Bible, Jewish and Christian

The Bible, from the Greek *biblia*, meaning 'books', is the sacred text of both Jews and Christians. The Jewish Scriptures are composed of the Old Testament (OT), a collection of 39 books written for the most part in Hebrew, with a few passages in Aramaic. The Christian Bible contains these Scriptures plus the New Testament (NT), and in some traditions, the Deuterocanon. The New Testament comprises 27 books, written in *koiné* Greek between 50 and 100 $_{CE}$. The Deuterocanon or Apocrypha, also written in Greek, is recognized as 'canonical', $_{i.e.}$ authoritative in matters of religious doctrine, by the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, but not by the Anglican or any other Protestant denominations.

History of Bible translation

The beginnings of the Bible translation can be traced back to an incident recounted in the book of Nehemiah (8:5-8) many centuries before the birth of Christ. After living for several decades in exile in Babylon, many Jews no longer spoke or even understood Hebrew. Thus, when the exiles returned to Jerusalem, and Ezra called the people together to listen to the reading of the Law of Moses, the Levite priests had to translate the meaning of the sacred texts into Aramaic so that people could understand. Since that time, Jews and Christians have continued to emphasize the importance of the Scriptures being understood by all believers.

The earliest know written translation of the Bible is the Septuagint, a translation from Hebrew into Greek of the Old Testament texts, carried out primarily for Greek-speaking Jews living in the Graeco-Roman diaspora. According to tradition, this versions, which includes the Deuterocanonical books, was the joint work of 72 Jewish scholars who completed the task in 72 days, leading to its name and abbreviation (Latin *septuaginta* = 70, LXX). The translation was started under Ptolemy II of Egypt and carried out in or around Alexandria during the third and second centuries $_{BCE}$. Although this translation and its interpretations of the Hebrew text have been criticized since its inception, the Septuagint has nevertheless served as a standard reference since that time. It is the source of most of the OT quotes in the NT. To this day, the Septuagint retains considerable influence on questions of interpretation and textual matters, and its study continues to shed light on the principles of translation used in the ancient world. However, in the second century $_{CE}$, Jewish scholars – Aquila, Theodotion, and Symmachus – produced new translations and/or revised versions of the Septuagint, which were preserved by Origen (c. 185 – c. 245 $_{CE}$). The Targum, literally 'translation', is a kind of running paraphrase of and commentary on the Hebrew text in Aramaic, originating from before the time of Christ but still read publicly in synagogues around the world today.

As the New Testament was compiled and its content fixed by 367 $_{CE}$ under Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, translations were undertaken in various European and Middle Eastern languages. The NT was translated into Latin, the languages of the former Roman Empire (including Northern Africa), as well as into Coptic, spoken by Egyptian Christians, and into Syriac. This latter translation served newly converted Jews and/or new Christians in the Mesopotamian region (Syria). The revised Syriac Bible, known as the Peshitta, the 'simple' version, is widely referred to in discussions of the biblical text.

In 383 $_{CE}$, Pope Damasus I commissioned Jerome to produce the whole Bible in Latin, a task completed in 406. This version, known as the Vulgate, served for centuries as a reference for translations into numerous languages, including Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopic, Arabic, Persian and Gothic.

In the meantime, scholarly work continued on the OT Hebrew texts, whose original writing system included only consonants. Though tentative systems to mark vowels and accents ('masorah') were devised in Babylonia and Palestine, basic standardization only came about in the ninth century, through the work of Moshe ben Asher and the scholars at Tiberius. This Masoretic text (MT) has served as the source text for major Jewish and Christian translations since that time. Its latest complete edition, the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, is used throughout the world as the primary source text of the Old Testament.

The invention of the printing press around the time of the Reformation and the growing interest in national languages such as German, English, French and Spanish led to the publication of Bible translations in various European vernaculars. Martin Luther, John Wycliffe and William Tyndale were among the pioneers who translated the Bible in a language accessible to all, often at great personal sacrifice. Many considered the translation of sacred texts from 'sacred languages' (Hebrew, Greek and Latin) into vernaculars to be heretical. However, despite serious opposition, this period saw the birth of many versions of the Bible, which still serve as references today: the King James or 'authorized version' (AV) in English (1611), Olivétan's French translation (1535) and the Luther version, among others.

Progress in the translation of Scriptures on the European continent steadily continued for the centuries that followed, with a sharp increase in Bible translation activity in the early nineteenth century. This major thrust has continued, almost unhindered, into the twenty-first century. The 1800s began what might be called the missionary era of Bible translation. Rising interest in taking the Gospel to the remotest parts of the world was accompanied by all-out efforts to translate the Bible into 'unknown tongues'. In first wave were the 'missionary greats', whose life work included learning, and reducing to writing, major languages around the globe: Adoniram Judson (Burmese), Robert Morrison (Chinese), William Carey (Bengali, Sanskrit, Marathi, Hindi), Henry Martyn (Urdu, Persian and Arabic). During this period, portions of Scripture were published in literally hundreds of languages worldwide: Thai or Siamese in the east, Maya and Quechua in the Americas, Swahili in Africa. Though at times unmentioned, mother tongue translators were major contributors to Bible translation during this period. For example, in 1843, Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a Yoruba speaker, began work on the Yoruba Bible in Nigeria, which was finally completed in 1884. This period of missionary activity coincided with the birth of the influential British and Foreign Bible Society (1804), as well as many other Bible societies throughout the world: Dublin (1804), East Pakistan (1811), Ceylon (1812), Ethiopia (1812), Mauritius (1812), the US (the American Bible Society, 1816) and South Africa (1820).

Alongside the many translations carried out in languages never before written, the late nineteenth century and the twentieth century witnessed in increase in the number of Bible translations done in major European languages. Taking English as an example, following the publication of the English Revised Bible in 1885, there has been a steady stream of new translations: the *American Standard Version* (1901), the *Revised Standard Version* (1952), the *Jerusalem Bible* (1966), the *Revised English Bible* (1970), the *New American Bible* (1970), the *New Living Bible* (1971, 1989, 1996), the *New Jerusalem Bible* (1985), the translation of the OT by the Jewish Publication Society (TANAKH, 1985), as well as Bible translations done by individual scholars, including Edgar J. Goodspeed, James Moffatt, Eugene Peterson, J.B. Phillips and Ken Taylor, among others.

A kind of turning point occurred in the 1950s and 1960s, as a number of factors led to a new focus on Bible translation theory and procedures. In 1947, significant archaeological discoveries were made at Qumran, with the Dead Sea Scrolls providing new texts and giving more information on the cultural and historical context of Scripture formation. At around the same time, new developments in linguistic and anthropological studies contributed to reflection on the theory and practice of Bible translation. In response to the growing desire for

Scriptures in non-European languages, emphasis was put on readers being able to read and understand the Bible. Guidelines were proposed to ensure natural, comprehensible renderings that would remain faithful to the source texts (Nida 1964; Nida and Taber 1969; Beekman and Callow 1974; Callow 1974; Barnwell 1975/1986). Decisions taken at Vatican II (1965) promoted the use of vernacular translations, alongside Latin, in liturgical settings. All these factors combined to raise interest in and support for what is known today as 'common language versions', translations meant to communicate to the 'common man'. These translations, many of which were inter-confessional, first met with resistance but eventually became best-sellers; they include in English: *Today's English Version*, also known as the *Good News Bible* (TEV 1966, 1976, 1994; GNB, 1976), and the *Contemporary English Version* (CEV 1995); in French, *Français Courant* (1982, 1997) and *Parole de Vie* (2000); in Spanish, *Dios Habla Hoy* (1966, 1979); and in German, *Die Gute Nachricht* (1982, 1997). Today some translations are being produced in simplified language, for example the Spanish *Versión en Lenguaje Sencillo* (2003), which can be used by children as well as second-language users.

Through time, the Bible translation cause, once championed mainly by missions, churches and individuals, has become the work of worldwide organizations focused on this one particular task. The United Bible Societies (UBS), with its translation efforts spearheaded by Eugene A. Nida, was founded in 1946 and currently groups together over 200 national Bible societies, whose primary task is the translation and distribution of Scriptures worldwide. The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL, also known as Wycliffe Bible Translators), founded in 1942 by Cameron Townsend and until recently led by the missionary-linguist Kenneth L. pike, continues to support the work of Bible translation teams around the world. Made up of expatriates and mother-tongue speakers, the work of these teams often involves language learning and analysis, in order to establish a suitable alphabet, written grammar and dictionary, all of which are useful in pursuing the translation task. While SIL teams initially concentrated on the translation of the NT, perceived to be more pertinent to evangelistic needs, interest is now extending to the whole Bible. Both SIL and USB have a system of quality control, carried out by PhD-level translation consultants. These two worldwide organizations are joined in their efforts by many other agencies, including Pioneer Bible Translators, Lutheran Bible Translators and International Bible Translators.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Bible translation activity has in no way waned, as more and more Bible translation projects are being put in place and revisions undertaken. Scripture use has generated new interest in providing Scriptures in varying formats: study Bibles, comics, Scriptures 'storying', as well as non-print media rendering music cassettes, videos, radio, TV, on-line Bibles, etc. Bibles in Braille as well as signed Scriptures are also becoming available in different sign languages around the world (see SIGNED LANGUAGE INTERPRETING).

As interest in Bible translation remains at an all-time high, the procedures and profile of personnel involved in Bible translation continue to evolve. During the missionary era, the role of mother-tongue speakers was ill defined, and 'native assistants' often remained unnamed. However, today, with colonialism arguably relegated to history and the role of expatriate missionaries diminishing, a new era in Bible translation has begun (Bessong and Kenmogne 2007; Sánchez-Cetina 2007). While in the 1970s translator training was being discussed and encouraged, today, mother-tongue exegetes and translators are being trained at a very high level around the world. Undergraduate and graduate training programmes, including studies in linguistics, communication theory, biblical exegesis, Hebrew and Greek, along with translation theory and practice, are producing highly qualified mother-tongue personnel. Whereas in the past most Bible translation consultants were Western expatriates, today's Bible translation consultants come from every continent on the globe.

Bible translation teams are also now equipped with new technology. Computers enable translators to bypass the numerous hand-written drafts of the past. Through innovative programs such as Paratext (a program designed by UBS and supported by SIL), translators can have instant access on their screens to dozens of Bible versions, including the source texts, as well as to dictionary definitions and parsing of Hebrew and Greek forms. Manuscript spelling and punctuation checks, which in the past took months of tedious work, are today carried out in far less time, with the assistance of computer programs. Thought attempts at MACHINE TRANSLATION and ADAPTATION have produced uneven results in the first instance, or controversial versions in the second, new technology has given Bible translation teams around the world a new sense of autonomy.

In some ways, twenty-first-century Bible translators can be compared to the earliest pioneers – Jerome, Luther and Tyndale – since today, once again, the major goal is to have qualified mother-tongue translators using biblical languages to consult the source text, in order to produce understandable and faithful renderings in their own languages. The difference is that today's Bible translators have the advantage of 2,000 years of scholarship, interpretation and translation models, as well as access to powerful technical tools.

Translation theory and approaches

It is difficult to speak of translation theory during the earliest years of Bible translation. Examination of the first known translations reveals that different translators have always used different approaches and conventions. However, despite centuries and even millennia of reflection and discussion, the basic issues in Bible translation remain surprisingly the same. These include whether a translation tends to be more or less literal, that is, how closely the forms and structures of the source language are reflected in the translation, how consistently words are rendered (especially 'key' terms of special theological importance), how much the translation adapts the source text to allow for natural modes of expression in the target language, and how much 'foreignization' is accepted, allowing readers to experience the 'otherness' of a foreign text. A brief overview of the developments in the last decades of theory and practice in Bible translation provides some insights into these issues.

In the early part of the twentieth century, the more accepted translations were those which stayed close to Hebrew and Greek grammatical structures. In the Anglophone world, for example, the Authorized or King James Version remained a standard reference, despite its difficult and increasingly archaic language. Some versions had a goal of verbal consistency, whereby a word in the source text would be consistently rendered by a single word in the target language. Such literal translations gave high priority to the form of the source text and tried to stay close to its word other, sentence structure, etc. But such translation approaches often resulted in unnatural, and sometimes incomprehensible, renderings. For example, the RSV's literal rendering of St. Paul's expression 'having girded their loins with truth' (Ephesians 6:14) is not immediately understood by the majority of English speakers.

In their *Theory and Practice of Translation* (1969), Nida and Taber put forth proposals (referred to as the TAPOT approach) for producing a more comprehensible rendering of such expressions: translators examine and analyse the source text, extract its meaning (by identifying the content of the 'kernels' of each sentence as well as semantic components of each lexical item) and transfer that meaning into the target language. This process leads to a *dynamic equivalence* translation. Though this approach was modified to emphasize the communicative functions of language and renamed *functional equivalence* translation (de Waard and Nida 1986), in both equivalence models meaning has priority over form (see EQUIVALENCE). Thus, faced with a phase such as 'girding the loins with truth', translators would 'unpack' the phrase to determine what Paul meant, and then look for the closest

natural equivalent expression in their own language. In the search for a meaning-based translation, many translators would reject RSV's rendering as too literal. They would drop the archaic verb *gird*, as well as the confusing Old English *loins*, and attempt to substitute them with modern equivalents. Some common language versions in English have tried to retain the original image by rendering the passage as 'stand ready, with the truth as a belt tight around your waist' (TEV). However, according to the principles of dynamic/functional equivalence, if the relevance of *belt* as part of this defensive military attire is not understood in the target culture, it is possible to drop the image and express the meaning directly, as in 'Always be ready to defend yourself with the truth'.

Another of the basic tenets of dynamic equivalence translation is that what is implicit in the text can be made explicit, if this is necessary for the reader or hearer to correctly understand the message of the source text. In the case of Ephesians 6:14, a Bible translator might be justified in making explicit 'the truth of (the word of) God', an acceptable exegetical interpretation in this context. Using the dynamic or functional equivalence approach, it might also be noted that certain languages need to make explicit where this 'truth' is kept, which might lead to an even wider rendering, as in 'Always keep the truth of God in your heart/mind/liver, being ready to defend yourself' (see EXPLICATION).

The dynamic equivalence approach thus adapts the translation to the realities of the target language and culture, so that the meaning or message of the source text can be clearly understood. Translators are free to use different terms, different grammatical constructions, and even different word and sentence orders, in order to express the meaning of the source text. In translation parlance, this approach 'domesticates' the text, by removing difficult expressions and images which would be incomprehensible or poorly understood if rendered literally.

An advantage of this approach is that it gives translators the freedom to make difficult theological concepts clear. For example, comparing RSV's rendering of Romans 3:28 to common language versions (TEV and CEV), the latter convey the message more clearly to today's speakers of English than the earlier versions does:

RSV   For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law.

TEV   For we conclude that a person is put right with God only through faith, and not by doing what the Law commands.

CEV   We see that people are acceptable to God because they have faith, and not because they obey the Law.

However, this approach can easily be misapplied. Over-eager or patronizing translators may end up paraphrasing the text. Some translations of this type have thus been widely criticized for being too explicit, i.e. adding or even changing ideas of the source text. This one of the reasons many of these versions are undergoing revision today. Indeed, translators can inadvertently (or advertently!) introduce theological and other ideological biases into their translations (see IDEOLOGY), a practice deemed unacceptable by most Bible translation agencies today (Ogden 1997; Zogbo 2002).

Another criticism of this approach is that translators using this model may take too much liberty, thereby violating historicity. For example, is it permissible for translators to substitute an animal such as a seal in the key phrase 'the lamb of God', in Arctic cultures where sheep are not well known? Does the use of a local fruit juice or distilled liquor to refer to wine made from grapes violate the historical accuracy of the translation and/or rob the text of an important leitmotiv? Along the same lines, by trying to make everything in the biblical text 'clear and natural', translators may flatten out poetic lines and image, or 'over-translate' literary forms, whose beauty is reflected precisely through brevity and possible multiple

readings. This domestication of both the form and content of the text pulls the translation away from the historical and literary bearings of the source text. For a detailed assessment of Nida and Taber's TAPOT approach, see Wilt (2003a) and Stine (2004).

In the past, where expatriate and/or indigenous translators have had little or no access to the source texts in the biblical languages, a method known as the *base-models* approach has often been used alongside the dynamic/functional equivalence framework. Thus, if a translation team does not have a member qualified in Hebrew or Greek, translators are encouraged to use a more literal version in a language they know, such as RSV in English, as the *base* text, with more dynamic versions (TEV, CEV) serving as *models* of what a good translation might be. Though many New Testaments and some Bibles produced using this approach have yielded highly readable and popular texts, in some cases this method has produced translations quite far from the form and meaning of the source text. Some teams end up translating a model text literally, often overlooking an excellent solution available in their own language. For example, translators may look for an equivalent of the dynamic 'God has given you victory over the Midianites' (Judge 7:16 TEV) when the target language might already have a structure identical to the one in Hebrew: 'God has given the Midianites into Your hands'.

However, despite the shortcomings and possible misapplications of this approach, the principles of dynamic/functional equivalence have liberated translators from a rigid system whereby word-by-word consistency, especially in relation to key terms, was considered the ideal. Thus, a word like *grace* (*charis* in Greek), which is used in many different ways many different contexts in the NT, can be rendered contextually. For example, in standard greetings ('Grace to you and peace…'), a natural equivalent in the language may be used, while another term may be used to translate the theologically crucial concept of grace in contexts where this is necessary (e.g. 'by grace you are saved'). By giving priority to meaning over form and translating contextually, translators may better render the message of the source text, providing a more faithful rendering, as established by the norms of this translation theory.

Common language translations have also popularized supplementary materials and Bible helps. In the past, the text was considered so sacred that certain versions put in parentheses or italics any word that was not actually present in the Hebrew or Greek text. Nowadays, almost all Bibles published by UBS have explanatory prefaces, introductions to each book of the Bible, footnotes explaining textual variants and word plays, and are equipped with helpful glossaries, maps, charts, illustrations, etc.

Since the introduction of the dynamic/functional equivalent approach, reflection on Bible translation theory and practice continues to evolve. Much thought is now given to the role of the audience in determining which type of translation needs to be produced. Scholars speak less of a strict dichotomy between literal and dynamic translations, tending rather to acknowledge a continuum. For example, a community may request a translation to be used in worship services, leading to the production of a liturgical version which preserves the literary beauty and poetic nature of the Hebrew source text (Zogbo and Wendland 2000). Another community may need a common language version due to their unfamiliarity with the Scriptures, while other special audiences, e.g. youth, may well appreciate a translation which exploits the stylistic features of oral genres of the target language.

Today, before a Bible translation project is begun, great care is taken to define the context and influences related to a given translation. In *Bible Translation*, *Frames of Reference* (Wilt 2003a), the sociocultural, organizational, textual and cognitive 'frames' involved in shaping and interpreting texts are explored. Questions of who is requesting, sponsoring and managing the translation (see Lai 2007), who will be using it and for what purposes, and who is actually doing the translations, have become fundamental. Audience considerations have also

led to the publication of Bibles with clear ideological and theological slants, for example, Bibles with feminist, liberation theology, Africanist, or Afro-American agendas (Yorke 2000). The close interaction between IDEOLOGY, theology, ETHICS and translation is today the subject of much debate, raising important theoretical issues (such as inclusive-exclusive language and GENDER sensitivity; see Bratcher 1995; Simon 1996; von Flotow 1997), as well as very practical ones (copyright, marketing strategies, low vs. high cost editions, etc.).

Today the field of translation is alive with discussion and debate, and there is more communication between theoreticians of Bible translation and those dealing with translation theory in general. Theorists and Bible translation practitioners are giving more thought to literary theory (Wendland 2006), discourse ('top-down') analysis of both source and target languages (Longacre 1989; Grimes 1972; Bergman 1994; Levinsohn 1987, 2000; Wendland 2002), pragmatics and communication theory, in particular relevance theory (Gutt 1990, 1991/2000, 2005; Hill 2006). Theorists writing from a non-western perspective have further enriched our understanding of the impact of biblical translation on a wide range of societies (Wickeri 1995; Rafael 1998; Naudé and van der Merwe 2002; Lai 2007, among others). Consideration of the skopos or function/goal of a text within its community has become a main focus of discussion. The question of whether it is possible, necessary or desirable to reconstruct the source author's intent, in order to reflect this in translation, remains a much debated issue to this day.

Despite these new avenues for reflection and research, the basic parameters for discussing Bible translation remain much the same, as translations continue to be described as more or less literal, more or less foreign, more or less natural. Some questions of faithfulness have been resolved or simplified as text sources for the Old and New Testament, to which translators adhere, are becoming more universally accepted. On the other hand, faithfulness remains a complex and intriguing in relation to new forms of Bible translation in non-print media, such as video, song, theatre and other forms of art (Soukoup and Hodgson 1999).

See also:

BRITSH TRADITION; GENDER AND SEXUALITY; GREEK TRADITION; HEBREW TRADITION; INSTITUTIONAL TRANSLATION; LATIN TRADITION; QUR'ÃN; RETRANSLATION; STRATEGIES.

Further reading

Nida 1964; Nida and Taber 1969; de Waard and Nida 1986; Gutt 1991/2000; Wickeri 1995; Soukoup and Hodgson 1999; Zogbo and Wendland 2000; Naudé and van der Merwe 2002; Wilt 2003a; Stine 2004; Wendland 2004, 2006; Noss 2007.

LYNELL ZOGBO