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Going the Extra Mile: Improving Linguistic Quality in Translation

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Abstract: In this century, the rise in mother-tongue speaker driven projects has led to the downplaying of the importance of linguistics. Many projects operate on the assumption that linguistic training is unnecessary for mother-tongue translators. There is documented evidence though that many translators are strongly influenced by a high prestige source text while drafting. In South Asia at least, a large number of organizations are doing translation, and not all of them value linguistic training. I contend that a more realistic solution is to have translation consultants pick up the slack by looking for language-related issues in the draft. In my research, I examined renderings of NT passages in eight South Asian language projects covering different language families. Of the 82 consultant note subcategories taught in training workshops, I restricted my review to 24 that deal especially with linguistic issues. The results show that the reviewing consultants detected only 3% – 20% of the issues that I found. I demonstrate tools for consultants to examine the actual draft even if they do not know the language. I also discovered that many potential errors are influenced by the forms of the classical regional language versions used as model texts. The issues discovered affect quality in two ways: naturalness and pragmatic accuracy. Looking for these potential errors is worth the extra time and effort on the part of the consultants, who can be easily trained for this enhanced review process.

1 Introduction

In May 2022, an experienced Bible translation consultant went out of his way to meet me at a CiT (Consultant in Training) mentoring workshop just before he was leaving for a checking workshop in another town. “We really need your help,” he said earnestly. “We as consultants need to be trained to ensure that translations

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come across as natural. This has been an increasing problem recently." The "recently" refers to the twenty-first century paradigm focusing on projects that are driven by mother-tongue translators (MTTs) rather than other-tongue translators (OTT). The OTT paradigm was the dominant one in my generation where an outsider, trained in linguistics, acquires the language in which translation is to be done, devises an orthography if it is an unwritten language, and analyzes the grammar and discourse in order to draft a translation that uses the natural rhetorical features of the language. This paradigm was long-drawn-out and expensive, too. The OTTs had to connect often with their home base and supporting churches, and were sometimes called upon to teach in training courses or pursue higher studies. Mother-tongue team members usually did not work full-time, but had other responsibilities and means of livelihood.

It seems ironic that there is a higher risk of a translation being unnatural or lower in quality when carried out by a native speaker rather than an outsider. No one may have expressed this problem better than Longacre (1998):

> There are, however, pressures inherent in the translation situation itself that may skew the translation output of the MT translator. These pressures result from the awe in which the MT translator stands of the source language text from which he works. At the same time the MT translator may be at least partially brain-washed in regard to his own language, feeling that it is culturally inferior to the source language, and so be inclined to import constructions and stylistic features from the latter instead of employing the resources of his own language. The MT translator may also be somewhat hamstrung in his translation efforts by theological concerns lest he be deleting or adding to the truth of the Bible. Consequently, the MT translator, while perfectly capable of producing a natural text in his own language, does not feel that same freedom in regard to translating from the sacred text that he would feel in translating other texts.

1.1 Checking of translation quality

William Cameron Townsend (1896–1982) is widely acknowledged as the pioneer of the movement to translate the Bible into the world's minority languages, many of which were (and even now are) not written down. Townsend was responsible for founding two organizations that even today are regarded to be at the forefront of the Bible translation movement. Recognizing that translation is essentially a linguistic task requiring a linguistic approach, Townsend founded the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) in 1934 as a summer training program. Later in 1942 he founded Wycliffe Bible Translators (WBT). While SIL grew as an academic organization overseeing translation, literacy and language development projects in minority languages worldwide, WBT emerged as a

sending agency for recruiting translators and promoting the ministry of translating the word of God among local churches, Bible colleges and seminaries.

Both organizations have grown into large international organizations; their members are involved in language documentation, language development and educational projects besides translation. Both are influential members of the Forum of Bible Agencies International (FOBAI). Because of its leadership in scholarship related to field linguistics and translation, SIL has played a major role in formulating best practices in translation that have been endorsed by FOBAI. SIL also works closely with the United Bible Societies (UBS), another important member of FOBAI. The Paratext software that is the standard for Bible translation projects worldwide is a joint effort of SIL and UBS. Since SIL plays an important role in determining the competencies required of translation consultants ("Statement on Qualifications for Translation Consultants" (2006) and the "Competency-Based Certification System")[1] and the resulting consultant approval process required for the publication of Bible translations, this monograph will focus on the augmentation of these competencies for existing as well as future translation consultants (TCs), so that they may work more closely with translation teams to improve linguistic quality and rhetorical effect prior to publication.

The rest of this section deals with the reduction of linguistic quality over the past two decades due to changes in translation practices and a reduced emphasis on linguistic training. In the next section, I focus more on the role of the TC and how such consultants are developed. In section 3, I proceed to outline my research goals and research methodologies in the process of analyzing a sample of translated passages that had already been reviewed by certified TCs. I propose the established consultant notes system as a framework that TCs can use to identify various issues in the drafts that they review. In section 4, I present the results of my analysis of eight passages in different languages that were consultant checked and approved, showing how the lack of attention to language features could adversely affect stylistic quality. I also look at the possible influence of a model source text and the reliability (or otherwise) of the back-translation. In section 5, I propose that consultants can now be trained and equipped to check for linguistic quality in exactly the same way that I used in my research; and that the burden of ensuring linguistic fidelity should fall more on the shoulders of the TCs and less on the translation teams. Finally, in section 6, I reflect missiologically on current practices in the field of Bible translation that may be related to a decline in quality.

[1] SIL has recently developed an online Competency Based Certification system. See https://sites.google.com/sil.org/ils-training-website/standards/consulting-competencies?authuser=0.

1.1.1 Translation checking procedures

Unique procedures were put in place from the early days of SIL to ensure translation fidelity and quality control. Chief among these is the requirement of having a draft translation approved by a certified translation consultant prior to publication. This procedure will be the major focus of this monograph. Since OTTs were doing the brunt of the translation work until the turn of the century, draft translations are also required to go through community checks, i.e., the draft translation is to be read or listened to by members of the language group who represent the typical audience which the translation is intended to serve. Their feedback on the draft was then used to revise it. The community check was intended to ensure comprehensibility of the translation by the maximum number of readers and appropriate use of the language. These checks are now mandated by many of the Bible translation organizations as well as by organizations that fund translation projects – at least on paper. They are mandated even if the translation is being done by mother-tongue speakers.

Since the reviewing consultant typically does not understand the *receptor language* (RL), i.e., the language into which the translation is being done, it is necessary for the translation team to provide a *back-translation* into a language that is intelligible to both the translators and the consultant. The process of preparing and reviewing a back-translation is described well in books written to train translators and consultants, such as Barnwell (2003, section 6). This means that the consultant looks at the translation through the lens of an intermediate language. This is definitely not an ideal process, and if the back-translation is not done well, that is, in a way that accurately represents the syntax and other features of the RL translation, the consultant is bound to be misled in her attempt to figure out what the translation is really communicating.

It is often hard to find an intermediate language in which both the translators and the consultant are fairly proficient. If the translators who prepare the back-translation lack the required proficiency, there is a greater chance of it being misleading. One way to minimize this shortcoming is to present the consultant with an interlinear back-translation. In some cases the consultant may prefer this. If a consultant finds the interlinear hard to read, the translation team can supplement it with a free back-translation of each sentence in the draft. Paratext has the ability to produce an automated back-translation; however, it does so by means of guesswork, by trying to match words in the draft with words in a model text which could be either a free (as opposed to a word-for-word) back-translation or a standard version in the intermediate language. Another option is for the translation team to manually feed the interlinearizer with the word glosses so that guesswork is minimized. However, this task requires a higher

linguistic and technical competency on the part of at least one member of the translation team. An example of such an interlinear is shown below:

mətɪ	orɑ	pølo	mɑt̪	murtɪy	kẽjom
but	those:M:GEN	matter	1P	ever:LIM	hear:NEG:1PE

But we never listened to what they said.

The second line in the interlinear contains the glosses for the words in the language that appear on the first line. At the bottom is the free translation of the sentence in italics. The gloss line contains abbreviations representing various morphological affixes attached to the root form of the words, such as case marking, person, gender and number, tense and aspect, etc.

As a rule, the consultant goes through the back-translation carefully, comparing the meaning with that of the original language scriptures and noting down questions to ask the translation team to make sure that the translation is accurate, clear and natural. Where it comes to issues of comprehensibility and naturalness, it is necessary to involve at least one native speaker who represents the intended community of recipients of the translation, and who was not involved with the translation of the passage being checked. This person is referred to as an *uninitiated native speaker* (UNS). The consultant asks the UNS questions (perhaps indirectly through the translation team in the intermediate language, if necessary) to test if he has correctly understood the translation – not just the content, but also the inferences to be made from the passage. Sometimes the translation recipients are unable to follow the relationships between parts of the text because they are unaware of background information about the history or culture of the biblical community which was implicit in the original text. In such a case, the consultant usually encourages the translators to provide the implicit information either in the text or in a footnote or glossary entry.

1.1.2 The human factor

Historically, translation projects in minority languages were largely carried out by expatriate WBT personnel formally seconded to SIL. Such personnel were required to undergo training in field linguistics, particularly in the subject areas of language acquisition, phonetics, phonology, morphosyntax, sociolinguistics and discourse. Following field placement, they were also required to produce written documentation of the linguistic features of the languages they were working with. The value of producing an accurate translation, easily comprehended by even uneducated native speakers and written in a natural idiomatic style that could easily be read or listened to, was strongly emphasized.

In south Asia, the geographical domain of the data presented in this monograph, there was a move to train national translators beginning in 1980. However, even these translators were serving cross-culturally as OTTs in languages that were not in their linguistic repertoire. Like the expatriates, they underwent the prescribed SIL training, and, following field placement, they had to learn the language, analyze it and produce the required linguistic documentation. There were just a few indigenous organizations that were recruiting young people for translation work, and they agreed to abide by the standards and quality checking procedures established by SIL for translators up to that time.

In 1999, Wycliffe and SIL adopted "Vision 2025". A restatement of this vision by Wycliffe USA is reproduced below from their website:

> In 1999, our leaders realized that at the speed we were going, it would be at least 2150 before a Bible translation could be started for every language that needed one.
>
> As they thought about the people perishing around the world every day without receiving the Good News of the gospel, they felt God calling them to adopt a new goal for accomplishing this mission.
>
> Our leaders committed to do everything we could to see a Bible translation program in progress in every language still needing one by 2025.
>
> Today, more than 1,600 languages still need a Bible translation started, and Wycliffe is working faster than ever to reach those languages as soon as possible. (www.wycliffe.org/about)

One of the core strategies of Vision 2025 as articulated by WBT and SIL was partnership. Greater partnership was needed to realize this big vision, which has quickly become a goal. As part of this, greater local participation was encouraged with larger numbers of MTTs taking part in the translation task. There was also a renewed effort to raise funds to finance such MTT-driven projects. Up to this point in time, the OTTs were regarded as the "translators" while the mother-tongue participants were often referred to as "language helpers" or "translation assistants" who worked part-time alongside the OTTs. With the advent of Vision 2025 and an increased emphasis on acceleration of the translation task, a larger share of the responsibility for the project shifted to the MTTs. From language helpers, they progressed to the role of translation assistants and co-translators. Now they are called the "translators" and work full-time (Barnwell 2003, section 1.3), with funds being raised in part through the promotion of Vision 2025. The OTTs, if there were any, began to adopt the role of consultants or translation advisors or facilitators. "A typical project of this nature is the recipient of

generous financial contributions that enable the project to run usually with proper office infrastructure and always with a time-bound program plan. Progress in the project is closely monitored and continued funding is dependent on project goals being reached in a timely manner" (Vaz 2015).

This increased sense of urgency in reaching the remaining languages brought on by Vision 2025 was accompanied by a proliferation of organizations taking on new translation projects in south Asia. It was no longer possible for SIL or any other agency to monitor the training of translators and ensure best translation practices in a coordinated manner. Training in linguistics is no longer mandated by most funding agencies. Each organization formulates its own policies regarding whether the translators they recruit should be trained at all and, if so, how much training they will receive. Many funding agencies do have funds available for training of candidates prior to beginning a language project, but only for trainees who have already committed to a language project.

Formerly, potential OTTs went through foundational training in field linguistics, and were required to meet certain minimum standards before they were assigned to a language project. This is no longer the case. Also, some of the decision makers in these organizations are not familiar with the intricacies of the translation process and the importance of linguistics in achieving an accurate, clear and natural translation that is easy to follow. No doubt some of them are convinced that a mother-tongue speaker knows his language well enough and therefore does not need to be linguistically trained. They are either unaware of, or unconcerned with, Longacre's observation on the influence exerted by the form of the source text used for the translation (see block quote on p. 25).

Another factor to consider is the availability of exegetical resources to the translation team. In south Asia, it is hard to find a wealth of exegetical resources in even the major languages. The vast majority of MTTs are at a disadvantage due to lack of proficiency in English. The UBS translation handbooks and the volumes of SIL's *Translators' Notes* for the various biblical books have also not been translated into South Asian languages. Most MTTs tend to use a single model Bible version published by the Bible Society in one of the regional languages that they understand. Unfortunately, the tendency is to use the oldest classical version (usually called the Old Version or OV) rather than the more modern versions that have been more recently published, some of them also by the Bible Society. As a general rule, due to a limited understanding of linguistics and translation principles at the time when the classical versions were published, these readily available versions tend to have a rather unnatural style, and have not made full use of the rhetorical features of the languages into which the translations were done. MTTs often tend to uncritically reproduce the styles of these versions in their own translations.

Yet another relevant change is the relationship between the consultant and the translation team. In the earlier OTT paradigm, while the translators understood that the consultants were experienced men and women who were proficient in biblical languages, exegesis and (perhaps) linguistics, they still viewed them as colleagues – not surprising considering that many of the consultants themselves are current or former OTTs. In the case of MTTs, however, the relationship tends to be more hierarchical. The translators are more prone to accept the consultant's suggestions and not have the boldness to challenge them. This means that errors in translation are more likely to arise when checked by consultants who are not aware of the linguistic features of the language they are checking and tend to be more prescriptive in their suggestions.

1.2 Qualities of a good translation

According to Barnwell (1986, chapter 5), "the three most important qualities of a good translation are *accuracy*, *clarity*, *naturalness*." Later the fourth quality of *acceptability* was proposed to ensure that the translation would be acceptable to and used by the intended readership (Gross 2003). I will have something to say about this criterion in section 6.

As evident in the anecdote I shared at the beginning of this section, naturalness is an issue that both translators and consultants struggle with the most. Translators often struggle to translate certain passages which are exegetically very hard to understand. However, this is an area where consultants are usually eager and able to help the translation team, so that accuracy is improved. Likewise, clarity is something that can be checked with native speakers. Even if the team has compromised on testing their translation after drafting, the consultant check normally requires at least one native speaker not involved with the translation to be present, cf. the UNS mentioned in section 1.1.1. As the consultant frames comprehension questions to ask the UNS, if there is a lack of comprehension, then the team usually either modifies the rendering or else supplies supplementary helps to aid in understanding. When it comes to the quality of naturalness, however, many consultants are ill-equipped to assist the translators. For one thing, the consultant is usually unfamiliar with the receptor language. Secondly, naturalness seems to be a somewhat fuzzy notion that is hard to assess, particularly in an unknown language. Yet de Waard and Nida (1986:32) hold that "stylistic quality seems to be the most determining factor in the acceptability of Bible translations." If that quality is missing, the translation is bound to sound wooden and foreign. Through my analysis of consultant practices and the linguistic manifestations of naturalness, I hope to shed some light on this issue and develop guidelines that consultants can use to make their services more effective.

1.3 Using the framework of functional linguistics

The analysis of the linguistic features of source and receptor language texts was carried out within the theoretical framework of functional linguistics. One of the pioneers in this field, Simon Dik remarks, "In the functional paradigm ... a language is in the first place conceptualized as an instrument of social interaction among human beings, used with the intention of establishing communicative relationships" (Dik and Hengeveld 1997, vol. 1:3). When we are dealing with written texts, especially with ancient documents, a thorough exegetical exercise is required in order to deduce the author's communicative purposes with reference to the original readers.

When it comes to developing a functional theory of translation, the focus is on maximally achieving the communicative purposes of the original author in the minds of the receptors of the translation. The focus on cognition ensures that employment of the natural linguistic features of the receptor language is not hindered. As expressed by Hope (1997:16–17),

> [The paratext/hypertext] is the meaning of the text that accrues in the reader's mind. It includes a knowledge of the relevant contexts, all the lexical information and grammatical information, plus all the implicatures and inferences, and all the pragmatic and rhetorical aspects of the text. ... In a functional equivalent theory of translation the total paratext of the target text is compared with the total paratext of the source text.

The comparison referred to above is the basis of my analytical approach. The structures of the source text reveal the probable discourse pragmatics in the mind of the original author; I then compare that to the rendering I am studying to see if those communicative functions have been realized in the target text using the linguistic resources of the receptor language. Any deficiency in this transfer of information would result in an unnatural or inaccurate rendering.

2 Consultant development and roles

Since the focus of this monograph is an enhanced role for TCs in improving translation quality, it is important to look into the qualifications and development process for a TC.

Much of the details concerning the role, responsibilities and development of a translation consultant can be found Barnwell (2003). These policies have been refined and revised over the years in view of changing circumstances and evolving technologies. In 2011, a handbook of best practices was circulated by SIL Asia Area (Kroneman and Sterner 2011). This handbook however deals with many

different aspects of a translation project. It prescribes best practices for consulting, too, but does not deal much with the area of consultant development.

2.1 Qualifications specified by FOBAI

The FOBAI statement of qualifications for a translation consultant (2006) is the standard normally relied on for certifying consultants. These are the minimum qualifications agreed upon, particularly in situations where there is sharing of consultant resources among different agencies. A glance at these qualifications reveals that there is a significant linguistics component. Consultants are required to have a minimum of a year's academic training in linguistics. One of the experience criteria is that

> A consultant should have an understanding of the characteristics of the languages in the area of expected service. Usually a consultant should also understand and be able to speak fluently at least one language of the area, including any major language spoken in the area which is likely to be a medium of interaction with translation teams and church leaders (FOBAI 2006).

As I will demonstrate, it would be difficult or almost impossible to detect the linguistics issues in a translation without these qualifications. Courses on the discourse features of biblical Hebrew and Greek are also essential since many consultant questions are based on the mismatch between the discourse features of source and receptor languages.

At the time of this writing, there is a proposal being made to revise the minimum qualifications and to state them in the form of required competencies without specifying the academic means of achieving those competencies. This is based on the assumption that consultants can achieve competence in ways other than through academic achievement and experience in a translation project.

2.2 Consultant development: the model of SIL Asia Area

Different organizations may have different paradigms for training consultants, though all of these are expected to demonstrate the minimum set of qualifications specified by FOBAI. Many SIL consultant training and recruitment models are centered on what is called a Translation Consultant Development Workshop (TCDW). Candidates participating in a TCDW are assessed for achieved competence and only those who are approved can proceed further along the consultant development track. They are designated as Consultants in Training (CiT). During the training period, the CiT normally performs supervised checks of translation drafts with a mentoring consultant as the supervisor. If and when

the training requirements are successfully met, the CiT is then appointed as an independent consultant.

The 2+2+3 model which has been a norm in SIL Asia Area since 2020 mandates that in order to qualify for TCDW, a candidate must have two years of field translation involvement with a specified number of verses translated in a variety of genres. Satisfactory performance in the workshop results in the candidate being appointed as a CiT. During the next two years, the CiT and his/her mentor are expected to commit a certain proportion of their time to execute supervised checks of translated scripture and other training requirements that may have been mandated in the TCDW. On successful completion of this, the CiT is appointed as a translation consultant (TC) and is required to give 50% of his time for at least the next three years to translation consultant activities before being certified as a full-time consultant.

Ideally, the minimum of one year's academic training in descriptive linguistics combined with the experience of applying the linguistics learnt in actual translation should result in the consultants being sensitive to issues regarding the features of the receptor language and the mismatches between source and receptor language features in the renderings that they review. However, if the projects that I analyzed are any indication, this ideal is rarely met.

2.3 The Consultant Notes (CONNOT) system

In order to standardize and classify the various issues that consultants may find worth commenting on, SIL and the UBS jointly developed a set of categories and subcategories of potential problems that consultants may come across while reviewing a translation. They can be found in Blight (1999). Together they constitute the Consultant Notes or CONNOT system. Table 1 lists all the subcategories with each column of the table corresponding to one of the categories. Blight's book contains a detailed description of each subcategory. A typical consultant note in Paratext may look something like this:



Figure 1: A sample consultant note in Paratext.

In the consultant note shown above (Figure 1), Paratext automatically enters the project name, the scripture reference, the name of the note's author and the date of posting. Also, since the note is usually created by selecting a portion of the back-translated draft, Paratext highlights the selected portion, also providing some of the preceding and following context. The consultant then enters the category and subcategory of the note; in this case the category is Lexicon and the subcategory is Idiom. This is followed by a discussion of the particular issue that the consultant raises. The image above is how the note actually looks when opened by a member of the team. The team member can then write a response to the consultant's question or suggestion in the box provided.

Table 1: Topical listing of CONNOT categories

Discourse [D]	**Exegesis and Text [E]**	**Communication [Co]**	**Grammar [G]**	**Culture [Cu]**	**Lexicon [L]**	**Rhetoric & Highlighting [Rh]**	**Receptor Language and Setting [RL]**
Chiasmus Chronological order of events Cohesion/ transition Discourse unit Formula Genre Information load Participant reference Perspective/ direction Poetry Prominence Propositional relations Speech quotation Theme	Double meaning Interpretation of source text OT quotation Textual variant	Accuracy in translation Ambiguity in translation Assumed info Clarity in translation Emotive focus Illocutionary force Implicature Naturalness in translation Omission of info Sociolinguistic setting	Comparison Condition Ellipsis Genitive in source text Modality Negation Other gram relations Passive voice Pronominal reference Relative clause Skewing between gram and semantics Tense/ aspect	Anachronism Cross-cultural mismatch Symbolism Unknown idea	Collocation Connotation Idiom Key biblical term Lexical correspon-dence Proper name	Apostrophe Euphemism Figurative extension Form Hendiadys Hyperbole Irony Litotes Metaphor Parable and allegory Parallelism Personification Repetition Rhetorical question Simile Sound symbolism Vocative Zeugma	Book intro Book title Cross-reference Footnote Front and back matter Glossary Influence Layout in RL Numbering Orthography issues Parallel passage Picture selection Section heading Miscellaneous

Any person who has been added as a user by the project administrator is able to access and read all the consultant notes in the Paratext project. This is true even if the user has been added only as an observer (i.e., without editing or commenting rights). For every project that was a part of this study, I obtained access to the translation project as well as the linked back-translation project. The latter contains all the consultant notes that have been entered. In the next section I will outline my research methodology, and the subset of consultant notes that I focused on.

3 The research paradigm

In section 1, I talked about how the declining emphasis on linguistics in translation has led to a decline in translation quality, particularly in the area of naturalness, which is closely associated with readability, and with the cognitive load on the mind of the listener when the translation is being read aloud. I also claimed that naturalness is better achieved when the translators have a better understanding of the differences between the language features of the source and receptor languages. As it turns out, paying closer attention to linguistic features improves not only naturalness but also pragmatic accuracy. When translators and consultants speak of accuracy and faithfulness to the source text, the tendency is to major on matching the semantics of the rendering to that of the source. But the pragmatic structure of the source text should not be neglected. Often this involves the use of connecting devices, information structure of clauses, modality and reference devices.

For the purposes of this research, I analyzed a number of language projects to look at the approach of various consultants to these language issues. I used the following guidelines in the analysis.

- Each project involves a **language from South Asia**.
- In each project I looked at a **passage (or group of passages) of at least one hundred verses in length from the New Testament that has been consultant reviewed in 2011 or later and approved for publication**.
- In each language I analyzed the review work of a different consultant; in other words, there should be **as many consultants as there are projects**.
- Ideally, the consultants involved should be **from a wide variety of organizations** (e.g., SIL, UBS, NLCI, IEM).
- Likewise the **projects too should ideally belong to a variety of organizations**.
- **All consultant notes should be available in Paratext**.

3.1 CONNOT categories that constrain this study

In section 2.3, I had introduced the CONNOT categories and subcategories with a total listing of eighty-two subcategories in table 1. In my study, I looked at just twenty-four of these eighty-two subcategories that deal with linguistic issues. These are listed below.

Discourse [**D**]
- Cohesion/ transition
- Information load
- Participant reference
- Perspective/ direction
- Prominence
- Propositional relations
- Speech quotation

Communication [**Co**]
- Illocutionary force
- Sociolinguistic setting

Grammar [**G**]
- Ellipsis
- Genitive (in source text)
- Modality
- Other grammatical relationships
- Passive voice
- Pronominal reference
- Relative clause
- Skewing between grammar and semantics
- Tense/ aspect

Lexicon [**L**]
- Collocation
- Idiom

Rhetoric and highlighting [**Rh**]
- Litotes
- Rhetorical question
- Vocative

Receptor language and setting [RL]

Orthography issues

3.2 Paratext and Logos resources

Here I describe in detail the methodology I used for this research so that any other consultant can also follow this paradigm or modify it as he sees fit. When analyzing any of the translation projects from the chosen data corpus, the following windows were always open in Paratext:

1. The standard translation project being analyzed (using the version of the project that is dated just after the latest consultant note in the passage being studied).
2. The corresponding back-translation project containing the consultant notes.
3. The ESV Enhanced Resource.
4. The translation project that I myself facilitated in order to see how we had handled the same issue.
5. The classical state language or language of wider communication (LWC) version that would likely have been used as a source by the translation team.[2]

In addition, the following optional windows were open as needed:

1. A Romanized transliteration of the translation draft – if the draft was written in a script other than Roman or Devanagari, the two scripts that I am able to read.
2. A Paratext-generated interlinear of the translation using the back-translation as a model, if I found the back-translation hard to understand, or wanted to see more grammatical details of the translation.

If I needed to figure out the meaning or grammatical function of a particular word and the interlinear was not adequate for that, then I would search the translation project (either original or transliterated text) for the word so that its occurrence in other contexts helped in understanding its usage and function.

[2] The classical version refers to the oldest version produced by the Bible Society in the major language of the area. The two Tibeto-Burman language projects were from an area where a regional LWC could not be clearly identified. I was told that some English versions would have been used as primary sources. So the analysis of these language projects did not include comparison with any LWC.

For every verse in the passage chosen for study, I would look up the Greek text (Runge 2014). This is one of the Logos resources available in the *Translator's Workplace* library. The resource is full of tags indicating the discourse features of various constituents of the text, although I did not rely solely on those tags. I was looking specifically for issues that would be associated with one of the twenty-four subcategories listed in the previous section.

Whenever I came across any of these issues and had doubts as to whether it was adequately captured in the rendering, I would note this down as a potential linguistic deficiency. I would also look at the consultant notes to see whether the reviewing consultant had detected this issue and had made a note of it. If she had and the team had responded to rectify it, then the issue would only be visible in the consultant note and not in the rendering as it stands currently. As an example, in Rev. 6:17 the plural pronoun in "their anger" refers to the one seated on the throne as well as to the lamb, both of whom were mentioned in the previous verse. Language L1 also has a plural pronoun in its rendering of this verse, but a note written by consultant C1 indicates that the rendering earlier had a singular pronoun. Thus this was an issue under the subcategory "Pronominal reference [G]" which was detected by the consultant.

On the other hand, the back-translation of 6:11 for the same project read as follows, "they were all given white cloths and said …". Here the first clause uses the passive voice while the second has an active verb (I verified this by looking at the actual text rather than relying on the back-translation). The topic of the first clause (which is also the topic of the second) is realized in the dative case, whereas there is no explicit nominative subject for the active verb in the second clause. It is reasonable to maintain that a nominative explicit subject is required somewhere in the sentence for the second clause in this Indo-Aryan language, and so this issue deserves to be flagged under the subcategory "Passive voice [G]". In this case, though, there was no note written by C1 on this issue and one may assume that the consultant did not detect this.

For each project I created a worksheet to record my observations. Figure 2 displays a small section of one of these worksheets for language L4 for which the chosen passage of one hundred-plus verses was 1 Cor. 7–10.

Verse	Issue	Detected	Not detected	BT based	Follows LWC	Remarks
7:2	Other gram relations [G]		x	Yes	No	It is important that the sing be used for husband and wife here, but it is plu in the rendering.
7:7	Propositional relations [D]		x	Yes	No	The first assertion is introduced with a contrasting connector (rendering *de*) which is not the relation intended.
7:8	Propositional relations [D]		x	Yes	Yes	*De* mis-rendered by a contrasting connector. ODCL avoids this error
7:11	Propositional relations [D]		x	Yes	No	Choice between two alternatives for a separated wife rendered as a coordinative relation.
7:12	Propositional relations [D]		x	Yes	Yes	*De* mis-rendered by a contrasting connector. ODCL avoids this error
7:15	Propositional relations [D]		x	Yes	Yes	Here a contrastive connector is expected but does not appear in the rendering.
7:16	Propositional relations [D]		x	Yes	No	What should be the grounds for the previous assertion (using *gar*) has been rendered instead as a consequence or conclusion. This is a serious error!
7:17	Cohesion [D]		x	Yes	No	The connection to the previous passage does not appear in the rendering.
7:22	Propositional relations [D]		x	Yes	Yes	*Gar* has been blindly rendered as a causal connective. ODCL also makes the same error
7:24	Pron Reference [G]		x	Yes	No	Distributive reference referring to individual persons has been rendered by a plural reference "all"
7:26	Propositional relations [D]		x	Yes	No	A causal connective that normally connects propositions is used to qualify a single constituent
7:31	Other gram relations [G]		x	Yes	No	Presence of an additive connector where it does not seem to fit

Figure 2: Sample sheet used for analysis.

For each issue that I detected after comparing the Greek text with the rendering, I created a row in the worksheet with the following information:

1. The scripture reference.
2. Whether this issue was picked up by the reviewing consultant (based on the record of consultant notes). If the consultant had indeed detected it, I did not consider whether the team actually followed the suggestion. Standard practice is not to delete any of the consultant notes; they are accessible in the notes history even after being resolved.
3. Whether the issue was detectable from the back-translation.
4. Whether the issue was also present in the classic LWC version which was most likely used by the team as a source text.
5. Remarks describing the issue. At times, if the classic LWC version had the same issue but a common language version did not, then I noted this too in the remarks column. While in many cases the problem can be clearly seen, there are also instances where there are indications of a potential linguistic problem, but I cannot say for sure without further inquiry. In such cases, the entry in the Remarks column is in the form of a question, one that I would have asked if I had been the reviewer.

Note that many of these are potential problems which the consultant needs to verify with the translation team. But it is important for those questions to be asked in a checking session.

4 Results of analysis

For the purposes of this study, eight different NT passages with at least one hundred verses each were chosen from seven different language projects (two of the passages were from one project). Each passage was reviewed by a different consultant. Of the seven languages, two are Indo-Aryan, three are Dravidian and the remaining two Tibeto-Burman. The projects represent four different organizations, and the consultants represent six different organizations. To protect privacy, the names of the languages, consultants and organizations are not revealed. The various languages are therefore denoted as L1, L2, etc., and the consultants as C1, C2, etc.

The results are tabulated in table 2. The number of linguistic issues that I found in each passage ranges from thirty-one to eighty-one. Out of these, a maximum of just 20% were detected and noted by the reviewing consultant. In some cases, only 3% were spotted. The projects varied widely as to the reliability of the back-translation in allowing these issues to be discovered. For both L1 and L2, a relatively high proportion of the various issues could not be detected by looking at the back-translation alone. This makes a good case for the consultant to make use of the Paratext interlinear utility, unless she has sufficient familiarity with the syntax of the receptor language.

Table 2: Results of analysis of the 8 passages studied

Language	Consultant	Language family	Passage	Issues found	Detected by consultant	Not visible in back-translation	Same issue in primary LWC
L1	C1	Indo-Aryan	Rev. 4–10	39	15%	23%	41%
L2	C2	Dravidian	Acts 13–15	31	11%	32%	29%
L3	C3	Indo-Aryan	1 Thess., 2 Thess. 1	65	17%	0%	51%
L4	C4	Dravidian	1 Cor. 7–10	31	3%	0%	42%
L5	C5	Tibeto-Burman	Luke 1:1–56; 2:1–52	35	3%	14%	—
L6	C6	Dravidian	Gal. 4–6; Jam. 1	43	9%	9%	65%
L7	C7	Tibeto-Burman	Mat. 9:1–11:24	37	14%	11%	—
L3	C8	Indo-Aryan	Heb. 3:12–8:13	81	20%	4%	64%

4.1 Nature of linguistic issues in the renderings studied

The reader can get a much better idea of the kinds of linguistic issues that are being missed by looking at some typical examples from the data corpus. The rest of this section is devoted to this. In all the examples presented below, the issues were not detected by the reviewing consultant except as otherwise noted.

4.1.1 Relationship between propositions

In Heb. 4:1, the exhortation to the readers to be diligent not to fall short of entering into the promised rest is grounded in the history that was outlined in chapter 3. This Grounds-Exhortation relation is marked by the Greek particle *oun*. In the L3 project, where Hebrews was reviewed by consultant C8, a contrastive connector is used in the rendering at the beginning of this verse. This rendering badly misrepresents the relationship of this exhortation to the preceding material. The consultant apparently did not notice this problem.

In Gal. 4:10, it is the general exegetical consensus that the readers' observance of days, months and seasons is evidence that they are slaves to the world system, which is the assertion of the previous verse (cf. Fung 1988; Longenecker 1990). In the rendering of language L6, the verse originally had no explicit marker of its relation with the previous verse, just as in the Greek. Thus there was room for the reader to interpret it as providing evidence for the prior assertion. Here, however, consultant C6 suggested an explicit expression to indicate that the observances mentioned in 4:10 were a *result* of the slavery noted in 4:9. This is a clear case, then, that the consultant suggestion did more harm than good.

4.1.2 Pronominal reference and participant reference

In 1 Thess. 3:7, Paul wrote about "our distress and affliction", with reference to the sufferings of the writer and his co-workers. He expressed how the news of the faith of the readers was a comfort in that affliction. However, in the L3 project, this was rendered as "*your* afflictions and troubles" with Paul commending the readers for holding on to their faith in the midst of such trials. Note how the error in pronominal reference changes the whole meaning of the verse. Yet the consultant (C3) did not notice this error. The L3 New Testament, with this and many other errors, is now in print.

The rendering of Heb. 4:3 in the L3 project (reviewed by C8) seems to have multiple problems of pronominal reference. The back-translation was written in Hindi, but an English back-translation of the first part of the verse would read as follows: *But those who have believed, they we with him are going into the place of rest, just as God said* ... The use of a left-dislocated clause results in a seemingly

unnatural collocation *they we*, where the third person pronoun is co-relative with the subject of the dislocated clause and the first plural pronoun identifies that referent as the writer and the recipients. It is quite doubtful that an Indo-Aryan language would permit such syntax. And this could have been easily avoided by using a subject noun phrase such as *we believing-ones*, thus avoiding the use of left-dislocation. Another issue seen in this sentence is the phrase *with him* which does not seem to render any constituent of the source text. One may assume that the translators wished to clarify that believers enter "with God" into the rest he has already prepared.[3] However it would be quite a cognitive feat for the reader to figure out that God is the referent, as it would require going back to 4:1 which speaks of God's resting place. But just a few words later, God is explicitly identified as the speaker of the declaration quoted. Thus it would make a lot more sense to have structured the rendering as follows: *But we believing-ones are going with God into the/his place of rest, just as he said ...*

4.1.3 Relative clauses

The rendering of Rev. 4:10 in Indo-Aryan language L1 seems to follow the syntax of the Hindi Old Version (OV). The first relative clause "bow down to the one who sits on the throne" is rendered more naturally as an attributive expression "to the throne-seated Lord they-bow-down". The second relative clause "worship the one who lives forever", however, is rendered by the unnatural relative clause expression "to him, who lives forever, they-worship", just as in the Hindi OV. The Hindi Common Language (CL) version has a more natural attributive expression "the forever living one, they-worship", which would have been a good example to follow.

A similar phenomenon is seen in the rendering of Heb. 5:7 into the Indo-Aryan language L3. This is the verse that declares that Jesus approached with loud cries and tears him who was able to save him from death. The L3 rendering has something like "to which God was able to save him from death, to him he cried out and wept ...". One possible understanding of this is that there are multiple gods, of whom he approached the one who was able to deliver him.[4] Though this might be true in principle, this is far from the point the author of Hebrews was making here. In this case, too, an attributive expression would have done the job nicely.

[3] In this discussion, I am not concerned with the exegetical accuracy of this phrase.

[4] The scripts employed for writing Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages do not have upper case and lower case characters as are found in European scripts, where "God" and "god" refer to different categories of beings.

4.1.4 Prominence

Prominence is an important discourse feature, with the use of certain devices to mark certain constituents (at the clause level or at higher levels) more prominent than others.

In the NT, the Greek particle *idou* is commonly used to draw attention to a narrative event. In many of the passages in this data corpus, no device was used in such cases even though most South Asian languages do have similar devices available.

In Gal. 5:2, Paul warns his readers that if they feel obligated to be circumcised, then Christ would be of "no advantage" to them; here "no advantage" is focally prominent. However, in the rendering of this verse in language L6, no focus marking was used for this constituent. Practically all South Asian languages have a morphological suffix to mark focus, and syntactic means are also available.

4.1.5 Vocatives

In Matt. 9:2, Jesus addresses the paralytic as "my son", a term of endearment. However, no such term of address was used in the rendering into language L7.

In Luke 2:35, Simeon has finished prophesying about the child and now speaks directly to the mother. For many languages, some kind of vocative would be required to mark this switch. A good question to ask the L5 team would be why they did not include such a vocative in their rendering.

4.1.6 Modality

The analysis of propositional modality is covered in Vaz (2011, chapter 11). It covers both epistemic and evaluative modality.

In the L6 rendering of Gal. 5:25–26, both the cohortatives ("let us keep in step with the Spirit ... let us not be conceited ...") were rendered by what appear to be imperatives, as evidenced in both the back-translation and the interlinear. The result is a possibly inaccurate rendering.

In Heb. 5:7, the temporal expression "in the days of his flesh" indicates that the information of Jesus having once appeared in the flesh is presupposed knowledge. However, in the L3 rendering of this verse, which was reviewed by consultant C8, that information was rendered as a main clause so that the presupposed proposition is rendered as an assertion. This could have been avoided by simply using a subordinate temporal clause in this Indo-Aryan language.

4.1.7 Orthography

Orthography issues are basically those of the writing system, the spellings of words, the attachment of affixes, diacritics and tonal markings and so on. Language L2, that had its New Testament published in 2022, was found to have several such errors in the passage I focused on, Acts 13–15. One noteworthy example was that the spelling of Lystra in the section heading above 14:9 was very different from the way it was spelt in the rest of Acts. There was also considerable inconsistency with the ablative case marking with this morpheme sometimes written as a suffix and sometimes as an independent postposition.

I would also include punctuation errors under this subcategory since punctuation conventions are also part of the writing system. I noticed several inconsistencies in the quotation marking in the L2 rendering of Acts. Among these are the following:

- A quote within a quote is sometimes marked by double inverted commas, sometimes by single and sometimes not marked at all.
- In long speeches, there were sometimes quotation marks accompanying paragraph breaks in the speech, and sometimes not.
- Usually in a long speech there would be no closing quotes at the end of a paragraph if the speech were to continue into the next paragraph. In some cases, however, such as in 13:37, which is in the middle of Paul's speech at Pisidian Antioch, there are closing quotes at the end of verse 37 and no opening quotes at the beginning of verse 38 even though Paul continues speaking.

Typically, orthographic issues are not detectable from the back-translation. In L2, this was true even with the use of the quotation marks. Quite often, there was more consistent use of the quotation marks in the English back-translation. This would mislead a consultant who looks only at the back-translation.

4.1.8 Information load

Information load becomes a problem where there is a long, complex sentence in the rendering with a lot of information densely packed into it. In most cases, it is possible to break it down into smaller sentences for ease of readability. Many such issues were detected in the translation of L3. For example, the rendering of 1 Thess. 1:8 contains a long sentence with four clauses, which could be easily broken down into three separate sentences. The same is true of the rendering of 1:10 where the syntax is also quite awkward with a nonrestrictive relative clause where the relative pronoun is quite distant from its head noun.

4.1.9 Cohesion [D]

"A text is said to be COHERENT if, for a certain hearer on a certain hearing/reading, he or she is able to fit its different elements into a single overall mental representation" (Dooley and Levinsohn 2001:11). "COHESION ... can be defined briefly as the use of linguistic means to signal coherence. ... Signals of cohesion indicate how the part of the text with which they occur links up conceptually with some other part" (Dooley and Levinsohn 2001:13).

In 1 Cor. 10:6, there is a transition from Paul's description of the rebellion of the former Israelites to his application in the form of exhortations for God's people of the present day. In the Greek, this is marked by a point of departure *tauta de*. In L4, however, there is no discernible point of departure, not even a paragraph break in the rendering of this verse. (The LWC common language version does have a paragraph break here.)

In Luke 1:21, the scene moves from the sanctuary where Zachariah has seen a vision to the worshippers waiting in the courtyard outside. One would expect a connector to mark this transition, but none is present in the L5 rendering of this passage, neither is there a paragraph break.

4.2 Effect of the dominant LWC version

Looking again at table 2 at the beginning of this section, one may notice that the proportion of issues detected that are also found in the dominant LWC version is quite substantial, ranging from 28% to 62%. This is true for six of the eight projects, as the two Tibeto-Burman languages did not have a single dominant LWC version that the teams used as a model text. The classic LWC versions of south Asia (also known as Old Versions or OV) are relatively older translations that tend to follow a formal equivalence style of translation.

One way in which this problem manifests is in the rendering of Greek conjunctions. According to Levinsohn (2000:71), *kai* is the default conjunction in Greek narrative. In non-narrative material, too, *kai* functions as an additive connective that "associates together the material it conjoins" (ibid., 124). In many South Asian languages, it is more natural to use asyndeton instead of an explicit conjunction. In an effort to follow the form of the Greek text, however, the old versions tend to use explicit conjunctions.

Another problem with the old versions is the widespread rendering of the conjunction *gar* as a causal connector such as *because* in English. "The presence of *gar* constrains the material that it introduces to be interpreted as *strengthening* some aspect of the previous assertion, rather than as distinctive information" (Levinsohn 2000:91). For instance, in 1 Cor. 9:7–8 Paul makes the case for servants of the gospel to be supported by the churches, stressing that this is not his own

teaching but is also found in the Mosaic law. In 9:9, he then supports that proposition by quoting from Deut. 25:4. Obviously, the *gar* at the beginning of 9:9 does not indicate the reason for such an injunction to be found in the Law; rather, it supports Paul's proposition that the church should bear the burden of supporting Christian workers. The rendering of 9:9 in L4 follows the classical LWC version in using a causal connector, thus distorting the relationship between the propositions.

Another major grammatical issue is the order of propositions in logical relations. Roberts (1997) has asserted that the default order in OV languages is usually the reverse of the default order in VO languages – and virtually all the South Asian languages are OV. However, since Hebrew, Greek and English are all VO, many of the classical South Asian versions have maintained the propositional order of the original, which is often an unnatural order in the target language.

In Gal. 4:15, Paul uses a rhetorical question to make an assertion that the recipients' former sense of blessedness seems to have disappeared. As grounds for his conclusion about their earlier regard for him, he testifies that they would even have gouged out their eyes to give to him if possible. This Conclusion-Grounds relation would normally be better expressed as Grounds-Conclusion in an OV language. Yet L6 in its rendering of this verse follows the classical LWC version in maintaining the source language order. In Heb. 3:13, the author exhorts his readers to engage in mutual encouragement so that they may not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. The Means-Purpose order of the source text is maintained by L3 in a possibly unnatural syntax that follows the LWC version used.

As a rule, the old versions of the major South Asian languages did not do justice to the discourse pragmatics of the original – not surprising since the study of pragmatics had not yet developed at the time those translations were done. Thus, many instances of prominence and highlighting were ignored in those versions. Those translations did not do very well with information load either, often retaining the long sentences with complex syntax that were found in the Greek.

In many of these regional LWCs, there are also common language versions. Each language has one common language version published by the same Bible Society that had published the classical versions. I noticed that most of these common language versions had significantly fewer linguistic problems than the corresponding classical versions. Translation teams should therefore be encouraged to also look at these versions when they do their drafting.

4.3 Reliability of the back-translation

Traditionally, translation consultants have relied mainly on the back-translation in their review. In most cases the back-translation would be fairly free to enable easy readability, though occasionally a team would provide a word-for-word back-translation or, more rarely, a parsed interlinear. As projects became increasingly MTT-driven, it became harder to find a common language in which at least one team member and an available consultant were both proficient. In some projects, an OTT or a translation advisor writes the back-translation, but this too is only reliable to the extent that the writer is familiar with the target language. In 2022, I reviewed a translation of Mark in a Dravidian language spoken in the Indian state of Odisha. The team members knew only their own language and the state language Odiya. There were hardly any consultants who were proficient in Odiya, so the team would draft a back-translation into Odiya, which was then converted to an English back-translation by their translation advisor. Such situations are not uncommon and so it is not advisable to rely solely on the back-translation. In 2015, I presented a paper at the International BT Conference to show how many problems could not have been detected by looking at the back-translation alone (Vaz 2015).

If the team members are unable to provide an interlinear themselves, the consultant can still make use of the Paratext interlinearizer. This tool is far from perfect, as it works by guessing the glosses by comparing the rendering to a model text such as the back-translation or else some published version. Despite this limitation, it can be a very useful tool for the consultant. For four of the eight passages studied, I needed to use the interlinear utility. Some of the linguistic issues could be detected only by means of the grammatical information available in the interlinear.

Table 2 reveals that in 0% to 31% of the linguistic issues detected, it was necessary to look at the translation draft rather than the back-translation. There are various reasons why the back-translation is inadequate for a review of linguistic quality. Problems with orthography are usually impossible to detect without examining the actual translation draft. For example, in the English back-translation of L2 Acts 13:38–39, there was inconsistency in the handling of the ablative, which is sometimes written as a suffix (as in 38) and sometimes as an independent word (as in 39). Obviously, the back-translation would not give any indication of this discrepancy.

Back-translations also tend to be more unreliable when the morphosyntactic features of the language used for the back-translation differ widely from those of the receptor language. In the English back-translation of Acts 14:13 in L2, a Dravidian language, the people of the city were said to go to the gates to offer sacrifices “to Paul and Barnabas”. In English, the preposition

"to" is understood as applying to both Paul and Barnabas, even though it only occurs once. In L2, however, this function is realized by a postpositional suffix on the noun. In the rendering, the suffix is attached only to the later noun (Barnabas) and not to Paul, thus violating the morphological rules of the language. Interestingly, the rendering has an illustration connected with this verse, and in the caption for that illustration, both the nouns are seen to carry the suffix.

Of course, a very common situation where the back-translation can be misleading occurs when it is inaccurately or poorly written. Gal. 4:8 begins with a temporal frame referring back to the days when the recipients of the letter did not know God. In the rendering of L6, this entire temporal clause is missing, but it is fully present in the English back-translation! The consultant C6 who reviewed this passage apparently did not notice the missing clause. When I browsed the history of the rendering for that verse, I was able to see that the clause had been there at one time, but had somehow dropped out, perhaps accidentally. Also, there were complete drafts of all the NT books, and current work appears to be in progress only in OT books, which is an indication that the NT has probably already been published. In the Paratext back-translation project, the team has not been using the checked boxes, which is unfortunate as these boxes often indicate the verses where changes to the draft have been made and the back-translation needs to be updated.

4.4 Failure to follow best practices in consulting

We just saw how failure to follow best practices in writing a back-translation has a high potential for misleading the consultant. However, as I discussed in section 1.1.2, the multiplicity of translation organizations with varying emphasis on qualifications and training of translators makes it very hard to regulate the use of best practices by the translation teams. The solution I am advocating in this article is for consultants to take up the slack and to go beyond what the currently prescribed best practices require by examining the translation draft more closely. In fact, as I have demonstrated, it is not possible to do full justice to some of the CONNOT subcategories without closer scrutiny of the draft.

That being said, the minimum that is required of the consultant reviewer is adherence to the best practices for consulting as detailed in Kroneman and Sterner (2011). However, in my analysis of the eight passages that compose this study, this was not always the case. The English back-translation of the rendering of Galatians in L6, a Dravidian language, was very poorly done, to the extent that it was very hard to follow in many places. I could see that the reviewing consultant C6 also found it difficult. There were at least two possible courses of action he could have taken. One is that he could have requested the team to have

the entire back-translation redrafted with the help of someone who had better proficiency in English. Alternatively, he could have asked for a back-translation in another mutually comprehensible language, and there are indications that there were such languages. Instead, C6 would often write in the notes that the back-translation did not make sense to him and then would cite as a model translation, a rendering from a common language version of a regional Dravidian LWC which perhaps the team members understood; he would also provide an English back-translation. By doing so, the consultant was not engaging with the draft, but seeking to put in checks and balances in an attempt to make sure that the meaning would come across. The 9% of issues that were "detected" were often not due to the consultant's awareness of the problems in the rendering; I marked these as having been detected mainly because in each case the problem would be resolved if the team were to follow the structure of the suggested rendering in the consultant note.

In the case of the review of 1 Cor. 7–10 in L4, consultant C4 in a large number of her notes did not highlight the portion of the back-translation for which she had a question or comment (see figure 1 in section 2.3). Typically, there would just be the verse number and a suggested rendering without any question being asked or discussion of the issue. It is possible that some verbal discussion may have taken place during the face-to-face check. However, if the content of those conversations are not recorded, then the team cannot refer to them later when the consultant is not present. The time of both the consultant and the UNS is far better spent when the team responds to written notes dealing with issues other than comprehension prior to the face-to-face UNS check.

4.5 The subjective nature of the results

Some readers may object that the results in table 2 are shown as a proportion of the total number of linguistic issues that I personally could identify, and that they are therefore subjective in nature. This is an obvious fact that I do not deny at all. However, it does not really affect the point I am trying to make: firstly, that it is possible for a reviewer who is unfamiliar with the target language or even perhaps the language family to still spot linguistic issues in the rendering that need to be investigated – provided the reviewer actively looks for those issues that come under the subset of the twenty-four CONNOT subcategories listed in section 3.1. Secondly, I fully admit that another reviewer may be able to do a better job and find more issues than I could. In that case, obviously the proportion of those issues that were identified by the original consultant would be even smaller than what is listed in table 2. The quantitative results should not distract the reader from the more important qualitative conclusions. They are presented here mainly as evidence to demonstrate the pressing need for those of

us engaged in translation consulting to broaden our horizons and to do our part in improving translation quality.

5 Recommendations for consultant development and practice

In the previous section, I attempted to show how a neglect of language-related issues in the translation by the translation consultant can result in compromising quality in two ways: unnatural language use and pragmatic inaccuracy. This means that the training of new consultants should include the acquisition of the skills needed to look for and identify these issues. Besides this, existing consultants also need to have their skills upgraded. The material presented in the previous two sections should reassure consultants that there is no need to acquire a new body of knowledge. Rather, what is called for is a change in one's approach to the consulting process. As detailed in the FOBAI statement of consultant qualifications, it is assumed that every consultant has the requisite linguistic competency as mandated by FOBAI to qualify as a translation consultant.

5.1 Mandatory use of the CONNOT system

It is probably true that every Translation Consultant Development Workshop (TCDW) includes a discussion of the CONNOT categories and subcategories. Nevertheless, the emphasis on following the system varies in practice. The reason I recommend mandating this system for consultant notes is that it has proved very useful in identifying and categorizing linguistic issues. Another advantage is that it facilitates standardization in a day and age when a number of databases are being generated for consultants to share their notes. Trainee consultants should especially pay attention to the subset of linguistic subcategories. They should be exposed to several examples of notes written in actual projects that use these subcategories. The list of twenty-four subcategories that I presented in section 3.1 is meant to be suggestive; the list could be expanded or reduced as needed.

5.2 Consulting methodology

The consultant may find it helpful to use the resources and methodology mentioned in section 3.2. To summarize, the following resources are the most useful ones:

1. The standard translation project being analyzed. If the consultant is unable to read the orthographic symbols, she can easily create a transliterated project that uses a familiar orthography.

2. The corresponding back-translation project.
3. One of the enhanced resources in Paratext.
4. A reference project for the same book. If the consultant at some point had been involved in a language project translating the same book, it may be worth having that project as a reference. It could provide valuable insights into how she herself had handled various issues.
5. The LWC version in a "gateway" language, if any, that would have been used as a model text by the translation team. If needed, a transliterated version of that could be created. Whenever the reviewing consultant finds a linguistic issue in the draft that needs to be investigated, he can also have a look at the model version (if one exists) to see if the same kind of issue occurs there and is likely to have influenced the translators. If so, then that is an indication that other problems in the model version may also be reproduced in the target language. If the same consultant later reviews another language project that has used the same model text, then he can predict some of the problems that may come up in that translation.
6. An interlinear of the draft. If the consultant is unfamiliar with the morphosyntactic structures and discourse features of the target language or the language family, then the team can be asked to provide an interlinear if possible. Otherwise a Paratext generated interlinear of the translation using the back-translation as a model would prove very helpful in deducing grammatical function.
7. A reference list of the CONNOT categories and subcategories such as those shown in table 1. It would be good to underline the subcategories dealing with linguistic issues (such as the list included in section 3.1)
8. The relevant Lexham discourse resource in Logos. For the OT, this would be Runge and Westbury (2014). For the NT, it is Runge (2014). Both these resources provide very useful tags for discourse and pragmatic features of the original texts. Not every discourse function may be formally realizable in the target language, but if the consultant has any doubt, she can always generate a note to investigate.
9. The Paratext search utility. If the interlinear is inadequate to deduce the meaning or grammatical function of a particular word or affix, the Paratext search utility can be used to search for that word or affix in all books drafted in the target language project. I had to make use of this often in my study, and it helped a lot.

6 Missiological reflections for best practices in translation and consulting

Gross (2003) has extensively discussed the criterion of acceptability, particularly when this conflicts with the requirements of the other three criteria: accuracy, clarity and naturalness. He admits that the issue is complex and that no clear answer can be prescribed. His focus is on four dimensions in which the principle of acceptability tends to operate: translation style, theological constraints, recognizability and euphemistic language. He does imply that if the end goal is maximizing the spiritual benefits derived by the receptors, then this end could maybe justify the means.

In May 2022, I had the chance to mentor some CiTs while they were checking some chapters of Luke in an Indo-Aryan language. In the process, I had suggested reversing the order of propositions at certain places in the rendering for the sake of naturalness and readability. This was acceptable to the team until such a change involved combining verses. They themselves were not against this, but were resistant because they were afraid that "the pastors will accuse us of changing the Bible." I then explained to the team that for a long period of time, the books of the Bible lacked chapter and verse numbers. The chapter divisions we see today were done in the thirteenth century. Verse divisions for the OT date back to the tenth century, while those for the NT were not formulated until the sixteenth century. The numbers are not considered divinely inspired or authoritative. The team was surprised, saying that this was the first time they had heard this. Of course they would still need to convince their pastors!

6.1 Acceptable to whom?

I gathered from Gross' article that he appears more inclined to accommodate the preferences of the receptors with regard to the first three dimensions he mentions, i.e., translation style, recognizability and theology. He also appears more resistant to using euphemistic language when the biblical author used crude language precisely with the intention of shocking and scandalizing the receptors. Based on my own experience in south Asia, however, I would tend to go in the opposite direction. If acceptability requires following a more literal translation style (at the expense of clarity and naturalness) or resemblance to the forms of a high prestige LWC version, then it is pertinent to ask the question: who are the most vocal proponents of this requirement? If a large segment of the faith community feels strongly about this, then their preferences need to be taken seriously. If, however, it is only a handful of church leaders that raise the acceptability issues while the laity by and large welcomes a more communicative

translation, then I would hesitate to give in so easily to the demands of the few objectors.

In Matt. 23:15, Jesus criticized the Jewish teachers for shutting the door of the kingdom in people's faces. Granted that church leaders today, who may act out of good intentions or preconceived notions of translation quality, may not be comparable to Jesus' opponents. However, the effect on the receptors of the translation is similar: they are being prevented from deriving maximum spiritual benefit from the translated scriptures. Jesus' teaching in Matt. 25:31–46 on the final judgment shows that he cares deeply about "the least of the brethren". In 1 Cor. 12:22–24, Paul argues that the seemingly less honorable members of the body of Christ should be shown greater honor. This is in line with the conviction of William Tyndale that every plowboy should be able to read and profit from the English scriptures. The very purpose of translation is to provide universal accessibility to God's message in the scriptures. If constraints that are based on misconceptions diminish that accessibility, then the purpose of doing the translation is partly defeated.

In Acts 2, we see that on the day of Pentecost, Peter began his message by declaring that what the people were witnessing was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel. That prophecy envisaged a day when the distinction between clergy and laity would be abolished, and that the Spirit would be poured out on all God's people. This does not mean that there would not be a need for teachers in the church, but it did mean that those teachers and elders would not function as gatekeepers of God's revelation. Being endowed with the Spirit of God ensured that the masses were spiritually empowered. Bible translation is to be seen in this very light – an act of spiritually empowering common people.

Of course one may point out, and rightly so, that the consultant has no authority to dictate the translation brief or to compel the team or the church to accept his recommendations. That is true. However, that does not mean that he cannot initiate a dialogue as I did with a couple of teams about the issue of the verse numbers. The consultant can equip the team to present the case to the church leaders with a live demonstration of the difference in impact of the alternative renderings on native speakers.

6.2 How much can be expected of a consultant?

In the course of informal meetings where I discussed my findings with other consultants, there were a few who objected that my suggestions would involve placing too much of a burden on the consultant. Many of the linguistic issues should be dealt with by the team and their translation advisor. After all, they know the language better and are in a better position to deal with language

related issues. And if they have failed to do so, it should not be the consultant's problem.

My suspicion is that such an attitude is related to the old OTT paradigm of translation where the OTT would typically place a high value on linguistics and discourse. For many of the MTT-driven projects, however, this is a big paradigm shift that takes time and effort to realize fully. I had mentioned in section 1.1.2 that organizations tend to differ in the extent of training they provide their translators with. However, even formal training may not produce the desired results. I happen to know that some of the teams that worked on the translations that I studied went through a very thorough and well-taught training program. Despite this, the impact of the training is not seen in the translation quality. Why is this? In south Asia, at least, the pedagogical culture is such that formal education is often seen as a means to obtain a qualification or certification and is not expected to be applied to real world problems. The examples dealt with in the training courses are usually from other languages unknown to the students, and not from their own. On the other hand, when the consultant sits with the team during a checking session and helps them see firsthand how attention to linguistic quality makes a difference to their translation, the impact is much greater and long-lasting. In the process they are trained to think linguistically.

In response to the potential objection that my suggestions involve overly high expectations of the consultant, I would point out that what I am recommending concords with the documented best practices for consulting. Kroneman and Sterner (2011:47) state that "consultants can have a lot of impact on translators and on the quality of their translations by being available as trainers, coaches and mentors," and that "training, coaching, and mentoring can be very effective tools of quality assurance, especially if they focus on critical thinking, methodology of exegesis and translation, and possible pitfalls to avoid."

What I have seen in my consulting practice is that expecting the translators to handle all the linguistic and rhetorical issues in the translation without on-the-job training by the consultant would be truly unrealistic. Whenever I have pointed out to a team how the features of their own language could be better used to effectively express the meaning of a passage, the usual response has been one of appreciation and gratitude. Translators are looking for such assistance in the difficult work they are doing and value it when it is offered. Thus it is fitting for those of us who are consultants to bear their burdens and to go the extra mile.

Another objection may be that consultants are already in short supply and thus we can ill afford the extra time needed to look at the language issues. I do not have a clear answer for this but am aware that others are working diligently to address this shortage. As a rule, it would be more efficient for each consultant to specialize in checking translations in language families that she may be more familiar with. In my experience, my greater familiarity with Indo-Aryan helped

me to work through those drafts fairly quickly. On the other hand, the Tibeto-Burman projects took me the most time as I have never worked with languages in that family. Tachick (2018) has written a helpful article on the value of consultants striving to understand as much as possible of the receptor language structure and discourse.

6.3 What's the rush?

It is indeed a positive development that there has been an acceleration in the number and efficiency of translation projects – but there is a warning bell that I would like to sound. I believe that one of the key assumptions fueling this acceleration is to be found in the statement of Vision 2025 that I had included in section 1.1.2. It is stated as follows: "As they thought about the people perishing around the world every day without receiving the Good News of the gospel, they felt God calling them to adopt a new goal for accomplishing this mission" (www.wycliffe.org/about, emphasis mine).

The implicit assumption then is that a translation of the scriptures into a particular language is a prerequisite for a Christian community to form in that language group. That such an assumption is fallacious is proved by both church history and contemporary accounts of church growth. Without necessarily commending the movement of Church-Centric Bible Translation (CCBT),[5] such a movement presumes that a functional church is present even before a translation is begun. In this age of increasing multilingualism, many come to faith in Christ by hearing the gospel in a second language. Or they may hear it paraphrased in their own language without any scripture being quoted. Many are led to faith through experiencing miraculous healing, deliverance from evil spirits and other supernatural phenomena which are mediated through the name of Christ. Alternatively, they covet the quality of life and character that they see in other Christians.

I would argue that the translated scriptures are primarily a tool for the growth and maturity of God's people, though, of course, they could be used secondarily as a tool for evangelism, too. In the Great Commission of Matt. 28:19, the main focus is on making disciples, with teaching as an important component of that. Indeed church history has demonstrated time and again that churches with the scriptures in their own language are far more likely to survive difficult times and persecution, and to have the passion to spread the good news.

It appears that both translation practitioners and translation funders are caught up in this sense of urgency generated by the assumption that translation of the scriptures into an unreached language is necessary for members of that

[5] Please visit http://ccbt.bible for more information.

language group to obtain salvation through faith in Christ. This may be why issues of quality and readability are not given as much attention as they used to be. Yet as we have seen, the facts of history point to the invalidity of such an assumption. In fact, the resultant loss of accessibility to the masses serves to defeat the purpose of discipleship and teaching in the local church.

The Results-Based Management model being followed for translation projects may also be partly responsible for this state of affairs. Rievan (2022) acknowledges that "projectisation", as he calls it, is here to stay and has both strengths and weaknesses. As an example of the latter, he states that "projects tend to focus on measurable results, losing sight of deeper impact"; and that "neocolonialist behavior—the tendency of Western organizations to determine and control what is 'good' for other nations—is increasingly unwelcome in many nations."

7 Conclusion

The main point I have been trying to make is that there are a few practices of translation consultants today that have not changed much from the previous century. Chief among these is the assumption that the responsibility of doing the necessary linguistic groundwork to ensure that the translation makes good use of the rhetorical features of the receptor language rests with the translation team. Either that or the alternative assumption that MTTs intuitively know how to make the best use of these rhetorical features when they translate from another language. The influence of a possible high prestige source text is often ignored. As demonstrated by the results of my analysis, this influence results in a translation quality that leaves a lot to be desired, particularly in the areas of rhetorical style, readability and pragmatic accuracy.

The main point I am making is that the little extra effort taken by the consultant to look more closely at the actual forms of the rendering may well achieve not only a better, more readable translation, but also simultaneously an informal, on-the-job training of the translators. Hopefully, when they see first-hand the difference made by closer attention to the linguistics of their language, they will also move further along the paradigm shift of aiming for a more natural sounding translation.

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