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Toward an Ethical Code in Bible Translation Consulting

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Abstract

One of the great unknowns remaining in Bible translation projects is a formal understanding of the ethical foundations needed for the consulting task. Although this is also true for consultants in anthropology, linguistics and related disciplines, the focus of this article will be on translation consulting. Ethical standards in Bible translation projects must also be examined regarding the translation team and other parties involved, but this article will focus on the consultant. To whom are consultants responsible? Is it to the initiating institution or organization, to the individual's or a people group's conscience, to God, to the translation team, or to the translation project? How do all parties know about their ethics? And, at the very least, how do the parties involved handle ethical considerations, such as disagreement, mutual aversion, rejection or cross-cultural differences? Because there is a void in this area, consultants and others involved often experience misunderstanding and distrust, and thus the quality of the Bible translation or the consulted product is at risk. This is caused by cross-cultural issues, divergent expectations about translation issues, vague job descriptions and understanding, lack of frameworks and planning, etc. Some of the difficulties that Bible translation projects face, and how these challenges could be overcome, will be addressed. The term "loyalty," borrowed from functional translation approaches, will be introduced to the process of Bible translation consulting. Finally, a proposal toward an ethical statement of standards for consultants will be drafted.

1. Introduction—Difficulties Caused by a Lack of Ethical Standards

This article is about the consultation process in Bible translation projects. Bible translation projects have an interdisciplinary approach that typically includes more than just translation of scripture. Additional language development activities often have resulting products such as grammars, lexicons, and folktale books that require consultant input. Consequently, in recent times consultants are needed who specialize in the domains of translation, linguistics, anthropology, missiology, theology and social sciences. In most projects only the first three areas are addressed, as they are considered the most central domains. This does not mean that the other areas are less important—they could also be improved by consultation—but it is taken for granted that they be combined as part of the translation, or translation consultant, work.

Ethics in general is divided into a *formal* and a *material* branch. A third area of ethics is about basic requirements and is called the area of *meta-ethics*. Formal ethics answers the "why" question (reason, cause and motive of an action) and the "who" (protagonist) question. It includes the issues of conscience, obligation, virtue, commandments and the laws of nature concerning language, categories and conceptions (Bockmühl 1995:16). Material ethics discusses content and norms of ethics and actual problems of morals of the individual (e.g., responsibility, loyalty, marriage, property, etc.). Ethics is culture-bound and reflected in behaviour, language, customs and traditions. Thus, ethical standards are defined by either a people group as their acculturated property or actively prescribed by the protagonists within an individual project, based on agreement. This article deals with all three branches of ethics, since consultation needs to be based on the "why" question (Why am I working as consultant for this specific project?—formal level) and an individual moral that needs to be known to the people one is consulting (material level), and the consultant has to be aware of his justification processes of his conscience (meta-ethics).

Consulting is an approach perceived as from the outside by the translation team. The consultant, an experienced specialist in the above mentioned domains, joins the translation team and the project management as an "outsider" to support the project by checking and improving a translated Bible portion. In a best case scenario, and currently preferred, the consultant supervises the translation project from the beginning, giving input on translation, anthropology, linguistics or social decisions. The goal of consulting is to guarantee high quality products from an objective viewpoint.

Unsolved problems in consulting are

- the question of power flow and responsibility
- how to improve quality in translation by the involved parties
- how to resolve differences, disagreements or aversions involving work and/or personnel

A Bible translation project involves many different parties. The project management invites and trains the team, taking responsibility for the funds and the planning and process of the project. The national or mother-tongue translation team works together with churches, exegetes or theologians of the people group. More on the periphery of such a project is the funding institution, the wider community of the group for whom the Bible is being translated, and local or national organizations interested in language or translation issues.

But often key persons like consultants are not considered to be part of the project. They come in temporarily and, if the translators and managers lack orientation about the role and benefits of a consultant in the process of Bible translation projects, the translation team may regard the consultant as an intruder who causes additional work. This potential for disharmony complicates the process, as consultants are expected to give final approval to the product. In large part this feeling of intrusion may be because often the product is nearly finished when the consultant is brought in—as one of the very last steps. Best practice would incorporate the consultant as soon as possible in a translation project. The best moment is right after the formation of a translation team.

Ideally, the planning for translation progress in the project plan would include the consultants, the project manager, the funding institutions, the translation team, and possibly other parties. This functional translation principle (Nord 2003) would give all parties a say and the opportunity to work toward a common *skopos* (purpose), which would be formulated at the inception of the plan. The project plan includes different breakpoints at which the whole assignment is evaluated based on the progress and the targets reached. These evaluations not only leave room for corrections but also incorporate sustainable corrections or realignment (principle of "reciprocal feedback mechanism"). Translation and project quality assessment is thus possible (Nord 2003:94—95, 101; Reiss 1971).

One of the tasks of such planning will be the evaluation of ethical standards in the translation project. Ethical standards refers to the distinct ethical orientations of the translation team, the consultants, the translation project management, the funding institutions or organizations, and other involved parties.

Why is agreeing upon an ethical foundation essential in planning? Some generalized experiences from work on the field will demonstrate the need.

1.1. Regular problems faced in consulting translation projects

This overview intimates just a few difficulties that are experienced during consultation in Bible translation projects, either from the consultant's or consulted parties' perspective.

A Bible translation project is normally initiated by a very small group of people or a single person. She or they gather a group of interested parties. All of them have a high interest in the cultural and linguistic setting of the people group to whom the Bible translation as a product is addressed. Their perspective is from inside—*emic*. So, besides the pure translation activity, all parties show, more or less, a personal interest in doing Bible translation as a means to this specific people group's language development. Also, the motivation to do a Bible translation project is based on a high value of Christian development aid. Thus the socio-economic situation of the people group or micro-culture acts as a "trigger" to the project. The

consultant, on the other side, is not an insider. His/her perspective is from outside—*etic*. The consultant does not know the specifics of the people group and is involved in other projects, too. His/her focus is mainly on academic translation issues such as translation style, accuracy, text fidelity to the biblical base texts and issues of formatting and publication. His/her reporting responsibility is to an academic department or institution. The consultant's academic reputation and stance in his/her organization is a high value—and therefore highly influences his/her decisions.

Conflict is bound to occur unless these four questions, at the least, are clarified:

- Who will oversee the process and the stages of a Bible translation project plan, and who will manage its improvement when alignments are necessary?
- How should parties interact with each other when there is no common mind or mediating institution in the project?
- Is there an option for the parties involved to leave, or acquiesce to decisions made by others, without losing face? Loss of face is a common issue in shame-oriented cultures.
- Who gives final approval or has final responsibility in a Bible translation project?

In general, those four areas are traced to the ethical foundations of a Bible translation project and its participants.

1.2. Ethical standards in linguistics and translation

Consultants, translators, and linguists are not left without advice about ethical standards in their disciplines. The American Anthropological Association in their Code of Ethics (1998) laid out essential principles of responsibility for academic professionals. For ethical standards in ethnography, see Spradley (1980:21). In the francophone area the Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs produced similar standards (visit www.fit-ift.org). Chesterman introduces a Hieronymic Oath for translators. He follows the Hippocratic Oath taken by physicians by referring to the patron of translators, Jerome (or Hieronymus).

This focus on ethical responsibility and standards will be followed up later in this article. I will suggest ethical guidelines for translation consultants similar to the standards mentioned above. There is no global institution that manages such ethical standards; they mainly address the conscience of professionals. Although such statements do not introduce new ethical concepts, they do offer general guidelines to be agreed upon, and followed, by all involved in the project: consultant, translators, international and national organizations.

Besides such formalized statements, every discipline follows its own ethical principles that are internal to that scientific study. Natural sciences follow the ethics of the Greek philosophers; pedagogy ethics follows Christianity—or sects arising out of Christianity. So, to whom is a consultant ethically responsible? In Bible translation it is assumed that a translator follows Christian ethics; the same goes for the consultant. But what if the translator is either a non-religious professional or from a different religious background?

Recent fragmentation of Bible translation approaches caused by postmodernism, a homogenous unit's orientation, and the general tendency toward individualism, produces a variety of interests in consulting and translation efforts. Currently a Bible translation is not expected to be done exclusively by Christians. People with a high value of linguistics, translation or anthropology may have low interest in theology or Christianity, but become involved in translation efforts also. What, then, will the common ethical base be for a Bible translation project?

2. Toward Ethical Standards

Approaching ethical standards requires an understanding of the difference between the inner and outer aspects of a Bible translation project. *Inner aspects* are those that form the backbone of the project. *Outer aspects* will be more on the surface level, but they are also important. *Loyalty* undergirds both aspects and is basic for establishing ethical standards.

2.1. Inner aspects and their influence on ethics

Foundational to a Bible translation project is the attitude toward the subject—Bible translation. How do the parties involved relate to the content of the written revelation? The ethical stance here relates to an inner attitude. No matter how, the subject needs to be addressed on the basis of high motivation, since the translation task is a huge and long-enduring project. The consultant's motivation comes from a different perspective, as he is interested in maintaining quality controls of the product. If the consultant and translation team members approach the translation project with different attitudes and motivations, conflicts will arise. An in-depth project plan for the shared task must be developed to avoid these conflicts.

Conflicts will happen if, for instance, the consultant follows a literal approach toward text fidelity but the translators focus on dynamic equivalence or free or communicative translation principles. These approaches seldom find common ground or can be combined, and in the end, the question of authority or power play controls the proceedings. An understanding and mutual agreement on translation principles, technical issues and the process of translation and checking is essential for a firm ethical foundation.

Another inner aspect is the interaction of the translation process and the checking procedure of the consultant. Sometimes the consultant, wanting to improve the translation quality, expects immediate implementation of his extensive suggestions for correction. Contrary to this attitude, the translation team expects only minor changes. Broad-scale alignments are only expected from the project manager—not from the consultant. In the end, another power play is launched between consultant and other parties.

One of the big inner aspects concerns time. Different worldviews or perceptions of time management affect the individuals' work load, the duration of a translation project, and the time frames needed for checking. Differing perspectives among team members will lead to unreachable expectations, and result in conflict.

2.2. Outer aspects and their influence on ethics

Responsibilities the consultant has to the outside world, competition among outside agencies, and funding differences between the consultant and other translation team members, are examples of outer aspects of Bible translation projects. These outer aspects of Bible translation projects are performed by parties such as funders, project partners, the consultant's organization and other involved institutions.

The consultant belongs to an academic department to which he is responsible. Responsibility lies in his/her and the department's reputation to the outer world. Also the department forms part of a wider set of academic departments that somehow work together and stay in competition with each other. Often this can be perceived as departments of different organizations, like SIL, UBS, universities or institutes seemingly competing with each other. The pressure is on the consultant to present his work with as much quality as possible for the sake of his reputation. Such an attitude of responsibility, or concern for reputation, causes conflicts with the lay translators. Their perception may be that the purpose of Christian literature is simply to present the message of Christianity to their people group. A common mistrust of academic influence, as opposed to a lay task in dependence on the work of the Holy Spirit for the work of Bible translation, leads to additional tensions.

Another outer aspect goes with funds and funding. The consultant has either an independent budget from his department or he is funded within the Bible translation project. The former guarantees the consultant more independence, but also less participation. The latter is ideal as it would include him in the planning process and the project as a whole. Still his motivation would be in some ways different from the translators' (see above).

It is clear that a common agreement should be formalized between the consultant and the other participants in the translation task. This would take into consideration both the inner and outer considerations of ethics and include authority issues, translation principles and the time frame of translating and consulting. It should be a dynamic and flexible plan that offers opportunities for alignment and reciprocal feedback mechanisms.

2.3. Loyalty as an ethical benchmark

"Loyalty" is a term, coined in translation theory (Chesterman 2001:140), that has been adopted in functional translation approaches. It is one standard of ethics in conflict prevention that creates a climate of confidence, professionalism and veracity (Nord 2004:236). These principles that apply to the translator are also relevant for the consultant in Bible translation.

The goal is to avoid any miscommunication or tension caused by the consultant's work (conflict prevention). In some cases he/she even functions as a sort of mediator or counsellor between members of the translation team, the team and the manager(s), even intervening with parties further removed. Conflict caused by consulting needs to be mediated through persons from outside (see more on mediation in section 3.3).

A consultant works with, and provides a climate of confidence for, all parties. Therefore he/she has to state explicitly any academic expectations and the operating standards (translation principles, theology and exegetical position), and has to be flexible enough to adapt those to the translation project's needs. For instance, if the consultant plans to translate literally using the base text, and the translation team wants to generate a contextualized and communicative translation, a compromise has to be found before the parties begin to work together.

Regarding the level of professionalism, all parties involved state what they expect. What is the education level of the translators? What academic standards are expected for the translation? Who is the receptor audience? All these questions play an essential part in this planning. The consultant and the team strive for excellence by improving their translation task throughout the production process.

Lastly, the consultant has to be in favour of full disclosure, to give the other parties enough freedom for feedback and bilateral alignment for the good of the Bible translation. The consultant's veracity has to be proven by word and deed.

Loyalty is directed toward the product, the parties involved, and the task of consulting. This means that a consultant does not always have to please those involved, but sometimes needs to depend upon his professionalism, and smoothly introduces those parties to new concepts or ideas. For instance, in the case of a religiously contextualized translation there may be principles of adaptation that move away from some language in the base text. Here the consultant, as the professional, can introduce the new concepts, but it will be up to the mother-tongue translation team to decide how far they would go and which terms to use.

We will now consider a proposal toward an ethical statement about consulting in Bible translation.

3. Proposal toward Ethical Standards in Bible Translation Consulting

An ethical code of standards for a consultant includes the issues of loyalty, authority, responsibility, and the interplay of the parties involved.

3.1. Foundations

1. As an ethical imperative, loyalty incorporates conflict prevention, a climate of confidence, professionalism, and veracity.
2. Consulting offers a mixture of support and advice to a Bible translation project.
    a. The consultant is responsible for supporting the translation team to accomplish their goal of producing a high quality translation (see also "Participant roles" in 3.3).
    b. At the same time the consultant takes a stance as advisor under the supervision of his/her institution or department. In undefined authority circumstances the final decision should go to the mother-tongue translators and the central figures from within the people group. Any colonialist approach has to be avoided by giving them full authority and responsibility.

3.2. Planning

All involved parties follow a functional approach by setting up a project plan together. This project plan includes the following considerations:

1. The *skopos* of the translation is outlined; that is for whom, what, when and how the translation will be done (Lasswell 1948:37).
2. The responsibilities and authority are defined for each party involved in the project (see also 3.3 Participant roles for more detail).
    a. the translator team and the project manager(s)
    b. the consultant(s), his/her role and final agreement
    c. the organizations and institutions that are funding, organizing, supervising or networking the project with others
3. The time frame is discussed clearly. This considers the expectations of all parties with regard to time, and in relation to a mutual response system.
4. The lines of communication between the parties, and the mediator's role, in case of miscommunication or disharmony, are elucidated.

3.3. Participant roles

1. The consultant's organization and other involved institutions are responsible as stakeholders to support the translation project to the best of their ability. They avoid any direct intervention, but work through the translation project management. They are responsible to introduce and promote the task of consulting and the pool of consulting services to the person in authority on the field.
2. The consultant has a complex role that requires discernment, flexibility and people skills.
    a. A consultant proactively promotes his/her services to potential translation projects, and will be sensitive to investigate whether they fit in the given team setting (personality, interest in this people group, and workload).
    b. High quality translation products are the result of qualified, academic work. Although the consultant may be a highly trained professional, he/she is responsible to avoid arrogance and support the translation project by maintaining a servant attitude. He/she must present his/her work in a fully communicative way on a language level that suits the translators and the translation project's management. (see 3.1.2 Foundations).
    c. The consultant works toward full consensus and should avoid any confrontation based on translation principles, cultural or linguistic understanding (consultant's ethnocentrism) or temperamental differences. A mediator will be employed to intervene in case of dissent.
    d. The best quality product will be achieved through a close interaction of the consultant(s), the mother-tongue translators and the translation management. Ideally all of them agree to a clear allocation of power, responsibility and authority.
3. In cases where there is no initial consensus, a neutral mediator from outside is brought in. Such a mediator focuses on the needs of the overall translation project and of the central figures, such as the translators and the translation project manager(s).

Consulting is always directed toward multiplication. The role of a consultant develops with experience. For this reason the consultant is an ongoing learner and a trainer of new trainees. The position, so to speak, takes the motto, "to work yourself out of a job." Every consultant job thus includes an orientation toward learning-that-lasts and training others.

4. Summary

This article demonstrates that consulting in Bible translation has to do with mitigating power plays. Often in the past, the consultant came into a project as an outsider. Translation work would have already started and the consultant joined for checking sessions. Common thinking was that experience and knowledge were not needed for the project itself. To deal with this mistaken idea, the role of a consultant has recently been changed to include him/her right from the beginning of a project. In either case, however, the role of a consultant causes an additional work load for the translation team (e.g., asking for a back-translation), which is sometimes not viewed positively.

Having observed multiple difficulties in Bible translation projects, it became obvious to me that an ethical code of standards for consultants was needed. It is not enough to follow general Christian ethics and morals when facing the specific problems involved in a translation project. A code that is generated must reflect ethical standards that all parties can agree to. This article proposes the elements needed for that ethical code, which serves consultants in relation to their organization or institution, the Bible translation team and its management, and other parties involved. The code addresses the questions of loyalty, which echo the ethical imperatives about conflict prevention, a climate of confidence, professionalism, and veracity.

Concerning the authority and responsibility that goes with consultation, we should note that in an epoch of postmodernism, post-colonialism and globalization, the mother-tongue translation team owns the text; they are the final authority. The consultant has to be considered a supporter of the project team. He has an advisory role, with some authority to generate new initiatives or encourage alternative ideas about translation style, exegetical considerations or linguistic and anthropological insights. However, he does not hold the responsibility for the project. As a consequence, to avert misunderstanding or conflict about the time frame, exegetical, translational, linguistic, anthropological, cross-cultural, or personal differences, two things are necessary.

- An in-depth project plan for the whole Bible translation situation must be developed, including clearly defining the roles of authority and the responsibility for all involved parties. The plan is set up by consensus and at the beginning phase of the project. The plan must be flexible and introduce a reciprocal feedback mechanism which supports the on-going improvement of the translation process.
- A neutral or outside mediating institution or person should be identified to supervise the program and the plan, and which holds the authority to intervene in conflict situations.

Another ethical responsibility of consultants includes improving the experience of trainees by giving them on-going learning with a view to the multiplication of their knowledge and practice.

It is my hope that institutions and organizations which deal with consulting in Bible translation and language development are becoming aware of the variety of difficulties that go with Bible translation projects. These difficulties are often caused when ethical standards are not defined by the consultants and other parties involved in a project. To avoid such tensions, the sending institutions need to train their consultants to adapt and apply an ethical code similar to the one proposed in this article, and involve the consultant as soon as possible in the translation project.

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