Subject Feb 2025 Translation News

Preheader SIL Translation Services (STS)

STS NEWS
SIL Translation Services

SIL Translation Services (STS) works in collaboration with colleagues in SIL and other agencies to creatively steward and advance the translation practices, tools, methods, and training necessary to enable a supportive environment for individuals and communities to flourish and engage with Scripture.

We value: Interconnectedness. Capacity Building. Diversity. Innovation.

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Best Practice – From Experiment to Established

- **Greg Dekker -** *International Translation Services Director*

Over the past four years, SIL Translation Services has been privileged to engage in regular collaborative conversations with partner organizations. These discussions have been a source of inspiration, joy, and innovative ideas. Through these partnerships, one truth has become increasingly clear to me: unity and collaboration thrive when built on a foundation of mutual understanding and strong relationships.

In one recent exchange, a partner highlighted their organization's deliberate efforts to create space for innovation and incorporate these ideas into mainstream practices. During the discussion, someone remarked on the importance of distinguishing between activities that are "experimental" and those that qualify as "established" or "best practice." This sparked an important question for me: under what conditions can an activity transition from "experiment" to "established" or "best practice"?

By definition, "best practice" refers to methods or techniques widely accepted as the most effective because they consistently produce superior results. Yet, how often do we assume innovations deliver superior outcomes without thoroughly testing and validating them? Sometimes, the goals themselves shift during this process, reshaping how we view their perceived success.

Take, for instance, the evolving role of the Translation Consultant (TC). Traditionally, stated very simply, their primary responsibility was evaluating translated texts for quality assurance - fidelity with the original. Now, their role is increasingly seen as that of a mentor, collaborating with- and guiding others within communities to take on quality assurance tasks. While this represents a shift in roles, the core practice of ensuring translation quality remains unchanged and frequently resides with the TC. Quality assurance is not disappearing—nor is the role of the TC, rather it is being redistributed, with community members stepping into roles previously held by the TC.

In one recent example that I observed, it was claimed that quality assurance was carried out entirely by a local community without a Translation Consultant. Yet, upon closer examination, a Consultant remained involved—albeit in an instructive, supportive, guidance in a behind-the-scenes way. This demonstrated for me that the expertise and insights of a Translation Consultant are indispensable, whether directly applied or transferred to others in the community.

The journey from innovation to best practice follows a clear path: experimentation, testing, validation, and eventual establishment. Rushing this process risks substituting assumptions for proven results. As the adage that originated with Shakespeare goes, "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." The essence of best practice lies in its demonstrated effectiveness, not in its label or packaging.

As we navigate these conversations and would-be innovative/new practices, let's remain diligent in distinguishing between innovation and proven methods. Only by rigorously testing results can we confidently promote practices as established or best.

Time To Submit Your Abstract - BTC25

- Phil King

The Bible Translation Conference will be in Chiang Mai, Thailand, from 28-31 October 2025. Abstracts for presentations are now being accepted. The submission deadline is Thursday, March 13, 2025. Please submit your abstracts using this Google form, and pass this information to other colleagues who might be interested.

The theme will be 'Ethics in Bible Translation', picking up a topic being explored by the FOBAI Translation Development Group this year.

We all get involved in Bible translation for different reasons, not least a sense of calling and desire to serve, while doing good and working towards transformation in peoples' lives. However, this motivation does not exempt us from ethical considerations about our systems, practices, methods and strategies. What are the ethical lenses we use as we examine how we do what we do? Where does Bible translation intersect with issues like respect, justice, fairness, concern for the vulnerable, minimising harm, and avoiding control and exploitation? More information is available on the Conference website: https://btconference.org/

Akuo Spoken English Bible & Psalms Layer by Layer

- Kris Toler

Akuo: The Spoken Bible is a digital tool designed for the incremental publishing and distribution of biblical content. It is developed by SIL Language Technology and features an Android app that allows users to access the same content on mobile devices. This application facilitates the listening and engagement with scripture, making it a valuable resource for those interested in audio Bible translations and oral scripture projects. It was designed as an audio first application that can publish biblical content directly from the Audio Project Manager (APM) tool for oral translation.

Psalms: Layer by Layer, managed by Scriptura, offers resources aimed at Bible translation teams focusing on the book of Psalms. It emphasizes the importance of understanding both the content and poetic form of the Psalms to achieve high-quality translations that maintain their literary beauty and communicative power.

They focus on both linguistic accuracy and the emotional resonance of the text, ensuring that its beauty and truth can be appreciated across different languages and cultures. Their goal is to enable every people group to engage with Scripture in a way that is culturally relevant and meaningful.

The First Oral Bible Translation in English

- Josh Frost

The *Spoken English Bible* (SEB) and its associated application, *Akuo*, are significant steps forward in the world of media within the Bible translation movement. The *Spoken English Bible* was created to serve the global church by offering a model oral Bible translation in American English.

This oral Bible translation draws on the full range of modern American English genres to faithfully communicate the messages conveyed in the original biblical texts. For instance, the Psalms are rendered as songs, the Gospels as vivid narratives, and the Epistles as public speeches.

Beyond the translation itself, the SEB has also developed a companion commentary series and an encyclopedia of key biblical concepts conveyed via biblical stories. While the SEB translation primarily targets an American English-speaking audience, the commentary and encyclopedia are designed to serve mother-tongue translators worldwide. These resources provide information akin to what is found in the UBS *Handbooks* and *Translator's Notes*, but they are presented in an oral-friendly format resembling podcast discussions.

The SEB team isn't stopping at audio and commentary. They've begun venturing into video production through their new YouTube channel. All SEB audio content will be paired with engaging visuals and captions to expand accessibility. The channel will also feature videos explaining the SEB's various products, their value for Bible translators, and how they can support the American church. Read the full story here from SIL International Media Services.

Interviews with Translation Consultants

We asked an experienced Translation Consultant to share their thoughts concerning their work and philosophy of ministry. Experienced consultants have been a key organizational resource over the years, equipping and encouraging others to academic and professional excellence while providing much needed leadership and service to many Bible translation organizations.

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AJ *- Asia*

How did you get interested in Bible translation? I was interested in missions as a college student and wanted to work with unreached peoples, but didn't know what to study if I wanted to live and work overseas, so I decided it would be good for me to study Bible at my college. During the university's mission week on campus a team of translators spoke to our Greek class. They shared about unreached and Bibleless people and the work of translation. One of the translators challenged us that if we liked Greek and found the language and grammar fascinating, we would make good translators.

I actually transferred schools to study linguistics and see if that is something God might be calling me to. I found I loved linguistics and translation. I graduated and moved to Asia.

What gets you excited when you work with others in Bible translation? My favorite thing about this work is that I get to spend time each day digging into God's Word – for my job. And I love sharing that with our translation teams.

What is your consulting philosophy? I love consulting and I love working with teams. My favorite part of this job is being able to meet with teams face to face.

While I love consulting and know there is great value in what the consultant brings to the table, the consultant's influence over the translation is actually quite minimal. The consultant does not know the target language, but works through a back translation. The consultant, while they are investing in the team throughout the project through trainings and workshops, they do not work with the team every day.

On the other hand, a Translation Advisor (also known as Exegetical Advisors, or MLQAs) really are the ones who retain the most influence over the translation. They are working with the team every day, they know the community, they know the target language and can read the final draft in the language.

While my job as a consultant is important because it brings a fresh set of eyes to look through their work, I realize that the impact I have on the translation doesn't even compare to that which the Translation Advisor has over the translation.

And every single Translation Advisor I work with is a potential Consultant in Training.

What translation resources do you really value? Exegetical Summaries actually are my favorite translation resource. There are so many times when I was translating myself or as a consultant that I would have a particular question about the text and Translators Notes and Translators Handbook didn't address the issue. I'd go to Exegetical Summaries and, bam, they'd have the exact the question I was asking.

How do you continue to grow as a consultant? (What helps you continue to grow as a consultant?) I am involved in various different training programs; training CiTs and training TAs, and preparing for those always stretch me and grow me in new areas each time. Also in interactions and friendship with other consultants, as they talk about their interests and strengths, I see areas where I am weak. Finding time to grow in those new areas and create new habits is hard. One area I want to refresh is my Biblical Greek, but finding the time and accountability is hard in an already demanding schedule.

Can you share about a time when you realized you were wrong and what you learned from it? My first consultant check on our translation team. Oh, it was horrible. I had no idea what I was suppose to be doing as Translation Advisor on the project. And the consultants checking for me, not only were they very good consultants, they ran a tight ship.

My back translation was a mess, my key terms weren't researched, our exegesis was wanting. But I'll tell you, having consultants that really pushed our team for excellence made me a better Translation Advisor. As humbling as that experience was, I grew from it, learned what I should have been doing, and made our practice even better.

I will never forget my first consultant check. And I think many teams are the same way; they aren't quite sure what they are doing or if they are on the right track.

Now as a consultant, I enjoy doing the first check for a team myself because I remember my experience. And hopefully I can graciously challenge them to excellence because I have been there before, too.

What are your top tips for someone starting on a career path in Bible translation? What would you say to young/aspiring translators? We often want God's plan to be clear and completely laid out in front of us for us to move in that direction. But His plan is hardly ever so clear from the onset. Don't wait till you have your ducks in a row. Just go. And don't expect no obstacles. Climb over them.

I had been to South Asia before moving to Asia and I thought that's where I wanted to return to. But SIL would not send me there. I redirected to a different area, somewhere I had never been to and didn't know anything about. I'm actually glad, looking back now, that God redirected me to where I am now, but at the time it was hard.

The same was true when I joined a translation project. It was not easy. There were a number of things that made project life hard – to name a few, politics and people. But even the assurance that the language needed a translation was not always obvious. The assurance that the community would use the translation was not always obvious. (I'm a supporter of doing due diligence to know if a translation is needed and the community wants it. We did that. Don't get me wrong.) But moving forward was often in faith, not because these things were clear.

So, to all those just starting out or aspiring to start, go out there and get experience translating. Even when it's hard and there are lots of obstacles. Because it will always be hard and there will always be obstacles.

Getting experience translating is invaluable.

What do you see as the place of the church in Bible translation? I strongly believe that if there is a church, the church should be involved in the translation to the degree they want to be involved. Obviously the church and Scripture should be connected. This seems like a no-brainer for me.

But there are various different nuanced contexts that we work in that make answering this question not so obvious. For example:

- What if the church doesn't want to be involved? In contexts like this, translation can go forward alongside the church, without the church's direct involvement.

- What if there is no church? Translation can be an avenue for church planting.

- What if the church is not contextualizing? That is to say, the church has created a Christian bubble in the community where their traditions and lingo are foreign to the greater community. There is space, and need, to translate for that greater community.

In any case we work with the church, represent the church and/or build the church in our work of translation.

News

Review of DTL Course

- Alice Reed

In November, I received a no-cost registration for the Digital Training Library's Oral Bible Translation certificate in order to review its suitability for First Nations translators I work with in Canada. What follows is my personal review of the certificate.

Content: The curriculum provides a strong theoretical foundation in orality, oral communication, the oral nature of the Bible (especially OT/Jewish), principles for storytelling, and practical steps for undertaking an OBT project from start to finish. The content was of high academic quality and well-cited. To have this information so easily accessible and organized online at any time is one of its strengths.

Pedagogy: Many built-in participatory learning activities formed part of the instructional method. The DTL highly encourages this course to be taken as a group, led by an advisor/facilitator. Many questions ask students to reflect on their own context. However, I would have liked to see greater connection with or acknowledgment of minority-language translators' pre-existing understandings of storytelling. An advisor is essential, as at certain points the course references important concepts (ex: recording equipment and standards) which require someone with additional expertise in the field to fully explain or make useful.

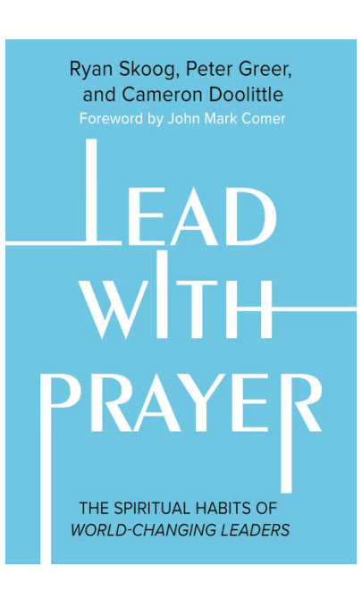
Weaknesses: There are inherent limits to an OBT course being taught primarily through reading (plus audio-visual illustrations) online. A literate advisor/consultant would be the ideal audience for this certificate. He or she may be able to distill the information into what is most useful for a team, while following the structure of the course. I do not think this format is one the translators I work with would be motivated to engage with. Furthermore, there is occasionally a subtle assumption in the wording of the materials that OBT is something "we" do for "them", which is potentially alienating to a MTT audience, although I acknowledge this is a difficult balance to strike. On a separate note, the instruction made a technical distinction between OBT and OBS, but in the final (practical) module, the examples seemed to be from OBS, and no specific guidelines were offered for how translation is different between the two.

Caveat: Students create their own oral translation of Scripture as a capstone project for this certificate. I am confident this assignment would be highly beneficial under the guidance of an experienced mentor, but I did not have access to that element of the course.

Lead With Prayer

- Steve Quakenbush

Want to learn to Lead with Prayer? Join a learning group hosted by SIL's Spiritual Life Team on six Mondays from January 27-March 10. Find out more here.


Ryan Skoog, Peter Greer, and Cameron Doolittle
Foreword by John Mark Comer
LEAD WITH PRAYER
THE SPIRITUAL HABITS OF WORLD-CHANGING LEADERS

The Spiritual Life Team is gearing up for a six-session online learning group with the book Lead with Prayer beginning January 27. This time will be most convenient for those in the West. Stay tuned for opportunities in the East. Register your interest by taking this quick survey. Based on responses already received, we're planning "learning groups" for Western time zones. Read about it here.

Lead with Prayer: The Spiritual Habits of World-Changing Leaders by Ryan Skoog, Peter Greer, and Cameron Doolittle, is based on three years of research into the spiritual habits and practices of current and historic world-changing leaders. In this newly published book, the authors share motivating insights and practical tools for cultivating a personal and organizational commitment to prayer.

Prayerlessness is detrimental for a Christian, but it's death for a Christian leader. (p. xvii)

An intentional prayer life is the nonnegotiable constant of lasting, fruitful Christian life and leadership. (p. xxi)

Journal of Translation New Volume

- Freddy Boswell

Digital Resources

Journal of Translation 20.2

Editor's Foreword
Freddy Boswell

Trust the Process: Improving Translator Training Workshops
Paul Franklin Morgan

Attaining Quality in Oral Bible Translation: A Guide to Effective Practice
Joshua Frost, Nikki Mustin, Heather Beal

Can Parallelism in Biblical Hebrew Poetry be "Unparalleled"?
Ernst R. Wendland

On the Nature of Poetry, Parallelism, and Methods: A Response to Ernst Wendland
Emmylou J. Grosser

The 1634 Wendat Texts Recorded by Jesuit Father Pierre-Joseph-Marie Chaumonot
John L. Steckley

Book Review: Between the Bridge and the Barricade: Jewish Translation in Early Modern Europe
Philip A. Noss

The JOT (Journal of Translation) Editors announce the release of JOT 20(2). The latest edition is available here: https://doi.org/10.54395/JOT202. Note that accessing JOT articles through the DOI handles instead of PDFs, enables JOT to track Internet use and article engagements.

Volume 20, issue 2, marks a turning point in the twenty-year history of the Journal of Translation. Following the release of JOT 20(1) in April of 2024, they now present in JOT 20(2) articles which have been published since then on a rolling basis, along with two that have just now been finalized.

This rolling publication schedule reflects a similar platform of presentation by an increasing number of academic journals. Moreover, it furthers the goal of providing timely release of individual articles in addition to a single issue—like this one—in which each can reside for ease of access and reference.

JOT is also now publishing translation-related doctoral dissertation summaries. If you know of one that has recently been completed, please ask them to contact us at editor_jot@sil.org.

ALA Translation Internship Coordinator

- Lydia Hoeft

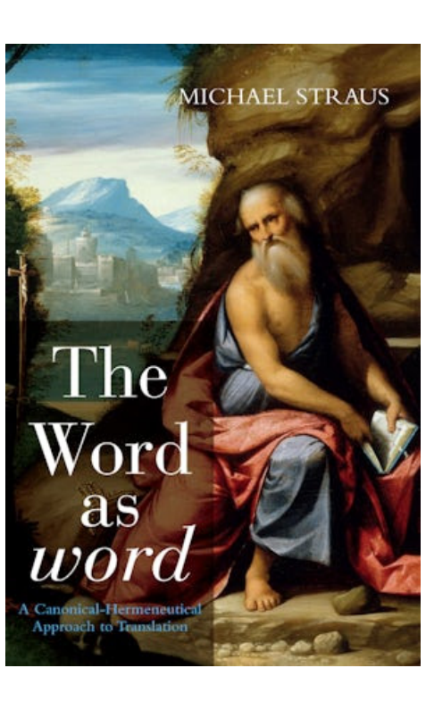
Lydia Hoeft has recently taken on a new role of ALA (Anglo-Lusophone Africa) Translation Internship Coordinator working with Jonathan vanden Broek (ALA Translation Domain Team Leader).

Erick Njumba summarizes the ALA Internship Programme as: *A program that aims at recruiting, training and mentoring highly qualified local candidates who have specific skills and capabilities with great potential to contribute to the work of SIL in Anglo Lusophone Africa in both technical and leadership roles that advances an increase in language project engagements from the current 236 languages to 270 by 2025.*

While still at school, Lydia had a desire to serve in the field of Bible translation. This led her to study linguistics. Starting at the University of Cologne, she completed her MA in Linguistics at UT Arlington and then joined Wycliff Germany. Following an initial period in West Africa, where she was engaged in language survey and Bible translation, Lydia has spent over three decades in Ethiopia supporting a Bible translation project as a linguist and exegete. During this time she has also been involved in the training of translators. For more than 8 years now she has fulfilled the roles of translation consultant and mentor to a number of teams and individuals, both in Ethiopia and more recently with Africa Area as well.

The Word as word

- New Book



Pickwick Publications, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers, has recently released a book by Michael Straus: *The Word as word: A Canonical-Hermeneutical Approach to Translation*.

This book provides an original translation methodology applicable to the New Testament, one that remains rooted in the literal Greek; considers its paleographic and philological characteristics as well as its socio-historical context; understands the text as part of a canonical whole; reflects its reception history in church doctrine and liturgy; accounts for "classical" formulations of its translation-tradition; yet speaks with contemporary literary style.

In developing a new methodology, the book appropriates ancient and modern insights into the relationship of thought and language not previously considered in the context of translation. Further, the book is premised on the understanding that Scripture is the divinely communicated Word of God made incarnationally present in the words of the Bible. As the viva vox evangelii, biblical texts thus have ongoing effects in the continuum of church history and tradition. The book argues that contemporary translators of the Bible should therefore be aware of their own situatedness in and shaping by this continuity of linguistic and cultural transmission. As such, the book provides a pathway to translating the Scriptures in such a way as to capture, recapitulate, and incorporate the living sweep of the timeless Word in words that cross time.

Biblical Hebrew Study

- Jochanan Löwenstein

We're excited to invite you to experience Biblical Hebrew as a Living Language—for free! Whether you're considering a course with us or just curious, we welcome you to join a free taster lesson with Israeli teachers. These online sessions are available on three different dates this February, starting February 9. Click here to sign up for the free Hebrew Taster Lesson. It's going to be a rich, immersive, and lively experience!

We also offer Biblical Hebrew reading groups, tutoring, and a special opportunity to come to Israel this May for *"Discovering Jesus in His Jewish Context"*, in partnership with the Caspari Center. Explore all courses and sign up here. If you have further questions, email Jochanan Löwenstein.

- Our regular online semester begins March 16, featuring:
  - Biblical Hebrew as a Living Language (Levels 1 & 2)
  - "*Unfolding Biblical Hebrew Poetry*" with Murray Salisbury—a deep dive into the artistry of biblical poetry for those with a working reading knowledge of Biblical Hebrew (taught primarily in English).
- Other courses of interest:
  - *"The Gospel of Matthew in Its First-Century Jewish Context"*
  - *"The Oral Torah: A Guide to the Mishnah for Yeshua Followers"*

Coming Events

- 2025 - 28 Apr-16 May. Narrative Discourse Analysis for Translation (in French). Cameroon
- 2025 - 05-10 May. ICON-25: The SIL International Conference & Vision 2025 Celebration. Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2025 - 19-22 May. EMDC. The Netherlands
- 2025 - 10-23 September. Narrative Discourse Analysis for Translation. Tanzania
- 2025 - 28-31 October. Bible Translation Conference 2025. Chiangmai, Thailand

Useful Links

- Bible Translation Consultant Competencies / YouTube channel for BT Competencies
- SIL Senior Translation Consultants
- Email the SIL International Translation Office / International Translation Services ILS page
- Join/visit the SIL Translation Resources Google Group
- Visit the public SIL.org/Translation site
- Find Translation Resources (both free download and for purchase) SIL.org/Resources/Publications
- Bamboo Project website / Journal of Translation
- Mentoring Matters website - Mentor Training Courses
- Consultant Development and Management Team
- Progress.Bible Information / Memoriam website

SIL Translation Services

International Leadership Team

- Greg Dekker - *SIL Translation Services Director*
- Angeline Foo - *SIL Coordinator for Translation Research and Practice*
- Paul O'Rear - *SIL Coordinator for Translation Resources*
- Phil King - *SIL Coordinator for Translation Training and Development*
- Kris Toler - *SIL Coordinator for Oral Translation Services*
- Viji Mathew - *Director, Global Consultant Pool*
- Brian Migliazza - *STS Operations and Project Management*

Area Translation Coordinators

- Angeline Foo & Amber Jasa - *Asia*
- Greg Carlson - *Pacific*
- Drew Maust - *Francophone Africa*
- Jonathan van den Broek - *Anglo-Lusophone Africa*
- (Currently Open) - *Eurasia*
- Rick Floyd & Dwight Shaver - *Americas*
- Bernadet van der Louw - *Global Sign Languages Team (GSLT)*

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You are receiving this email because of your interest in translation updates.

This newsletter is produced by SIL Translation Services. It contains items of interest for translation personnel within SIL and related organizations. It includes notices of upcoming conferences and workshops, announcements of recent dissertations and journal articles, and pointers to useful information related to translation.

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