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Building Partnership Between Church Interpreting and Bible Translation

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Abstract: This paper examines the relationship between church interpreting and Bible translation and suggests ways that the two can work in partnership. Church interpreting is understood as the process of taking what is said or signed in one language in a church context and producing a new version in another spoken or signed language. While historical and experimental research has revealed that interpreting and Bible translation were closely related in the past, the contemporary relationship between the two is ambiguous. This paper will argue that the two practices should be reconciled for practical, theological, and theoretical reasons. I will also suggest places where the theory and practice of church interpreting can feed into Bible translation practice and theory and where church interpreting can learn from Bible translation. Most notably, it is argued that the innate contextualisation of church interpreting, as well as the growing understanding of interpreting as the negotiation of meaning, offers important insights into what it means to deliver an excellent Bible translation.

Introduction

The term "Bible Translation" now covers a broad set of activities, from the traditional act of producing a new written version of the Bible to the production of oral, signed, performative, and musical activities that enable the Bible to be read, heard, and understood in a new language. There is one performative oral or signed translational activity that has a rather strained relationship with Bible translation, despite the fact that the two have co-existed for at least 2,500 years. This activity is church interpreting. Church interpreting takes place when there is a felt need for the production in one or more spoken or signed language of what was said or signed in another language at any kind of church meeting. There

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are many reasons for providing interpreting, but they all allow for the coexistence of the original and interpreted versions for as long as the interpreting takes place.

Despite its historical roots, church interpreting has often been overlooked or even disdained by Bible translators. This may be due to the fact that church interpreting is often, but not always, performed by those with little or no prior training. In this paper, I will argue that the practice and people involved in church interpreting have much to bring to the theory and practice of Bible translation. For their part, church interpreters also have much to learn from Bible translation.

Understanding the relationship between church interpreting and Bible translation provides the basis for understanding how they can work together effectively. For this reason, this article will first examine the closely related roots of church interpreting and Bible translation. This will provide historical and experimental evidence for the argument that Bible translation first took place using practices that would now be considered as examples of interpreting. This also provides further support for recent drives towards taking into account the importance of speech and declaration in discussions of Bible translation.

This historical account is followed by an introductory exploration of recent church interpreting practices, as they have been examined in research, mostly within the field of Interpreting Studies. The ephemeral, co-operative, and context-specific nature of church interpreting will provide the platform for a more detailed examination of the contexts in which church interpreting takes place and how these contexts affect the practice. This then leads to a discussion of the ways that church interpreters are selected and how they and their co-participants view their work, before the theological assumptions and implications of church interpreting are analysed.

The third section of this article argues that, given the strong practical and historical overlap between church interpreting and Bible translation, it would appear important to find ways of creating co-operation between the Bible translation and church interpreting communities. Both practical and theoretical means of co-operation are discussed, with a special focus on the importance of the communities for whom translation and interpreting are produced.

1 Tracing the roots of church interpreting and Bible translation

As much as modern vernacular Bible translation may wish to trace its roots to the work of pioneering theologians and translators such as John Wycliffe, the practice goes back much further. Indeed, some of the earliest Bible translation practices can be seen within the Bible itself. The Book of Nehemiah is a record of

the restoration of Jewish identity and security after the Exile, and contains an important account in the history of Bible translation. It is also instructive to note that this example of Bible translation demonstrates that interpreting and translation have always been closely interlinked. In the New Living Translation, one key passage is translated as follows:

> So on October 8 Ezra the priest brought the Book of the Law before the assembly, which included the men and women and all the children old enough to understand. He faced the square just inside the Water Gate from early morning until noon and read aloud to everyone who could understand. All the people listened closely to the Book of the Law. ...
> The Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah—then instructed the people in the Law while everyone remained in their places. They read from the Book of the Law of God and clearly explained the meaning of what was being read, helping the people understand each passage. (Nehemiah 8:2–3, 7–8 NLT)

While it is quite common for theologians to view this text as an archetype of good expository preaching (e.g., Kuruvilla 2009:98–99), there is an important element that is missing in such readings. According to Jewish interpreting scholar Francine Kaufmann (2005:976), an important contextual clue is that the Hebrew scriptures needed to be translated or interpreted into the Aramaic used by the returning exiles. Those exiles, who had learned to live, work, trade, and think in Aramaic, needed to hear the Scriptures in the language that they were used to using every day. More than that, the rich, urbanised society the Jews had left behind was very different from the more dangerous, precarious lives they would have led in an area still recovering from wars and invasions. This meant that the function of the translation in this context was not simply to tell people what the sacred text said, but to help people understand what it meant to them. This view is attested by accounts of Ezra setting up regular synagogal readings of the Torah accompanied by an interpreted version and gloss into Aramaic (Kaufmann 976–977).

Indeed, it is indicative of the style and function of the translation used in this context that Kaufmann argues that the Hebrew term used in Nehemiah 8:8 has a wider semantic field than might be expected. Thus, she states (976, my translation):

> This, at least, is the interpretation that the Talmud gives to the word *meforash* (which literally means: made explicit, explained, interpreted) in the famous verse Nehemiah 8:8, "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, *meforash*, and caused them to understand the reading."

In fact, the breadth of this term underlines the complexity of what was going on in the reading of the Torah in Nehemiah 8. It is clear from vv.2–3 that Ezra was reading aloud. Verse 8 has the Levites explaining the meaning or translating what was read. If Ezra was reading aloud and the Levites were explaining orally, then what was going on in this situation was the production of an oral version of an oral reading: this is interpreting, not translation as we would view it now.

The links between interpreting and Bible translation have become even clearer as a result of ongoing research to discover the translation methodology used in the Septuagint, a translation of the Hebrew and Aramaic scriptures into Greek. While the Septuagint is the source of citations of the Old Testament in the New, research has shown several distinct patterns in the translated text, especially regarding translation units indicating how much was translated at once (see, e.g., Wagner 2013).

Van der Louw (2008) set out to explain the source of such patterns. He found that across the ancient world there was a consistent practice whereby texts were translated by someone reading aloud, followed by either the reader providing a sight translation or someone else giving a spoken version in another language. This version was then written down, possibly after a further editorial stage (compare with the evidence in St. André 2010 and Pym 1994). It would seem likely that this widespread practice was also used for the Septuagint.

To investigate whether this method was indeed used in the Septuagint, van der Louw carried out experiments using this method to provide a translation of selected Old Testament passages. The results of these experiments were striking, showing very similar patterns in terms of translation units and errors as found in the Septuagint itself (van der Louw 2010; 2020). There is therefore both historical and experimental evidence that oral versions, either sight translations or interpreted versions of read aloud Scriptures, were used in the translation of the Septuagint.

Yet this historical practice stands in contrast to some of the attitudes to church interpreting that have been reported in the literature. In her study of church interpreting in The Gambia, Karlik points out (2010:163) that some Bible translators had disdained the interpreting of Scripture readings, reporting "abhorrence among many practitioners of written Bible translation because of perceived shortcomings in the interpreted product at the levels of both texture and fidelity." Whether these concerns are always well-founded, and even how frequently they arise, is beyond the scope of this paper. What matters is that such concerns could create situations where Bible translation and church interpreting are thought to be in opposition to each other, as if a church could either have one or the other but not both.

Thus, while the work of van der Louw is of considerable historical interest, its relevance here is that it provides both theoretical and practical insights for Bible translation. On the theoretical side, it would seem that any aversion to the use of interpreting as a means of making Bible readings understandable in other languages is a modern, post-Gutenberg attitude. Such attitudes emphasise the integrity of the text over its contextualisation to each audience. If interpreting and translation were complementary activities in history, it is worth asking whether the same might be true today.

On the practical side, it may be worth investigating whether these historical techniques still have relevance to modern translation practices. While we may be used to viewing translation as a largely unmediated jump from one printed page to another, the idea of using an interpreted version in the middle reminds us of the personal, performative value of Scripture. Indeed, coupled with the rise of oral Bible translation, it would seem that there is an increasing shift towards viewing the Bible not just as written words but as the Word to be spoken and declared (e.g., Wendland 2008; Maxey et al. 2012; Wendland 2012). Including speech and declaration as part of the translation process simply underlines this.

Efforts to include speech and declaration as part of the translation process require a fuller understanding of what is involved in interpreting if they are to be fully integrated into Bible translation practice. This is especially the case since, as shall be explained shortly, one of the most common findings in research on church interpreting is that it must be understood as much more than the production of semantic equivalence in a signed or spoken language.

This section has therefore provided evidence from both history and experiments that strongly suggests that Bible translation originally relied on practices that would now be classed as interpreting. This insight was linked to the increasing attention given to the oral, performative nature of Scripture over the past fifteen years. Bearing this shared history in mind, discussion will now move to the subject of church interpreting as it is now practised.

2 Church interpreting explained

While it is common both among some academics and the public to view interpreting as signed or oral translation, it is important to give it its own semantic space, especially when understanding how and why it is used in church contexts. While the line between interpreting and translation can be fuzzy (see Wurm 2014), a few common differences seem generally applicable. The first and most obvious is that, in whichever medium they work, translators can revise their work and arrive upon a version with which they are happy. Interpreters, however, are subject to what has been called the "linearity constraint" (Shlesinger 1995:194), in that the speaker is either continuing to speak or waiting

for another turn while they interpret. If interpreters want to revisit what they said, they can only do so for the immediately preceding text and at the cost of most likely losing what is being said now.

Interpreting is therefore inherently ephemeral. As soon as the interpreter has finished speaking or signing, their work is over. Making the interpreting more permanent in any way either involves removing it from its temporal context through video or sound recording or turning it into a different form of communication altogether by transcribing it (for the issues with the latter, see Niemants 2012). Interpreting is therefore inherently time-bound and situational. It exists in the moment and then is gone.

Lastly, interpreting is now seen by most researchers as a co-operative activity. That is, it is not simply something that the interpreter does, but it is what emerges from complex interactions between the interpreter(s) and the primary participants. This view first began to emerge in the 1990s as research moved from examining the cognitive processes of interpreters working simultaneously at conferences and diplomatic events to observational research on interpreting in contexts such as a student-professor meeting (Roy 1992) and interpreting in community settings (Wadensjö 1992). Alongside this was the growth of innovative theoretical approaches, such as an account of sign language interpreting in court given by Turner (1995). This research led to the view that interpreting was a triadic activity, with the interpreter and the users of the two languages involved each playing an important part in the success of the event (Mason 2001).

While the theoretical and methodological effects of this shift are still being felt in the discipline of Interpreting Studies, one important theoretical concept that has become commonly accepted is that interpreting involves the negotiation of meaning between the parties involved (Turner 2005). Thus, rather than seeking to find the ultimate, objective meaning of what was said, interpreters look to enable the understanding of what was meant in each particular situation. In his popular-science accounts of interpreting, Downie has given real-life examples of words gaining new meanings within particular interpreted events (2019:3–4, 12, 88–90).

This is not to say that interpreters are free to determine whichever meanings they wish for what they hear or see, as if interpreting were about creating something out of nothing. Quite the opposite, if interpreting is about enabling and taking part in the negotiation of meaning, then the position of the interpreter involves co-operating with the other participants to allow them to work together towards mutual understanding. This can only be possible when the interpreter is able to perceive what each participant is trying to achieve with their words or signs, and to find the right words or signs to help them achieve that.

The discussion of the precise application of this theoretical view to Bible translation will be addressed later in this article. At this point, however, it is important to note that research within Interpreting Studies has long moved beyond the idea of interpreters being impartial conduits of meaning. Their involvement and responsibility and the need for them to be culturally and contextually aware is now well established.

Church interpreting therefore takes this ephemeral, heavily contextualized practice and places it within Christian gatherings.[1] It is entirely logical then that research in this area has often paid close attention to the contexts in which such interpreting is performed.

2.1 Church interpreting in context

As mentioned earlier, one important thread in the theory of interpreting is that it is a co-operative activity that involves the active negotiation of meaning by the parties concerned. Such negotiation does not have to be confined to understanding the intent of what someone else has said or signed. Research on church interpreting has underlined that this practice often performs a symbolic role in addition to or even instead of its linguistic function. Vigouroux sees interpreting as the symbolic performance of the church's vision to reach the Anglophone community around it, as the church was composed entirely of migrants from the Democratic Republic of Congo living in South Africa (2010:342). This helps explain why interpreting was provided into English when the languages of the congregation were French and Lingala. Viewing interpreting as performance in this context also provides the framework for understanding why the church continued to provide interpreting even though it made little sense for those who did not speak French or Lingala (352–357).

A more complex case can be found in Balci Tison (2016), who examines the role of interpreting in a church in Izmir, Turkey, and the subsequent expectations of interpreters. In this church, there was a strong preference among leaders and preachers for interpreters to be Christians, as it was felt that having a personal, lived experience of the content of the sermon was a vital part of being able to interpret it (133, 162). The importance of the personal commitment of the interpreters was borne out in the fact that their work became a core part in the church's move towards having its own identity as a Turkish church, separate from its founders from the USA (108–112). As the interpreters negotiated the

[1] While this paper concentrates on church interpreting, there is a small but important portion of the literature addressing practices that are akin to interpreting in other faith traditions – e.g., Islam (Salawu 2009) and Buddhism (St. André 2010) – even if the nomenclature varies, in addition to the account from Judaism discussed earlier.

direction in which they worked (first English to Turkish, then Turkish to English) and the terminology they used, the church was negotiating its own identity and vision.

The link between interpreting and church identity and direction is also evident in Downie (2016), wherein he examined expectations of interpreters in two churches: one in the United Kingdom and one in Germany. In both contexts, expectations were closely tied to the position of interpreting within the church. In the church where interpreting was deemed peripheral to its work, interpreters were expected to function as neutral conduits to the words of the speaker. In the church where it was central to the church's mission, interpreters and preachers were expected to work as partners (171).

Studies of the contexts in which church interpreting takes place therefore underline its inherently social and theological nature. While it seems logical to assume that church interpreting most frequently arises due to a linguistic mismatch between different groups wishing to worship together, Vigouroux (2010) and Rayman (2007) make the case for interpreting also arising for symbolic or theological reasons. In the former case, this was due to church members coming from DR Congo but living in South Africa. Since the communities around spoke English, it was helpful for the church to also offer English, especially since the church aimed to reach people from across Africa. In the latter case, a dedication service for a building shared by a Deaf church and a hearing church created the need for interpreting to reflect the desire for partnership between the two groups.

Understanding the contexts in which church interpreting takes place also helps to address the quandary posed by Karlik (2010; 2012), who points out that the practice of interpreting readings from the Bible continues, even when a written Bible translation exists in all the languages involved. If, in some contexts at least, church interpreting is a means by which churches perform their theology of openness to those of different backgrounds (Vigouroux 2010; Downie 2016:171–172) or a means by which the identity of the church is being formed (Balci Tison 2016) or a reflection of long traditions (Karlik 2010), then it makes sense that it would continue. Co-operation between church interpreting and Bible translation therefore must be grounded in the realization that the linguistic function of church interpreting is not its sole purpose. Understanding and affirming the place of church interpreting within a congregation is an important step towards working with those providing this service.

The contexts in which church interpreting takes place therefore provide the reason for the existence of the interpreting and drive the conditions in which it takes place. There would be no interpreting, however, without the people to deliver it. It is therefore to these people and the expectations that others have of them that this article will now turn.

2.2 The people of church interpreting

As researchers have sought to understand church interpreting, one important focus has been the people who provide it. While some literature has aimed to compare these mostly volunteer interpreters with each researcher's own views of what professionals would do (Salawu 2010; Alvarenga 2018; De Tan et al. 2021), the majority of research on church interpreters has taken a more descriptive angle.

Perhaps the most detailed study of this kind is Hokkanen's autoethnographic study on her work interpreting in two churches (Hokkanen 2016; 2017a; 2017b). She underlines the double role of interpreters as those who interpret to serve God and to experience God themselves (2016:57–62). This serving and experiencing happens in parallel, with the interpreter often experiencing the emotional or personal force of the sermon as they interpret it (2017b).

Strikingly similar findings are seen in Tekgül (2020) on interpreting in a Protestant Armenian church in Istanbul, in which church interpreting is described as "emotional labour" in that church interpreters must regulate their own emotions to allow their interpreting to contribute to the goals of the church. This is not to say that the interpreter must remain emotionless. In fact, the interpreter tended to mirror the emotions of the speaker, even down to adopting the preacher's intonation and mannerisms (7). While the interpreter was seated at the back of the church, she also adopted the preacher's gesticulations and added some of her own (8). Interpreting therefore involved the whole person, rather than simply being a purely linguistic act.

The involvement of the interpreter's entire person explains the extremely common finding that churches prefer to have church members act as interpreters, instead of hiring professionals. While some researchers have taken issue with this decision (e.g., Salawu 2010; Odhiambo et al. 2013), the literature provides ample arguments from the churches themselves as to why they take this position.

Karlik explains how the churches she studied in The Gambia chose their interpreters. Family relationships with members of the congregation and known public speaking skills played a part, but mostly the community placed "most trust in those interpreters who are known as people of integrity, and especially those who are preachers or Bible study leaders in their own right" (2010:167).

The work of Balci Tison (2016) emphasised the need for interpreters to have personal commitment to the message they were interpreting. In both interviews (124–125) and survey responses (162), respondents in a church in Izmir, Turkey, overwhelmingly said that interpreters had to be Christians themselves. Two related explanations are evident in her work.

The first explanation for the strong preference for Christian interpreters is simply the issue of trust. Several respondents expressed a feeling that the versions given by non-Christians may lack the experiential or terminological knowledge required and that such interpreters might actually act against the meaning intended by the preacher (126, 128). This is closely related to the second explanation, in which interpreters are seen as partners of the preacher or "co-preachers" (128–131). This conception of interpreting, which can be found in earlier work, such as Karlik (2010) and Vigouroux (2010), seems to be common although not universal in churches (see Downie 2016:134–138 for a counterexample). Its existence may hold an important key for understanding church interpreting as a communicative act.

Research that has omitted the perspective of the interpreter as a co-preacher has viewed church interpreting as an example of language access—a service of which the primary purpose is to allow people who speak a language access to understanding of content produced in a different language. In this approach, it makes sense to focus on the "errors" committed by interpreters (thus Salawu 2010; Musyoka et al. 2014) and the "challenges" faced by those involved (Biamah 2013), or to compare the behaviours of church interpreters to those of "professional" interpreters (Alvarenga 2018). This perspective also explains the expectations of interpreters working in one of the two churches studied by Downie, in which interpreters were seen as a "channel" (2016:135) and as people who need to ensure that their own influence does not intrude in the work (133).

The underlying logic in all of this is that if church interpreting is primarily an instance of language access, then its purpose is to provide this access to what was said by the source language speaker or signer. Interpreting is then largely a secondary or reactive process, reacting to linguistic difference by providing a means to understand what was said before. In this view, the meaning already resides in what has been said or signed, and it is the sole purpose of the interpreter to decode and communicate that meaning as efficiently and unobtrusively as possible. This is why the "church interpreting as language access" approach tends to view any deviation from what researchers deem to be the correct version as an error, and why evaluation tends to proceed as if a comparison was being made between two written texts (see the paradigmatic examples in Odhiambo et al. 2013; Musyoka et al. 2014).

Yet the problem with this paradigm is that it presents no methodological or theoretical means of explaining the common examples of church interpreting where interpreters took an active role:

- in improving intra-textual cohesion of interpreted Bible readings (Karlik 2012),

- in adapting a speech to cater to the cultural background of the target audience and purpose of the meeting (Rayman 2007),
- in working with preachers to find ways to deal with theologically questionable content (Downie 2016:161–162),
- or even in experiencing the emotional impact of the sermon before passing it on (Hokkanen 2017b; Tekgül 2020).

This explains why, among many church interpreting researchers, it is common to either supplement or replace the language access function of church interpreting with a more performative angle. Whether this has meant viewing church interpreting as "transforming" (Giannoutsou 2014) or as the performance of theology (Vigouroux 2010; Downie 2016), the result has been a push towards theological reflection on the meaning of this activity and its place in preaching and church life (Downie 2014; Parish 2018). While this research area is still in its infancy, such theological reflections provide an important theoretical grounding for the reconciliation of Bible translation and interpreting. As such, they bear closer examination.

2.3 Church interpreting and theology

Much like Bible translation, theological reflections on interpreting are based on the fact that linguistic difference and a consequent need for interpreting and even translation to allow communication are subjects already covered in the Bible itself. Parish (2018:55–60) carefully maps the traces of the multicultural and multilingual background in which the Israelites lived during all the periods when the Bible was being written. This leads to an awareness that multilingualism and hence interpreting were a reality throughout this period and has Biblical attestation (cf. Kaufmann 2005). Indeed, Parish goes on to read Pentecost not as a reversal of the linguistic diversity of Babel but as a creative celebration of such diversity, unifying the people not by having a single language but by all hearing the Word of God in their own languages. This is then re-enacted when interpreted preaching takes place, as she states (2018:69):

> In the scripture, interpreted preaching honours the diversity of cultures and languages, not expecting all gathered to hear in the same ways. Interpreted preaching understands that unity comes through our unity as the body of Christ not through the language in which we speak about God.
> Acceptance of linguistic and cultural diversity is a foundational element of the early church and remains intrinsic in the Christian church today.

In this light, the act of interpreting in a church setting becomes an acknowledgement that linguistic diversity is a gift from God, not a limitation or

a curse. The presence of an interpreter speaks volumes, even before the interpreter speaks or signs. It proclaims that God wants people to hear or see the Word in the language of their heart, a theological precept that has long had importance to wider Christian theology. According to Parish (2018:70),

> Translation, whether written, spoken or incarnational is dyed into the fabric of the Christian faith. The belief that all languages are equally valid linguistically has led to the promulgation of the written gospel into over 5000 languages and dialects. This is important for the issue of interpreting, as the scriptures do not identify one language as sacred.

What better example of an incarnational God could there be than having one or more interpreters who embody a church's desire that all should hear in their heart language? This links back to the idea that interpreting has a performative or symbolic function in the life of a church. The act of offering interpreting represents a theological and practical acknowledgement by the church that there may be linguistic diversity and that those who speak different languages are welcome. As explained in the earlier sections on the context of church interpreting and the people of church interpreting, this symbolic or performative meaning of interpreting is distinct from any linguistic function. Underlying all of this is the theological presupposition, foregrounded by Parish (2018:70), that "all languages are equally valid linguistically" for the preaching and understanding of the Gospel.

The notion that interpreting embodies the theological and political position of all languages being equally valid for the preaching and understanding of the Gospel illustrates once again the theological interlinking of Bible translation and church interpreting. Both come from the same theological wellspring as both rely on the same understanding of linguistic diversity.

Thus far there are very few surprises. It would seem only natural that Bible translation and church interpreting both rely on theologies that value linguistic diversity. What is less obvious, however, is that both are closely connected with specific communities and historical moments. In church interpreting, this is evident in Karlik (2010; 2012), Balci Tison (2016), and Vigouroux (2010) discussed earlier, but is given its theoretical explanation in the work of Downie (2014; 2016; 2018).

In two cases, this theorisation came as part of efforts to reconcile church interpreting with homiletics, especially given that much of the study of church

interpreting has been centred on the interpreting of sermons.[2] At the most basic level, sermons and interpreting share the same ephemeral, fleeting nature in that, as soon as the preacher stops speaking or signing and the interpreter stops speaking or signing, the preaching and the interpreting are over, never to be repeated quite the same way (Downie 2014:62–63). This attaches interpreting to a specific audience at a specific time (Downie 2018:57) and makes preaching an example of what Bartow (1997:1, 120) calls "local theology".

Much as a sermon takes the eternal truths of God's Word and applies them to a specific community at a specific time and interpreting is unavoidably local, the effectiveness of a Bible translation cannot be understood apart from its reception and use by the community. This is the point at which interpreting, with its fleeting, ephemeral, local nature, would seem to pull away from Bible translation. Interpreting can never be repeated the same way and is inherently local. A written, printed Bible translation is, at least in theory, accessible and readable to anyone with the required level of linguistic competence. Yet Bible translation is local too. Not only are modern Bible translation projects instigated following community requests, but the final judgment as to whether or not a translation is used can often come down to "acceptability", the extent to which the community feels that the translation fulfils its needs and requirements (Chemorion 2009).

Indeed, it is not unknown for translations to be prepared only to remain unused or even abandoned by the community for which they were intended (Karlik 2010:162). It is ironic and perhaps telling that this admission came in the context of explaining that there had been tensions between Bible translation and church interpreting because some communities continued to practise the latter when written translations were available.

There seem to be reasons why certain congregations wish to resort to interpreting, not as a last resort but as an integral part of their existence. In seeking to understand patterns of expectations of church interpreters that did not fit within those predicted by then existing theory, Downie (2016:168) argues that expectations of interpreters and indeed the place of interpreting itself are organisationally driven. In the churches he studied, there was a clear difference between one that used interpreting simply because of linguistic differences, making it incidental to the work of the church, and another where interpreting was viewed as integral to its work and future existence (168–171).

This is reminiscent of the difference discussed earlier between interpreting as language access and the symbolic or performative role of interpreting. Indeed,

[2] This point can be fruitfully contrasted with the observations of Tipton et al. (2016:237), who point out that interpreting is required in a variety of Christian meetings, large and small, and in other religious gatherings such as Islamic Hajjs and in synagogues.

where interpreting is incidental to the work of the church, it has only the language access function, without any symbolic or performative importance. In the integral position, it has both a language access function and a performative function.

On the basis of Vigouroux (2010), Downie (2016:172) also suggests that there is a third position where interpreting exists to demonstrate the commitment of the church to reaching speakers of different languages, even if the actual interpreting provided does not enable this. This gives the interpreting a symbolic function without any immediate language access function.

In light of these positions, Downie argues (2016:173) that understandings of church interpreting must begin by understanding the communities in which the interpreting takes place. In this perspective, the reason why the "church interpreting as language access" paradigm fails to account for important findings is that it decontextualises the evaluation of the interpreting, subjecting it to the same standards as what the researcher deems professional interpreting to be. However, since church interpreting exists because the community feels it should, then it must be viewed in line with the perceived requirements of the community. It is no longer a question of "how good is this interpreting?" but "is the interpreting functioning in the way the community wants or needs it to?"

Put in Bible translation terms, this ties the evaluation of any act of translation or interpreting to its effect on those receiving it. If church interpreting is best understood within its community context, then it may be useful to use the same lens to examine Bible translation projects. Framing a translation project as taking place within a community and for the use of the community means giving high importance to community needs and goals. Indeed, in both church interpreting and Bible translation, it would appear paramount to develop a framework for analysing these goals and the intended roles of the translation and interpreting within a community. Indeed, initial work in this vein has already taken place (see Maxey 2010).

This does not mean throwing away any idea of accuracy or faithfulness, assuming those terms can be defined with any kind of precision. Instead, it pushes us to ask whether the kinds of accuracy or faithfulness attained were the most effective ones in a given context. This is not a new theory. The skopos theories of Vermeer (1996; 1998) and Nord (1997; 2003) argue that accuracy matters in translation inasmuch as it is necessary for the translation to attain its purpose. A Bible translation that misrepresents the Word of God would be no good as a discipleship tool, but then neither would one that was unusable by the community to which it was addressed. In terms of the two paradigms of church interpreting above, it is possible to ask both "is this Bible translation offering language access to the propositional meaning of Scripture?" and "is it performing the role that the community wishes it to perform?" It is important to

view the two questions as offering important and compatible perspectives, rather than as opposing views.

Theologies that value linguistic diversity become foundational for theologies of interpreting and Bible translation that place the linguistic needs of communities at their heart. Such theologies understand interpreting as a Biblical response to the need for everyone to hear the Gospel in their own language. For this hearing to produce obedient faith, acts of translation and interpreting must take into account the needs of the community, without ignoring the fact that an unfaithful presentation of the Word of God cannot be viewed as meeting those needs.

As section 1 above discussed, such theologies can be traced back to their Scriptural roots. To say that church interpreting arises out of community needs and must respond to them is to view it as an incarnation of the commitment to people hearing the Gospel in their language found in Acts 2.

Understanding the importance of communities in Bible translation also means giving a theological and practical place to the Interpreting Studies concept of the "negotiation of meaning" (Turner 2005). This reminds us that meaning is what emerges as we wrestle with what was said, who said it, how it was said, how we understand it, and who we are translating and interpreting for. Just as a word can gain new meaning within a specific interpreted event (Downie 2016:3–5), and just as the Israelites had to discover how the Torah written hundreds of years previously applied to them after they returned from exile (Kaufmann 2005), translators have to work with the text and the community to negotiate the meaning of the text in each context.

Written translation has often been viewed as a largely internal practice, where translators work alone or in small groups to find the best way of dealing with the difficulties posed by the text and its intended audience (see the summary of findings of Think Aloud Protocols on translation in Kussmaul et al. 1995). Taking account of findings from Interpreting Studies and from church interpreting specifically means viewing Bible translation as something that is done in the community, with the community. As the community and the translator negotiate the meaning of the text together and work on applying it, new translation problems and solutions will appear as new understandings of the context and meaning of the text emerge.

Just as it has been important to understand interpreting within the theologies that frame it in any given church, so it would seem to be important to allow knowledge from interpreting to help frame our theologies of what it means to translate the Bible. This forms part of a larger project to reunite translation and interpreting in ecclesiastical practice and thinking.

3 Reuniting translation and interpreting

The previous sections have sought to show that there is both a practical overlap between church interpreting and Bible translation and the potential for both to be improved by co-operation. The historical and theological links between them suggest places where theory can be combined, while the practical links suggest places where practices can be adopted. This section will briefly sketch out the direction of travel in theory and practice.

As good theory undergirds good practice, it makes sense to start with the theory. The emphasis on co-operation and explanation in the discussion of church interpreting shows that the goal of the practice is always to produce output that leads to both comprehension and application. The second half of Nehemiah 8 shows the people applying what they heard by celebrating the Festival of *Sukkoth* and thus re-establishing their connection with those who wandered in the wilderness, prefiguring a need to view the end goal of Bible translation and church interpreting as application.

The historical intertwining between the two activities via the probable orality of the Septuagint therefore links to the production of modern oral Bible translations and serves as an important reminder that Bible translation must be a team sport. Translators cannot afford to lock themselves in a room and translate alone. Testing for accuracy, adequacy, and crucially the ability of people to apply the translation to their lives must take place throughout the process. Just as church interpreters often benefit from nearly immediate feedback as they are constantly on the lookout for signs of understanding, so Bible translators may need to ensure that feedback is available quickly.

The history and theology of Bible translation and church interpreting tell us that we are not just creating texts but building communities. We are not engaged primarily in linguistic exercises but in "local theology" (Bartow 1997:1, 120). In the same way that recent understandings of interpreting insist it is something done by the speaker, interpreter, and audience together, so Bible translation is what happens when all the stakeholders involved in the process work, understand, and apply together.

This goes beyond the idea of translating a section and then taking it out for testing to the point of moving the entire translation process into the community. Discussing key translation decisions with those who will read or use the text, testing translations in prayers or local performance, and even working with the community on the format of any translation would be examples of this paradigm at work. In theological terms, this leads to a view that exegesis, translation, and application are not three processes but a single process that loops around.

A natural way of furthering this thinking would be to reflect on Bible translation as a form of interpreting, not simply in the hermeneutical sense, but

in the very specific sense of interpreting used in this paper. The example of the Septuagint is once again instructive. Viewing that translation process through the eyes of interpreting helped to explain translational patterns in the text and advanced understanding of the choices made. For Bible translators, working with the triadic view of interpreting and taking on board its inherently social nature might lead to new translation practices and new understandings of terms such as "adequacy" and even of the link between Bible translation and scripture engagement.

As theoretical as these considerations might seem, there are very practical outcomes too. If Bible translation is to reach the 828 languages with no Scripture but a need for it, and if work is to be completed in the 2,778 languages with some Scripture but not the whole Bible (Wycliffe Global Alliance 2022), then more translators will be needed. Finding good, reliable Bible translators is no easy task, but church interpreters would seem to be good candidates.

Aside from their obvious skills in working between two different languages, the inescapably social aspects of interpreting mean that interpreters are already personally familiar with the social norms, language abilities, scriptural knowledge, and preferences of the communities in which they work. Now that oral and signed Bible translations are becoming increasingly common, working with those who are already producing oral and signed Christian content for their communities on a regular basis is logical. This, of course, means recognising the important role that interpreters are already playing in communities, and accepting that they may have valuable insights to offer into the translation process and product. In turn, Bible translators have important insights for interpreters.

As much as research evaluating church interpreting has arrived at a methodological and theoretical cul-de-sac, given a lack of understanding as to why interpreting takes place and what churches are trying to achieve with it, it is entirely legitimate to argue that church interpreters would benefit from training for the task. Modern training for commercial or public service interpreting is complex, spawning an impressive literature of its own (e.g., Tipton et al. 2016; Setton et al. 2016; Cirillo et al. 2017; Liberty Language Services 2021). Yet church interpreting is rarely covered in such literature.

Bible translators, with their experience in negotiating what an accurate translation looks like for specific communities, can offer important insights for interpreters. Their understanding of the importance of linguistic structures, and their ability to apply theological reflection and to take on board the purpose for which a translation is to be written are vital skills for interpreters, too. As long as there is an understanding of the innate differences between the long period of reflection available to translators and the brief, interactive, cognitive strategies

used by interpreters, Bible translators stand to play an important role in the improvement of the skills of church interpreters.

Indeed, both activities stand to benefit from a commitment to partnership. In such a partnership, Bible translation cannot assume superiority due to the longer history of its study and the wide array of tools and training available. Church interpreting cannot claim superiority given its much more immediate relationship to the community and its longer existence. Instead, it is both practically and theoretically important for Bible translation and church interpreting to function as two sides of the same linguistic, social, and theological coin. Viewing the two as complementary, rather than mutually antagonistic, opens up new avenues in research and practice that await to be explored.

4 Conclusion

This article has sought to explore the relationship between church interpreting and Bible translation with a view to reuniting the two practices. Beginning with the earliest instances of church interpreting and Bible translation, it was argued that the two have always been closely intertwined, even if their relationship has not always been amicable. With this in mind, an overview of historical and contemporary church interpreting practices was provided, emphasising the co-operative, theological, and performative aspects of the practice. This reflection was tied to the need to understand church interpreting within its social and ecclesial contexts. Understanding such contexts in turn led to a reflection of how Bible translation and church interpreting could not only co-exist peacefully but act as partners, growing as expertise is shared between those involved in each practice. Emblematic of this shift is the possibility of interpreters becoming Bible translators, enabling us to meet the still imposing need for Bible translations in new languages. In short, if we understand that translation and interpreting have played a part in fostering Scripture engagement for thousands of years, it makes sense to be intentional in ensuring that they work effectively together in the future.

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