁵ Philip Mauro, cited in Chinn & Newman, *Demystifying the Controversy ...* 23.

Translators to the Reader, in the section “The purpose of the Translators, their procedures and principles”: “We did not speed through the work at a gallop. ... Nor were we restricted or hindered from going over it again, once we had done it. ... Matters of such gravity and consequence are to be pursued with due deliberation: in matters of importance no one fears being blamed for taking all the time necessary. ... But having and using as many helps as were necessary, and fearing no reproach for slowness, nor coveting praise for speed, we have finally, through the good hand of the Lord upon us, brought the work to its present state.”

Do we translate from the KJV?

When our translators are preparing to translate a Bible book or portion, we encourage them to read it in several different versions first in order to have a clearer understanding of the material. Since various versions generally represent the same thought with slightly different wordings, comparing and contrasting them can benefit the translators greatly. We value the KJV translation highly and consider it to be a very good translation. In fact, some of our basic translation principles are the very ones expressed by the KJV translators in the preface of their Bible. We also value many other English versions that have been translated over the course of the last few centuries.

Who are Mother Tongue Translators, and are they included in our translation process?

Mother Tongue Translators (MTT's) are a vital part of our Bible translation efforts. In each language group where we are church planting and translating the Scriptures, these MTT's are the native speakers who work alongside us. We recognize them as important members of our translation teams in each church planting ministry across our mission. The basic idea behind partnering with MTT's is to achieve naturalness in the Receptor or Target Language by obtaining the wording for each passage of Scripture directly from the mouth of a “Mother Tongue” (native) speaker.

On the majority of our translation teams, we have an expatriate who has been trained in critical thinking skills as well as discourse and linguistics and who also has access to our training workshops and the exegetical and commentary help available through the extensive library of translation helps produced by SIL/Wycliffe, United Bible Societies and other translation organizations. That expatriate works closely with native speakers/MTT's at every step of the translation procedure, since they are the experts in the target/receptor language. This approach capitalizes on the strengths of each member of the translation team as well as minimizing their weaknesses and in our evaluation is the most likely way to produce a translation that achieves our stated goals.

What is the process to complete a translation?

There are three major steps required to complete a translation for a language group that has never had the Word of God in their language before: Exegesis, Transfer and Testing. Each of those major steps consists of several individual tasks, totaling over 20 unique steps that must be completed in order

to produce a quality translation. Then the translator still needs to work with the typesetting and printing teams, reviewing the proofs to make sure the final format looks as it should!

Below is a brief outline representing the challenging task of translating the Scriptures.

- 1) Exegesis
 - a) Exegetical Study (of book introduction and several versions of the Scripture text)
 - b) Produce Exegetical Outline (with Section Headings, based on Exegetical Study)
- 2) Transfer
 - a) Teach Exegetical Draft to a native speaker
 - b) Prepare Comprehension Questions to verify understanding
 - c) Record Mother Tongue Draft from mouth of native speaker
 - d) Transcribe recording
 - e) Evaluate recorded draft to ensure accuracy to Source Language text
- 3) Testing
 - a) Content Check to verify no meaning has been added or left out
 - b) Revise based on Content Check
 - c) Comprehension Test #1 with native speakers
 - d) Revise based on results of Comprehension Test #1
 - e) Comprehension Test #2 with native speakers
 - f) Revise based on results of Comprehension Test #2
 - g) Comprehension Test #3 with native speakers
 - h) Revise based on results of Comprehension Test #3
 - i) Detail Check to verify verse numbers, punctuation, capitalization, formatting, etc.
 - j) Back Translation into English to send to translation consultant
 - k) Process Consultant's Pre-Check notes and questions
 - l) Consultant Check
 - m) Post-Consultant Check revisions
 - n) Insert Illustrations and Maps
 - o) Produce Bible Dictionary/Glossary if desired
 - p) Final Formatting and Key Terms checking, to prepare for printing
- 4) Typesetting and Printing
 - a) Send to Typesetter for final Printing preparation
 - b) Proofread typeset version from Typesetter
 - c) Send to Printer/Publisher

How much does a Bible translation cost?

In order to answer this question, we need to first consider our ministry paradigm. There are several organizations that exist solely or primarily to produce Bible translations into foreign languages, and therefore the cost for a given translation project is easier to calculate for them. However, our organization exists to plant mature churches amongst the world's unreached people groups. To do that, we recognize that missionaries must be involved in language learning, discipleship, literacy, community development, Bible lesson development and teaching, as well as Bible translation. The task of Bible translation, then, is just one of many ministry aspects necessary to see a church be able to feed itself

and continue to grow and become mature. The member of the church planting team who is the primary translator has several other roles, and the other team members also are involved with aspects of the translation project. As a result, it would be nearly impossible to try to separate out the cost of Bible translation from the whole of what an individual missionary or missionary team does during the course of their multi-year ministries. In fact, for our ministry context, it is more realistic to think in terms of the all-inclusive cost of planting a church among an unreached people group. That cost would include all the ministries mentioned above: learning the group's language and culture, teaching literacy, community development, Bible lesson development and teaching, discipleship, church leadership development and, of course, Bible translation.

However, if someone did try to separate out translation costs, perhaps the only factors that could be measured to some degree would include:

- The average time frame of more than ten years to complete a New Testament.
- Room, board and flight costs for the primary translator to attend training workshops.
- Any compensation that may be paid to native speakers for helping with translation.
- Flight costs for the translation consultant to come and conduct consultant checks.
- Printing costs for individual Scripture books that have been approved by the consultant.
- Final printing costs for a complete New Testament and portions of the Old Testament.

All of those costs, except for the final printing, are generally paid for using the monthly support given by donors to the members of the missionary team who are not only translating the Bible but also conducting all the other ministries needed to plant a church among an unreached people group.

What roles are needed on a translation team? Could I be involved?

In our organization the task of completing a Bible translation is done in the context of a church planting effort, so the various roles of a translation team are filled by the members of the missionary/church planting team themselves. The primary translator and the other team members also work closely with several different native speakers of the target language during the course of a translation project, since they are, of course, the language experts who can best ensure that the translation is natural sounding.

Once members of a church planting team reach fluency in the target language, a translation consultant will help them determine who the primary translator will be. The primary translator will then have the responsibility of handling the first two major sections of the translation procedure, *Exegesis* and *Transfer*. Those sections basically include studying the text to determine its meaning and then drafting that meaning into the target language. Ideally, all other team members will play significant roles in the third major section of the procedure, that of *Testing*. Since the required steps of *Testing* include a content check, a detail check, multiple comprehension tests with various native speakers, and a back translation, there is plenty of work to be shared among the team. Any tasks done by other team members lessen the load carried by the primary translator.

Since languages each have their own very unique features, it is not feasible for anyone outside the church planting/translation team to contribute to the actual translation procedure. However, we greatly value individuals who are willing to pray for the success of our translation efforts. We have found that

our enemy does not want God's Word to be understood clearly by those who formerly lived without any hope of hearing it, and as a result there are countless obstacles encountered during the course of a translation project. Specific prayer requests would include the following, that translators would:

- 1) be committed to finding natural ways to express the meaning of the source text.
- 2) be committed to testing their translation to make sure it is accurate to the original text.
- 3) follow good translation procedures.
- 4) find and develop good relationships with many native speakers who are willing to provide good feedback and correct the translator when necessary.
- 5) be willing to edit their translated text at any stage of the procedure.
- 6) always realize the need to continue to learn the target language better.
- 7) be committed to finishing the translation project.