

## Translating the Text

### Performance Objective

*The student demonstrates understanding of the basic principles and practice of translating the Greek text of the New Testament.*

### Performance Indicators

Upon successful completion of this lesson the student:

1. *Identifies* specified English translations as to type of translation method used.
2. *Identifies* specified English translations as to type of translation.
3. *Evaluates* the fidelity of specified English translations to the Greek text.
4. *Evaluates* the understandability of specified English translations.
5. *Translates* specified Greek texts according to a designated method of translation.
6. *Identifies* the grammatical function and/or the interpretative view reflected by specified English translations for designated Greek words, phrases, or clauses.
7. *Parses* specified Greek words.
8. *Evaluates* the alternatives of punctuation in specified texts.
9. *Identifies* the types of manuscript evidence for specified readings of a text.
10. *Reads* specified Greek sentences.

### Grammar Discussion

#### Outline of Grammar Discussion

- I. Approaches to Translating
  - A. Two Basic Methods
    1. Form-Oriented Translation
    2. Content-Oriented Translation
    3. Model for identifying Translational Methods
  - B. Resultant Types of Translations
    1. Highly Form-Oriented Type
    2. Modified Form-Oriented Type
    3. Content-Oriented Type
    4. Unduly Content-Oriented Type
    5. Model for Identifying Translational Types
- II. Considerations for Translating
  - A. Nature of Translating
    1. Analysis
    2. Transfer
    3. Restructuring
  - B. Basic Principle of Translating
  - C. Models for Evaluating Translations
    1. Evaluating Fidelity to *SL* Text
    2. Evaluating Understandability of the *RL* Text
  - D. Models for Making specific Translation Types
    1. Interlinear type
    2. Form-Oriented Type
    3. Content-Oriented Type
    4. Highly Interpretative types
  - E. Models for identifying Grammatical Functions and Interpretative Views

Translating scripture requires diligent application of skills with the original language of the text (technically called *Source Language, SL*) and with one's own native language (technically called *Receptor Language, FL*). Far more is needed than is reflected in a letter written to an organization of translators.<sup>1</sup>

I would be so glad to help in the translating of the Bible, and so if you would send me a dictionary and a grammar of some of these primitive languages, I would be happy to dedicate my spare time to the translation of the New Testament.

By nature, translation involves at least two languages and a message.<sup>2</sup> These two categories are technically labeled *form* and *meaning*. Everyone would agree that *meaning* is the primary concern in translation. Yet how to handle *form* has occasioned wide diversity of opinion. Thus in this fourth period of translational popularity, a proliferation of translations exists which reflects the widest possible applications of specific methodology.<sup>3</sup>

### Approaches to Translating

When one enters this maze of terminology and methodology, bewilderment can soon take over. Note Eugene Glassman's listing of various titles of books and articles reflecting both the complexity and the subsequent negativism about translation work.<sup>4</sup> Yet in spite of the hurdles, one must press on toward understanding what is taking place in the act of translation and whether or not this produce is a worthy fruit of such action. Here lies the heart of our endeavor in this Workbook: the evaluation of existing English translations on a substantive basis and the use of these translations for exegetical and homiletical insights.

### Two Basic Methods

An inquiry into translation methodology will uncover two basic approaches which are modified in many different ways. Several terms have been used for these two methods but those employed here will be *Form-Oriented Translation* and *Content-Oriented Translation*. The distinction between them will become apparent in the following discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene A. Nida, God's Word in Man's Language (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> For detailed discussion see John Beekman and John Callow, Translating the Word of God (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), pp. 19-21.

<sup>3</sup> Nida sees four periods of emphasis on translating the scriptures: Early Church, Reformation, Modern Missionary Endeavor, Indigenous National Translations. See Eugene A. Nida, "The Book of a Thousand Tongues," The New Testament Student and Bible Translation, ed. John H. Skilton (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1978), pp. 1-4.

<sup>4</sup> Eugene H. Glassman, The Translation Debate (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1981), pp. 11f.: The Way of the Translator is Hard, The Trials of a Translator, The Precarious Profession, Translation--The Art of Failure, The Trouble with Translation, The polite Lie etc.

### Form-Oriented Translation<sup>5</sup>

In this approach the primary emphasis is upon maintaining the form of the *Source Language* in the *Receptor Language*. The presupposition is that the grammatical structures of both languages are at least enough alike so that the translator can move directly from one language to another. Thus in the process of translation basic attention is given to the Source Language. Most translations through the nineteenth century followed this approach. This method is sometimes labeled as 'formal equivalence', 'formal correspondence' or 'literal'.

### Content-Oriented Translation<sup>6</sup>

In this approach major attention is placed on the Receptor Language. Does the reader/hearer understand what the passage is saying? The objective is to reproduce in contemporary readers/hearers the same reaction to the *message* that the original author sought to produce in the initial readers/hearers.

The *form* of the Source Language is important but not nearly as important as the *meaning*. The communication of accurate, clear *meaning* is the overarching aim.

This approach rests on several presuppositions concerning both the Source Language and the Receptor Language.<sup>7</sup>

Source Language:

- (1) The languages of the Bible are subject to the same limitations as any other natural language.
- (2) The writers of the Biblical books expected to be understood.
- (3) The translator must attempt to reproduce the meaning of a passage as understood by the writer.

Receptor Language:

- (1) Each language has its own genius.
- (2) To communicate effectively one must respect the genius of each language.
- (3) Anything that can be said in one language can be said in another, unless the form is an essential element of the message.
- (4) To preserve the content of the message the form must be changed. The extent of change depends upon the linguistic and cultural distance between *SL* and *RL*.

This approach has evolved in this century through the attempt to apply principles of scientific linguistics to Bible translating.<sup>8</sup> Eugene Nida of the American Bible Society has been a pioneer and a leader of this methodology.

One area of particular productivity has been the concern to produce 'common language' versions of the Bible.<sup>9</sup> These versions are oriented toward that huge middle

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<sup>5</sup> For helpful discussions and evaluations, see Glassman, *Debate*, pp. 48-52; Nida and Tabor, *Theory*, pp. 1-3, B-C, pp. 19f.; Nida, *Translating*, pp. 11f.

<sup>6</sup> For helpful discussions and evaluations, see Glassman, *Debate*, p. 52; Nida-Tabor, *Theory*, pp. 3-32; B-C, pp. 20f.; Skilton, pp. 109-118.

<sup>7</sup> Nida-Tabor, *Theory*, pp. 3-8.

<sup>8</sup> Nida, *Good News*, pp. 97-109.

ground in language between the opposite extremes of highly technical language (e.g. legal language, etc.; thus ecclesiastical language) and vulgar language (Not necessarily indecent, but highly colloquial or substandard such a 'Me and John went'.) the presuppositional clue for this is from the Koine form of Greek in the New Testament. The New Testament was originally itself a 'common language' version. many battles have been fought and much blood shed since the Reformation from the legitimacy of this type of translation.<sup>10</sup>

Another area of significant contribution from those in this methodology has been the publication of the *Translator's Handbook* series for each book of the Bible. Most of the New Testament is now available. These publications carry the reader through the three stages of the process of translation (Discussed below under *Nature of Translation*.) and give helpful insights at each stage. Reference to appropriate volumes is given in the For Research and Study section of both volumes of this Workbook.

### **Model for Identifying Translational Methods<sup>11</sup>**

From the specified example, the student should indicate whether the translation is basically following either a Form-Oriented or Content-Oriented methodology.

Examples:

Col. 2:6

"As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him."

*Form-Oriented*

"So, just as you once accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue living in vital union with Him."

*Content-Oriented*

### **Resultant Types of Translations<sup>12</sup>**

The implementation of these two methods of translation has resulted in four basic types of translations which represent a continuum from one extreme to another: highly form-oriented; modified form-oriented; content-oriented; unduly content-oriented.<sup>13</sup> The first and last types of represent unacceptable patterns of translations with exceedingly limited value. The second and third types are better approaches with great value for specific uses of scripture.

#### **Highly Form-Oriented Type.**

Characteristically this type reproduces the linguistic features of the Source Language, such as word order, syntactical relations etc., with high consistency. As a result one must often be able to go to the Greek text and/or consult commentaries before he

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<sup>9</sup> Glassman, Debate, pp. 64-67.

<sup>10</sup> Price, Ancestry, pp. 225-320.

<sup>11</sup> For additional drill work, see Larson, p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> Beekman-Callow, pp. 21-25.

<sup>13</sup> For the sake of consistent terminology with previous discussion in this lesson, these terms are used. They are, however, based on Beekman and Callow's terms: highly literal, modified literal, idiomatic, unduly free.

can begin to understand the translation. The most extreme example of this type is the interlinear translation. But others fall, at times, into this pattern.

Some noticeable traits emerge in this type. First, word sequences are rigidly maintained in the Receptor language. Sometimes this involves a violation of grammatical rules in the *RL*; often it results in an unnatural flow of thought. Secondly there is a frequent attempt to match a single word in the *SL* with a single word in the *RL* and to use the *RL* word in every context in which the *SL* word is used. The consequence of this is the putting of words together which do not fit and gives rise to either nonsense or wrong sense. An example is a translation of Mark 3:26: “If Satan has risen (in the morning from sleep) and is divided (like an orange s cut in half), he is not able to endure, but is coming to an end.” The parentheses reflect the natural sense of the preceding verbs.

Ambiguity is another trait of this type. This particularly surfaces in a passage containing a large number of pronouns--especially personal and demonstrative--where confusion of antecedents reigns if each Greek pronoun is translated literally. Idioms and figures of speech are difficult areas in this approach. Often a word for word translation of an idiom results in a totally different meaning. For example, the statement in Mark 10:38 “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?” translated literally into one West African language becomes the challenge of a drunkard to his buddies to drink as much as and as strong a drink as he. That is obviously not what Jesus was saying to James and John.

#### *Modified Form-Oriented Type*

This approach represents an improvement over the first. more flexibility in word sequence and concern for thought patterns in the *RL* are characteristic. Yet there will still be the preoccupation with ‘word-for-wordness’ in translation that frequently results in a wooden, artificial style in the *RL*. Unnecessary ambiguities and obscurities will frequently occur. Thus this type translation is usually difficult to understand for the average reader. The *meaning* of the text has been sacrificed too much for the sake of maintaining the *form*.

However, this type translation can serve a valid role. In bible study groups where extensive use is made of reference tools, and detailed analysis of the text is the norm, this type translation can be a productive source of study.

#### *Content-Oriented Type*

Here the focus of attention shifts from the *form* of the text to the *meaning* of the text. The overarching aim is the communication of the *meaning* of the *SL* into the *RL* in the *RL form* which is natural and clear. If the *form* of the *RL* coincides with the *form* of the *SL* then similarity of *form* would be maintained. But where they are different--which usually is the case--the most natural and clearest *RL form* must be preferred for the sake of *meaning*.

This perception of the task of translation is not new. Jerome in translating the Vulgate said, “I could translate only what I had understood before.”<sup>14</sup> Luther reflected the same insight when he said, “If the angel had spoken to Mary in German, he would

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<sup>14</sup> Beekman-Callow, p. 24.

have used the appropriate form of address; this, and no other word, is the best translation whatever the phrase in the original may be.”<sup>15</sup>

This type translation offers the best possibility for a broad-base audience and diversity of usage of scripture. That is not to imply that this type will reflect a perfect translation, for no such thing exists. But this type will reflect a clear expression of *meaning* using natural word combinations and word order. Ambiguities and obscurities will be kept to a minimum. The person without a religious background can understand the text along with the Christian leader.

### *Unduly Content-Oriented Type*

As the Highly Form-Oriented type represents an unacceptable kind of translation so does this type from the other extreme. The concern here is exclusively on the *message*, or perhaps more accurately, the reader/hearer of the *message*. Within any *RL* varieties of style are possible which can all accurately communicate the *meaning* of the *SL*. Thus variety of style is not the weakness here. Rather distortion of *message* is the criticism.

Several traits will surface in this pattern. Substitution of historical facts often occur. Note C.L. Jordan's title of 1 Corinthians, "A letter from Paul to the Christians in Atlanta." Unjustified inclusion of interpretation into the translation is common. To be sure some interpretation -- both syntactical and theological -- is present in every type of translation. Yet this should be based on the best exegetical grounds possible. Sometimes where the *SL* contains ambiguous statement that ambiguity -- both syntactically and theologically -- may need to be preserved in the *RL*. Or else the alternatives should be reflected in marginal readings. But this type of translation will tend not to do this. Rather, there will be a tendency to inject the personal bias of the translator into his translation, particularly his theological bias. The result may be a highly sectarian translation reflecting one particular theological viewpoint. For example Kenneth Taylor's Living Bible is basically a reflection of the fundamentalist Bible Church movement.

A word needs to be said about a paraphrase. Most experts in this field avoid the use of the term in a set of categories referring to types of translations.<sup>16</sup> The reason for this is that 'paraphrase' in the strict sense means to tell or say the same thing in other words. That is, technically it has to do with restating ideas within the same language, not in another language.<sup>17</sup> The popular perception of the term is that of a very free, loose and thus inaccurate translation based mostly on the subjective bias of the translator. While this popular image is related to the last category of translation types, the true meaning of the term prohibits its usage in most instances. One possible exception would be the Living Bible which is a paraphrase--in the technical sense--of the American Standard Version.

### Model for Identifying Translational Types<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> See Glassman, Debate, pp. 23-24, 42-45, 93-117; Beekman-Callow, p. 21.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 26-34.

<sup>18</sup> For additional drill work see Larson, pp. 18-20.

From the specified examples the student shall classify each according to one of the above translational types: *HFO*, *MFO*, *CO*, *UCO*. In some instances examples will be given and then the student shall list them sequentially along the lines of the above continuum. Base your evaluation on the characteristics given in the above discussion in relation to the approach to the original text.

Col. 2:14

- (1) "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.
- (2) "Cancelled the note that stood against us, with its requirements, and has put it out of our way by nailing it to the cross."
- (3) "Having obliterated the hand-written document consisting of ordinances, the one (which was) against us, which was directly opposed to us, and He removed it out of the midst with the result that it is no longer there, having nailed it to the Cross."
- (4) "And blotted out the charges proved against you, the list of his commandments which you had not obeyed. He took this list of sins and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ's cross."
- (5) "He has wholly done away with the bond that was against you."
- (6) "And wiped out the charge-list, which set out all your self-admitted debts, a charge-list which was based on the ordinances of the law, and which was in direct opposition to you. He nailed it to His Cross and put it right out of sight."

In the first kind of assignment, each example shall be categorized:

(1) *HFO* (2) *CO* (3) *HFO* (4) *CO* (5) *UCO* (6) *FO*

In the second kind of assignment the examples shall be sequenced on the continuum *HFO* to *UCO*:

(3) (1) (6) (2) (4) (5)

In doing this assignment the student will discover that no single translational example of any length will be a pure example of any of the four types. Individual words, phrases or clauses in a sentence may exemplify several, if not all, of the basic types. Thus one should look for dominant patterns in making his assessment.

One consequence of such activity will most likely be the shattering of preconceived opinions about individual translations. For that reason no translation will be named in the assignments. The student is discouraged from attempting to make such identification before assessing the translation. Let it stand on its own treatment of the *SL* and *RL*, not on its reputation which may or may not be relevant to a given passage.

### **Consideration for Translating**

In the previous discussion (Approaches to Translating), the focus was on examining 'how it has been done' in a fairly generalized way. Now attention will be given to the process of translation itself and some suggested guidelines for translating as well as for evaluating translations. In other words, 'how to do it.'

### **Nature of Translating<sup>19</sup>**

The most substantive basis for good translating involves the three step process of Analysis, Transfer, and Restructuring. Nida has diagrammed it as follows.

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<sup>19</sup> For helpful discussions see Glassman, pp. 48-64 and Nida, *Language*, pp. 79-94. Additionally, both Nida-Tabor, *Theory*, and Beekman-Callow are extensive amplifications of this process in minute detail.

*Source Language*

*Receptor Language*

Text

Analysis

Translation

Restructuring

\*\*\*\*\*Transfer\*\*\*\*\*

In its fullest use, a great deal of linguistically expertise is required. Since our objective is not to produce translators capable of making published translations, we will not go into that level of detail. Instead a more practical application involving a minimum of technicality will be our direction. An excellent example of this type application is the volume on Mark in the previously mentioned series Translator's Handbook. Each verse is divided into three sections: Text, Exegesis, Translation. The reader is carried through the three step translation process for each verse. The technical activity is accomplished without the use of technical jargon.

Analysis

This step involves the determination of the *meaning* of the Source Language; that is, what it meant to those who first heard or read the passage? The first fundamental clue is the grammatical relationships between words, phrases and clauses. In other words, the parentheses in the parsing models and diagramming of sentences. What does the phrase "the love of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:14) mean? Christ loves? Christ is loved? Subjective Genitive? Objective Genitive?<sup>20</sup>

The next clue in analysis is exploring the meaning of words or word combinations at two levels: referential (dictionary) meaning and connotative meaning (conveying emotion or feeling, which the reader or hearer will react to, either positively or negatively). In the Gingrich-Danker Lexicon the range of referential meanings are given and distinguished by an outline procedure.<sup>21</sup> Each usage is then indexed under the appropriate meaning, in all but the most extremely frequent words. Explanatory statements usually accompany the reference and provide a basis for this assessment of referential meaning. This may be indexing similar usages and grammatical patterns outside the New Testament and early Christian writers. And/or it may be calling attention to peculiar grammatical constructions for this word which establish precise shades of meaning. Occasionally journal articles which treat the matter more detailedly will be listed. Often not only will referential meaning be provided but assessment of grammatical relationship will be given as well.

The occurrence of παραλαμβάνω in Col. 2:6 will illustrate this. The range of referential meaning goes from 'take with' in an associative context to 'take over', 'receive' in a possessing or receiving context to 'accept' in the context of approval or agreement. The second meaning is the proper meaning here via context. But in what sense of possessing/receiving? The verb can take a personal object in shade of this meaning

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<sup>20</sup> See Nida, Language, pp. 80-86, for helpful although technical discussion of the processes of back-transforming and forward-transforming of words. Also helpful is the basic structural classes of words into objects, events, abstracts, and relationals.

<sup>21</sup> For a helpful discussion from a linguistic slant see Nida-Tabor, Theory, pp. 56-90.



(Cf. John 19:16b), yet all but one of the uses are with an impersonal object. Within the NT, these are almost all in Pauline writings with the object referring to the Gospel message or instruction for Christian living from the Gospel. The unusual object in Col. 2:6 τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον serves to confirm this specific meaning of the verb. Thus the core meaning of the verb-object combination is “you received the teaching that the Christ is Jesus and that He is Lord.” Now for the Colossians it is a possessed conviction and commitment that is to serve as the foundation for daily living. Though translators have seldom attempted to explicitly express this idea, the entire clause has the sense of “Because you have received the Christian confession that the Christ is Jesus the Lord . . .” (See Bratcher-Nida, p. 50, and Abbott, *ICC*, p. 244, for more details.)

Attention in Analysis must also be given to connotative meaning.<sup>22</sup> Although difficult to measure formally, the emotional reactions favorable/unfavorable are an important factor in translation, howbeit a neglected one. Sometimes the same word connotes entirely different responses in different contexts. The Greek word γυνή is often problematic here. In Matthew 11:11 the phrase ἐν γεννητοῖς γυναικῶν (‘among those born of women’) has a positive connotation. However, the use of γυνή in the vocative case will create a false connotation when translated literally. In John 2:4 and 19:26 the literal translation ‘Woman’ in English has a strong negative tone. But in Greek this has the exact opposite tone. How should it then be translated? The *FO* approach will insist on using the referential meaning alone and thus translate it ‘Woman.’ Yet this communicates a false meaning. The *CO* approach will consider both referential and connotative meanings in attempting an accurate expression of *meaning*. Two approaches surface within the *CO* method in John 19:26. γυνή is left untranslated so as to avoid the negative tone for the related statement: “Here is your son” (NIV, also *Wms.*). Or, the referential term is replaced with one having equivalent connotative meaning: “Mother, there is your son” (NEB).

Sometimes the translator has a number of *RL* words with the same referential meaning but different connotative meanings. He must choose the one which fits the perceived connotative meaning of the *SL*. Paul’s frequently used statement μὴ γένοιτο following rhetorical questions illustrates this concern (e.g., Gal. 2:17). Literally it means ‘May it not occur!’, yet this does not carry the strong negating tone clearly present in the statement. Thus another approach with the same referential meaning needs to be used. A check of several translations will reflect a variety of constructions which connote strong negation: “Of course not.” (*Wms.*); “Never!” (Beck); “No never!” (NEB); “Absolutely not!” (NIV); “By no means!” (TEV); “Heaven forbid!” (TCNT); “God forbid.” (KJV); “Hell no!” (C.L. Jordan). The English expressions with the exclamation point come closer to the connotative meaning.<sup>23</sup>

Though the process of Analysis ultimately involves several other facets both grammatical and semantic, these concerns of referential and connotative meaning are at the heart of the process.

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<sup>22</sup> For a helpful discussion see Nida-Tabor, *Theory*, pp. 91-98.

<sup>23</sup> For a helpful discussion of this statement, see E.J. Goodspeed, *Problems of New Testament Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), p. 88.

### Transfer<sup>24</sup>

This stage of the translation process largely occurs in the mind of the translator as he serves as the 'bridge' for transferring *meaning* from the Source Language to the Receptor Language. All at once a complex of factors are interacting with one another in the effort to preserve very carefully the meaning of the original text. Glassman calls attention to several of these concerns, but Nida and Tabor discuss them in a more helpful way. At this stage the translator needs to be sensitive to some potential barriers within himself. He may know so much about the subject matter that he unconsciously uses technical words in the *RL* that make understanding very difficult for the nonprofessional. He may fall into the trap of equating the mystery of the faith with an obscure, in-house translation that only 'insiders' can understand. There may not be an adequate appreciation for the nature of the translation process. These and other personal cautions should alert the translator to possible distortions of *meaning* when translating.

Also in this process of transfer many adjustments from *SL* to *RL* will inevitably become necessary. A certain amount of loss in semantic content will always occur in translation. But it must be reduced to the lowest possible level. Several problem areas develop here. Idioms are potential disaster areas. Nida mentions that the phrase 'heap coals of fire on their heads' suggested to one Congolese tribe a new 'Christian' way of torturing one's enemies to death. The translator can approach idioms by either a literal translation of the *SL* words, or by a non-idiomatic kernel sense translation of the *SL* idiom, or by an equivalent *RL* idiom. Note examples of each approach in the above idiom from Rom. 12:20; (1) "heap coals of fire on his head," (2) "make him ashamed," (3) "make him feel a burning sense of shame." In addition to idioms other problematic areas usually requiring adjustments are figurative expressions, necessary shifts in generic and specific meanings, pleonastic expressions and several others. Adjustments often are necessary in semantic units such as discourse structure<sup>25</sup>, sentence structure and word structure.

In this stage of translation the following priorities must be maintained.<sup>26</sup> (1) The content of the message must be transferred with as little loss or distortion as possible. (2) The referential meaning has highest priority but connotative meaning is very important. (3) If the above can be transferred by using a similar *RL* form then it should be used, but form must not be maintained to the sacrifice of content.

### Restructuring<sup>27</sup>

The focus of attention at this stage is the intended audience for the translation. What *RL form* will best communicate the *meaning* of the *SL*? At this point several factors came into view. The translator must give careful attention to the educational level,

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<sup>24</sup> For helpful discussions see Nida-Tabor, Theory, pp. 99-119; Nida, Language, pp. 91f; Glassman, Debate, pp. 61-63.

<sup>25</sup> For a valuable detailed discussion of this area see Kathleen Callow, Discourse Considerations in Translating the Word of God (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974).

<sup>26</sup> Nida-Tabor, Theory, pp. 118f.

<sup>27</sup> For helpful discussions see Nida-Tabor, Theory, pp. 120-162; Nida, Language, pp. 92-95; Glassman, Debate, pp. 63f.

the cultural and religious background of his audience. His aim is the best possible communication of the meaning of the text to the targeted audience.

Sensitivity to the language levels, types and styles are imperative. Nida identifies five basic situational levels of languages: technical, formal, informal, casual, and intimate.<sup>28</sup> A good translation will take into consideration the level of the *SL* text and then reproduce that level in the translation. Philemon as a very personal letter of Paul (informal to casual level range) should not be translated with the stilted, elevated style of highly formal or technical language. It would sound more like a legal document than a personal letter to a close friend.

Secondly one must be sensitive to the type(s) of material in the *SL* text and reproduce that in the appropriate *RL* form.<sup>29</sup> The two most basic types are prose and poetry. Prose subdivides into three linguistic subgroups: narrative, description, and argument. Each has distinctive features which set it off. narrative is principally structured around one or more chains of related events. Description is based largely on spatial relations between objects and parts of objects and also greatly uses abstracts. Argument is largely structured around two logical relations: (1) the 'because . . . therefore' argument and (2) the 'if so . . . then' kind.

The primary characteristic of poetry is multilevel parallelism. This can be in sound (thus rhyme, rhythm, alliteration etc.), in morphological and syntactic patterns (successive lines show similar or identical grammatical structure), in lexical choices and in semantic structures. One very common feature of poetry in all languages is a twofold level of meaning. It has a surface meaning (the literal themes or word meanings) and one or more extensions or plays on meanings.

The translator must recognize the type of discourse material, or, as often is the case, combinations of the various types, and then reproduce the equivalent type in the *RL*.

Distinctive styles, the third concern, stand as the most elusive of the concerns.<sup>30</sup> A large caution is necessary: the translator's style must not import new meaning into the text. Compare the TEV and Phillips translations of Luke 22:3 for a good and a bad approach. TEV: "then Satan went into Judas." Phs.: "Then a diabolical plan came into the mind of Judas." Style basically serves two purposes: Either to increase efficiency of thought expression, or to create special effects (enhance interest, increase impact etc.), or both. Features of style fall into two types: formal and lexical. Nida and Tabor analyze these into four helpful grouping which are outlined as follows:

- Formal features designed for efficiency
  - Simple discourse structure
  - Discourse-type markers
  - discourse-transition markers
  - Intersentence markers
  - Marking of relationship between clauses
  - Parallel subject-predicate constructions
  - short sentences
  - Overt marking of participants
  - Sentences with simple structures

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<sup>28</sup> Nida-Tabor, *Theory*, pp. 128f.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 131-133.

<sup>30</sup> Nida-Tabor, *Theory*, pp. 133-151.

- Potential terminals in a sentence
- Clauses in sequence
- Fit between semantic categories and grammatical classes
- Formal features designed for special effects
  - Complex discourse structures
  - Lack of discourse-type markers
  - Lack of transition markers
  - Paratactic constructions
  - Nonparallel constructions
  - Long and structurally complex sentences
  - Failure to mark participants
  - Discrepancy between semantic and grammatical classes
  - Nonparallel semantic structures
  - Formal confusion
  - Sound effects
  - Rhythm
- Lexical features designed for efficiency
  - Well-known words
  - High-frequency words
  - Familiar combination of words
  - Combinations of words which have 'semantically agreeable' parts
  - Present-day rather than obsolescent or archaic words
  - Specific vs. generic terms
  - Central meaning of words
  - Words appropriate to the constituency.
- Lexical features designed for special effects
  - Little-known words
  - Infrequent words
  - Specific vs. generic terms
  - Unusual combinations of words
  - contrasting words
  - Dated words
  - Peripheral and figurative meanings
  - Puns
  - Calculated avoidance

Thus a translation may express meaning in a simple style but be difficult to understand because of vocabulary usage, or visa versa.

### *Basic Principle of Translating*

Many suggestions have been made for translational principles<sup>31</sup> The most basic and preferable statement of a general principle is that of Nida: closest natural equivalence.<sup>32</sup> The translator must endeavor to reproduce equivalency of meaning from the *SL* in the *RL*. This is not general equivalency of meaning but rather 'closest equivalency'. Where commonality of form between *SL* and *RL* exists the *SL* form would be retained in the *RL*, for example. The translation must be 'natural.' That is, it should not read like a translation. Instead it should have the tone and style as if Paul wrote to you in English when Philemon was penned.

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<sup>31</sup> The earliest attempts to formulate principles go back to Etienne Dolet in 1540. Many have tossed their ideas into the hat since. See Glassman, Debate, pp. 32-34; Skilton, pp. 18-36, 45-55.

<sup>32</sup> Nida, Good News, pp. 108f.

## Models for Evaluating Translations

In light of the preceding discussion evaluation of translations will focus on two basic areas of concerns: fidelity to the meaning of the original text and understandability by the intended audience. Any such evaluation of a translation has inevitable limitations, for no formal testing procedure is fully adequate.<sup>33</sup>

### Evaluating Fidelity to SL Texts<sup>34</sup>

Such an endeavor looks at one basic concern: Does the translator understand the meaning of the text? This should be reflected in the translation. One limited way of testing this is to evaluate the handling of historical and didactic references in the text.

Note the way Colossians 2:16-17 is handled by several translators.

- (A) Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration, or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.
- (B) let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath *days*; which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ.
- (C) So don't let anyone criticize you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating Jewish holidays and feasts or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. For these were only temporary rules that ended when Christ came. They were only shadows of the real thing -- of Christ himself.
- (D) So let no one make rules about what you eat or drink, or about the subject of holy days, or the new moon festival, or the Sabbath. All such things are only a shadow of things in the future; the reality is Christ.

In completing the evaluation assignment, first identify and list both the historical and didactic elements of the text and how each translation handles them. Then evaluate each translational element on the following scale of (1) to (5) with (5) representing the highest level of fidelity of *meaning* (not literalness) of the SL text as you understand it. Then assess the entire translation on the same scale. Diversity of view will occur in the rating of each translation. The student is expected to have a basis for his evaluation rather than an arbitrary rating.

#### *Historical Elements Listed and Rated:*

ἐν βρώσει:

- |     |                           |   |
|-----|---------------------------|---|
| (A) | <i>by what you eat</i>    | 5 |
| (B) | <i>in meat</i>            | 3 |
| (C) | <i>for what you eat</i>   | 5 |
| (D) | <i>about what you eat</i> | 5 |

καὶ ἐν πόσει:

- |     |                    |   |
|-----|--------------------|---|
| (A) | <i>or drink</i>    | 5 |
| (B) | <i>or in drink</i> | 4 |
| (C) | <i>or drink</i>    | 5 |
| (D) | <i>or drink</i>    | 5 |

ἢ ἐν μέρει ἑορτῆς:

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<sup>33</sup> See Nida-Tabor, Theory, pp. 163-173, for a helpful discussion of testing approaches and limitations.

<sup>34</sup> See Beekman-Callow, pp. 33-39; Larson, pp. 21-23.

- (A) *or with regard to a religious festival* 4
- (B) *or in respect of a holyday* 4
- (C) *or for not celebrating Jewish holidays and feasts* 2
- (D) *or about the subject of holy days* 4

ἡ νεομηνίας:

- (A) *a new moon celebration* 5
- (B) *or of the new moon* 3
- (C) *or new moon ceremonies* 5
- (D) *or the new moon festival* 5

ἡ σαββάτων:

- (A) *or a sabbath day* 5
- (B) *or of the sabbath days* 5
- (C) *or Sabbaths* 5
- (D) *or the Sabbath* 5

*Didactic Elements Listed and Rated:*

Μὴ οὖν τις ὑμᾶς κρινέτω:

- (A) *Therefore do not let anyone judge you* 4
- (B) *Let no man therefore judge you* 4
- (C) *So don't let anyone criticize you* 3
- (D) *So let no one make rules* 3

ἃ ἐστὶν σκία τῶν μελλόντων:

- (A) *These are a shadow of the things that were to come* 4
- (B) *Which are a shadow of things to come* 5
- (C) *For these were only temporary rules that ended when Christ came. They were only shadows of the real thing.* 3
- (D) *All such things are only a shadow of things in the future.* 4

τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ:

- (A) *the reality, however, is found in Christ* 5
- (B) *but the body is of Christ* 4
- (C) *of Christ himself* 4
- (D) *the reality is Christ* 3

*General Rating of Translations:*

- (A) 5
- (B) 4
- (C) 4
- (D) 4

### Evaluating Understandability of the RL Text

Once again, this area faces a very difficult task in terms of formal testing procedures. Yet it is a very important part of the translation endeavor. If the translation is not understandable the whole aim of translation has been missed. Two basic procedures are suggested as partial measurements of understandability.

First the commonly used Fog Index test can be helpful.<sup>35</sup> These steps should be followed:

- (1) Count a 100 word sample beginning at the designated verse reference. Count contractions and hyphenated words as one word.
- (2) Count the number of sentences in those 100 words. Sentence equals independent clause. If you are over half way through the last sentence at the end of 100 words include it in the count. Otherwise do not.
- (3) Determine the average number of words per sentence by dividing the above number of sentences into 100. Round off fractions.
- (4) Count the number of three or more syllable words. Do not count the following as three syllable words: word somewhere the third syllable is *-ed* or *-as*; repetitions of the same word after the first occurrence.
- (5) Add the numbers of (3) and (4) to get a total. Multiply this total by .4. The resulting number will be the approximate school grade level that the materials are suitable for. Note: the reading skill of the average American is eleventh grade.

Note how the procedure works with translations beginning at Colossians 2:6.

	KJV:	NASV	NIV:	TEV:
(1)	2:6-11b	2:6-10c	2:6-11b	2:6-10b
(2)	3	2	3	5
(3)	33	50	33	20
(4)	9	9	9	3
(5)	16.8	23.6	16.8	9.2

Observe that only the TEV falls within the reading skill level of the average American. Both the KJV and NIV fall into the first year of master's level graduate school. The NASV is post-doctoral level reading skill! One must remember that these calculations apply only to this passage. Other samples should be taken from several passages before a general evaluation of the entire translation can be made. Yet this does reflect that fact that this passage could be understood only with great difficulty in most of the above translations.

A second test to measure understandability is the Cloze Technique, where every fifth word is deleted to be filled by the one completing the test.<sup>36</sup> The greater the number of correct guesses of words the easier the text is to understand. Test this out by filling in the blanks on the sample translations below. Do not look up the correct words until after filling in the blanks.

*Because of this, we \_\_\_\_\_, from the day in \_\_\_\_\_ we heard, do not \_\_\_\_\_ praying for you, and \_\_\_\_\_ that ye may be \_\_\_\_\_ with the full knowledge \_\_\_\_\_ His will in all \_\_\_\_\_ and spiritual understanding, to \_\_\_\_\_ walking worthily of the \_\_\_\_\_ to all pleasing, in \_\_\_\_\_ good work being fruitful, \_\_\_\_\_ increasing to the knowledge \_\_\_\_\_ God, in all might*

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<sup>35</sup> See Robert Gunning, How to Take Fog Out of Writing (Chicago: Dartnell Corporation, 1964), pp. 9-10. See Rudolf Flesch, How to Test Readability (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), for variations and other approaches.

<sup>36</sup> See Nida-Tabor, Theory, pp. 169f., for detailed explanation and application of this tool.

being \_\_\_\_\_ mighty according to the \_\_\_\_\_ of his glory, to \_\_\_\_\_ endurance and long-suffering with \_\_\_\_\_.

Formerly, you were yourselves \_\_\_\_\_ from God; you were \_\_\_\_\_ enemies in heart and \_\_\_\_\_, and your deeds were \_\_\_\_\_. But now by Christ's \_\_\_\_\_ in his body of \_\_\_\_\_ and blood God has \_\_\_\_\_ you to himself, so \_\_\_\_\_ he may present \_\_\_\_\_ before himself as dedicated \_\_\_\_\_, without blemish and innocent \_\_\_\_\_ his sight. Only you \_\_\_\_\_ continue in your faith, \_\_\_\_\_ on your foundations, never \_\_\_\_\_ be dislodged from the \_\_\_\_\_ offered in the gospel \_\_\_\_\_ you heard.

The first example is the Young's Literal Translation of Colossians 1:9-11. The second example is the New English Bible translation of Colossians 1:21-23a. How many of the blanks could you fill in correctly? Only a few correct guesses would suggest a high level of difficulty for the translation. Getting most of the blanks correct would reflect an easily understandable translation.

Gunning gives ten guidelines for clear writing which certainly have relevancy to translations from the understandability facet.<sup>37</sup> (1) Keep sentences short. (2) Prefer the simple to the complex. (3) Develop your vocabulary. (4) Avoid unneeded words. (5) Put action into your verbs. (6) Use terms your reader can picture. (7) Tie in with your reader's experience. (8) Write the way you talk. (9) Make full use of variety. (10) Write to express, not to impress.

### Models for Making Specific types of Translations

In this assignment the student will be asked to translate a specified passage according to one or more of the following translation types, ranging from an interlinear to a highly interpretative pattern.

#### Interlinear Type

In this assignment the student is to translate only words (including case meaning) in the exact sequence they occur in the Greek text. Note the following example from Colossians 1:21-23.

*And you once being having been alienated and enemies in the mind in the work the evil, now but he has reconciled by the body of the flesh his through the death, to present you holy ones and blameless ones and irreproachable ones before him, since indeed you remain in the faith having been established and steadfast ones and not moving yourselves from the hope of the gospel of which you heard of having been preached in all creation in the under the heaven of which I have become I Paul a minister.*

#### Form-Oriented Type

In this assignment the student is to translate the text giving primary attention to maintaining the same word sequence, sentence structure as the Greek text. This differs from the Interlinear Type only by rearranging sequence where English grammar (RL) requires it. Note the example from Colossians 1:21-23.

*And you, once having been alienated and enemies in your mind by your evil deeds, but now he has reconciled by the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, since indeed you remain in the faith established and steadfast and not moving from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached in all creation under heaven, of which I Paul have become a minister.*

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<sup>37</sup> Gunning, *Fog*, p. 8.



### Content-Oriented Type

In this assignment the student will translate the text and give major attention to expressing the meaning of the text in a natural, clear form of English. The suggestions of Gunning (above) for clear writing should be kept in mind. Note the following example from Colossians 1:21-23.

*Although you were once alienated and enemies even in your thinking by evil deeds, he has now reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death. God did this in order to present you holy, without guilt and faultless in his sight. He will do this because you remain faithful, on a sure and firm foundation, and unmoved from the hope of the Gospel. This is that message which you have heard, which has been proclaimed in all the world, and which I, Paul, serve as a minister.*

### Highly Interpretative Type

In this assignment the student is to reflect in the translation his personal interpretation of the meaning of the text. The primary emphasis is to be upon signaling his parsing of words, perception of both historical and didactic references, etc. The simplest, clearest English form should be used. Note the following example from Colossians 1:21-23.

*At one time you were completely cut off from God. By the wrong things you did and the way you thought you were his enemies. But now God has brought you back to himself as his friends. This he did by Christ's physical death. Thus God can stand you up before himself in final judgment as holy, pure, and faultless people. This, of course, assumes that you remain in the faith, the strong and certain foundation of God's deliverance from eternal punishment, and that you do not allow yourself to be shaken loose from the hope gained in the Gospel. This good news is the message you first heard preached to you and which has been proclaimed to everybody in the world. It is the same message that I, Paul, have been called to preach as its minister.*

### Models for Identifying Grammatical functions and Interpretative Views

In the assignment the student is asked to identify either grammatical functions or interpretative viewpoints reflected in specified English translations of the Greek text. Note the following examples.

(1) *Identify the grammatical function understood by the stated English translations:*

- (a) ἀνθρώπων (Col. 2:8)  
"human traditions"      *Descriptive Genitive*  
"men's thoughts"      *Possessive Genitive*

- (b) ὄντας (Col. 2:13)  
"when you were dead"      *Adverbial Temporal Participle*  
"although you were dead"      *Adverbial Concessive Participle*  
"who were dead"      *Adjectival Participle*

(2) *Identify the interpretative viewpoint understood by the stated English translations:*

τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ (Col. 2:17)  
"the substance is in the Christ"

*σῶμα is understood as referring to reality in contrast to the unreality or lack of substance in the preceding reference to new moon's etc. This substance is found in union with Christ.*

“ the reality is the body of Christ”

*σῶμα is understood with two shades of meaning. First, as the first translation understands it. Then as formally designating the church of Christ. One must be in the church if he is to possess the reality.*

#### For Study and Research

In addition to those books referred to in the footnotes of this lesson, see the following for helpful assessments of English translations.

F. F. Bruce, History of the Bible in English.

Sakae Kubo & Walter Specht, So Many Versions?

Harold L. Phillips, Translators and Translations.

Danker, Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study, pp. 163-199.

Moule, CGTC, pp. 107-126.

Bratcher-Nida, Translator's Handbook, pp. 70-91.

Abbott, ICC, pp. 127-165, 273-293.

Bruce, Ephesians, pp. 90-113.