

Lesson Plan

Qualities of a good translation

1. Introduction: Tell a little about yourself and your experience in Bible translation.

Start with a question: Why do we translate? Translate is hard work! Why go to all the trouble of making a translation?

From discussion, draw out the fact that the purpose of a translation is to help people of another language understand a text that was originally written in another language. The aim **is to communicate a message**. Write this on the board in a place where you can keep pointing to it.

2. An example

Here is the beginning of a story originally written in Amharic. I am going to read you an English translation:

Two thieves friend being, together while stealing living, one day by the road having sat playing, one countryside for obeying tax carrying honey in a pot, pulling a ram coming they saw. At this time, they discussed to steal and one thief rose up and entered the forest. But one there on the road, “I am hidden eye” having said, rolled up and slept.

Will people understand this story?

Now listen to the next translation:

The Two Thieves

Once upon a time there were two friends. They made their living by working together to rob people. One day, while they were sitting by the side of the road talking, they saw a man coming along the road leading a goat and carrying a pot of honey on his shoulder. He had been ordered to pay these as tax. The thieves decided to rob the man. One of them got up and ran into the forest to hide while the other lay down in the road and pretended to be blind.

What is the difference between these two versions? The first translated the Amharic words very exactly, word by word. What did the second version do?

So what is translation?

Translation is re-telling, as exactly as possible, the meaning of the original message in a way that speakers of the receptor language will easily understand.
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In a good translation,
the words and expressions will be different, the grammar will be different,
but the meaning will be the same.

If the translator follows too closely the grammar and the words of the original language, the translation will be unnatural and confusing, as in the first example above. It may even lead to the wrong meaning being understood.

3. A picture

Have some (coloured) water in a glass jug. Have two or three glasses or different shaped glass jars. Pour the water from the jug into the glasses and jars.

What do you see? The water remains the same, but it now has a different shape.

In a translation the meaning remains the same, but the “containers”, the forms of each language, are different.

- 4. Biblical examples:** **Luke 3:3 (see separate file)**
 Luke 3:8 (see separate file)

5. A longer biblical example: Luke 1:1-4 (see separate file)

REMEMBER that the goal of the translator is to keep the meaning the same. It will be necessary to change the way the message is expressed in order to keep the message the same

6. Three qualities of a good translation

What qualities should a good translation have? Ask the participants to suggest. Write the qualities they suggest on the board. From these, draw out the principle qualities.

Three questions you can ask to see whether a translation is a good translation:

Is it accurate?

Is it clear? Will people understand it?

Is it natural? Is it the way that people speak. **(Write these up on the board.)**

a. Accuracy - A translator must remain faithful to the meaning of the original message. No part of the meaning must be omitted; nothing extra must be added and the meaning must not be changed or twisted in any way.

b. Clarity - The translation must be clear. The readers or hearers should be able to understand it as easily as possible.

c. Natural - A translation should not sound ‘foreign’. It should sound as though it was originally written by a native speaker of the language. It should use the kind of language that speakers use in their every day life, language that sounds ‘sweet’ to their ears.

Picture: three legged stool. What happens if you take away one leg?

LANGUAGE GROUPS OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES (Monday morning)

This session is important in beginning to form right attitudes to translation. Encourage discussion of what “accuracy” is – communicating the exact meaning of the original message (as closely as possible). This may, and often does, involve changing the form.

If the group is already involved in translation, discuss what kind of translation they are aiming to make. Raise the question “Who is the audience of the translation?” “Who will use the translation?” Always be thinking of this audience as you translate.

Teach the terms “source language” or “source text” and “receptor language”.