

Discussing and Translating Biblical Sexual Terms in Multi-cultural and Multi-gender Situations

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Why a study on this subject is needed:

- It is hard to find good information on sexual terms.
- Commentaries give little guidance on the full meaning of these terms.
- Bible Translation Helps do not deal with some of the problems with translating them. One of the goals of this paper is to help with that.
- Back translations help to some extent, but sometimes they either use a loan word or do not “unpack” how a concept is translated.
- We may not have had any training how to learn these terms in another language, especially in ways that are appropriate in the local culture. There is also the problem of learning and translating these terms when working with cotranslators of the opposite sex.
- One of the biggest challenges is to avoid the entry of offensive words into the translation. In some cases, words can have double (bad) meanings, giving implied meanings which takes a very insightful speaker of the language and much testing and checking to avoid. There is also the problem of neighboring towns interpreting words differently, and in a bad way.
- Because of past experiences or other reasons, we ourselves may be hesitant to delve too deep into this subject.
- Roy Ciampa and others are providing good information on the understanding of the terms, as well as their cultural context. One of Ciampa’s paper on this topic can be found at: www.viceregency.com/TranslatingSexPaper.pdf My research does not delve much into the Greek meaning of the terms nor into the Greco-Roman culture of the New Testament period. That type of information, which is basic to understanding and translating these terms, can be found in Ciampa’s paper.

Acts 15

The challenge of translating sexual terms was also brought to my attention because of the succession of events found in Acts 15. Paul and Barnabas had a heated discussion with some men who came to Antioch from Jerusalem and said, “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” This led to a big conference in Jerusalem, where Paul, Barnabas, Peter and others spoke, and ended with the decision to send out a letter to deal with the controversy. In vs. 23 of chapter 15 we see that it is a letter from the Jewish leaders to the Gentiles: “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the

Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings.” Then verse 29 communicates their decision: “that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

Notice the most interesting list in vs. 29:

**that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols,
and from blood,
and from what has been strangled,
and from sexual immorality.**

Eating together can cause good communion or division

The letter is not a four spiritual laws type of list. It contains three requests to abstain from certain types of food, and the other admonition is to abstain from sexual immorality. F.F. Bruce (p. 311) says in regards to the food recommendations: “In most of the churches, Gentile believers had to live alongside Jewish believers, who had been brought up to observe various food laws.” “James asked them to respect their Jewish brethren's scruples by avoiding ‘these things’.” It is hard for people in modern times imagine how repugnant meat with blood was to the Jewish people. They had grown up from early childhood with these laws and regulations. Now, as a result of them giving their hearts to Jesus, and Gentiles doing the same, for the first time in their lives, and we might even say, in history, these “people of the law” are having close communion with Gentiles, people who were accustomed to eating meat with blood, or meat that had been sacrificed to idols.

In that era, almost all communion included food, so this was something they had to deal with practically every time they came together. At that time the idea of the First Christian Church of the Gentiles and a separate First Christian Church of the Jews was not an option. The Bible emphasizes the importance of koinonia, and many of the problems within the church had to do with divisions, strife, bickering, judgment of others, etc. So the letter asked the Gentiles to be willing to adapt in this way for their “weaker brothers.” Paul deals a lot with this issue in his letters as well, for example: Rom 14:20: “Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.” 1 Cor. 8, another chapter dedicated to this issue says in verse:13: “Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”

A big difference in sexual mores

Besides the significant differences between Jews and Gentiles in regards to food (and idols), there was also a gulf of difference between them in regards to sexual mores. As a result, FF Bruce (p. 311) says this letter asks the Gentiles to “conform to the high Jewish code of relations between the sexes instead of remaining content with the lower pagan standards to which they had been accustomed. This would smooth the path of social and table fellowship between Christians of Jewish and Gentile birth.” It is hard to overstate how much the difference in sexual mores between the Jews and Gentiles affected their fellowship. The believing Jews had grown up with a strict sexual code to live by while most Gentiles grew up with the opposite. We get a glimpse of their former lifestyle through what Peter, one of the Acts 15 conference attendees and speakers said in his letter (1 Peter 4:3-4a): “For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans

choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation.”

Not only was the different views of sex an issue, but the pagan attachment of feasts and sex showed itself in a number of cases. As already mentioned, most meetings among the believers at that time included food. Witherington (p. 13) says that “one should not underestimate the place of sexual expression in some pagan festivals. There is evidence that there were in Roman Corinth numerous *hataerae* who often served as companions of the well-to-do at meals. 1 Cor. 10:7 is a meaningful warning only if Paul had good reason to assume that sexual play was a regular part of some meals among the pagans.” 1 Cor. 10:7 says: “Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: ‘The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry.’” Quintilian warns that a teacher of rhetoric should teach his charges about the danger of such feasts, especially because of the possibility of more mature youths or men taking advantage of younger boys in such settings.” (Witherington, p. 13. footnote 31) It is clear that at least something similar was a problem in some churches, reflected in Jude’s warning about the false teachers, with the implication that some of them practiced such things, as vs.12 says: “These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves.”

Paul’s letters emphasize sexual purity

It is into this cultural context that Paul writes his letters. Paul’s letters include at least twelve lists of three or more sins, and in every one of his lists, except for one, at least one sexual sin is listed, and in most lists there are three. The one list in Ephesians 4 which does not include a sexual sin is preceded by verses promoting purity, and followed by a list which entreats the Ephesians to flee sexual immorality. Paul contextualizes his instructions not to sin, and one of the biggest sins which he had to confront the people about was illicit sexual relations. (Note also how many times division and strife are mentioned as well.) We can think of the Acts 15 controversy this way: Judaizers sought to change the Gentiles’ religion. (Acts 15:5b: “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.”). Paul, on the other hand, gives them a message which could change their heart, and gives instructions on how to live a holy life, pleasing to God. His lists are contextualized to deal with their specific sins and temptations, although they included most of the ideas from the 10 commandments.

At the end of this paper is a rather comprehensive chart showing the twelve lists of three or more sins found in Paul’s letters, especially notable for how many sexual terms are included. Following that is a list of the Greek sexual terms used in the New Testament. In regards to that list, note how many verses in the New Testament contains a sexual term. This issue is not just some obscure topic. It literally concerns well over one hundred verses.

The challenge for translators

Keeping in mind how broad and complicated this issue is, as well as how many passages in the New Testament are touched by it, those involved in Bible Translation have a significant challenge in translating these terms. The rest of this presentation focuses on three major issues: 1) How does the linguist/translator go about learning the sexual terms in another language? 2) How does one discuss these terms with people of the opposite sex when working on the translation? And 3) How does one make sure offensive words are not included in the translation. I sent out a questionnaire to the members of SIL Mexico Branch asking them how they dealt with the issues involved in these three questions, as well as asking them how they translated terms like circumcision, virgin, prostitute, eunuch, etc. I also asked them to give a backtranslation of some of the key verses which contain sexual terms. What follows is some of the information I obtained from this questionnaire. I got some input from a few from other countries as well. (The questionnaire which was sent out is found at the end of this paper.)

Question 1.

How did you go about finding the meaning of sexual terms in the language? Was this part of language learning, things you picked up as time went along, or did you only confront the issue when the words began appearing in translation work?

Compilation of the responses:

- Some people are “earthy” and ready to share
- Pick up a puppy and ask about body parts
- Friend teaching offensive/swear words so they wouldn’t use them by accident
- Finding out the “other” (bad) meaning of a word, or its tone pair, which may mean something offensive, or mispronouncing a word which is similar but has an offensive meaning.
- Hear word in mixed company, then ask later what it meant
- Take coworker to see baby who has been circumcised
- Hearing the playful banter of a husband and wife
- Stories
- Jokes

Question 2.

How did you discuss these terms with people of the opposite sex? A number of our SIL teams include one or two females, who sometimes work with one or two males on translation. There are also cases where a male is working with one or more females. When this is the case, how did you feel talking about sexual terms? How detailed did you get in regards to the meaning? What are the language group’s cultural norms when two people of the opposite sex discuss such things?

Compilation of the responses:

- Depends on the level of trust you have with the coworker.
- Working with a married couple with whom you have a good relationship.
- Do not make a big deal about them, either by acting embarrassed or too interested in the subject. Be as matter-of-fact as possible.
- Working with someone who understands that sometimes we need to know words that men and women wouldn’t usually talk about.

-Maybe skip a passage if you have someone else with whom you have a more trusting relationship to talk about such things.

Direct quotes from Translators:

1. Our coworker, not a Christian, was a brother-type who treated us as a brother and understood that sometimes we needed to know words that men and women wouldn't usually talk about. We now work with a Christian man on translation, and he is even more understanding and matter-of-fact about the need to describe the sin without using offensive terminology.
2. Maybe it helped that I had taught biology in the past. I think I was helped by working with a mature husband-wife team. They seemed comfortable discussing these issues with me.
3. Working with young unmarried girls, they know all about these things, and I didn't sense any reticence to talk about them and to get the precise wording. What would have messed up the process would have been any indication of embarrassment or hesitancy on my part to discuss these things or if I had shown any kind of prurient interest in these topics.
4. I think the most important ability needed here is the ability to estimate the confidence that your cotranslator may have in you.
5. It's the uncommon concepts that can be the most difficult, and I might have been more hesitant to work through them with an unmarried girl.
6. How you proceed depends entirely upon the rapport you sense you have with your cotranslator.
7. My guess is that they are typically a little more "earthy" than most of us are and yet not from such a sexualized culture, and so it's not the big deal to them that it may be to us.
8. It could easily be taken as being suggestive in a wrong sense to discuss such things with a woman.

Question 3.

A big issue for translation is that we want to make sure that the words used in the translation, while correctly conveying the meaning of the Greek, do not unnecessarily offend people, that they can be read in a church-type environment, where there will be adults, children, women, men, young people, etc. How did you make sure "groserías" (offensive words) are not included in the translation?

Compilation of the responses:

- Check, test, test, check, check, test with a variety of different people, and if applicable with people of other related variants! Make preliminary recordings to check Scripture.
- The "giggle/snicker" test. (see below)
- Asking non-believing friends if this can be said in mixed company, with young people, with older adults.
- Will people be comfortable reading this in church?

-An imaginative coworker who can imagine how the kids in church will react when they hear the passage read.

-Many times the “normal” word for a concept (homosexual, hell) is an inappropriate word to use in Scripture. (Homosexual being too derogatory, a slur, hell being used only as a curse)

Direct quotes from Translators:

1. We followed our Christian brother co-translator's advice in this, and checked it with a couple other Christians as well--male and female, to make sure that it could be read aloud.

2. Many sexual terms in Zapotec are groserías. They would risk a misunderstanding rather than leave in a word that would be offensive. They discussed this problem with the young people. If hearing a word in church would shock listeners or cause a lot of giggling, it was not used.

3. Often I would ask an older woman (non believer) store owner if this word could be used in mixed company? In a church situation? Could a group of male and female teenagers read this and not laugh? I could tell by the expression on her face what was what.

4. You must expose your rendition to an adequate selection of people. It helps to have a young, imaginative girl around who can't hold back a snicker, or else an imaginative coworker who can imagine how the kids in church will react when they hear the passage read.

Be careful! (Things that can “seal the scroll”)

During the BT2013 conference, a devotional was given in which the speaker gave several examples of inadequate translations which kept the speakers of the language from really understanding the message of the Scriptures. As a result, the scroll continued to “be sealed” (Revelation 5), even though it was right there within reach. Mistranslation of sexual terms or not realizing the second meaning of other seemingly innocent terms, can cause a translation to be rejected. People will not only not want to read it out loud in church, they will probably not want to read it at all, viewing it as a bad translation. The following is a list from SIL Mexico Branch linguists of seemingly innocent words and phrases which in the language in question have a double meaning, and whose inclusion in the Scriptural text could easily cause a translation to be rejected.

1. The term brother, "betsa" in Zapotec means my male sibling. However, if someone using "betsa" is talking to a male that is not his male sibling, it means he's having an affair with his wife.

2. I recall that we learned one grosería (inappropriate word) as a result of leaving out a glottal stop in the early stages of language learning.

3. Reading the passage where the disciples threw their nets into the water on the other side of the boat, some young girl would snicker, and then someone else, until there would be quite a bit of snickering going on, and he finally realized that the term for scrotum is none other than the possessed form of “net.”

4. His stone “means “his penis.” If you want to talk about a plain old stone that belongs to him, you have to work around it a bit.

5. For 'semen' they personalize (make possessive) 'water', putting a clitic pronoun on it. Thus I learned not to say "his water" when referring to a full bucket or spring.

6. Some surprises came up when we had the NT read through with 7 sub-variants present. In one, the word for tree meant penis. In another, the word for touch that we used in the story of the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' garment meant a sexual touch.

7. In one town “endure/put up with” is OK as a virtue like patience, in another it is taken as a homosexual reference unless the object is clear. Also the term to “like.” Between generations there is also a huge chance of embarrassment.

8. Mark 10:25: It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Cases of “eye” having a bad meaning (i.e. anus).

9. Jesus appears/shows himself to His disciples. Can be He shows His intimate parts.

The purification of the language

Here are two examples of how not taking into account double meanings or just a lack of really knowing the language and testing the translation can have a profound negative affect on a translation.

1. In a Zapotec village, the translation was done quite a number of years ago with unbelievers, who used everyday language, “street talk”, which included rough and sexualized terms and ways of talking. Now, as people have become more sensitive to speaking in a way which does not offend, “church talk”, they will not use the NT, especially not in church.

2. One girl in another Zapotec language says that they do not use Zapotec in the services because it has so many double meanings.

Men and women's speech

Here are two examples of how important it is in some languages to be aware of the differences between the way men and women speak.

1. If you work mostly with someone of one sex, you may introduce terms which are okay with one sex but not with the other. Men have been known to say, “I can't read this, this is women's speech.” All of this points to how important it is to check with others, others of different ages and sexes, and, if applicable, people from other villages the translation is expected to reach.

2. I took Justa's word that the phrase she gave me for “ear,” as in “he who has ears to hear, let him hear,” was the right word, until it became clear that it was completely unacceptable to her brother (the pastor of the church). What he knew as a man and she could not have known as a woman was that her phrase was a *grosería* to the men, referring lewdly to the female genitalia.

How some of the terms are translated

The following are examples of how translators in various different languages have rendered some of the key sexual terms:

Circumcision: (Relevance Theory: do not make the phrase so long (or graphic!) that you lose or change the true focus of the passage.)

1. Few in the community have a clear notion of what it is. Justa is a clinic worker, almost a nurse. I held up my thumb and described the removal of the foreskin. She got the idea pretty fast.
2. Cut off from the delicate part, since the image is separation.
3. Usually we use the Spanish “complete the custom of circumcision” and sometimes in a footnote explain “the custom of circumcision, which is what the Jews did, cutting the skin around the top of the penis (not an offensive word). This was a sign to show that their children were dedicated to God.”
4. Circumcision: “to cut a mark” (no need to say where, it begins to come clear when one realizes that it can only be done to a male; however, it can be confused with the cuts made in a cow's ear to identify to whom it belongs, not a bad analogy by the way)
6. When you focus on the idea that this is usually done to a baby boy, it makes it easier to talk about and even translate, add “to a newborn.”

Nahuatl Luke 1:21: put a sign on his body, the sign which the people of Israel put

Otomi John 7:23: you mark your sons when they are born/ sign for you to do which is called circumcision

This is when the little skin at the head [end] of a man's member [“power”] is cut off. This is a sign that is put on people so that it's seen that they are people of Israel. (Zapotec Bible dictionary)

Fornication/sexual immorality (a cover term which includes adultery and other sexual sins)

1. to live badly with your neighbor
2. come together even though they are not married
3. Live-with their companion whom they have not-yet married
4. all kinds of ugly/repulsive things that people do with another woman or man.
5. those who lie down with those with whom they are not married
6. man that takes (lit.: leads/brings with him) many woman, or woman that takes many men

Adultery:

1. to have another man or woman
2. a man entering sin with a woman who is not his wife, and a woman entering sin with a man who is not her husband.
3. those who woman change or men change.

4. the married people who go off with another
5. the ones who are married and lay down with another
6. to have a lover (musa) “Musa” almost exclusively refers to one who is already married.

Sensuality (lasciviousness, debauchery, wantonness)

1. “to have vices” and includes a lot of things.
2. they don't restrain/pull back their desire to enter sin with a man or a woman
3. those who fall in love a lot even though they are married
4. being naughty, to live without shame

Prostitute:

1. a woman who sells herself. “Be careful that whatever is used is not vulgar.
2. in first language we worked in, a woman “happy inside with men”; in the other, a woman “is foolish is nothing,” it is a doublet which refers uniquely to a prostitute.
3. a woman that plays around based on the word for toy!
4. woman who lives-with lots of men/woman that takes many men
5. A women who acts in an ugly way

Virgin

1. In the first language we worked in, it's the word for woman plus the word for new/young/unmarried. If she has had sex, she is no longer in this category whether married or not. In the second, it is a woman who still has not had a man/husband. A woman who has not yet slept with a man would be equally understood.
2. the word for a young woman because once she is married or sexually active we use a different word

Eunuch (Does over translating it in Acts 8 change the focus of the passage?)

1. same word as what is done to convert a bull into an ox. (castrate)
2. A man who cannot cause children to be born
3. men who won't/can't marry
4. man that can neither marry nor have children

Hard verses:

Matthew 1:18: Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

1. Happen-offspring Mary through power-of Holy Spirit
2. Mary was gifted/pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit
3. the child she was pregnant with wasn't Joseph's but it was the child of the Holy Spirit that was contained within her.
4. became pregnant with a child, for the Holy Spirit gave this wonderful thing to her.
5. she was carrying a child (pregnant). But it was the Holy Spirit who caused that she was carrying a child.
6. Maria became pregnant. Her pregnancy was from the power of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 19:12 For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. (Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.)” (ESV)

TEZ: For some men are able to live alone (without sex) because that has been the way they have been since they were born, and some men are able to live alone because men have cut them so that they will not desire women, and some men are able to live alone because they have denied themselves women because they want more people to enter under the authority of God.

AYU: Some men do not marry because they have been like that since they were born, and some of them are men who have been castrated, and some men, since they want to work so that God might govern over more people’s hearts, they don’t marry.

KANK: The reasons that a person is not able-to-marry are varied. Some are born as if they were castrated, some were castrated by their fellow people, and still others, they do not marry so that they will be single-minded (make-one their mind/thoughts) in their serving God in his ruling.

1 Cor. 6:9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders (NIV)

TEZ: Do you not know that evil people will not enter where God governs? Do no deceive yourselves, for people who desire to sleep with just anyone will not enter where God is, nor will those who worship idols, nor those who sleep with those who are not their husbands or wives, nor those men who sleep with other men.

AYU: Therefore do not forget that those who do evil have no part of God’s governing. You must not deceive yourselves, for those who commit sexual sins will not live there, nor those who worship false gods, nor those who have a lover, nor men who cause other men to do shameful things with them, nor men who take a man as if he were his wife.

KANK: Don't you know that those who are doing evil will not join/be-included in God's ruling? Don't deceive yourselves, because the adulterer (lit. one-who-womens-with), the one who sleeps-with someone who is not his spouse, the man who sleeps-with his fellow man, and the one who worships idols, they will not be-included in God's ruling.

[illegible]

Greek word	Romans letters	verses	Translations
πορνεία	porneia	Mat. 5:32, 15:19, 19:9; Mark 7:21; John 8:41; Acts 15:20, 29, 21:25; Rom. 1:29, 1 Cor. 5:1, 6:13, 18, 7:2; 2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; Co. 3:5; 1 Th. 4:3; Rev. 2:21, 9:21, 14:8, 17:2, 4, 18:3, 19:2.	Fornication, sexual immorality
πορνεύω	porneúō	1 Cor. 6:18, 10:8; Rev. 2:14, 20, 17:2, 18:3, 19:2	sins sexually, sexually immoral person
πόρνη	pornē	Mat. 21:31-2; Luke 15:30; 1 Cor. 6:15-16; Heb. 11:31; Jas. 2:25; Rev 17:1,5, 15-16, 19:2	Prostitute, harlot, whore
πόρνος	pornos	1 Cor. 5:9-11; Eph. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:10; Heb. 12:16, 13:4; Rev. 21:8, 22:15	Fornicators, whoremongers, sexually immoral, adulterers (NIV)
ἐκπορνεύω	ekporneúō	Jude 7	Giving themselves over to fornication/sexual immorality
μοιχαλís	moichalis	Mat. 12:39, 16:4; Mark 8:38; Rom. 7:3 (2); Jas. 4:4; 2 Pet. 2:14	Adulterous, adulteress, adultery
μοιχεύω	moicheúō	Mat. 5:27, 28, 32 19:18; Mark 10:19; Luke 16:18; 18:20; John 8:4; Rom. 2:22; 13:9; Jas. 2:11; Rev. 2:22	adultery
μοιχεία	moicheia	Mat. 15:19; Mark 7:21; John 8:3 Gal. 5:19	Adultery, adulteries
μοιχάω	moicháō	Mat. 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11-12	commits adultery
μοιχός	moichos	Luke 18:11; 1Cor. 6:9; Heb, 13:4; Jas. 4:4	Adulterers,
ἀσέλγεια	aselgeia	Mark 7:22; Rom. 13:13; 2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19, Eph. 4:19, 1 Pet. 4:3; 2 Pet. 2:7, 18; Jude 4	Sensual conduct, sensual passions, lasciviousness, debauchery, wantonness, lustful desires

Greek word	Roman letters	verses	Translations
πάθος	páthos	Rom. 1:26; Col. 3:5; 1 Th. 4:5	Vile affections, inordinate affection, lust
πάθος ατιμία	páthos atimía	Rom. 1:26	dishonorable passions, shameful lusts,
ἐπιθυμία	epithumía	Rom. 1:24, 6:2, 7:7-8, 13:14; Gal. 5:16, 24; Eph. 2:3, 4:22; Col 3:5; 1Th 4:5; 1 Tim 6:9; 2Tim. 2:22, 3:6, 4:3; Tit. 2:12, 3:3; Jas. 1:14-15; 1Pet. 1:14, 2:11, 4:2-3; 2Pet. 1:4, 2:10, 18, 3:3; 1Joh. 2:16-17; Jude 16, 18.	Lusts, sinful desires
ὄρεχis	órexis	Rom. 1:27	lust
ἐκκαίω	ekkaío	Rom. 1:27	inflamed, consumed with passion
κῶμος	kómos	Rom 13:13; Gal. 5:21; 1 Pet. 4:3	Orgies, rioting, revellings, carousing
κοίτη	koitē	(Luke 11:7, Rom. 9:10) 13:13; Heb. 13:4	Bed, chambering, sexual immorality
μαλακός	malakós	(Mat. 11:8(2); Luke 7:25) 1 Cor. 6:9	Soft, effeminate, male prostitute
ἀρσενοκοίτης	arsenokoítes	1 Cor. 6:9, 1 Ti. 1:10	Abusers of themselves with mankind, defile themselves with mankind
ἀκαθαρσία	akatharsía	Mat. 23:27; Rom. 1:24; 6.19; 2Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5.19; Eph. 4:19; 5.3; Col 3:5; 1Th 2:3, 4:7	Uncleanness, impurity

The following is the first e-mail sent out to teams of the Mexico Branch. A second one was sent out, and is almost the same.

Greetings. I know we all have very busy schedules, but if you can contribute in any way to the request for information here, it would be greatly appreciated. I am giving a poster presentation (changed to an oral one a little later) at the October Bible Translation 2013 Conference in Dallas. The presentation is called: Discussing and Translating Biblical Sexual Terms in Multi-cultural and Multi-gender Situations. Talking about such things is a sensitive issue, and that is partly why I am raising it in my presentation. This is especially important since almost all of Paul's lists of sins include 2-3 or even more sexual terms.

Some of the issues in which I would like your input are:

1. How did you go about finding the meaning of sexual terms in the language? Was this part of language learning, things you picked up as time went along, or did you only confront the issue when the words began appearing in translation work?
2. One of the main issues I am researching is how did you discuss these terms with people of the opposite sex. A number of our SIL teams include one or two females, who sometimes work with one or two males on translation. There are also cases where a male is working with one or more females. When this is the case, how did you feel talking about sexual terms? How detailed did you get in regards to the meaning? What are the language group's cultural norms when two people of the opposite sex discuss such things? How did you know the word or phrase that was finally agreed upon was correct or even appropriate?
3. A big issue for translation is that we want to make sure that the words used in the translation, while correctly conveying the meaning of the Greek, do not unnecessarily offend people, that they can be read in a church-type environment, where there will be adults, children, women, men, young people, etc. How did you make sure "groserias" are not included in the translation?

Below are some example verses which include some of the around 20 sexual terms in the New Testament. If you can give a back translation from the language you are working on into English, or even just a back translation of the sexual terms, that would be most helpful. The verses below include a translation from the English Standard Version, with the underlined words or phrases the focus. In addition, if you could tell how you translated words like circumcision, eunuch, prostitute and virgin it would be most helpful. If for any reason you feel uncomfortable responding to this e-mail, that is fine.

Thank you very much,
John Williams

Matthew 1:18: Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 1:25: but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Matthew 19:12: For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it."

Mark 7:21-22: For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

Luke 2:21: And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Romans 13:13: Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy.

1 Cor. 6:9: Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,

1 Cor. 6:15-16: Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh."

2 Cor. 12:21b: I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced. (ESV)

Galatians 5:19: Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,

Colossians 3:5: Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Heb. 13:4: Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

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