

UNITED BIBLE SOCIETIES

PRINCIPLES OF TRANSLATION

APPROACHES TO TRANSLATION

The UBS approach is influenced by the policy of meaning accuracy and faithfulness to the source languages and by the charter of the national Bible Societies, the publishers, to serve all the churches by meeting their Scripture needs for worship, nurture and mission.

UBS translations are usually translations undertaken by national Bible Societies at the request of the churches. These could be first translations or new translations and sometimes revisions of old translations. Translations are always by a team made up of translators, exegetes, stylists and reviewers who are native speakers of the language and drawn from the churches. The teams are supported by translation consultants who are responsible for input in the selection of the translation teams, setting up the project, training the translation team and guiding them through the translation process. The TC is also responsible to the national Bible Society for approving the translation and recommending it for publication. The ownership of the translation is with the national Bible Society and the final authority is the Board of the Bible Society.

LEVELS, STYLES AND TRADITIONS

Formal Correspondence: A formal correspondence (literal) traditional translation is not the kind of translation normally preferred by the Bible Societies, although they print and distribute old versions which fit that description, as long as there is demand for such versions.

Traditional-Liturgical-Literary: Some churches who do not want to go back to the formal correspondence approach are asking for translations that are traditional and literary, that are believed to be suitable for liturgical use in worship. This approach focuses on literary style, level of language and traditional church vocabulary. They could range from some degree of formal features of the source text to dynamic. NRSV and NEB would be models.

CHURCH TRADITIONS

Since the Bible Societies serve the translation needs of the churches, this means serving churches of three traditions, the Protestant, the Catholic and Orthodox.

Catholic: The Bible Societies and the Catholic Church have agreed guidelines for interconfessional projects. Such projects include translators and reviewers from Protestant churches and the Catholic Church. The goal is to produce a translation that is used as a common text by all the churches, and not as is often misunderstood to be a doctrinally eclectic translation. When difficulties arise they are often not doctrinal but arise out of the local church traditions, relating to proper names and the use of familiar or honorific pronouns referring to or addressing God and Jesus. The Guidelines apply to source texts, Canon, exegetical basis, alternative readings, alternative renderings, orthography, proper names, language style etc.

Orthodox: New opportunities for translation in Eastern European and former Soviet Union countries has opened up the possibility for cooperation with Orthodox churches on interconfessional translations. The possibility of agreement on guidelines for cooperation with the Orthodox churches is being explored. There may initially have to be a different approach in regard to the source texts as base texts than the principle adopted for the interconfessional translations involving the Catholics.

TRANSLATION AS COMMUNICATION

Bible Society translations, first and new, are for the most part functional equivalence, common language translations. The translation goal is to render the meaning of the source text accurately and faithfully and in a way that is clearly understood and expresses the emotive and evocative dimensions of the source.

Intelligibility and naturalness in the receptor language is the main goal of the majority of the translations that the UBS is involved in. The translations must be clear and the message easily understood the first time the translation is read or heard.

The theoretical approach adopted by the UBS is the one expounded in Nida & Taber's *Theory & Practice of Translation* and Nida & de Waard's *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating*.

The priorities are dynamic/functional/common language over formal/literal/literary, that is: meaning over form; contextual consistency over verbal consistency; easily accessible to speakers at the lower levels of the education scale and acceptable to those at the upper levels of the education and social scales; hearing over reading; unchurched over church.

Base and Model Texts: The UBS recognizes the UBS Greek NT 4th Edition and Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS) as the prescribed source texts on which all translations will be based. However, not all translators can work from the Hebrew and Greek texts. In such cases, the UBS recommends the use of the Revised Standard Version as the base text and

the Today's English Version as the model text. Neither of these is treated as the determinative text for rendering--the translation is not to be a translation of RSV or TEV. RSV is used for its formal correspondence to the source texts and TEV is used as a model for the application of functional equivalence, common language translation principles. Translators are encouraged to refer to other translations in major languages as models, as well. The resulting translation must reflect exegesis of the Hebrew and Greek texts, and not a prototranslation in a major language.

Alternate Readings: The source of the variant readings is the textual apparatus in the UBS Greek NT 4th Edition and the textual apparatus in BHS. The ratings in GNT4 and the evaluations in the Hebrew OT Project are guides to choice of a reading for translation.

Alternate Renderings: Where several meanings are possible the onus is on the translator to choose the rendering that is most probable and not resort to an ambiguous literal translation. After the translator has made a choice, the literal rendering of the source text may be given in a footnote along with the other possible renderings. An example would be 1 Cor 7.36 "But if anyone thinks he is not behaving properly toward his virgin" (Gk), where virgin could mean a fiancée, an unmarried daughter or a partner in celibacy. Another example is Gen 1.2 where *ruach elohim* can be rendered in three ways: "mighty wind", "wind from God" or "spirit of God".

Inclusive Language: Where the Greek and Hebrew texts are clear that a reference to participants is to both men and women, the translation should faithfully represent this meaning without a linguistic bias towards one gender to the exclusion of the other. The obvious examples are *adam* in Hebrew when in context it refers to the human race and the Greek *adelphoi* when it addresses or refers to a group which includes both male and female participants and *aner* and *'ish* when they refer either to a male or female participant.

The UBS does not support the principle of intervention by the translator to revise the historical patriarchal and androcentric culture reflected in the source text through the rendering in inclusive language what are clearly exclusive references to male participants. The same applies to social and cultural norms and ideological constructs in the Bible which are incompatible with modern social and cultural norms and ideological constructs.

Figurative Language: Figurative language is indispensable to the enrichment of the message and the Hebrew and Greek texts abound in it. But their meanings and impact are lost in translation if translated literally where there are no equivalent figures in the receptor language. Therefore shifts from figurative to non-figurative or from one type of figure to another should be made to express the meaning of the original. In other instances a shift to the figurative in the receptor language to express non-figurative language in the source is quite acceptable.

Implicit Information: The original speakers/writers of the biblical text shared information about society and culture, religion, politics, people, events, beliefs, customs and practices, economics, history, geography, the natural environment and so on with their hearers/readers so that they did not need to include a lot of explicit information for their messages to be clear to the receptors.

Nearly all translators today would resort to making implicit information explicit in translation. The difference would be one of degree. This is an area in translation that needs a lot more investigation and formulation of criteria for determining the boundaries that would enable translators to determine what are the legitimate limits in making implicit information explicit in translation.

In the UBS approach to translation we recognize a number of areas where it is necessary to make explicit certain types of implicit information as a legitimate part of translation as the indispensable minimum component for the reader to make sense of the message.

Here are some examples:

1. Making participants explicit:

Many languages do not have passives and the implicit agent is made explicit as the subject in translation. Translators do this even where passives are commonly used in the language, e.g. "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged." (Mt 7.1 literal) which can be rendered, "Do not judge others, so that God will not judge you."

2. Making explicit the identity of persons or places:

"Jordan" translated as river Jordan. "David" translated as King David. "The king of the south shall come to the king of the north." (Dan 11.6) translated as "the king of Egypt will make an alliance with the king of Syria." Caesar translated as "the Roman Emperor".

3. Making explicit historical information:

"We should have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah" (Is 1.9) translated as "Jerusalem would have been totally destroyed, just as Sodom and Gomorrah were."

4. Historical information and practice:

"If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles" (Mt 5.41) translated

as, "If one of the occupation troops forces you to carry his pack one mile, carry it two miles."

5. Making explicit cultural information:

"You gave me no kiss" (Lk 7.45) translated as "You did not welcome me with a kiss" or "you refused me the customary kiss of greeting." "rent my garments" (Ezra 9.3) translated as "tore my clothes in despair".

There are other types of information which can be recognized as relevant to an understanding of a message, but which pose the question as to whether their inclusion would be legitimate as translation. This type of information is the type of information that would be normal for a commentary, but is questionable as translation. It also raises the question of the legitimate role and function of the translator in relation to the audience.

The Bible Society approach is to select the minimum amount of information to make sense of the text as in the examples above. Bible Societies are constrained by the criteria evident in the translation models used by the churches and excesses which do not meet Bible Society publishing criteria will not be acceptable for publication.

A couple of examples which seem extreme would serve to illustrate the point:

1. "Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness" (Romans 4.9) translated as:

"Abraham believed the Lord and the Lord said, "I am pleased with you because you are doing what is right to believe that I will give you a son and so you know if I give a promise, I will always keep my promise."

2. "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." (John 6,53) translated as:

"When you cause livestock to be raised in your name for forgiveness of sins, then to get forgiveness, you must necessarily eat its meat, but it is forbidden to drink its blood, because in the blood is life. Now I will give my life in God's name and it is necessary that you keep faith on me, so that by my flesh and my blood you may get forgiveness and life. I tell you the honest truth: so long as you are keeping faith on me the son of the human race but do not eat my flesh and drink my blood, which I will give on God's name, so long you will not receive life of ever."

These are two examples of what are perhaps extremes, but they serve to call attention to the issue and the need for constraints in applying the implicit/explicit principle.

While dynamic/functional equivalence provides the UBS with a consistent basic approach with its theory and translation principles presented in a systematic and coherent manner in *Theory and Practice of Translation* and *From One Language to Another*, more of the advances in communication theory are being incorporated into the UBS basic method of analysis, transfer and restructuring as described in *Theory and Practice of Translation*.

The UBS is now adapting translation theories based on semiotic theory, relevance theory, functional grammar, pragmatics, cognitive linguistics and text linguistics, in translation method.

United Bible Societies
Translation Services Center
New York