

How new teams might best translate orally

A proposed process for communicating God's message effectively

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(The author carries the full responsibility for the views expressed.)

The skill of translating

Human beings are skillful learners. Babies begin learning to associate specific sounds with their experience while still in their mother's womb principally whether comfortable or uncomfortable. After birth, they gradually widen their environments and their experiences with their environments. They learn to manipulate their hands, arms and legs to obtain things that interest them. Early on, they learn meaning for the sounds they hear from their mothers and fathers. Soon, they attempt to mimic those sounds in attempts to communicate meaning to mother, father and siblings. The learning part of their brains is wonderfully skillful. They gather and retain vast amounts of proper association of sounds and meaning.

As children develop, they learn to compartmentalize those associations. If a child's family speaks a language different from the language he hears in the street and playground, his mind automatically maintains the two categories, resulting that the child can speak either language with ease in the environment where it is appropriate. If a child maintains interactions in several languages into adulthood, he or she can usually shift instantly and easily into the language appropriate for the occasion.

It seems that children have this innate ability to learn language until about the age of ten to twelve. Up to that age, they can function comfortably, as children, in two languages, even three. Of course, they are more comfortable in one language, but function well in the others. After some critical point of their development, most people find their learning a new language increasingly difficult as they age. No one can verify whether the difficulty comes about because of hormonal changes in the brain or because the person becomes more focused on interactions with others in their comfortable language. From the point of change, it seems that a person's brain becomes as if hardwired to the languages of youth.

Now let's think about a person who learns a language in classes or in the market. His or her experiences are limited to the kind of language used in those environments. He or she will have difficulty understanding or communicating in other environments. Those limitations can be overcome at least partially by a cooperative oral translation team of two to five members. Their combined experiences help them all to understand the language of the base-translation.

See also (Willis Ott):

The description of the oral translation process,

The rationale for communicating orally the Scriptures,

The strategy for presenting orally the Christian Scripture in audio-media,

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Orality and orally translating

When we think about how we humans learn language and how we communicate to others orally and they hear our messages, we can understand better why oral translation is possible and why it is perhaps preferable.

Let's think about the process that happens in the mind of a person who hears a message in a language he or she has learned. If the person hears the words of a language in which he is comfortable, his brain immediately and automatically formulates the meaning to him personally. He understands the message fairly well. He might even remember the words of the message as well. But the message might be in a language with which he is not comfortable, such as is the case of a person who has learned the language in school, workplace or marketplace. When he hears such a message, his brain also automatically formulates the meaning. But HIS BRAIN STORES THE CONCEPTS IN TERMS OF HIS LANGUAGE OF COMFORT. It does not store it in the words of the language of the message he has heard. The stored concepts are shaped into concepts in the language in which the person is comfortable. When an American hears "Vale cinco dólares" in Spanish

(which he has learned in school), he understands the meaning “the seller wants five units of money.” If we could elicit from him what he heard, he would likely respond with the American idiom “It’s worth five bucks.” His brain will have “translated” and stored the meaning in the words of his most comfortable language. If a Brit heard a seller say “Vale vintecuatro pesetas”, he will likely convert (perhaps unconsciously) that value to the value in pounds sterling and then decide whether to buy or not buy, BECAUSE HE HAS UNDERSTOOD THE MESSAGE. If his wife asked him later how much he paid for the item, he likely would tell her the value in pounds sterling, knowing that she would likely understand the value more quickly in the values with which she is comfortable.

Putting it simply, ORAL TRANSLATORS TRANSLATE AT THE MOMENT OF THEIR HEARING THE MESSAGE! They do it automatically. Then, when they speak their understanding of the message, they do not mimic the words that they have heard but rather they speak THE MEANING OF THE MESSAGE in their language.

So then, with the audio-recordings of the spoken translation, the translator himself can review what he has spoken and he can restate it if he is not satisfied with it. His teammates can listen the recording and suggest possible changes. The process facilitates the translated message being natural and truly communicative.

Hindrances to the communication of the message

The trainee translators might be hindered by their preconceptions about translation. Most will have experienced interpreting sermons for guest pastors in their churches (instantaneous translation). Those experiences have a strong similarity to orally translating. We can build on those experiences.

Some educated trainee translators might hold the attitude that “proper translation” can be done only in writing. It will take a few days for them to recognize that the action of writing is encumbering, as well as sometimes causing too much ambiguity.

The translators’ lack of experience in the spheres of spiritual interaction as spoken in the language of instruction can hinder their understanding the passages. This problem is resolved by their hearing a meaning-based resource-translation, by the teams’ discussing problems among themselves and by the facilitator’s advice when needed.

Everyone should recognize that the process of the original writing the New Testament documents complicated the communication of God’s message, since the authors (the Apostles) were limited to *symbolizing* spiritual concepts with images that represented words. Since there were no audio or video recorders in those days, the Apostles voices and body language was not preserved to us. The authors were obligated *to follow certain protocols* of writing in their language. (For example, they often used third person to refer to themselves.) They were limited somewhat *by the size and shape of the media*. (Parchments and papyrus sheets were expensive. So the writers maximally utilized the writing area by omitting spaces between words. That created quite a few ambiguities.) All those conventions shaped their display of the message. Those conventions cause impediments to oral translators whenever they attempt to use a printed version as their resource.

A proposed process for oral translation of God’s message

We suggest that a team consider making two oral translations, one for an older generation that uses a vocabulary that communicates deeper meaning than the borrowings from Language of Wider Communication. The younger generation is likely to be using a vocabulary that is strongly influenced by the LWC. At first, everyone, old and young alike, will listen to anything in their language, because it is novel and entertaining. They will continue and listen more deeply if they are comfortable as they listen. The team can make the two translations easily and economically, even with different translators.

No one should be alarmed that the oral translation for an older generation is different from the oral translation for the younger generation. The audiences are different! We want to influence them both. Further along, the team might incorporate the better ways of saying spiritual concepts from one version into the other. By the time that the team gets to the stage to doing recordings for the complete books of the New Testament, they will have found the most deeply meaningful style and vocabulary.

We suggest that the team use the same procedure for both oral translations. The difference will be in the oral translators.

Step 1

The team chooses the source audio-recording for their base-translation. See the Pros and Cons of the options in the boxes below. The options are:

- **A recording of an orally-oriented script created by a consultant panel.**

We have prepared scripts for three sets in Genesis and a long set in the New Testament. We expect to offer audio recordings of these scripts. Along with those, we have notes on each set that can guide the team leaders and consultants in their guiding the translators and their vetting the recorded translations.

- **Someone reading an orally-oriented script created by a consultant panel.**

This procedure should produce almost the same good results as the above process. It requires a good reader who is able to read well in public.

- **Someone reading a script that has been adapted for oral learners from a meaning-based printed version in the translators' language or in a close dialect.**

We are in the process of developing guides for someone to create a orally-oriented script from a printed meaning-based translation.

- **Someone reading aloud (close at hand) reading in the LWC a meaning-based printed version. Alternatively, the team might use a commercial recording of someone reading a meaning-based version in the LWC.**

Such versions are TEV/GNB, CEV, NCV and NLT in English. The team should recognize that such printed versions will have communicated some ambiguities that oral translators will likely misinterpret. Oral translation that are based on such translation will require more work by the team and the advising consultant than an oral translation based on an orally oriented script.

Some might consider it viable that the translator might read a meaning-based version for himself and translate from it. We suggest that such a procedure will inevitably produce many problems in naturalness. However, should the team choose to begin with this procedure, they should then use the resulting audio-recordings as a resource and translate again the passages. In their second version, they will be able to incorporate more naturalness.

We strongly warn against the team choosing to listen to a traditional version in the LWC, whether it is a commercial recording or someone reading it aloud.

The translators very often misunderstand understand the complexities of the Hebrew idioms as they are expressed in a learned language. Translation from such a source results in problems that cause unacceptable quantities of time to be spent in revision and very much time in the vetting process by consultants. Further, the frequencies of occurrences of such difficulties are discouraging to the teams.

We warn EVEN MORE STRONGLY against the translator choosing to translate, while reading himself a version or even several versions in the LWC.

It is extremely important that the translator HEAR the message before translating it. The problems mentioned in the previous paragraph also will happen in such an attempt. It is inevitable that the translator will be encumbered by the first process of understanding the complicated printed text and then trying to express his understanding in natural speech.

Step 2

The team records, progressing in the size of segments with which they are comfortable.

- a. One team-member plays the resource recording. The translator probably will understand better if he listens to a whole paragraph and then each sentence, BEFORE BEGINNING TO TRANSLATE.
- b. The recordist plays each sentence (or the paragraph if the translator wishes) and switches to record. The translator speaks the translation as he understands the meaning.

- c. Both the team members momentarily reflect on whether the recording is accurate and adequate.
- d. Should either feel a need to revise, they repeat **Step b**, until both are satisfied.
The recordist will record each revision in a new track.
- e. After a translation session, the recordist will “paste” together complete units (paragraphs, sets).

Step 3

When the team is satisfied with the quality of the first units, they should play each one for friends to hear. It is likely that someone will ask questions that might indicate something that should be made more clear. Someone might suggest a better wording.

Step 4

The team might make a new recording, revising that they something discovered in the test-hearing.

Step 5

The team next prepares a back-translation for the consultant of the parts where they recognize that the oral translation is different in meaning or implication from the source recording. The back-translation can be either oral or written. Usually an oral back-translation is easier for the team to accomplish but more difficult for the consultant. The compensation is that an oral back-translation often shows up issues that might not be apparent to a consultant vetting a written back-translation.

Step 6

The team and consultant review the recording. The team revises where they recognize there is need. The team then distributes the recording through its chosen system.

The pros and cons of each resource translation option

It is important that the team choose well their resource translation.

<p>The oral translator listens to a recording of an orally-oriented script created by a consultant panel.</p>	
<p>Pros</p> <p>The team will likely communicate accurately the message, since the consultant panel has clarified many of the cross-cultural ambiguities and minimized many of the complications created by the process of writing the original document.</p> <p>The team can focus on the most effective idioms in their language, since they do not feel obligated to keep the form of the written document.</p>	<p>Cons</p> <p>There can be some difficulty if the speaker of the script speaks a dialect that the team cannot understand well. Generally, practice helps the team to learn that dialect.</p>

<p>The oral translator listens to someone reading an orally-oriented script created by a consultant panel.</p>	
<p>Pros</p>	<p>Cons</p>

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The oral translator listens to **someone reading a script that has been adapted for oral learners from a meaning-based printed version** in the translator's language or in a close dialect.

Pros

Cons

The oral translator listens to **someone reading aloud (close at hand) reading in the LWC a meaning-based printed version**. Alternatively, the team might use a **commercial recording of someone reading a meaning-based version in the LWC**.

Pros

Cons

Orally communicating, Part A, The rationale

Orally communicating, Part C, The process