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Overliteralness and Mother-Tongue Translators

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Abstract

One barrier to quality in Bible translation is a tendency for translators to translate literally from their primary source text. This is a hazard for any translator, but has particular relevance in the case of Mother-Tongue Translators (MTTs) with minimal training, who are bearing an increasingly larger role in new Bible translations around the globe.

In this article,[1] we first examine the problem of overliteralness, observing cases of RL structural adherence to the SL in direct speech, ungrammatical sentences, mistranslation of rhetorical questions, use of idioms, and neglect of discourse factors, etc. The problem of overliteralness extends to information and emotional impact implicit in the SL that is not made explicit in the RL. Reasons for overliteralness include the natural intuitiveness of translating literally, respect for the Word of God (they don't want to change it), and MTTs' unawareness of their own language patterns. Since translation consultants are not always familiar with the receptor language, these types of mistakes may escape notice in the checking process.

Nonetheless, many MTTs do excellent translation work. We present two major factors that help MTTs avoid overliteralness. Through training and mentoring, they need to absorb the translation principle that gives them "permission" to not be literal. Next, deliberate study of structures of their own language is key, especially contrasting it with structures of the primary source language.

Cases where these types of activities are already being done will be presented, and more are encouraged.

1. Introduction

Literal translation can be disastrous.

The first draft of John 20:2 in Bontoc, in the Philippines, reads, fairly literally, "They have taken away the Lord and we don't know where they have laid him." The problem is that Bontoc collocates words differently than the source language, English. When one refers to "the *Lord*" rather than "the *body* of the Lord", the inference in Bontoc is that the person is still alive. Furthermore, in Bontoc, you *lay* a living person down, but you *put* a corpse down. So this literal translation implies that Jesus wasn't dead, he was just very sick!

In this case, the repair is fairly simple: "They have taken away the *body* of the Lord and we don't know where they have *put* it."

[1] The materials in this article were first presented at the Bible Translation 2005 conference in Dallas, and subsequently at the Academic Forum of the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics, in 2008. The authors are grateful for discussion of participants there. Any errors of fact, interpretation, or analysis which remain are our responsibility.

One barrier to faithfulness of meaning in Bible translation is a tendency for translators to translate literally from their primary source text. In this article, "literal" refers to very closely following the grammatical structure and vocabulary of the source language in the receptor language translation.

Overliteralness is a hazard for any translator—mother-tongue translators are not the only ones at risk, so the topics in this article can be applied by any translator. The focus of this article is on mother-tongue translators for two reasons. The first reason is that some people have an overly optimistic outlook that mother-tongue translators will automatically, with no special training, translate equivalent meaning from a source language into their own language. We will show that this is not the case. Secondly, this topic is particularly timely since mother-tongue translators are bearing an increasingly significant role in new Bible translations around the globe; this article contributes toward awareness and specific training for these vital and key people.

In sections 2 and 3 of this article, we examine several detailed aspects of the overliteralness phenomenon, along with specific examples of each. In section 4, we propose some interconnected reasons for overliteralness. In section 5, we propose possible solutions, and note how some mother-tongue translators are already applying these solutions.

Abbreviations used in this article are as follows: MTT = mother-tongue translator, OTT = other-tongue translator, BT = back translation, SL = source language, and RL = receptor language.

2. Overliteralness in Structure

As experienced language workers know, many MTTs are prone to translate over-literally. This overliteralness can be manifested in several ways, with a variety of undesirable results. In this section, we name and illustrate some structural linguistic differences between the SL and the RL that can lead to overliteralness. This list is not exhaustive; experienced translators could name other language structure features that lead to overliteralness as well. However, we hope it is comprehensive enough to illustrate the pervasiveness and complexity of the problem.

2.1. Following the SL word order too closely

Following the SL word order too closely can produce an unnatural word order in the RL, perhaps to the point of unintelligibility. In Kifuliiru, as in many Bantu languages, the main point of the sentence, the "comment" of the topic-comment pair, comes at the end of the sentence. If the comment occurs sentence initial, as in English or Greek, confusion can reign.

For example, in Luke 24:25, Jesus rebukes the disciples for their unbelief. The TEV says, "Then Jesus said to them, 'How foolish you are, how slow you are to believe everything the prophets said!'" The main point of this passage seems to be that they don't believe. Since Kifuliiru, like English, is an SVO language, this can be grammatically translated with the same basic word order. However, if it is translated with this word order, the point becomes the fact that the disciples don't believe *everything the prophets said*. The obvious question in the mind of the Kifuliiru speaker then becomes, "What *do* they believe—something someone else said? Or only *part* of what the prophets said? Or only what the prophets *wrote?"* There are multiple interpretations possible.

In order to understand the real point in Kifuliiru, the translation needed to be worded, "And Jesus said to them: 'You are foolish! And your hearts are dulled! Everything which was said by the prophets, *you do not believe it*.'" Here, "you do not believe it" is a verbal construction in which "it" is a non-prominent prefix, so the prominent point of the sentence is their unbelief, as it should be.[2]

Quoted speech can also require a specific word order for an accurate translation of meaning. This can be a challenge, with distinguishing between direct and indirect quotes as one problem. But quoted speech can also involve word order. For example, in a linguistics and translation workshop in Brazil, most MTT participants were using the Portuguese Bible as the source text. The Portuguese usually positions "X said"

[2] This example is courtesy of Roger VanOtterloo.

before any reported speech, as in "Jesus said, 'Mary!'" in John 20:16. Naturally, some of the MTT workshop participants had done the same. However, in the workshop they discovered that in many Brazilian languages, this particular word order implies that Jesus was arguing with Mary. To avoid giving that impression, they simply had to change the order to "'Mary!' said Jesus."

2.2. Translating one word in the SL by one word in the RL

This topic necessarily has different sub-parts. A maximally meaningful translation takes advantage of the fact that there are many-to-one and one-to-many relationships in word correspondence between languages. There can also be one-to-zero and zero-to-one (or more) correspondences. These possibilities for translation are enumerated below.

Table 1: Mapping SL to RL word correspondence

	Source Language		Receptor language
a.	One word	→	One word
b.	One word	→	Several words
c.	One word	→	Zero words
d.	Several words	→	One word
e.	Zero words	→	One (or more) words

2.2.1 One-to-one

Often a word-for-word correspondence is possible and appropriate, as in table 1, a. However, if a one-to-one correspondence is translated when the better solution would be b, c, d. or e, then the result of this unnatural, literal translation is likely to be both unnaturalness and lessened comprehension.

2.2.2 One-to-several

Cases where one word in the SL demands a multi-word phrase in the RL table 1, b, are common and known well enough that we will not mention these further. The others, however, are illustrated below.

2.2.3 One-to-zero

An example of table 1, c comes from a translation workshop in Kenya, where there were five MTT teams. Their languages do not normally use isolated personal pronouns (e.g., "I" or "they") as separate words in sentences; personal pronouns are used only for disambiguation, prominence, or focus. Normally, prefixes or suffixes on the verb are used to distinguish the various subjects and object pronominal forms.

A problem arose because the mother tongue translators in the workshop were using a front translation in English as their source for translation, and since English syntax requires the use of isolated pronouns, the MTTs also used many of these isolated pronouns in their translations. The resulting translations sounded stilted, something like: "He *himself* went to the river, and she herself saw him *himself*." Most of the pronouns were inappropriately prominent.

The solution came after the MTTs were given an orientation to the natural pattern of their own languages. All the translators returned to their translations and, at first reluctantly, removed most of their isolated personal pronouns. One of these reluctant translators went home and read the revised version to his wife. Not only did she say it was "very sweet," (i.e. a good translation), but he found himself reading with much more fluency than he had the previous version.[3]

[3] Example is courtesy of Helga Schroeder.

2.2.4 Several-to-one

An illustration of table 1, d comes from the Philippines, when Finallig MTTs began to study the lexicon of their language in more detail. One passage they had drafted was Matthew 2:21: "So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt...."

In the first draft of Finallig, the MTTs had translated "the child and his mother" literally. Even though it seemed unambiguous, it didn't sound quite as natural as they would have liked. As they explored the richness of Finallig vocabulary, the MTTs realized that a *single* word covered the meaning of the whole phrase. They substituted this word, *sin-ina* 'the mother-child pair' for the multi-word phrase with the result that the passage sounded smoother and more natural. As a bonus, the ensuing lexicon studies made the MTTs think more deeply about their language, and helped them select other words that made the translation clearer and more natural. It also gave them confidence and credibility when defending their translation choices in their home community.

2.2.5 Zero-to-one (or more)

Cases where words are inserted in the RL translation that were not present in the SL (table 1, e), are more complex than the others, since there are multiple examples of making explicit what is implicit in the SL. Here we mention three of those cases.

1. Ideophones add naturalness and vividness

A stylistic case when words are introduced where the SL did not express them is to add vividness, as is the case with ideophones in some African languages.

Roger VanOtterloo[4] gives this back translation from Kifuliiru Acts 5:10: "At once she fell down at his feet *buuu* and suddenly died." The ideophone *buuu* represents the sound the woman made when falling and adds immediacy and vividness for the reader (see also discourse structures, section 2.5).

Contextual vividness is also indicated by the use of what I have called "dummy verbs" (e.g. "go, turn, arise") in some African languages. These are often inserted as a marker of story peak in the RL (Cahill 2005), though they contribute nothing to the actual events described.

2. Grammatical structure required in the RL that do not exist in the SL

The RL syntax may require that a word or particle be inserted in the translated text—particles that are nonexistent in the SL. For example, the verb "believe" requires an object complement in some language families in Africa. If there is no object in the SL, it is necessary to make explicit the object, as in "…the company of those who believed [the message] were of one heart" (Acts 4:32).

3. Vocabulary added to the RL translation that does not appear in the SL

Frequently, vocabulary which is not explicit in the SL, and not absolutely required by the syntax, may conform a translation better to the RL's natural patterns, and potentially avoid misunderstanding.

In Digo (Kenya) and other Bantu languages it is necessary to indicate most changes of location by the use of an auxiliary verb such as "come" or "go." For example, in Digo it is more natural for John 2:3 that "…the mother of Jesus *came-and*-told-him, 'Their wine is finished,'" than the simple statement in English (NIV) that "Jesus' mother said to him, 'They have no more wine.'" Omitting the Digo auxiliary verb "come" would suggest that Mary was with Jesus all along.[5]

These examples demonstrate that the number of words used to communicate an equivalent meaning may vary considerably, and a literal ("forced") one-to-one correspondence may create misunderstanding.

[4] Personal communication
[5] This example is courtesy of Steve Nicolle.

2.3. Translating rhetorical questions as literal questions

Rhetorical questions in the original languages often are a source of overliteral translations in the RL.

The first issue with rhetorical questions arises when the translator fails to distinguish between real and rhetorical questions in the SL. The result is that rhetorical questions are encoded in the RL as literal questions. In some languages, unlike English, there are specific syntactic or vocabulary differences between the two.

1 Samuel 13:11a (NIV) says: "'What have you done?' asked Samuel." This is not a literal question but a rhetorical one that indicates dismay or rebuke. A real question would imply that Samuel was simply seeking information. The original Kalanguya (Philippines) translation was *Hipay immeg mo?* The back translation of this suggests that the Kalanguya would understand the question literally: "What have you done?" Margie Lumawan, the MTT, changed the form of the question to indicate that it is rhetorical:

- Kalanguya rhetorical questions

Kalanguya:	*"Hipay immeg mo?"*	→	"*Kelay iyan mo impahding?*"
BT:	"What have you done?"		"Why is this that you did?"

On reflection, the mother tongue translator commented:

> "What have you done?" in English is clearly understood as a rhetorical question. It is very easy to just translate the English as it is and pretend/believe that Kalangoyans say their rhetorical questions that way. But Kalanguya uses *why* rather than *what* in expressing a rhetorical question. The *why* implies to the hearer that he is not expecting an answer, and thereby expresses a more powerful rebuke than a plain rebuke in a declarative form.

In some languages, then, the forms of rhetorical and real questions differ, and care must be paid to the differences.

There is another issue with rhetorical questions. Rhetorical questions in the Bible have several functions. In some languages, however, *all* rhetorical questions function to rebuke someone. Translating all rhetorical questions as questions has the result that all of these are interpreted in the RL as rebukes. For example Romans 8:35, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" is *not* meant as a rebuke, but would be interpreted as such if translated literally.

In the previous example, one form of a question should be transformed into a different question form to indicate that it is rhetorical. But in this case, the question itself should be transformed into a statement in the RL, e.g. "No one can separate us from the love of Christ."[6]

2.4. Translating SL figurative speech literally

Figurative speech can include metaphors, idioms, hyperbole, and others. Here we mention only idioms and hyperbole, but the discussion could easily be extended to other figures of speech.

2.4.1 Idioms

Idioms by definition are non-compositional, that is, the meaning of the whole phrase is not the sum of the meaning of the parts. Though different languages may have the same idioms, this is not common. It is almost guaranteed that translating figurative speech literally will result in either obscure language, or language only clear to those very familiar (through a trade language) with SL idioms or church language.

Another Bontoc example:

- Bontoc Psalm 69:15

RSV:	Let not the…pit close its mouth over me.

[6] For an example of going the other way, of making a statement into a rhetorical question, see section 2.9.

Original Bontoc: *Adim itlok…nan fito et omokmon.*

Original BT: Do not allow…that the hole will swallow-(me).

Revised Bontoc: *Ad-im itlok…nan longog si etey et omokmon.*

Revised BT: Do not allow…the shaft of the dead to swallow-(me).

The Hebrew word 'well' is translated 'pit' in the RSV. Both wells and pits are features of somewhat dry country. In Bontoc country, with its heavy rainfall, wells are not needed, and pits would fill with water, making them dangerous. Neither word exists in Bontoc, so in the original Bontoc translation the MTT used a loan word, *fito* 'pit.'

However, as the NET Bible footnote points out that the Hebrew "well," here symbolizes the place of the dead (cf. Psalm 55:23). "Well" here is not a physical well with water, but symbolic of the place of the dead. In the original literal translation, the symbolization is not clear; and in fact the whole concept of a 'pit' is not clear to Bontoc speakers.

With the implication of death in mind, in the revised translation, the MTT used an equivalent Bontoc idiom, 'shaft of the dead'. Bontocs often bury their dead underground by digging a shaft under a large rock. In this passage the SL also has an idiom related to the mouth: "Let not…the pit *close its mouth* over me." The Bontoc MTT adjusted this by replacing this SL idiom with a cultural equivalent to achieve naturalness. "Do not allow…that the shaft of the dead will *swallow*-(me)." This communicates the original intent more accurately.

2.4.2 Hyperbole

The issue of hyperbole is fairly well known, so we mention it only briefly. A hyperbole is exaggeration for effect, as in Luke 15:35, when the father of the prodigal says, "Your brother was *dead*, and now is alive." A similar case is found in Luke 14:26: "If any man come to me and *hate* not his mother and father…" The brother was not literally dead, but it was *as if* he was. We are not commanded to literally hate our parents, but compared to our love for God, it is as if we hate by comparison. A literal translation often skews the meaning since the RL may not use the same way of expressing the concept. Thus it creates the potential to be misunderstood.

2.5. Neglecting to translate discourse structure

The term discourse structure includes a wide diversity of topics: paragraph structure, participant reference, peak markings, etc. (Dooley and Levinsohn 2001:165). Neglecting these can lead to a variety of confusing, even bizarre, translations.

Uche Aaron, in a pertinent article in *Notes on Translation* (1998:5), tells of a case in Obolo in Nigeria. One verb form is used to begin a story, and another, reduplicated verb form marks crucial turning points in the story. These forms do not exist in English, and Aaron explains how two MTTs accidentally misused these:

> One of our two translators used the simple initiating form all through his translation of Mark's Gospel. The effect was that, to the listener, the stories of John the Baptist and Jesus were presented as ever starting, never moving forward, and never climaxing. The translation sounded childish and unbelievable. The second translator used mostly the stem-reduplicated verb form in his translation of the first chapters of Matthew with the effect that everything in these chapters was prominent. This resulted in a very high information rate that easily exhausted the listeners. Fortunately this was noticed after a discourse workshop and was rectified.

3. Non-structural considerations

Most examples in this article are *linguistic* ones, but *culturally understood information—or information gaps*—skews understanding in the RL, often resulting in literal translation as well. For example, in Bontoc, Matthew 1:19, "Joseph, being a righteous man, decided to divorce Mary quietly," has a collocational clash. Joseph could *not* have been righteous—see what he planned to do. No righteous man would plan such a terrible thing!

A full exploration of cultural factors and overliteralness is beyond the scope of this article, but would be a useful parallel investigation. Here we will limit our discussion to culturally defined implied vs. explicit information and emotional impact implications.

Here we note additional examples of one-to-one translations that MTTs re-translated as zero-to-one (or more) words for increased clarity (see table 1, e, and section 2.2.5).

3.1. Failure to recognize implied information

Not all information that a text refers to is explicit—the writers often depend on the readers' background knowledge to fill in the links between propositions. The result of this is that there are gaps in the logical progression of a text, which may need to be made explicit to RL readers who do not have a common mindset with the original SL readers. If the MTT does not recognize that there are gaps in the flow of information, he may fail to insert logical connections between propositions when needed.

For example, consider the following example from 1 Samuel 18:23 provided by MTT Margie Lumawan in Kalanguya, for which two distinct changes are required.

- Kalanguya implied information

NIV: They repeated these words to David. But David said, "Do you think it is a small matter to become the king's son-in-law? I'm only a poor man and little known."

Original Kalanguya: *Impidwa day ya ni hi David. Nem hi David, kan to ay, "Hapa nalakan mambeblin ni inapon adi? Nabitegak tan aliwan madamagak ni too."*

Original BT: They repeated this to David. But David, he said, "Is it easy to become a son-in-law of a king? I am poor and I am not popular."

For the first change the MTT significantly restructured the sentence to avoid wrong meaning. Implicit in the original Kalanguya is that David's intention is to garner support for marrying a princess.

- Kalanguya implied information, change 1

Revised Kalanguya: *Hapa nalakan mambeblin ni inapon adi?*

→ *Kelay amon angkayon nalalaka yon makiinapod adi?*

Revised BT: Is it easy to become a son-in-law of a king?

→ Why is it that it is as if it is very easy for you to become a relative/son-in-law of a king?

Margie Lumawan comments that,

> On the surface, the old translation is not much different than the new, since all the facts are there. But the old translation communicates a totally opposite meaning. The desired meaning is that David does not think he deserves to marry a princess and so become a son-in-law of a king. This is clearly stated in the English. But to a Kalanguya reader, this sentence construction may be understood as if David is trying to gather opinions that it is acceptable for him to become the son-in-law of a king even though he is poor and unpopular. In context, the old translation may stand but without context, I am almost 100% sure it will communicate the wrong meaning.

For the second change, the MTT replaced the first person pronoun with a third person pronoun. This removes an incorrect implication of pride, and implies humility.

- Kalanguya implied information, change 2

Revised Kalanguya: *Nabitegak tan aliwan madamagak ni too.*

→ *Itibtibew yo ngon nababa tan nabibiteg i too êy!*

Revised BT: I am poor and I am not popular.

→ You know (see) very well that the person is lowly and poor!

Margie Lumawan comments,

> It is very natural in Kalanguya to refer to oneself in the third person to imply humility or even inferiority. Usually, when a Kalanguya uses the first person, he means to be contradicted by the hearer. So if we retain *nababa–ak* "lowly-1s" and *nabiteg–ak* "poor-1s" then it is as if deep inside David wanted and expects his hearers to think the opposite of what he is saying about himself.

This example shows the complexity of language in that it interacts with cultural norms in unpredictable ways.

3.2. Failure to recognize the emotional impact of a passage

This is more subtle than the preceding issues, in that it does not affect grammaticality, nor correct recognition of the content; rather, the emotional impact results from the emphasis of a whole sentence or passage. (As an aside, this is also often missing in English translations!) When the "emotional impact" is not properly expressed, the translation fails to impact the reader as it should. The following example was contributed by Bontoc MTT Daphne Falag-ey:

- Bontoc emotional impact, original translation

2 Samuel 2:21a (RSV): Abner said to him, "Turn aside to your right hand or to your left, and seize one of the young men, and take his spoil."

Bontoc: *Kanan et Abner ken siya en, "Ad-i ka man omapayaw! Enmonaang ka ta en ka't chompap isnan esa's nan cheycha'y fabfafallo ta enkwam nan wad-ay ken siya."*

BT: Abner then told him, "Do not run-after me! You-look around so-that you capture one of the young-men so-that you-will-own what he has."

- Revised translation: The Bontoc expression *kay ya* (emphatic) was added for emphasis.

Revised Bontoc: *Enmonaang ka ta en ka't chompap…* → *Enmonaang ka <u>kay ya</u> ta en ka't chompap…*

Revised BT: You-look around so-that you capture… → You-look around (emphatic) so-that you capture…

Revised BT: Abner then told him, "Do not run-after me! You-look around (emphatic) so-that you capture one of the young-men so-that you-will-own what he has."

MTT Daphne Falag-ey commented, "I added *kay ya* to emphasize the command of Abner—that Asahel should truly look around! These tiny particles have often been ignored but I came to realize how valuable they can be in translation, particularly in the area of emphasis."

3.3. Observations about non-structural considerations

All the previous examples are ones that were noted and corrected, either by a MTT or by a translation consultant. It is unlikely that translation consultants would note these types of over-literal translation if they do not have in-depth experience with the language or the language family. When translation consultants are not familiar with the receptor language, these types of mistakes will fairly often escape notice in the checking process, as seen in the original Bontoc translation in section 3.2. The back translations from which consultants work often do not reveal the relevant issues.

4. Reasons for overliteralness

Problems with overliteralness are not uncommon, and the reasons for this happening are not random but systematic, due to the very nature of translation and the background knowledge that MTTs bring to the process. Here we examine these systematic and systemic reasons.

4.1. Literal is the most intuitive, easiest, and fastest translation method

When the prototypical "man on the street" is asked what makes a good translation, his first response is often "accuracy." But by "accuracy," he usually means "as literal as you can get away with," and this starts to intersect with issues of one-word to one-word translation and others dealt with in the previous section.

A literal approach is easier since the translator does not have to consider the finer details of word meaning, syntax, discourse structure, implied information, cultural interference, and other factors that affect how the reader will understand the translation. It is also quite a bit faster. If a rapid speed of translation is desired, the temptation would be to take shortcuts and take a more literal approach to translation. Investigation and experimentation with alternatives definitely slows the process.

We need to be clear that this approach is not limited to mother tongue translators; every translator must deal with this tendency to translate quickly and easily. We also need to acknowledge that some aspects of literal translation have positive value.

First, there is value in retaining the Hebrew cultural aspect of the SL. Such themes as blood sacrifices not only pervade Scriptures, but often have far-reaching theological implications.

Second, for the sake of acceptance of the translated Scriptures by local churches, we sometimes need to be as literal as possible. This is because readers in these churches will be comparing the RL Scriptures with of the trade language Scriptures. If there is not a close match, the RL readers will feel that they don't have the "real" Bible.

We will note that for emotional impact, particles, including ideophones (see section 2.2.5), can often be used quite freely, without affecting the RL readers' sense of a "literal translation." Since RL readers can't usually give a translation equivalence for these particles anyway, they can't say that they were *not* in the source language.

4.2. Respect for the Word of God (we don't want to "change it")

Most MTTs have a high respect for Scriptures as God's Word. If this respect, even reverence, leads to thinking that there is no flexibility to rephrase the Scripture in the translation process to keep the meaning the same, then adherence to literality is a natural consequence. As one MTT wrote to Keith Benn:

> When I was doing translation work with (a missionary)...Revelations 22:18–19 ("I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book") was my only guide in doing the work. Prompted by this, I religiously did a word for word translation from the King James Version. Faithfulness to the Word of God meant adherence to literalness in translating the Bible. Extra words not found in the wording of the Bible were considered a deviation or corruption of the written Word. Paraphrasing wasn't allowed. It was easy with literal translation, as it did not involve exegesis, key terming, grammar, discourse analysis, background information and other disciplines required in Bible Translation Task. So I was able to do many verses, even long chapters in a day.

4.3. Opinion that the RL is inadequate: Unaware of rich structure of the RL

Many MTTs have not had the opportunity to study their own language. When telling a story spontaneously, they automatically invoke rich vocabulary, use natural discourse structure, and use direct and indirect quotations and rhetorical questions appropriately. But these are below the level of consciousness. When they translate, their attention is on the structure and precise words of the SL. Unless they have been specifically made aware of how their language operates, they will not think that the function of the SL text can be equivalently expressed in the RL by modifying a structure or replacing a phrase with a single word. MTTs often don't realize that it is even an option.

4.4. Inexperience in writing their language

In schools using languages of wider communication, (e.g., English, Chinese, French), students who are mother tongue speakers of these languages have years of training in composition, and experience writing their own language. Some are more talented than others, but when a student graduates, that student has at least a basic idea of how to order propositions, create vivid language, make participant references clear, etc. However, if a language has only recently had an orthography developed, the most advanced readers may have only had a year's experience in writing their own language, and in the classes they have taken, they would have done minimal creative writing. These students will not have had much practice expressing themselves in writing.

For example, most schools in the Philippines have no place in their curriculum for writing in the vernacular. The language of education is English and Tagalog/Filipino, so children who speak any of the 100 plus minority languages never experience writing their own language.

The result of this is that many MTTs have never had the opportunity to think analytically about the lexicon, grammar or discourse patterns of their own language. These are all basic for natural and idiomatic translation. When these skills are missing, then the translation will be correspondingly deficient.

5. Possible solutions

5.1. Deliberate study of the structures of the RL

It is clear from the examples in section 2 that a first step in deliberately applying language knowledge to a translation is to investigate the structures of that language. This can involve everything from morphology studies to discourse analysis. MTTs can be individually mentored and guided by qualified consultants, or learn in a group setting such as a workshop or formal course. At least two types of linguistic study are possible: isolated language study and focused workshops involving multiple languages.

One approach is to study the ethnic minority language in relative isolation. This is the approach many SIL linguists have taken for some decades. One advantage of this approach for the OTT is that it permits focus on the language under study, with less interference from an awareness of the linguistic structure of other languages. There is also the opportunity to write a clear description of the structure of the language under study, including the discoveries made, thus increasing the publications available to the scholarly world. A number of volumes have been published of papers that originated in such workshops (Hale 1973:462; Hale & Pike 1970:305; Grimes 1978:389; 1986:233; Longacre 1968–69:222, 234; Longacre & Woods 1977:299; Anderson & Comrie 1991:255; Levinsohn 1994:241; to cite just a few). A disadvantage, or perhaps more accurately, a huge challenge of this approach, is to get the translator to then apply this knowledge to the translation process.

Another type of linguistic study of structure is more of a comparative study between the RL and a trade language. For example, "Here is a function—Spanish handles it this way, but *your* language does something different." One advantage of this approach is that MTTs often see immediately that a particular function is structured differently, with no inherent change of meaning. Then they are more likely to apply this knowledge in the translation process. A disadvantage of this is the relative lack of publications arising out of such workshops—at least, to date.

5.2. Deliberate study of the meanings of the RL

Besides the study of structures, discovering fine shades of meaning is crucial to translation. These can also be deliberately studied in several ways.

One concrete way relates to dictionaries. Using SIL's Fieldworks Lexical Explorer (FLEx) with the built-in semantic domains, one can rapidly gather several thousand words of a language, though it takes much work after that to prepare a real dictionary.[7] By doing this in the early stages of a translation project, the

[7] For a more complete description of this Dictionary Development Process (DDP), see www.sil.org/computing/ddp.

translator has at his fingertips a range of near-synonyms and related words that the translator would sometimes not have thought of spontaneously.[8]

In one case, some MTTs in the Pacific were considering what word would best translate "wilderness" in their Scripture translation. After talking for a while, one of them suggested they look at the words they had gathered in a Dictionary Development Process workshop a few weeks prior. They were pleased to find a word they all agreed was exactly right, but which had not come to their minds during the discussion.

There are multitudes of other areas and methods of investigation of meaning, from a course or workshop that focuses on figures of speech, semantic relations, etc. to a study of pragmatics and inferential factors in communication. These can often give MTTs a "mental hook" and the metalanguage needed to discuss their own language. Recognizing a metaphor, for example, is the first stage in deciding how to translate it.

5.3. The Imagination Factor

In one area MTTs have a distinct advantage over OTTs—they can dream and imagine in their own culturally unique imagery, something that is impossible for OTTs. This is what makes *The Message* more vivid than the NIV, for example. Peterson used his imagination and asked, "If Eliphaz and Job were talking in my vernacular, how would they express themselves?" Compare Job 6:26 (Job to Eliphaz) in the two versions:

- Job 6:26 in two versions

  NIV: Do you mean to correct what I say, and treat the words of a despairing man as wind?

  The Message: You pretend to tell me what's wrong with my life, but treat my words of anguish as so much hot air.

Similarly, the King James Version translators used their imagination when translating Mt. 27:44, inserting an English idiom for emotional impact.

- Mt. 27:44 in two versions

  NIV: In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also *heaped insults on him*.

  KJV: The thieves also, which were crucified with him, *cast the same in his teeth*.

In *Analyzing the Psalms, with Exercises for Bible Students and Translators* (Wendland 2002), Wendland recommends, "To determine what the personal interaction in a psalm is, *imagine* it as being a dramatic dialogue or conversation between the psalmist and his God." This is what we may call the "imagination factor." An example from Bontoc is the following.

- Bontoc 1 Samuel 20:30

  RSV: Then Saul… said to him, "You son of a perverse…woman.… I know that you have chosen the son of Jesse…to the shame of your mother's nakedness?"

  Bontoc: Saul said, "You are indeed the child of a mother with a twisted gall-bladder…. I know that you have-given more importance to…the son of Jesse…in so doing, you are causing-yourself-to-be-laughed-at and even your-mother who birthed (lit. brought-you-out)?"

In this example, the MTT has correctly understood the exegesis, and then felt free to truly express the meaning in the idioms of her own vernacular.

6. Concluding remarks

We have painted a largely negative picture showing that overliteralness has been the result of less-than-accurate and meaningful translation. However, there are many MTTs who are doing excellent translation

[8] There are a host of other benefits to a dictionary as well, relating to literacy and local people's view of their own language, as well as value to outside linguists and anthropologists.

work. In fact, many of the previous examples of overliteralness were what was produced by MTTs in their first draft translation, and then was corrected by themselves in their next revision. There are several factors which have helped them to become the excellent translators they are today. It didn't happen by accident. The end results of the previous examples show their competence.

As a result of translation workshops, training, and mentoring, MTTs get the necessary and foundational idea that they "have permission" not to be literal, a basic translation principle.

In addition, deliberately investigating their own language while working with other mother tongue speakers over extended periods of time, they have become aware of the rich resources available to them in their own language.

Traditionally, although SIL has run linguistic workshops and translation workshops, there has often been a disconnect between the two. The "marriage" between linguistic analysis and translation work has failed. The perennial challenge is to get translators to apply their linguistic knowledge to the Bible translation task. One solution seems to be catching on in recent years: a combined linguistics/translation workshop. In this type of workshop, participants investigate the structures of their languages, then deliberately apply this new knowledge to Scripture translation—on the spot.

Stephen Levinsohn in recent years has run six-week long workshops investigating discourse structure and applying it directly to Scripture translation on the spot. He has taught this type of workshop in Ethiopia, Cameroon, Mozambique, East Asia, Brazil, etc. Dick Kroneman in Indonesia has also been training MTTs to directly investigate their own language and apple it to translation. During his time as Training Coordinator in another Asian country, Keith Benn arranged for Dick and Lou Hohulin to run a workshop in which MTT translators analyzed their RL and then applied this linguistic knowledge in their translation. The Hohulins have followed this approach in subsequent workshops.

Finally, Stuart Showalter in Burkina Faso reports concisely on a four-week training seminar on discourse analysis for translators:

> With the aid of a UBS colleague, I guided national translation teams in discovering how narratives are structured in their languages, and how that structure differs both from French and biblical languages. Understanding questions of word order, highlighting for emphasis, subordinate clauses, pragmatic connectors, style of reported speech and other complexities, is crucial for a translation that is both accurate and natural in the receptor language. The whole Kaansa translation team was there, along with eight other language teams. On the last day one Burkinabe translator from the Mooré language group said, "This course should be taught whenever a new translation is begun. I have been working on the Old Testament translation in my language for fourteen years, and now it's almost done. I see now mistakes that could have been avoided. Those who come after us will say. 'This could have been done better.' If only I had known at the beginning what I have learned at this course!"

Mother-tongue translator, Myrlin, made the following observation about the Bontoc translation produced the first time around:

> Looking back, when I was still an untrained translator in the past, the whole picture of a meaningful translation never occurred in my mind. And I wondered why my translation cannot communicate to me even though it was written in my own native tongue. In fact, my English Bible was more meaningful to me and richer in content, while the ones I have translated were like a recipe without ingredients. It wasn't interesting enough to read. (Myrlin, Bontoc MTT)

It is our hope that the concepts in this article will help others to avoid future cases like Myrlin's.

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