

## 9. TRANSLATE BY DOCUMENTING EVERY STEP

Documentation is important in every area in which crucial information must be evaluated, confirmed, made traceable, and linked to accountability. Thorough procedures of documentation play a key role in banks, hospitals, schools, courts, businesses, airlines, travel agencies, realties, construction firms, and in all organizations where accurate information is the very lifeblood of their endeavor.

Given the scale of this almost universal commitment to documenting procedures, it is all the more perplexing that so few scripture translations have bothered to document even small slices of the translating process. There are many reasons for this. In chapter one, *Translate the First-Century Text*, we analyzed some of the more obvious ones.

What needs to be done to remedy the situation? If the translating process is documented, what does that look like? Exactly what should be documented and how should it be done?

What follows is an overview of all the steps of scripture translating along with suggestions and examples of how the entire process should be documented.

### **The beginning of the translating process**

The translating trail of the scriptures begins in the middle of the first century when the original writings left the hands of the authors, and it ends two thousand years later in the hands of a present-day reader. The translator's journey with the texts stretches between these two points, and it should always be traceable and transparent. At no point should the authors' writings be pulled off the track and manipulated. To insure credibility, a translator should be expected to document the completeness and the accuracy of a writing of scripture from the beginning to the end of the translating process.

To do this, translators have to begin with a complete and accurate text of the original Koine Greek manuscript, and they have to maintain the precision of that text all the way through the translating process so that a complete and accurate target language text is the end result. How should it be done? What are the steps that need to be taken to ensure that the entire translating process from beginning to end has been done accurately, credibly, and effectively?

### The original documents

As far as we know, none of the original documents of scripture have survived. Thus, we know them only through handwritten manuscripts which are copies of previous copies going back to the originals. Over 5,000 Koine Greek manuscripts of the Christian scriptures have been catalogued. They are in various libraries, museums, and private collections.

Manuscripts of the scriptures can be pages long and include many writings or they can be the size of a postage stamp and include only a few words. Some manuscripts are ancient, having been copied little more than a generation or two later than the original documents. Other manuscripts were produced just prior to the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century.

Translators of the scriptures must begin with these handwritten manuscripts of the writings of scripture. These are the only witnesses to the original texts of the scriptures. The main problem associated with the manuscripts is that not all of them agree with one another in every portion of text. Though most of the differences are of an insignificant sort—different spellings, different placements of words, repeated words—there are also differences that can affect the meaning of a text.

The textual variants present among the manuscripts have been the subject of a great deal of scholarly research and debate, particularly in the last two centuries, due to the discovery of many ancient papyrus manuscripts. The issue has become dominated by heated discussions primarily between two opposing views concerning the methods that should be used in determining the best readings among the variants.

Proponents of the *Textus Receptus* (the so-called majority text on which the *King James Version* is based) are in one camp and supporters of the *Greek New Testament*, published by the United Bible Societies, are in the other. Most Bible translators use the UBS *Greek New Testament* as their source text. As I have noted before, it goes beyond the scope of this writing to venture into this issue in great detail. Nevertheless, several observations need to be made.

Obviously, decisions concerning the variants among the texts are important. A translator should always have good reasons for preferring one variant to another. This brings up a serious question, however, because one of the most important lines of evidence that all scholars say should help determine a correct reading is the context in which a variant is found.

The context of a variant reading is an essential part of what is often called the *internal evidence* and it is based on the logic that the variant best fitting the context is the one most likely to be the original reading. One wonders, however, how Bible translators can make good decisions about the context when they rely so heavily on the influence of previous translations. We have examined how traditional Bible translations ignore many genre codes and prominence codes and replace them with codes that do not belong in the text. Yet it's precisely genre and prominence language codes that so powerfully orient a reader to the context of a writing.

We have also observed that the Greek texts used by Bible translators—*The Textus Receptus* and the *UBS Greek New Testament*—include many language codes that either have no support or weak support in the Greek manuscripts. This raises questions about the validity of certain variant readings included in Bible translations. The concern is that traditional influences rather than objective data have had a hand in these readings.

A translator must decide on the texts that are most likely the closest to the original texts of the scriptures. This is the beginning of the process of translating and it cannot be avoided. The manuscripts are the factual basis of the writings of scripture. Every translator should have a deep respect for these foundational documents and should have more than casual contact with their characteristics. These manuscripts then have to be transcribed, the variants among them noted, and the reasons recorded for the readings the translator deems to be original.

The manuscripts first need to be transcribed because the handwritten manuscripts are often difficult to read and are therefore difficult to use. Transcribing is the process of recopying the old Greek letters of a text into a modern font. This accomplishes two tasks: First, it becomes the translator's documentation for the text of a particular manuscript, and secondly, it provides the translator with a text that is easy to read and work with. A transcript should be clearly labeled and include everything written on each manuscript.

The transcript should then be compared with the transcripts of other manuscripts of the writing that is being translated, and all the variants among the manuscripts should be noted. The final task is to decide which variants are most likely the original readings. The reasons should be recorded in an accompanying report.

This work may seem overly demanding, but much has already been accomplished by others and it can be used by a translator. It is not necessary, for example, for a translator to transcribe all the manuscripts for a text. Many of the manuscripts have already been transcribed and copies can be obtained. Also, a translator does not have to do all the work of comparing manuscripts. Much of this work has already been done and has been published in reference works that make the results available.

A word of caution is in order, however, because the published works are not necessarily complete or accurate, and many of them reflect the bias of the authors. Therefore a translator is advised not to completely forego working with photos or digital reproductions of the manuscripts. The amount of information that a manuscript can give a translator is surprising. Manuscripts also help to transport a translator back in time. When it comes to text analysis, any translator of the scriptures needs all the assistance that can be mustered to leave the confines of the twenty-first century to live in the world of the writers.

Once the transcribed text of a manuscript is complete, a record of all the variants should be included. This transcript is the documentation of what the translator understands to be the original text. The purpose of this text, however, does not go beyond being documentary. It should never become authoritative. As documentation, it is there to be an open and viewable text of the translator's reasonings and choices. It is there for evaluation. It is there to assure a transparent process of translating. It is there to assure that improvements and corrections can be made at any time.

The next step in the translating process is a careful analysis of the text to recognize all the codes and coding procedures that the author wrote into the text.

### **Identifying and documenting the codes and coding procedures of the source text**

Recognizing the codes and coding procedures of a text of the scriptures requires much skill and insight into the language codes of Koine Greek. Unfortunately, there are Bible translators who have neither the linguistic skills nor the language skills to recognize all the codes in a Koine Greek text. It is just as unfortunate that the translators who do have these skills rarely use them to do a comprehensive analysis of the Greek texts. Instead, they follow earlier translations and too often are content to simply revise these translations rather than do the complete task of translating the source texts.

As we have seen, there are seven language codes and seven coding procedures that make up the textual fabric of every written language. It is important to identify and document each of these codes and coding procedures to ensure that each makes its contribution to the meaning of the text. How is it best to do this, particularly in view of the fact that the codes and coding procedures of even a small text can constitute a great deal of information?

The overview of language codes and coding procedures in *Part I* serves as a good checklist for analyzing a text. It provides a potential of forty nine points of analysis for each code and therefore provides a translator with a tool useful for uncovering any possible language code or coding procedure.

On page 129, we have already discussed in some detail the task of documenting an analysis of a source text of the scriptures. Here is an excerpt from that section:

*Obviously, trying to record each and every code and coding procedure in even one of the smaller writings of scripture would be a massive undertaking. Fortunately, it is not necessary to do this to achieve an effective and comprehensive survey of all the codes and coding procedures in a text.*

*Many language codes require no tracking simply because they are obvious. It is unnecessary, for example, to identify all the prepositional phrases in a text. It's enough to simply note those that for some reason raise questions. In other words, it is sufficient to document only those language codes that might be overlooked or present a particular challenge to a translator.*

*It is also possible to streamline the process of recognizing language codes and coding procedures by using methods that allow considerable amounts of linguistic information to be packed into a small space. A very effective way to do this is through the use of three unique texts of the scriptures that make it possible to depict a broad selection of language codes and coding procedures.*

Chapter 3 (Page 127) is a demonstration of how an analysis of a Greek text can be documented through the use of symbols, fonts, colors, indents, boldings, and shadings. The

*Greek Code Text* in the *Appendix B* depicts many of the language codes and coding procedures of a document. The final result is a visually enhanced text that documents how the translator views a broad selection of language codes in the text. The purpose of the text is to allow the translator and indeed other translators to trace and continually evaluate each code.

When this step is complete, the next task is to begin the process of transferring the information in the Greek text to the target language.

### **Documenting the steps transferring language codes from the *Greek Code Text* to the *English Code Text***

When translating from the Greek text to another language, it is important that the translator not lose sight of any of the codes in the Greek text. To facilitate a complete transfer of codes, it is helpful to construct a target language text that is similar to the *Greek Code Text*. We have already demonstrated what such a text looks like. (*Chapter 3* and *Appendix C*) It is called the *English Code Text* and it is the closest thing to a literal translation of the scriptures because a broad selection of the language codes depicted in the text corresponds exactly to the codes in the Greek text.

The *English Code Text (ECT)* serves as the first half of a linguistic bridge from the source text to a target language text. The text uses a system of markings to make Greek language codes explicit in the target language. As such, it has a specific function as a transition translation and can only be used effectively by a person who has learned to read such a text and who has a comprehensive understanding of language codes and coding procedures.

The purpose of the *ECT* is not to serve as a pattern for a target language translation, but to serve as a check list of all the language codes and coding procedures the author chose to include in the original text. These codes need to be clearly represented in the target language text, though in most cases they cannot be represented in the *same* way they were in Greek, because every language has its own coding system. Nevertheless, the Greek codes must be accurately transferred to the target language text, and they must signify the same meaning or function in the target language text as they did in the Greek text. The *ECT* is a tool to facilitate this process.

The next part of the bridge between the Greek text and the translated text is formed by the *English Prominent Text*. (*Chapter 3* and *Appendix D*) It is a zoomed-out view of the *ECT* and is designed to make the genre codes and the prominent codes explicit. Particularly these codes are often overlooked by scripture translators.

In the same way that the *GCT* needs to be supplemented with notes and explanations in order to document language codes that cannot easily be depicted in the code text, so too do the *ECT* and the *EPT* need to be supplemented to ensure that all the codes are included. When this task is complete and an accurate *ECT* and *EPT* is available to the translator, then the next step in the translating process can begin, a step in which the translator creates a personal translation.

### **Creating the translator's translation**

Translators must first understand a text in order to translate it for anyone else. This principle cannot be bypassed. This means that translators should be very careful about documenting their own personal translation. This is necessary for several reasons.

First of all, it's only when translators have carefully and deliberately determined their own translations of a text that they can distinguish it from translations they are making for others. A translator must be careful not to assume that a personal translation will work for anyone. This is a common mistake. Translators have to develop the discipline and the skill of testing their translated texts on the people for whom they are translating. The goal is that the reader understands the translation. It is not enough that a translator simply translates a text. A translator's personally preferred text will seldom be the same as the text the translator creates for a target language person or group. Thus, translators should be aware of their own preferences and clearly label the text of their own translation as exactly what it is: a personal translation and nothing more than that.

Secondly, the translator's translation should be a documentation of the translator's own work and conclusions. It should be a document in which translators critically examine and record their own processes, principles, and research results, and apply them to their detailed work in the texts of scripture. It should serve as a "translator analysis" which is every bit as important as a text analysis or a reader analysis, and as such it should include a record of the struggles and difficulties the translator had with particular portions of text.

Translators need to critically test their own understandings of the writings of scripture by submitting them to a detailed written analysis that can be read and critiqued by other translators. Only in this way is a true evaluation feasible. Only in this way is it possible to trace the actual path that a translator has taken to see if that path stays within the parameters of the author's language codes. Translators will never be able to meet the linguistic needs of a target language person if they have not critically and objectively analyzed their own language codes, identified those places where their understanding or skill is lacking, and taken measures to eliminate these deficiencies.

Finally, it's in the making of the translator's translation that translators should strive to find their own voice. The problem many translators have is that they too easily get stuck in the traditional linguistic world of Bible translating and easily forget the language they normally use (or once used) when rubbing shoulders with people in the real world. Translators have to struggle with these blind spots and make sure that "translator-ese" or "bible-ish" do not sneak into their translations.

In this task, translators must force themselves to step into the role of the original reader and remember that they, too, are readers as well as translators. And they must step into the role of learners who realize that understanding the scriptures is the prerequisite to translating them.

The next step of translating is when a translator begins the task of transferring the text of a Greek scripture into the language of a reader.

### **Creating scripture translations for real readers**

The purpose of a translation is to take a message written in a language that readers do not understand and make it possible for them to understand it in their own language. But what is a person's "own language"? As we have noted before (See page 138), there is no such thing as a single language understood by anyone who speaks that language.

It is a common myth that languages such as French, Russian, English, or Spanish actually exist as single languages spoken and understood by all speakers of these languages. The fact is that these languages are much more like linguistic families consisting of many different variations and levels and special content areas. This is why translations have to be adapted to particular readers. Translations shouldn't just be in a reader's general language, but in the particular variation of that language that is truly the reader's own language.

It might strike one as being too complicated or involved to try to define readers closely, but it is a normal practice in many areas of life. Schools do this, obviously, but so do advertisers, writers, playwrights, counselors, publishing houses, magazines, newspapers, and many other groups who are interested in communicating with a particular segment of the population.

Consider, too, the many professions that exist to help people understand information in their own language. The government, for example, hires thousands of people who do nothing more than explain government documents and tax documents to individuals who could never understand them on their own. Lawyers, finance managers, real estate agents, and counselors of all stripes are other examples of people who spend a great deal of time simply translating documents for people who cannot understand them even though, on the face of it, they are written in their own language.

Bible translations are notoriously weak when it comes to targeting actual readers. It's not been their practice because, as we have observed, it is the priority of the publishers of most translations to maintain the essence of previous translations. Targeting an actual target language group would require the producers of most translations to completely jettison their traditional texts.

There are translations that claim to target a particular linguistic group such as those who speak English as a second language or societal groupings such as college students, singles, or housewives. None of these kinds of translations, however, qualify as genuine target language translations. The first example—those who speak English as a second language—is a far too linguistically complex group to define. The English speakers from any of ten different Asian backgrounds, for example, have very different takes on English among them, and none of these Asians speakers can be lumped together with English speakers from South America, Europe, or Africa, all of whom have their own linguistic characteristics and, in most cases, speak their own brands of English.

The other practice—targeting societal groupings with "specialty Bibles"—is little more than a marketing gag and has absolutely nothing to do with serious translating for specific linguistic groups. It is common for specialty Bibles to simply use one of the standard Bible translations and then add extra motivational information for the group in question.

What does it mean to translate for actual readers? It means that when translating, real readers have to be involved in the translating process. Their language is analyzed and used in the translation. Their understanding of each text is tested. The readers literally become the source for the language of the translation.

Targeting real readers forces a translator to make decisions that are otherwise usually ignored in most translations. It's impossible, for example, to do a single translation for readers with different linguistic orientations. It might seem possible to translate for them by constantly seeking the lowest common linguistic denominator among them, but that approach does not function when the linguistic differences are great. The end result is always a translation for the group with the fewest reading skills and the smallest vocabulary, and that is a translation that by no means corresponds to the normal linguistic makeup of the other groups. Seeking the lowest common linguistic denominator is only effective when the individuals in a language group share very similar reading skills and code networks.

When translating for a target group, care needs to be taken in defining the group. The process of doing this actually becomes an important part of the translating work that follows. Among other things, it provides a language control group for language choice and for translation testing. Without such a control group, the process of translating easily becomes the translator's best guess rather than translating in the language of actual readers.

### **Factors that set readers apart**

What are the matters that need to be considered when defining a linguistic group? The following list is a sampling of the kinds of issues that cause readers to be quite different:

*Degree of Bible exposure:* Translators should never forget the power of situation codes, not only in terms of how they affect the meaning of the scriptures, but also in terms of how the long history of Bible translations has impacted the language codes and code networks of many readers. A translator must remember that no piece of literature has ever been pressed through so many thought filters over the centuries and been manipulated to the degree that Bible translations have.

It is often the case that a translator needs to *retranslate* the scriptures for a reader. This can be a difficult challenge when a reader has already been conditioned by "Bible language". (See page 89.) No translator should simply assume that readers understand even fairly common words correctly when they are part of a scripture translation. I have interacted with Bible readers in enough places of the world—Bangalore, Bucharest, Vienna, Basel, Dublin, Dallas, Salt Lake City, Denver, Los Angeles—to know that people are programmed with very different assumptions about words and concepts in the Bible. Some entertain very strange and exotic views of the Bible itself.

The fact is that Bible translations over the centuries have produced networks of language code that have become part of the common culture in many places of the "Christian" world. Translators have to be aware of these influences and face them. The fact that they have so often been ignored in the past shows the degree to which many religious traditions continue

to influence Bible translations by encouraging (and demanding) the continued use of anachronistic terms. Translators should have the courage to refuse to use words that readers will obviously understand in a different way than any writer of scripture intended.

*The networks of resident language codes:* Just because people have learned to read and write does not mean that they are necessarily “literate” in relationship to the kind of information in the scriptures. Literacy involves much more than just being able to read one word after the other. A reader, for example, can be literate in one informational area and illiterate in another. Who hasn’t experienced how it is to read a page of words and understand nothing more than the *and’s* and *the’s* sprinkled throughout the text?

It’s not at all unusual even for an expert in one field to be a complete illiterate in another. Many elderly professionals without computer skills have experienced how frustrating it is to hear kids speak computerese and not understand what they’re talking about. It doesn’t matter how smart people are or how many degrees they’ve earned, if they possess no language code concerning a particular area of knowledge, then they are functionally illiterate in that particular area.

The various writings of scripture were also written within the contexts of many different networks of language code. The original readers of each document were acquainted with these networks of code and could therefore understand the references the authors were making. Readers who are not acquainted with these networks of code will need a very different translation of the scriptures than will readers who have studied these matters and built these first-century networks into their reservoir of language codes.

*Study skills and reading skills:* Translators need to be very careful about drawing conclusions about readers on the basis of external observations. Technically trained people, for example, may have very limited reading skills in areas such as history, geography, economics, or politics. A successful contractor may have few study skills. A skillful legal secretary may have never read a book.

Reading is like any other skill. If it is constantly used and practiced, then it grows in comprehension and increases in speed. If it is not practiced, however, then it tends to disappear. This means that readers can be as different from one another as a marathon runner is from a non-runner. Just because people can put one foot in front of another does not mean they can run a challenging race, and just because people can read one word after another doesn’t mean they can read a challenging piece of literature (which the scriptures certainly are!) A person without practiced reading skills is severely handicapped when it comes to dealing with a written text.

Is all of this concern for the reader something translators should *not* care about? Is this irrelevant to the task of scripture translating? There is no reason for translators to turn their backs on any of the language barriers that can stand between the scriptures and a potential reader. Translating should include more considerations than simply choosing a certain word or phrase to include in a text, and those should include work that a translator may have to do with a reader.

*Age and gender of the readers:* It is not unusual for there to be considerable disparity between both men and women and the young and the old when it comes to reading habits, content preferences, and reading skills. It is interesting that the great majority of magazines target readers in one of these four categories—men, women, seniors, youth—and the topics represented in these magazines are of considerable diversity. Regardless of what translators might think regarding the equality of the sexes or the generations, they cannot overlook the great linguistic divides that often exist between men and women and the young and the old.

*Ethnic and cultural influences:* This is another area in which the spirit of the times often dictates that differences be downplayed. Globalization, for example, is often mentioned in the media. The world, however, continues to spread its ethnic and cultural diversity. Immigrants in many lands are tending more and more to maintain their own backgrounds right along with those of their adopted countries.

The use of languages other than English is becoming increasingly evident even in countries like the United States which in the past has often been thought of as a single-language country. Translators have to be aware of these trends and remember to test for linguistic influences stemming from ethnic or cultural roots.

Elsewhere we have discussed other influences such as *educational and regional influences*. (See page 138)

Though defining a target language group is a necessary step toward creating accurate translations that people can read in their own language, it is not the final step in giving readers the help they need in understanding the scriptures. Even within tightly defined target language groups, there will be individuals with unique linguistic profiles who need the individual help of a skilled translator.

### **Translating the scriptures for individuals**

If people are often surprised to hear that scripture translators should turn from translating for the masses to targeting smaller, linguistically similar groups, then they are all the more surprised to hear that a translator should consider translating for individuals. This, however, is the second most effective of all approaches to translating. (The most effective is described in the following chapter.)

Though it may seem impractical and a waste of the translator's time, every translator should be willing and available to work with individuals. If doing such customized translating for individuals is a waste of time, then Jesus undoubtedly was wasting his time by putting so much effort into his tiny group of Galileans and for investing additional time into a few individuals within that group.

For all of the mass communicating that seems to dominate our world, we easily forget the huge role that individual consultations play in everyday life. When doctors meet with patients, it is individually. When financial matters need attention, consultations take place at the desk of a financial officer. When legal matters arise, discussions about them take place in the

privacy of a lawyers office. When parents have concerns about their children's education, advice is sought from teachers and counselors in confidential surroundings.

The fact is that when personal needs become critical, people automatically seek help that can be specifically applied to their individual situation. People instinctively know that their own set of circumstances is not necessarily like anyone else's. Doctors confirm this by doing tests on each patient. No doctor calls in fifty patients at a time. They know that each person is physically unique and has to be tested, diagnosed, and treated in accordance with that person's weight, age, sex, medical history, immune system, environment, etc.

Linguistically, people are even more diverse than they are medically. In all my years of work in scripture translating, I have spent most of my time helping individuals with their translations, and that work has been by far the most effective translating I've done. It's also in working with individuals that I have learned how difficult the task of translating can be. The constant feedback and the questions have kept me from assuming too much and from being satisfied with my translations. There is nothing like instant evaluation to keep a translator humble and on his toes. It's certainly much easier to sit in one's own office and "translate" for the anonymous masses.

I know that translating for individuals may sound like the unrealistic goal of an idealist, but that is only because most people have never met a scripture translator in their lives. And if they were to meet such a person, they would find it difficult to imagine arranging for a personal translation of the scriptures.

The fact that almost no one has access to a scripture translator is simply another result of the traditional way in which Bible translating has focused on revising translations rather than doing the real job of translating. Thus, there have been few efforts made to involve translators with many different kinds of people. There is no logic to this oversight. It's as though in the field of medicine the leading doctors would spend all their time reproducing old works of medicine and take no time to train young doctors to work with individual patients.

People can expect skilled professionals in law, medicine, finances, and many other areas of life to be a few minutes away and available for personal consultation, but not scripture translators. They are a rare breed, hidden in the mists of religious tradition much like the translations they produce.

And what about the many religious professionals who lead the numerous religious institutions of Christianity? Most of them have neither the skills to be translators nor does it meet their job-description. In most cases, they rely completely on Bible translations for their own understanding of the scriptures. Most of them are, in fact, themselves in need of translation consultants. Even many of the people who do work as Bible translators are not equipped to do the complete work of translating. Many of them depend on Bible translations rather than source documents for their source texts.

Translating for individuals is neither impractical nor idealistic. It is the skill that a translator most needs and it provides the help that individual readers need most. In addition, translating for individuals is an important step in the training of translators. Translators should first learn

to translate effectively for individuals before venturing on to the more difficult task of translating for a target language group. In fact, the most effective way of translating for a target language group is to first do a translation for a representative person in the group.

Translating for individuals gives a translator the best possible translating situation and the greatest number of options to achieve an accurate translation. Feed back is instantaneous. Problems can be quickly defined. Personal strengths and weaknesses can be observed. Missing networks of language code can be determined and targeted. Misconceptions can be detected. Necessary resource works can be procured. And each work session can be documented with a journal in which every measure taken is recorded and explained. The journal entries are then earmarked to the translation. A similar system of documentation can also be used when translating for a target group.

### **Moving the man to the mountain**

Have we now traced the entire translating track from beginning to end? Have we covered every translating step that needs to be taken from the manuscript evidence of the Greek Text to the final step that represents the best translating effort that a translator can make? No. There is one final translating option that is by far the most logical, the most accurate, and the most effective.

All of the steps we've described up to now could be understood as bringing the mountain to the man, that is, bringing the original message to the reader in the form of a translation. The final translating option is exactly the opposite: It involves taking the man to the mountain, which is by far the most logical approach when it comes to men and mountains.

What does it mean to take the man to the mountain? It means to challenge a reader to learn Koine Greek and to learn to read the scriptures in the original languages in which they were written. This is also a way of translating the scriptures for a reader, but it is done by helping readers become their own translators. This route to learning the scriptures is so important that it will be addressed in detail in the following and final chapter.