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Attaining Quality in Oral Bible Translation: A Guide to Effective Practice

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Abstract: In the rapidly advancing field of oral Bible translation (OBT), agreeing on principles for maintaining high-quality translations is now necessary. This article offers a robust guide for achieving quality in OBT, emphasizing the collaborative efforts required to ensure a high-quality translation. Drawing upon literature in linguistics, biblical studies, and performance studies, it offers tools for thinking about *what* constitutes quality in a finished OBT and *how* it can be achieved by translation practitioners (translators, advisors, exegetes, trainers, or consultants) and other parties (administrators, stakeholders). This paper adds to current discussions on OBT by examining the intricate interplay between "performance", linguistics, and meaning in communication and using that interplay as the basis for exegesis strategies. Furthermore, it presents field-tested strategies from multiple OBT consultants to streamline the OBT process and optimize quality outcomes. The paper proposes a definition for standards of quality in OBT and shares effective strategies for its achievement. In doing so, it not only lays the groundwork for progress in OBT practice and research but also provides valuable insights for translators, consultants, trainers, administrators, and stakeholders.

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1 Introduction

In the past five years, the number of oral Bible translations (OBTs) started each year has grown from a trickle to a steady steam, and the number of organizations involved has increased from a handful to over a dozen. The number of OBT projects will likely continue to swell from a small stream into a river. Hundreds of projects are on the horizon (cf. Floor and Harmelink 2023). Consultants with little formal training or practical experience with audio-based translations may soon need to navigate this rolling river of oral Bible translations.[1]

The sheer volume of oral Bible translations serves as a clarion call for discussions about quality, both as a product and as a process. The Bible translation movement needs consensus, firmly grounded in research, on what constitutes quality in oral Bible translations. Translators, exegetical advisors, and consultants need this consensus to ensure quality in their translation decisions. Project managers and funders need this information in order to know how to prioritize personnel, time, and financial resources.

The authors of this paper represent a significant cross section of the current OBT movement. Nikki Mustin, Translation Consultant, has served twenty-one translation teams as an OBT practitioner with Seed Company and serves as an exegete with Scriptura on the Psalms: Layer by Layer project. Dr. Heather Beal is the course head of Dallas International University's course in OBT and has served as a member of the Spoken English Bible (SEB) Translation project since 2018. Joshua Frost has served with the SEB Translation project since 2020 and with SIL as an oral translation researcher and resource developer since 2022. Together, they have firsthand experience with the challenges faced by OBT translators, translation advisors, consultants, trainers, and researchers.

This article surveys the key differences between OBT and written Bible translation, providing theoretical lenses and practical questions translators and consultants need to address to ensure quality in OBT. For those just encountering translation, this paper provides an introduction to best practices in OBT. For those familiar with Bible translation, this paper can serve as a guide to help them successfully navigate the waters of OBT.

The paper is structured around four fundamental questions:

1. What constitutes quality in OBT, as a product?
2. How important is performance in OBT?

[1] This article is indebted to the feedback of many of our colleagues, for whom we are very grateful. Those who directly contributed data are acknowledged in the locations of their contributions.

3. How can OBT quality be assessed?
4. What workflow(s) best facilitate quality in OBT?

Section 2 addresses what constitutes quality in an oral Bible translation in comparison to a written translation. Section 3 lays a theoretical foundation in cognitive linguistics for the importance of performance in oral-aural communication. Section 4 then surveys how quality in an OBT product can be assessed by grounding performance and translation decisions in a sound exegesis of the passage. Section 5 discusses processes that ensure consistent quality in OBT translations. The paper concludes in section 6 with final remarks and recommendations for future research and translation resources.

2 Defining "quality" in oral Bible translation

OBT quality encompasses the key aspects emphasized in traditional Bible translation approaches: clarity, accuracy, naturalness, and acceptability.[2] Beyond these, another crucial element must be considered in OBT—the original aesthetic and social qualities of the biblical texts. These texts were originally designed to be sonically pleasing (Wendland 2013) and delivered orally by skilled public speakers (Seal 2023:1–7, Shiner 2003). Consequently, a faithful oral translation of the Scriptures should also incorporate these aesthetic and social dimensions. In this vein, some OBT practitioners[3] have proposed the inclusion of a fifth element in CANA representing the translation's ability to captivate and engage the audience: the "appeal" of the translation and performance (Floor and Harmelink 2023).[4]

Many reference works for translation already discuss how to translate aspects of language that can be written. This paper emphasizes attaining quality in aspects that cannot be written—the performance features. We contend that,

[2] For example, Beekman and Callow 1974, Nida and Taber 1974, de Waard and Nida 1986, Barnwell 2020.

[3] In this paper, the phrase "OBT practitioners" refers to OBT translators, exegetical advisors, consultants, and trainers.

[4] Some translators also want to add how deeply the community is transformed by the translation as a measure of the translation's quality. While we agree that community engagement with the translation plays a major role in the quality of discipleship and ministry accomplished using the translation, we differentiate between the quality of the translation in terms of its conceptual correspondence with the biblical text and the "quality" of its impact in a community (and measuring spiritual transformation is notoriously difficult). In many ways, a high quality translation paves the way for future high-quality discipleship and church growth, even if its initial impact seems like a "day of small things" (Zech. 4:10) when it is first created.

just as the wording of the text must be grounded in the communicative function of the source text, so too must the performance decisions in oral translations.

What are the performance features of an oral translation? Practically speaking, "performance" includes the vast layers of meaning speakers communicate with their voices. These layers have rarely fit into orthographies. De Waard and Nida stated the importance of performance features in their seminal work, which we quote at length because of three crucial points (1986:13–14, bracketed numbers added):

> [1] The impoverished nature of a written text can perhaps be better appreciated when one realizes how much can actually be communicated by various features of the voice. For example, speakers may increase emphasis by loudness or by drawing out the length of some expression. On the other hand, it is also possible to attract special attention by reversing the process and reducing the volume to a whisper. [2] The quality of voice may in fact completely reverse the meaning of a linguistic message, as when one growls out the sentence *I love you* with the clear indication of communicating hatred, not love. Quality may be soothing or frightening; different levels of pitch may communicate various degrees of excitement, anger, or frustration. [3] In handwritten documents one can often detect nervousness, anxiety, or strong determination...

These three insightful observations about the relationship between the expression of a statement (i.e., performance) and its meaning warrant further exploration. Concerning the first point, written language has "impoverished" resources compared to spoken language. This means that those trained in traditional translation methods must gain a slightly different perspective and some practical skills to deal with the translation challenges introduced by spoken language. Concerning the second, performance plays a significant role in expressing emotions, which are closely linked to the intended meaning behind spoken words. The way something is said can completely change its interpretation. This means that translators must thoroughly understand the emotional tenor and illocutionary force of each section of Scripture to translate it faithfully. Finally, concerning the third, writing style can carry indications of emotion and attitudes. While de Waard and Nida refer to handwriting style in this quote, other researchers have shown that people communicate emotion in their word choices, syntactic structures, and much more (J. Frost 2023:185–194). This means that source texts contain information that can set parameters for performance features such as emotions and attitudes.

The element of performance in an oral Bible translation has the potential to give communities the most accurate, memorable, and beautiful taste possible of the Bible. Oral performances can clearly communicate aspects of the original

texts that may be difficult to discern in a written translation, such as sociolinguistic dynamics, the politeness level of speech acts, and emotions. Oral Bible translations have a unique ability to tap into oral-aural communication systems and genres that already exist in the culture (cf. K. Frost 2024). Using culturally familiar genres in OBT opens the possibility of hearing the Scriptures in a manner functionally equivalent to *how they were first heard*. These dynamics give OBT the unique ability to provide a highly accurate and impactful translation of biblical texts. The letters of the Apostles can become stirring sermons. As songs or poems, the Psalms of the Bible can arrest the attention of the community and lead many to accept its teachings.[5]

A brief story illustrates this last point. One translation team in a sensitive context made a remarkably bold decision (K. Frost 2024): they hired a leading opera singer to perform translations of the Psalms and of Hebrews 1:1–3. The songs climbed to the top of the charts, stayed there for months, and were the most requested songs at the performer's live events. Scores of people from the dominant religion regularly listened to these songs. In addition, singing these songs for several years led the singer and his entire family to follow Jesus.

3 The "primacy of performance": Cognitive linguistics theory for oral communication

In OBT, the meaning people infer from the performance is like the hidden portion of an iceberg—unseen by the eye and yet the substance that keeps the top portion afloat. Recent developments in linguistics and the study of human cognition explain why so much meaning lies in performance. Cognitive linguistics has shown that people derive meaning simultaneously through both the semantic content and the pragmatic situation of the utterance (Evans 2019:351–361; Grandjean 2021; cf. Ferreira 2021). The brain forms unified semantic representations of communication through (at least) three separate channels: linguistic meaning, embodied memories, and emotions (Vigliocco et al. 2009). What is written down in most orthographies represents only a portion of the total meaning in oral-aural communication.

The performance in an oral translation must be carefully considered because of the amount of meaning it contains. In fact, it upholds all other aspects of meaning. The authors of this paper call this principle the *Primacy of Performance* in oral communication and translation (cf. van Aswegen and Koroma 2021:12). Figure 1 illustrates this graphically:

[5] We recognize that not all OBT translations will make the Apostles' letters sermons, the Psalms songs, etc. Those that do, though, give a special gift to their community.

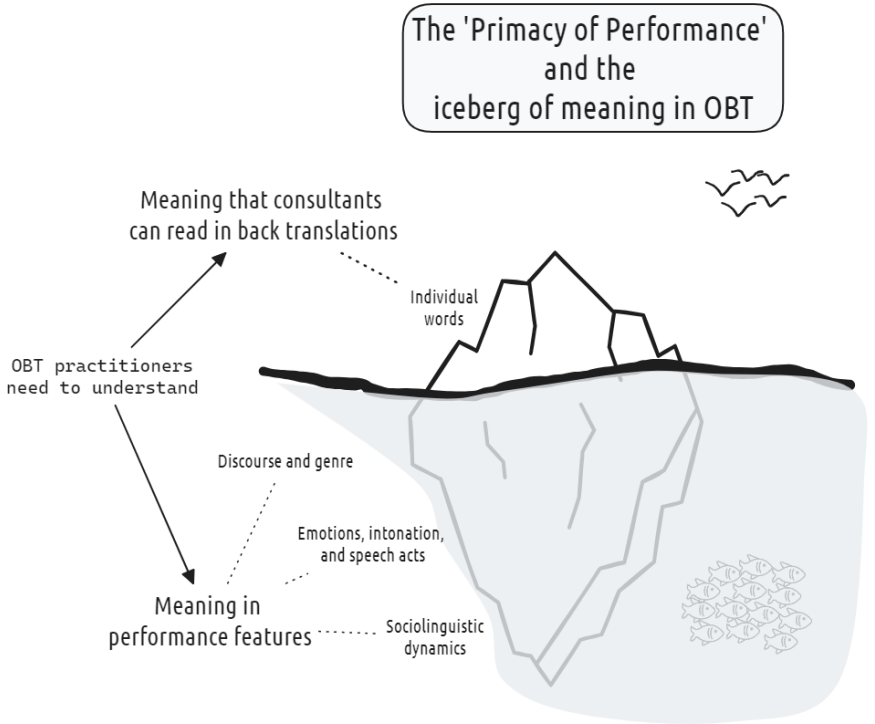

Figure 1: The 'Primacy of Performance' and the iceberg of meaning in OBT.

The rest of this section discusses the interplay of performance features[6] with these aspects of communication: (1) discourse and genres; (2) emotions and speech acts; and (3) sociolinguistic dynamics. The final section, (4) illustrates how these features can cumulatively result in powerful and appealing oral performances.

3.1 Discourse and genre

Performance features often act as a compass, guiding the audience to identify the genre they are hearing and the discourse structure of the message. For instance, in North America, what distinguishes reading poetry aloud from performing a

[6] Many of the features that constitute a performance have been called "paralinguistic" features in linguistic publications (Kraus 2017), but this paper employs the more general term "performance features" from ethnoarts (Schrag 2013).

rap? The difference is that the rap is performed with a characteristic rhythm and speed, easily discerned by cultural insiders.

Research has shown that performance features, especially intonation, play a key role in the discourse processes of oral-aural communication. Though intonation was once considered outside the domain of language proper (i.e., "paralinguistic"), it is now considered a property of language by many theorists (Couper-Kuhlen 2001). Researchers have noted that continuity in an intonation contour often signals continuity of thought. Cognitive linguists have dubbed these intonation-thought units "attention frames" (Langacker 2008:481–482).

Attention frames appear in many areas of language, as illustrated by the following three examples:

1. Intonation contours have been linked to *focus marking* in languages as disparate as Mapudungun in Chile (Rogers 2019), Swedish (Myrberg 2021), Farasani Arabic (Abbas and Jun 2021), and Standard American English (Couper-Kuhlen 2001).
2. Breaks in intonation contours indicate changes in the *topic of the discourse* (Riou 2015), such as paragraph breaks in spoken monologues (cf. Wiklund 2014).
3. *Parenthetical phrases* are often set off by their own pitch and intonation contours (Hansen 2006).

While important, intonation is not the only performance feature relevant to discourse—rhythm, volume, and relative pitch also play important roles (de Waard and Nida 1986:13–14). Continuation of an established speech rhythm signals continuity in communication, so much so that a break in the rhythm often indicates a break in thought (cf. Couper-Kuhlen 2001). As an illustration, breaks in rhythm were the primary strategy one woman used to mark peak when recounting the murder of her daughter. The woman frequently paused mid-sentence while recounting the moment she heard that her daughter was shot, which was the peak of the narrative (van Drunen 2011:29–33).

As a practical example from the world of Bible translation, consider 1 Peter 1:3–4, which uses syntactic parallelism to underscore how richly God has blessed his people (table 1):

Table 1: Syntactic Parallelism of εἰς 'to' in 1 Peter 1:3–4

Main clause	3... According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again
Sub. cl. A	**to** a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
Sub. cl. B	4 **to** an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading...

When the Spoken English Bible team first drafted the passage, they found that using the same rhythm and intonation contour throughout the whole statement made the sentence hard to comprehend. When the drafters inserted pauses between the clauses and gave each clause its own intonation contour, the sentence was easily comprehensible and rhetorically impactful for the audience.

3.2 Emotions and speech acts

Emotion plays a crucial role in human cognition. It subconsciously directs our attention, enabling us to reason through issues that evoke our initial emotional responses (Adolphs and Anderson 2018). People have emotional responses when an event (or thought) affects what they value most, and what people value most always touches on their core identity (Smith and Lazarus 1990:615). Emotional evaluations underlie what the brain considers "relevant" enough for further processing. When a situation is emotionally relevant enough for the brain's attention, the brain simultaneously analyzes the situation and prepares the body for any necessary response.

With such an important role in cognition, emotions also form the backbone of human communication, signaling what people most value and what actions they will take. The emotional force and implications of an utterance are what people remember best because the brain is hardwired to encode emotionally salient information (Tyng et al. 2017). Emotions are so important in communication that they can be expressed through any level of natural language, from individual morphemes to syntactic structures and conceptual metaphors (J. Frost 2023).

Emotions, as signs of pragmatic intent, are inextricable from the illocutionary force of statements. Recall the statement from de Waard and Nida (1986:13–14) quoted at length above, "The quality of voice may in fact completely reverse the meaning of a linguistic message, as when one growls out the sentence *I love you* with the clear indication of communicating hatred, not love." The only way the audience can tell the difference between these two contradictory speech acts is by processing how the speaker performed the utterance (Hellbernd and

Sammler 2016). The importance of prosody in determining *what* people are doing with their words (i.e., speech acts) is reflected in how quickly the brain processes it. Scientists have found that the brain processes prosody much faster than it decodes even individual phonemes (Tomasello et al. 2022).

The emotional prosody of a statement forms a core component of its meaning in oral-aural communication, even in tonal languages.[7] Studies have shown that the emotional prosody of statements has a stronger impact than the lexical meaning of the statement (Lin et al. 2020). For example, if someone states in a sullen voice, "I'm as happy as can be," the audience will infer from their prosody that the person is, in fact, quite sad. If the emotional prosody conflicts with emotion signaled by the semantic content of the sentence, the brain becomes subconsciously biased toward the emotions signaled through prosody (Filippi et al. 2017). Researchers studying how people interpret emotions from speech have called this "prosaic dominance" (Ben-David et al. 2016).

3.3 Sociolinguistic dynamics

Sociolinguistic factors include *when* a communication event occurs, *where* it occurs, and *who* is involved in the interaction (Perry 2019).[8] These sociolinguistic elements, though outside the purview of semantics proper, are foundational for the social meaning of communication. This point can be aptly illustrated with two examples. The nomadic Himba people of southern African only permit storytelling when the sun is down so that it does not interfere with their work during the day (Floor, personal communication, July 2023; cf. Floor 2021). Additionally, among the Baka in Cameroon, only older men can tell origin and creation stories such as Genesis 1–3 (Leonard, personal communication, 2023).

Sociolinguistic dynamics also appear in the performance of an utterance in the form of *politeness codes*. Speakers may be expected to modify their pitch, rhythm, or volume according to the person they are addressing. Intonation can also signal whether a request is polite or impolite. For example, questions in modern Greek have varying levels of politeness depending on the height of the intonation at the end of the question (Baltazani et al. 2020).

Finally, the *register* of the utterance also cues the audience into factors such as where the speaker fits into the "social and economic hierarchy, educational

[7] Mandarin (Gandour et al. 2003), Thai (Gandour et al. 1995), and Kɔnni (Cahill 2016) serve as a few examples of tonal languages that use emotional prosody. It should be noted that each language community may use intonation differently. Most (if not all) languages appear to use intonation to signal emotion.

[8] The time, place, and participants may also constrain what genres are acceptable (Schrag 2013).

differentiation, division of labour, urbanisation, and other aspects of economic development" (Warren-Rothlin 2006:84). Both the Old Testament (ibid, cf. Alter 2019:55, 102) and the New Testament (Cadbury 1920) contain clear indications of register. But, the wonderful "texture" which these differences in register add to the biblical texts are often flattened during the translation process. Warren-Rothlin suggests retaining these cues of register and goes as far as advocating that translators insert them when the target language would normally include such cues even when they do not appear in the original (Warren-Rothlin 2006).[9]

Warren-Rothlin illustrates his point by providing a translation of 2 Kings 7 in British English (ibid, 90–91). In his translation, Elijah the prophet sounds poetic, the king's captain sounds colloquially dismissive, the king sounds upper class, and the men with leprosy sound like they are from a very low class. By encountering a variety of registers in translations of the Bible, contemporary audiences can discern nuances that were apparent to biblical readers, thus preserving the richness of the biblical texts.

3.4 Aesthetics of the performance

Taken together, performance features combine to impact audiences in special ways, especially when the translation *skopos* includes translating in emic genres that are traditionally performed (cf. Dickie 2022). Mwana Hadisi (2012) found that aesthetic features were particularly important among the Digo people of southern Kenya. While serving as a church planter there, he discovered that the Digo loved their traditional stories for imparting moral values because these stories were filled with aesthetic features like onomatopoeia and ideophones. Concerning features that contribute to the aesthetics of the experience, Hadisi says:

> All the various features of metacommunication that enhance the enjoyment of narrative performance not only gain an audience for its message, they also add to its meaning by making it more memorable and experientially available for personal application (ibid, 451).

[9] Translators of secular literature have discussed how important register is for meaning and how difficult it is to translate (Essam and Mustafa 2014, Ignacio et al. 2022, Yu 2017). While Bible translators have often discussed register in translation, these discussions have not often been about maintaining register differences in the biblical texts. More often, Bible translators discuss which register to translate the Scriptures into (e.g., Blumczyński 2007, Sipilä 2007), which misses the point of the diversity of registers in the biblical texts. Buitenwerf 2005 is a good example of the type of register-sensitive translation for which Warren-Rothlin advocates.

The cognitive linguistics view of semantics supports the idea that aesthetic experiences are important during the construction of meaning from artistic communication. Cognitive linguists state that the conceptualization of meaning happens in part through stored knowledge and in part through dynamic conceptualizations (Evans 2019:372). Aesthetic experiences influence these dynamic conceptualizations and thus play a key role in the formation of meaning through artistic communication.

For oral Bible translators, this means that the performance of a passage directly mediates how impactful and appealing the passage is. The importance of performance to OBT brings up two more questions:

1. How can teams ground their performance of the Scripture in exegesis?
2. How can practitioners check the accuracy of features that often defy simple linguistic or cultural analysis?

Section 4 examines how translators can study biblical texts to ensure that the translation is adequately equipped to create an impactful and accurate performance.

4 Studying a passage with an eye toward performance decisions and comprehension testing

In order to create an accurate OBT, the performance factors listed above must be grounded in sound exegesis of the biblical texts.[10] We suggest that OBT practitioners, which includes the translators themselves, can ground the performance of the Bible in the text by asking questions along the following lines:[11]

1. *What is the genre of the text? What genre markers are present in the text? What local genre is most appropriate to use in the translation?*
2. *What are the main discourse sections, the mainline elements, and their logical relationships?*

[10] Some who make performance translations advocate that exegetes perform the text as a means of identifying and evaluating interpretation options (Agnew 2020, Dickie 2020, Frost 2023).

[11] These questions are often addressed by those in the field of Biblical Performance Criticism, which facilitates translating the Scriptures for performance (Maxey 2012, Seal 2021, cf. Makutoane et al. 2015). Wendland (2013:267–286) outlines eight major steps for analyzing the oral components of the Bible. Our approach overlaps with Wendland's treatment in many ways but adds to his approach by suggesting translators also determine the sociolinguistic and emotional elements of the text. Ballarin has independently proposed many of the same criteria for successful OBT (2015, 2023).

3. *What is the peak of the text and how is it marked?*
4. *What rhetorical and poetic devices occur in the text, and what are their functions?*
5. *What sociolinguistic factors appear in the text? How did they position the utterances in the original social context?*
6. *What speech acts occur in the text, how explicit are they, and how polite are they?*
7. *What emotions and attitudes are encoded in the text? What did these emotions mean in their original context?*

The following subsections explain how practitioners can follow these lines of inquiry for the source text and turn them into fruitful questions for comprehension testing and consultant checking.[12] For each subsection, we provide additional questions that can be asked during exegesis, drafting, and checking. It should be stressed that these questions *must be adapted for each circumstance and culture*. In other words, OBT practitioners should not use these questions verbatim unless they are certain they will work in their context.[13]

4.1 Genre of the communication act

What is the genre of the text? What genre markers are present in the text? What local genre is most appropriate to use in the translation?

While it is fruitful to identify the (etic) Longacre genre of a passage of Scripture, the social function of the passage is most closely tied to the (emic) genre categories within the biblical cultures themselves.[14] Because of the social significance of genres, understanding how the original audience of the biblical text thought about the genre is crucial for translating the function of the genre into other contexts. For example, genre can influence: (a) who can perform the passage, (b) when and where it can be performed, (c) who can be in the audience, (d) what emotions are acceptable, and (e) the communication's general purpose (K. Frost 2024).

By way of illustration, consider the different genres in the Psalms or the distinct narrative styles of Mark and John. It is important to determine if a Psalm

[12] The *Psalms: Layer by Layer* project of Scriptura tackles many of these questions for translators. Their materials are freely available at https://www.scriptura.world/psalms.

[13] For more on adapting questions for different cultures, readers may wish to consult "Testing Scripture Translation for Comprehension" (Rountree 2001).

[14] For a full categorization of the Bible's passages according to Longacre, see Thompson 2016 in the *Translator's Workplace* package in Logos. For more on the importance of using local genres, see Schrag 2013, Morrison 2023a and 2023b, K. Frost 2024.

serves as a lament, a praise, or a means of conveying wisdom, as each of these genres has different expected components. The function of these parts must be identified and captured in performance in order to make powerful and appealing translations of the Psalms. In narratives, translators can reflect the pace of the prose in their delivery styles. Mark's fast-paced stories can be delivered with energy and excitement, while the long dialogues in John can be delivered more deliberately or contemplatively (cf. Rhoads 2006:10).

Some genres, like narratives, can accommodate instances of other genres within them, such as Miriam's song in Exodus 15 and Deborah's song in Judges 5. These songs are "embedded" instances of a genre (Auken 2021) that mark important events. Though it is challenging to capture the poetic aspects of these passages, taking the time and effort to do so can make the translation incredibly impactful.

The Altai OBT project in Asia chose to translate Deborah's song using a local art form featuring throat singing. Since throat singing in this form is traditionally used to recount epic stories, this local genre reinforced the emotive force and the general communication purpose of Deborah's song. The response from the audience exceeded any expectation the translation team had. They said things like "this spoke to our heart" and throat singing made it feel like the Scriptures were "their own" (Cleaver 2023).[15]

Once the genre, the function of the genre, and the genre markers in the text have been identified, translators can make a functionally equivalent translation into their own context, like the Altai translators above. During the translation and comprehension testing process, translators and consultants can test the effectiveness of their translation using questions like these:

Questions for exegesis, drafting, and checking:

1. Exegesis: *What is the main communicative purpose of this text?*
2. Exegesis: *What is the genre of the source text? What kind of evidence of the genre can be seen in the wording and/or in other features?*
3. Exegesis: *How does this genre differ from others in Scripture in form and function?*
4. Drafting: *What genre(s) serve a similar communicative purpose in our/your context? What are some examples of these genres?*
5. Drafting: *Which genre would most appropriately carry the function of the genre in the biblical passage?*

[15] On the other hand, translations of the Psalms can be unrecognizable as poetry if the translators did not use the poetic features of the receptor language. This has been the personal experience of one of the authors, Nikki Mustin, while consultant checking drafts.

6. Drafting: *What are some key characteristics of this local/familiar genre? Should there be any vocal indications that show that this oral text belongs to a certain genre, such as singing, chanting, or voice-acting characters?*
7. Drafting: *Who would be best to compose and record this genre?*
8. Checking: *What type of talk/speech is this? A story, advice, or what?*
9. Checking: *Who normally speaks this way? Men or women? Older people or younger people? Important people or unimportant people?*

4.2 Parts of the passage and how they relate

What are the main discourse sections, the mainline elements, and their logical relationships?

Understanding the flow of thought in a text, a.k.a., its discourse flow, is the foundation for comprehending its meaning and storing it in memory (Robar 2014). In their introduction to Hebrew discourse, Patton and Putnam summarize the importance of discourse for text comprehension (2019:29):

> "A text's meaning crystallizes only when we can trace the flow of thought from start to finish. In-depth knowledge of individual words, phrases, and clauses is of little value if we cannot relate each of these parts together in the text... We have identified the flow of a text when we can describe how each part relates to the other parts in the text..."

The ability to "describe how each part relates to the other parts" is foundational for OBT. This ability underpins the internalization process and the initial drafting stage. So far, we have not found that using one discourse approach, such as Longacre's, Levinsohn's, or Wendland's, is always better than others in OBT. Instead, we have found that our teams benefit most when the exegete employs insights from various authors and methodologies as best fits the situation.[16] The purpose is that the team understands the sections of the text, the mainline elements of each section, and the logical relationships among these components.

The internalization process occurs more efficiently and thoroughly when translators understand the discourse flow of the passage. Initial research in the Spoken English Bible translation project showed that when translators had a thorough grasp of the text, they could internalize and draft over thirty verses in as little as four hours (Beal and Frost 2023). The initial focus on discourse flow also increased the naturalness and accuracy of the initial draft, in comparison with other initial drafts from the same team.

[16] E.g., Longacre 1990, Longacre and Hwang 2012, Levinsohn 2000, Dooley and Levinsohn 2000, Runge 2010, and Zogbo and Wendland 2020.

Hélène Ballarin-Ducasse's translation team in Francophone Africa has seen similar results (2015, 2023). She found that when the translators understood the logical relationship between sections, they all independently used the same connectors in their initial drafts. Finally, in addition to choosing the correct connective particles, teams who understand the discourse flow of a passage can also use the correct intonation and pauses to indicate the discourse structure of their utterance (cf. van Aswegen and Koroma 2021:12).

Questions for exegesis, drafting, and checking:

1. Exegesis*: What are the main sections/paragraphs in the text and how are they logically related to each other?*
2. Exegesis*: What syntactic structures, word choices, or other features indicate the section breaks and the logical relationship between sections?*
3. Exegesis*: What are the mainline events in each of those sections and how are they logically related to each other?*
4. Exegesis*: What syntactic structures, word choices, or other features indicate the section breaks and the logical relationship between mainline events?*
5. Drafting*: Does your language require any of the sections or events to be reordered to maintain the same logical relationships between them? If so, how should they be reordered to maintain the highest level of accuracy and naturalness?*
6. Drafting*: How can the translation accurately and naturally indicate the logical relationship between sections using word choices, syntactic constructions, and performance features?*
7. Checking*: In your own words, please tell me the main points of the audio file you just heard. If a narrative, what are the most important events in the story you just heard?*
8. Checking*: What did the person say first? What did they say next?*
9. Checking*: Sometimes people stay on the same topic but give another piece of information, other times they change topics. What is the relationship between the first and second thing the speaker said? Did they stay on the same topic or change topics?*
10. Checking*: How could you tell? Did they use certain words, or their voice in a certain way?*

4.3 Peak of the text

What is the peak of the text and how is it marked?

The peak of the text is perhaps the most important section to understand and translate because it contains the crux of the discourse; however, the peak of

biblical texts is not always evident without careful analysis. Longacre's A.I.M. method (1990) provides a flexible framework for the type of thorough analysis required to identify the peak. A.I.M. stands for *augmented sequence*, *immediacy*, and *maximum/minimum interlacing of participants*.[17] The table beneath summarizes the aspects necessary to do an A.I.M. analysis of a text.

Table 2: A.I.M. in Discourse

Augmented sequence	Change in the rate of action, such as a fast series or a "slowing down" of one action; sentence length change; cluster of negatives.
Immediacy	Changes in tense/aspect or the agency hierarchy; additional background or setting; onomatopoeia, ideophones, or exclamations; asyndeton; mystery particles.
Maximum/minimum participant interlacing	A crowded stage, rapid change in participants, or only one participant; special devices used to shift attention; change in vantage point or orientation.

The same categories in the A.I.M. model can be used for choosing performance features to highlight the peak of the text. Many translation teams do this intuitively, as illustrated by two examples from Africa. The Baka translation in Cameroon uses immediacy to highlight the peak, featuring more frequent ideophones, shorter clauses, and an increased speed of speech during the peak. Likewise, the Kaaps translation team in South Africa indicated peak(s) of many Psalms by "crowding the stage" with additional voices in the recording.

Longacre's method, while useful, does not account for all possible factors for peak marking. We suggest combining it with Wendland's (2013) approach of identifying peak as the area in which rhetorical and aesthetic components occur most densely, a topic discussed in more detail in the following section.[18]

[17] While this was originally based on African narratives, studies of peak marking in non-narrative discourse reveal that the same method also works well in this application (cf. Wendland 2017; Clark 2006). Even hortatory texts can interlace participants at their peak, such as in Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "I Have a Dream" speech. In its climax, Dr. King painted a vivid picture of "all men" living in peace and harmony.

[18] Wendland's literary-rhetorical approach may be the best way to identify the peak of poetic passages.

Questions for exegesis, drafting, and checking:

1. Exegesis: *Is there one (or more) peak(s), or climax(es) or turning point(s), in this section?*
2. Exegesis: *What makes those parts the most important, dramatic, or surprising in this particular section?*
3. Drafting: *When listening to a traditional story (or other types of text) in the receptor language, how does a listener know when the peak happens? Are there any vocal qualities that can show the peak? Word choices? More voices that join?*
4. Drafting: *What peak-marking characteristics are most appropriate to use while translating this passage?*
5. Checking: *What part of the audio sounded most important, dramatic, or surprising?*
6. Checking: *What made that part sound so important? The words used? How it was said?*

A note for consultants:

- *When consultants listen to an oral translation, they should take note of any noticeable differences in performance (e.g., tempo, emotion, pauses, etc.) and inquire about them. Occasionally, there may not be any distinct peaks or variations throughout the recording. In such cases, the consultant should ask the translators to pinpoint the peak of the biblical passage and discuss how they can use their voice to emphasize that particular part.*

4.4 Rhetorical and poetic devices

What rhetorical and poetic devices occur in the text, and what are their functions?

Rhetorical and poetic devices play a significant role in the structure, meaning, and appeal of a text. However, these devices often present challenges in translation due to their language-bound nature. Translators need to be creative and ideally will possess expertise in the relevant genre to convey the impact of such rhetorical devices effectively. Sometimes, translators may need to reposition the poetic features to maintain the desired effect (de Waard and Nida 1986:26). In certain cases, such as the acrostics in Psalm 9–10 and Psalm 34, the passage's form can be more important than any of its individual propositions (Scriptura 2022; 2023).[19] To translate these poetic elements successfully, translators must first recognize their presence and purpose.

[19] The same may be said of the poetry in Isaiah 24–27 (Ogden 2010).

Wendland (2004, 2017) and Zogbo and Wendland (2020) have laid the groundwork for one way of translating the literary elements of Scripture.[20] Wendland's eight categories of rhetorical devices (2004:85–86), summarized in the list beneath, provide a good starting point for a literary analysis of the text:

- *Figuration*: imagery or figurative language (metaphor/ metonymy).
- *Documentation*: intertextual links through reference or allusion.
- *Repetition*: can be exact or synonymous, and occur continuously or remotely.
- *Compaction*: examples include ellipsis, asyndeton, and cryptic/concise expressions.
- *Deviation*: elements that violate expectations in form or content, such as irony, hyperbole, and genre violations.
- *Phonation*: decoration through sound, including alliteration, end rhyme, and assonance.
- *Evocation*: stimulating sensory impressions through evocative words or sounds, such as ideophones.
- *Dramatization*: higher concentrations of direct quotations.

The following resources in *Translator's Workplace* in Logos can facilitate the discovery of rhetorical and poetic devices and their functions. *Doublets in the New Testament* (Moore 1993) examines the function of each instance of a "doublet" in the New Testament. *Rhetorical Questions in the New Testament: A Checklist for Translators* (SIL 1999) provides a comprehensive list of questions in the New Testament and their potential rhetorical functions. *A Handbook for Translation Consultants* (Barnwell 2002, Appendix D) contains a list of rhetorical devices commonly discussed during consulting sessions. Lastly, *Questions and rhetoric in the Greek New Testament* (Estes 2017) provides an incredibly detailed survey of questions and their functions, organized by whether questions are "driven by" syntax, semantics, or pragmatics.

The authors of this paper have witnessed OBT teams using different techniques for translating rhetorical and poetic devices. For instance, the Baka in Cameroon add pauses and intonation to highlight rhetorical questions and convey their "heaviness" (significance). The Kaaps in South Africa used phonation, juxtaposing similar sounds, and lexical choices, to translate emotions in Psalm 2 successfully. Some communities tend to express emotion only through

[20] Wendland has applied this approach to several passages and longer stretches of Scripture. His 2004, 2013, and 2017 publications all include examples and he has posted detailed applications of his process on his academia.edu page: https://sun.academia.edu/EWENDLAND.

direct quotations. Translators for such communities may dramatize emotional indirect quotes by making them direct quotes.

Questions for exegesis, drafting, and checking:

1. Exegesis: *What are the key rhetorical and poetic devices in the text?*
2. Exegesis: *What are the functions of those devices? Which ones help bring out the meaning of the text? Which ones are tied to the genre or link the passage to other passages with similar content? Which ones simply add aesthetic richness or contribute to cohesion?*
3. Drafting: *What is the best way to translate those functions into the receptor language? In other words, which rhetorical and poetic devices in the receptor genre will accomplish the same purposes?*
4. Checking: *Sometimes people repeat things to make a point, other times they make it sound nice. What special effects did you notice in this translation?*
5. Checking: *What point was the speaker making by using these special effects?*

4.5 Sociolinguistic factors

What sociolinguistic factors appear in the text? How did they position the utterances in the original social context?

By "sociolinguistic factors", we mean factors that add a level of *social meaning* to the utterance. These factors include, but are not limited to, *who* speaks to *whom,* at what *event,* in what *register,* and with what level of *politeness*. These signals often have deep significance for oral societies because they reflect and reinforce the society's power structures.

Many portions of the biblical texts contain sociolinguistic cues that signaled the original audience(s) where to situate the message within their social sphere. For example, the register of language routinely used by an author signals their relative social status. In comparison to Mark, Luke used a higher register. In fact, many have noted that, if Luke was drawing from Mark, then he frequently "corrected" Mark's grammatical constructions and colloquial word choices (Cadbury 1920). These corrections are comparable to amending English *split infinitives* and *sentence-final prepositions*. Though fully intelligible, Mark's Greek was more colloquial than Luke wanted for his audience. By using a higher register of Greek, Luke signaled to even the most learned Greek speaker that this Good News was worth their attention (ibid).

Sociolinguistic factors like Luke's register are often reflected in how speakers use their voice. Those in higher-status positions are expected not only to use different words but also to say them in a different manner. In an OBT project, this may result in using a "more proper" voice to perform Luke and a

more colloquial voice to perform Mark. Similar choices may also be made for stories in which sociolinguistic factors are an important part of the storyline, such as the famous Shibboleth scene in Judges 12, the accounts of Peter being presumably identified as a Galilean by his accent (Mark 14:70; Luke 22:59), and the high register speeches of Acts (Kistemaker 1990; cf. Buitenwerf 2005).

Questions for exegesis, drafting, and checking:

1. Exegesis: *What registers appear in the source language in this passage? If there are titles or addresses used in the passage, what level of formality and politeness are there?*
2. Exegesis: *What social meaning do those registers communicate?*
3. Exegesis: *How polite or impolite are the statements in this passage?*
4. Drafting: *How can the translators use their voice and word choice to indicate the proper level of politeness and register in this passage?*
5. Drafting: *Do the translators need to add indicators of register or politeness to make the text accurate and natural in the receptor language?*
6. Drafting: *What titles/addresses would communicate the same level of formality and politeness in the passage?*
7. Checking: *When you hear [piece of dialogue/direct speech], what do you imagine about the person(s) speaking, in relation to the person(s) they/he/she is addressing? Is this an expected or unexpected way for such a person to speak to such an addressee?*
8. Checking: *Is there any word, phrase, or vocal quality in the passage that sounds impolite or inappropriate for the situation? Are these instances intentional, and if so, what do they communicate?*

4.6 What are the speech acts?

What speech acts occur in the text, how explicit are they, and how polite are they?

Correctly communicating the force of speech acts in the Bible may be one of the most important things an oral Bible translator can do. While analyzing speech acts can be considered a subcategory of sociolinguistic aspects, especially overlapping in the area of politeness, their relative importance merits separate treatment. The force of the speech act depends not only upon the type of action being performed (e.g., request, command, rebuke), but also upon how *explicit* the speech act is and other indications of how *polite* it is. Cumulatively, these aspects of speech acts reveal the character of the communicator and their attitude toward the person they are addressing.

Speech acts are particularly important for oral Bible translators because performance features often indicate the force of a statement. For example,

indirect requests may be signaled through special intonation contours. Likewise, speakers may be expected to use certain performance features depending on the social status of those whom they address.

Understanding the force of speech acts in the biblical text is crucial for translating the social dynamics of passages, such as when Jesus calls the disciples in Luke 5:1–11. In this passage, Jesus commands Peter to try fishing one last time (verse 4). Peter's response in verse 5 reveals tension between his resistance to Jesus' idea and his respectful deference to Jesus' command. A good oral translation should capture this dynamic.

Indirect speech acts can be quite difficult to identify. The *Speech Act Dataset* (Parks 2016) and *Propositional Outlines* (Thompson 2015a, 2015b) in Logos are good starting points. The translation team can access these by selecting a passage and right-clicking.[21] For example, when Luke 5:4 is clicked, the datasets indicate that Jesus is giving a command.

Questions for exegesis, drafting, and checking:

1. *What are the narrator and characters in the text trying to accomplish with their words? Inform, rebuke, provoke, persuade, etc.?*
2. *How do you know?*
3. *How polite are they?*
4. *Do the translators need to add any indications of politeness to make the text natural in the target language?*

4.7 Emotions in the text[22]

What emotions and attitudes are encoded in the text? What did these emotions mean in their original context?

As mentioned in section 3.2, emotions are foundational for communication. While emotions arise subjectively, they have conventionalized ways of being expressed within individual linguistic communities and so can be examined in a text quite objectively. For example, the particles הִנֵּה and ἰδού ('look') direct the audience's attention and thus are often used conventionally to express surprise. Another conventional strategy for expressing emotions in the biblical languages

[21] For detailed instructions on this function, please consult the Logos Website: https://www.logos.com/features/speech-acts.

[22] For a much more detailed discussion of emotional exegesis in preparation for translation, see Joshua Frost (2023). Vines and Dooley (2018) provide excellent insights into analyzing and reproducing the emotions of Scripture in preaching contexts.

was to ask rhetorical questions, which were often used to express surprise and contempt (Barnwell 2020; SIL 1999).

Section 3.2 above already discussed how emotions signal pragmatic intentions, but it is important to note that emotions can also be morally or spiritually appropriate or inappropriate in situations (Haidt 2003). Some cultures view anger as a good thing (Boiger and Mesquita 2012), while others view expressions of anger as one of the highest sins a leader can commit (Dye 1976:29). The moral and spiritual implications of emotion in a passage, such as God showing anger, can cause issues with the acceptability of the translation. Such issues must be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

Biblical scholars have only given rigorous, concentrated focus to emotions since the early 2000s (cf. J. Frost 2023:172–174). As a result, translators and consultants should approach the analysis of emotions in biblical texts with a sense of humility. During the review of a translation of Luke 4:31–37, author Nikki Mustin was reminded of this need. Initially, Mustin perceived the demon in the passage as scared and Jesus as angry; however, the translators voiced both Jesus and the demon as disgusted with one another. Upon closer examination of the passage, it became clear to Mustin that the translator's interpretation was a viable, and perhaps even preferable, choice—both parties in the dialogue express a strong desire for the other to leave.

In addition to investigating *linguistic* indications for emotion, translators can gain significant insight into the emotions in the passage by thoroughly examining its *context*. J. Frost (2023:199) provides six categories of inquiry for translating emotions, quoted in table 3:

Table 3: Six Categories for Determining Emotional Context of a Passage
(reproduced from J. Frost 2023:199)

	Immediate context	**Broader context**
Frame of mind	– What mood may the participants be in, given recent events?	– What cultural events may influence the broader cultural frame of mind? For example: After 9/11, there was a mix of fear and patriotism in America; after George Floyd's death, there was a heightened fear of police among African Americans (cf. Lingis 2022:176–177).
Relationships	– What are the characters' past interactions? – How are they connected? – How strong are their relationships? – Where does each party want the relationship to go? The perception of their future is critical.	– What aspects make up their social identity? Gender? Class? Ethnicity? Occupation? Family of origin? Marriage? – What rules govern these aspects and their unique combination in each of the characters or groups involved (cf. Barclay and Rosa 2020)? – How might the society's power structures determine emotions (cf. Mermelstein 2021)?

Expectations of event	– What expectations might each individual or group involved have for the event? – What evidence do we have for their expectations? – Are the expectations met? – Given their expectations and actions during the scene, how might they feel? An outgoing person, for example, may enjoy chance encounters with strangers, whereas a reserved person may dislike them.	– What types of expectations does the culture have for such events? – Is it related to a holiday? – What types of actions and emotions are permissible during the event? – Is the event public or private? How might that affect the social rules and how people can express emotion?
Influence of Location	– How might the location influence the emotional dynamics for those involved? – Do participants feel safe? For example, a favorite café will likely bring more positive emotions than "the classroom I hate at school".	– What is the history of the city or region? – What are the cultural associations with the location? Is the location associated with a social function, such as public worship, work, or something else? Locations often have "feeling rules" socially prescribed to them. For example, some people experience more "peace" and closeness with God simply by walking through a church (Kindermann and Riegel 2018).
Default response(s)	– How have the characters responded to this emotion in the past? Their personalities and experiences condition what default responses they will develop.	– What does their culture say about responding to this type of emotion? Cultures prescribe ranges of acceptable and unacceptable responses for some emotions (Boiger and Mesquita 2012:226).
Foundational values	– What are the characters' deepest values? These values set the foundation for their emotional responses.	– What core cultural values might govern the emotions in this passage? The foundational values for culture are embodied through their emotions (Mermelstein 2021:260–264).

Translators and consultants can use questions from the table above as they do preparatory background research on the passage. J. Frost (2023:195–201) also suggests that the team turn the results of their study into an *emotionally compelling backstory* that concisely communicates the emotional dynamics in each section of the passage.

Questions for exegesis, drafting, and checking:

1. Exegesis: *How did the narrator feel about the characters? Why did s/he feel this way?*
2. Exegesis: *How did [insert character] feel about [insert character/event]? Why did s/he feel this way?*
3. Exegesis: *What did the emotions of the characters reveal about how moral/spiritual they are?*
4. Exegesis: *Were there any inappropriate expressions of emotion?*
5. Drafting: *How can these dynamics be portrayed by the words and performance features the translators choose?*
6. Checking: *How well do people's perceptions of the emotions match what was found in the original exegesis?*

5 Quality in the OBT process

This section explores how to ensure quality in the final product of an oral Bible translation, focusing on aspects unique to OBT. It begins by discussing the skill sets required on an OBT team (section 5.1). The next section (5.2) explains why revising oral translations can be more challenging than written projects and presents a possible solution for the OBT process. The final section (5.3) provides commentary on five steps of the OBT process that differ from written BT: pre-translation considerations, exegesis, internalization, drafting, and consultant checking.

5.1 The translation team

In order to produce good drafts, OBT teams require three essential skill sets: the ability to (a) understand the meaning of the original texts, (b) translate the words well into the receptor language, and (c) perform the passage with the appropriate meaning in an appealing manner. It is important to note that individual team members may be more gifted in one of these areas than the others; for example, they may be excellent at wording the translation or understanding it but ineffective in performing it.

In order to perform the passage in an appealing manner, we advise that each team have at least one highly proficient oral-verbal artist, someone who can

"make their language sing" (Sebastian Floor, personal conversation, July 2023). Not everyone possesses oral-verbal artistry skills, but they can be developed and improved. These individuals become indispensable if the receptor community has high standards for how Scripture should sound (cf. Morrison 2023).

5.2 Revisions are harder, so build quality early

Prepare your work outside;
get everything ready for yourself
in the field,
and after that build your house.
(Proverbs 24:27, English Standard Version)

Measure twice, cut once.
(American construction proverb)

Undergirding the entire OBT process is the reality that revisions of performances are harder to make in spoken versions than in written ones. As demonstrated at length above, the performance's appeal significantly contributes to the quality of an oral translation. This complicates revising small portions of the translation, such as key terms. Sometimes revisions can be accomplished by just re-recording the sound bite in which it appears and new AI technology may aid such revisions. Other times performers may need to re-record a larger chunk. Either way, revision is more complicated and takes significantly more time in OBT than it does in written BT.

The inefficiency of revision can motivate teams to ensure that the foundation laid by each preparatory step leads to a solid final translation. Teams must build quality early, starting with the exegetical step, to have a good final product. Teams must be presented with high quality information and deeply process that information according to their (oral preference) learning style so that the group has a correct and cohesive grasp of the passage. They must then internalize an accurate interpretation of the passage in order to produce an accurate translation (Kelly 2020:77).

Given these challenges, OBT projects benefit most when consultants are involved in the early stages of exegesis and drafting (cf. Alexander 2023). Many major organizations suggest this strategy, such as Faith Comes by Hearing, the Seed Company, and Spoken. Consultants in OBT projects often serve as mentors and trainers (Stark 2022). As a Seed Company OBT consultant and former OBT trainer, author Nikki Mustin strongly advocates for early consultant involvement. In her consulting experience, input in the early stages of the project drastically reduces revisions in the later stages.

5.3 Comments on steps in the process for OBT

Oral Bible translation largely follows the same steps that written projects do, as outlined by Larson (1998) and Barnwell (2020). What distinguishes OBT from written projects is that the translators must internalize the text and that performance considerations must be kept in mind throughout the process. Although by no means comprehensive, this section comments on five steps of the translation process that function differently in oral rather than written projects: pre-translation considerations, exegesis, internalization, drafting, and consultant checking.

Pre-translation considerations

The utilization of translation briefs, while beneficial, is not universally adopted by translation projects. Regardless of the presence of a brief, it is important that the OBT team address key considerations with the primary stakeholders. Considerations particular to an audio translation include:[23]

1. *Is the chosen dialect widely acceptable to the majority of the language speakers?*
2. *Do the individuals selected for voice recording hold a favorable standing within the community?*
3. *Could the voices of any of the team members detract from the message's content in any way, either because of the quality of their voice or because of sociolinguistic factors?*
4. *What are the standards for acceptable audio quality within this specific language group?*

Anticipating potential project-level issues early in the process can prevent significant setbacks, wasted resources, and heartache. For instance, discovering during the final consultant check that the voice actor's reputation within the community could undermine the translation's acceptability, or that an incorrect dialect has been used, could lead to extensive revisions or even restarting the project. In cases where a translation brief is available, consultants should assess how these issues have been addressed. In the absence of a brief, it becomes even more crucial for the team to come to a consensus on these matters with the primary stakeholders.

High-quality initial exegesis

As stated earlier, effective exegesis is crucial for OBT teams, as it profoundly shapes their interpretation and drafting of the text. At the start of new books,

[23] The following questions are adapted from Cleaver (2023:16).

teams may consider organizing key term workshops so the most important terms are not changed midway through the process. They will also want to know other information such as the major sections of the book, the most important themes and pericopes in each section, the register of the author, and the social context of the original audience.

Performing a passage requires drawing together all relevant factors into a single, cohesive presentation. Because of this, J. Frost (2023:197–198) suggests that exegetes learn to perform a text before they study secondary literature. The performance will create "mental hooks" upon which they can hang information in commentaries that is pertinent to the performance, including clues about the emotions, speech acts, and sociolinguistic dynamics in the text. Agnew (2020) also suggests that performance can be a tool used during exegesis. She states that performing the Scripture is another way for exegetes to determine the likelihood of a given interpretation.[24]

As stated in sections 4.2–4.4, the internalization and drafting process can be significantly improved by presenting the discourse structure of the passage, including the peak, and the discourse function of each component. The *Spoken English Bible* translation team found that focusing on the rhetorical patterns in Luke 15 significantly decreased the time necessary for the team to internalize and draft the chapter (Beal and Frost 2023). Ballarin-Ducasse (2015, 2023) found similar results in Francophone Africa. Using these methods, teams can internalize and draft large chunks of scripture in less time than other methods may require. The SEB team and Ballarin's team have drafted thirty verses in as little as four hours.

Internalization

While performance is the distinguishing factor in OBT as a product, internalization is the distinguishing factor in OBT as a process (Cleaver 2023). The process of internalization is qualitatively different from traditional memorization techniques in that it (1) engages the whole person (Suzuki 2023) and (2) results in a person understanding the function of each part of the text so well that they "own it" (Toler 2020) and can easily translate it into another

[24] Sometimes when exegetes choose to perform a passage as part of their exegetical process, they may sense a discrepancy between performing the text naturally and their analytical understanding of it. These discrepancies can indicate two things. First, there might be a critical mismatch between the source culture and the receptor culture, which can be addressed through careful explication or audio endnotes. Second, their exegesis may not have led to a coherent comprehension of the passage, indicating the need for further exegesis. Identifying either of these early on can prevent the team from having to rework passages later.

language. The embodied nature of the internalization process provides a sound basis for linguistic reasoning and translation (Adams 2023). Relatively few authors have written on internalization thus far, though Katie Frost has taught the process for several years and outlines educational principles and best practices undergirding this process (2023).[25]

What activities translators should use to internalize a passage will vary by culture, individual preference, and by passage. The underlying principles of the process, however, do not vary. K. Frost (2023) outlines four major stages to the internalization process which she calls the "Four Es": *encountering* the passage, *experiencing* the details, *(re)engaging* with the whole passage, and *establishing* consistency in recitation.

Throughout the process, the team should engage the passage with their whole person: heart, body, and mind (Suzuki 2023). Acting out the text with their body activates subconscious emotional memories of related events, simultaneously making the text more memorable and fostering natural language to express the text (Adams 2023). Doing these activities as teams also promotes group memory, which compounds how effective the activity is for most oral learners (cf. Davis 2014, chapter 4).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the process of internalization uniquely fosters translation. In three different sessions of Dallas International University's class on OBT, students whose first language was not English internalized a biblical passage of seven or more verses using English. After the students performed that section of Scripture in front of the class, the teachers asked them on the spot, with no warning, to translate the Scripture into their first language. Each year, the students translated it without missing a beat, surprising themselves by how fluidly and accurately they translated the passage.

Drafting

There are several key differences between OBT drafting and written drafting. First, OBT translators should adjust the rate of information in the text and some performance features so that an audience can easily understand the information by listening to it (Sundersingh 2018, chapters 11–15; Van Aswegen and Koroma 2021:12–13). Second, since the core emotions in the passage were identified in the exegesis stage, their expression can and should be decided on and performed in the drafting stage, not reserved for the final recording (Cleaver 2023:16).

Many OBT practitioners have observed that teamwork is especially important in drafting oral translations, yielding two primary advantages. First,

[25] OBT practitioners are beginning to write more on this subject, such as Adams (2023) and Dickie (2023), and the organization SRV International is creating a set of resources that facilitate internalizing the whole Bible (Stringer 2023).

translators perform most naturally for a group. Second, the group can cooperate to refine the translation significantly during the drafting stage. Team members can provide instant feedback on the accuracy, appeal, and naturalness of translations as they orally experiment with options. According to experienced orality practitioner Yves Leonard, one-person translation teams are prone to more inaccurate or insufficient performance features than they are to poor wording choices (personal communication, 2023).

Sociolinguistic dynamics also come into play for OBT drafting. For example, in the Tolobt project in Siberia, the translation team had to decide whether to use a female or male voice for their first translated book, Ruth. With the encouragement of their trainer, they opted to use a female voice to test the community's preference. The majority liked the female voice for Ruth but expressed a desire for a male voice for the next book (Jonah), and possibly beyond.

While internalizing and orally drafting a passage can produce very natural translations, these procedures are not silver bullets. Oral drafting does not always produce natural translations. If the translators do not fully comprehend the discourse function of the source text, they are unlikely to translate those features naturally *even during oral drafting* (Stirtz and Cahill 2023).

Consultant checking

On the topic of consultant checking, one may ask two questions:

1. *What type of questions should consultants ask?*
2. *How much should consultants rely on the back translation?*

Concerning the first, section 4 above already includes many specific questions that consultants can ask. Van Aswegen and Koroma (2021:14–18) state that the questions for CANA in OBT are by and large the same as in written translation, but that consultants must ask how appropriate the performance features and the rate of new information are for an audio recording (cf. Sundersingh 2018).

Concerning the second question, even if the consultant does not understand the target language, *consultants must interact with the audio draft of the translation* and not just the back translation.[26] Why? Because the consultant must examine

[26] Frequently consulting a written back translation can still be helpful, but consultants should prioritize listening to the performance of the audio draft. We also strongly suggest getting *oral back translations* that replicate the performance features of the original translation. Back translators often need to be trained how to do this, but having and using oral back translations increases the quality and efficiency of the consultant checking process.

the performance features in order to determine the accuracy of the translation. These features exist in the actual translation, but can be lost in the back translation. In Mustin's experience, even highly trained back translators may frequently forget to include the draft's performance features in their back translations.

Finally, consultants must keep in mind that understanding the performance features in a language is just like learning any other facet of the language—it requires time, an inquisitive attitude, and extensive discussions with the translators. Effective consultants are lifelong learners of the languages and cultures they work with, and performance features are no exception. Initially, identifying performance features may pose a challenge, but with persistence and practice, consultants will improve their ability to engage with performance in a translation.

6 Conclusion

The Bible translation movement will soon face a river of oral Bible translations. This article presents a small handbook for those familiar with Bible translation but unfamiliar with OBT—a short guide for consultants and exegetes interested in navigating the waters of OBT. In it, we provide what we believe are key theoretical lenses and practical questions that OBT practitioners, from translators to consultants, need to address in order to ensure quality in oral Bible translations. We hope that this article will be only one of many that serve to foster quality in the OBT movement.

In review, the power of performance gives OBT a unique opportunity to impact people groups deeply, such as the songs which exposed a nation to the Psalms and led an opera singer to follow Jesus (sections 2–3). Because performance is such a critical part of meaning in OBT, we have asserted that performance decisions must be grounded in the biblical text and proposed seven areas for analysis (section 4). Finally, we have discussed several nuances in the process of OBT that can help lead to accurate and natural performance features (section 5).

We conclude by looking toward the future: we encourage *individual OBT teams* to include performance dynamics in their translation briefs and to focus on performance throughout the translation process. We encourage *OBT trainers* and those who interact with stakeholders in project planning to emphasize the importance of performance from the beginning and to help set best practices accordingly. We encourage *those at the highest levels of translation governance*, especially those who set interagency policies, to highlight the primacy of performance and to set policies accordingly. We encourage *all involved* to

remember that it is not just the *words* that are shared, but the *way* that they are shared that makes a Bible translation accurate, natural, clear, and beautiful.

Finally, may our OBT translators be able to confidently say with the psalmist,

"My tongue is the pen of a skillful poet" (Psalm 45:1).

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