

# **Biblical languages and Bible translation practice**

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Should the Bible be translated directly from the Hebrew and Greek texts? One may wonder why the question even needs to be addressed. However, for those who work with Bible translators across Africa, a 'yes' answer might come with a note of caution.

This paper will look at a bit of the history of Bible translation practice in reference to Biblical languages, and seek to understand the issues involved. In conclusion, it will propose how we can overcome the challenges of translation from Biblical languages and achieve higher quality and respected translations across Africa.

## ***An historical overview of translation practice***

Right from the beginning of Bible translation history, there were translations of translations. The first known use of an intermediary language in translation was that of the Greek Septuagint. This translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek was, in turn, translated into languages such as Old Latin and Coptic during the early Christian era. The reasons are probably multiple: First, the translators may not have had good knowledge of the original language, in particular, Hebrew, but second, the Septuagint was considered inspired and canonical by many church leaders, including Augustine, in the time of Jerome (Würthein 1988:96).

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Jerome was commissioned by Pope Damasus I (366-384) to improve upon the Old Latin version. Jerome considered it important to translate the Old Testament directly from the original Hebrew, and applied himself to learning Hebrew. As a result, he produced a Latin translation directly based on the Hebrew text, (later called the Vulgate) in 309-405. This does not mean that he disregarded the current Greek and Latin translations available at that time. In fact, there is evidence that he was influenced by these other versions (Würthwein 1988: 97). According to Würthwein (1988: 96), Jerome was the only western Christian at the time qualified to undertake such a task. Since then, the Catholic and Protestant churches have looked to ancient Hebrew manuscripts as the most authoritative and faithful rendering of the Old Testament, while at the same time taking into consideration the Septuagint readings and other ancient readings.

With the invention of the printing press in 1450<sup>1</sup>, Bible translation activity picked up, and Protestant scholars such as Martin Luther translated directly from the original language manuscripts available to them at the time. However within the Catholic Church, Jerome's Latin translation became so authoritative that for a long time, it was the primary source text for Catholic translations. In modern times, the most authoritative translations of both the Catholic and Protestant churches come from the original language texts.

With the explosion of Bible translation and mission activity in the last two centuries, many people have applied themselves to the task, both Biblical language scholars, as well as ordinary missionaries

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<sup>1</sup> In Europe that is. The Chinese had their own printing press at a much earlier date.

who would simply use the King James Version as their source text. This was especially true in the African context.

The first secondary school in Africa, Fourah Bay College, was founded in Freetown in 1827 in order to train Africans for missionary work. Based on the European model of that time, Hebrew and Greek were taught so that Africans could be trained to translate the Bible into their languages and in the languages of the people that they would be serving (Schaaf 2000: 52)<sup>2</sup>. Out of this college came the first African Anglican Bishop, Reverend Samuel Ajayi Crowther (1809-91). He supervised the translation of the Bible into his own language, Yoruba, completed in 1884 (Noss 2004:14). According to Walls (1992), Yoruba was the first African translation in the modern era in which a mother tongue speaker took a leading role.

There are other notable examples of well-trained Africans collaborating with missionaries in Bible translations<sup>3</sup> but for the most part, it was only the missionaries who had mastered the Biblical languages and corrected what mother-tongue speakers had translated from the English.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See also Faure (1978: 194-197).

<sup>3</sup> In 1843, The British and Foreign Bible Society published the gospels of Matthew and John in the Gã language. This translation was done by a speaker of that language, the Rev. A. W. Hanson, who had been educated in the United States. Ekem (2010: 54), shows evidence that these two Gospels may “have been translated from the original Greek, based on the available Textus Receptus readings.”

In 1847, the Basel mission started a seminary in Akropong, Gold Coast. In 1858, a higher level institution was founded. But the mission truly wanted well educated Africans for the mission and specialized language work, so starting in 1854, 4 people were sent for seminary training in Europe (Faure 1978: 171-172). Out of the training at the Basel mission came Jakob Nikoi who also became a teacher of Hebrew at the seminary and collaborated with Johannes Zimmerman, the head of the Gã translation project (Ekem 2010: 59).

David Asante was one of the first five students who graduated from the seminary at Akropong, where he had learned German, Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. He taught at seminary himself for some time before going to Europe in 1857 for further studies. He is also known for working with Johann Gottlieb Christaller who headed up the Twi translation work (Ekem 2010:79).

<sup>4</sup> See Ekem 2010: 168-169: “The missionaries could not have chalked up these achievements on their own. Teams of indigenous co-workers contributed in giving shape to the draft translations that were finalized for printing. In terms of the Old Testament books, the following comment is illustrative of the translation procedure adopted by Binder<sup>4</sup> and possibly, other missionaries, “Evidently, the helpers translated from English and Binder is most likely to have corrected from the Hebrew.”

“This procedure is similar to the one adopted by the Basel missionaries, some of whose indigenous partners were, as noted at in previous chapters, found wanting in the biblical languages. If more of these indigenous translators were given the opportunity to study the biblical languages—like Onipayede who could discuss New Testament Greek texts with Weyhe—the quality of their translations would have improved and thereby, reduced the burden on Binder and his fellow Bremen missionaries.”

## ***Modern Translation practice***

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, United Bible Societies became very active in developing resources to facilitate translation from the original language manuscripts. This has included scholarly editions of the Biblical texts, publications on textual issues<sup>5</sup> as well as Louw and Nida's Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains (1988).

Eugene Nida's book, *Bible Translating*, first published in 1947 and revised in 1961, states clearly that Hebrew and Greek texts are to be followed when translating (1961: 50). But he also warns about the importance of knowing the Biblical languages well and being careful about interpretations that diverge from the respected English translations (KJV, English Revised Version, American Standard Version, and the Revised Standard Version). Then he adds,

“This does not mean that the English versions cited are necessarily to be the basis for the translation into an aboriginal language. This would be to defeat the purpose of the Bible Society in emphasizing the use of the original languages. It does mean that when the translator's interpretation of the Greek differs markedly from the more accepted English versions, such an interpretation should be checked with the utmost care.” (p.52)

At the time the book was written, it was assumed that most 'translators' would be missionaries, and that the indigenous speakers would be 'informants'. However, Nida did have a section in his book where he outlined the requirements and procedures for indigenous translators. He states:

“The translators must have a thorough knowledge of both languages: the source language and the receptor language. If possible, the translators should have a working knowledge of Greek and Hebrew. But this is frequently not the case. ...” (p.96)

The first two handbooks for translators published by UBS, Mark (1961) and Luke (1971) clearly pointed in the direction of helping translators access Biblical languages. Both handbooks provided careful exegesis of transliterated Greek words and phrases before giving translation advice.

Moving on into the 1970's, mother-tongue translators increasingly took on the task of Bible translation. For instance, work on the first Bible in Swahili that was translated by East African Bible scholars began in 1973 and was completed in 1995 (Mojola 2004: 99)<sup>6</sup>.

However, it appears that this shift towards indigenous translators also coincided with a shift in orientation of the Translators Handbooks, where the assumption was made that more and more translators would NOT have an adequate knowledge of the Biblical languages. From 1972 on, with the publication of the Handbook on Acts by Newman and Nida, the Greek transliterations were kept at a bare minimum, and discussion of the Greek text was done with the help of a literal translation into English in comparison with the dynamic TEV translation. As the introduction clearly states, this change was an intentional policy change using the following rationale: “Those who know Greek can readily

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<sup>5</sup> The United Bibles Societies Greek New Testament 4th Edition and Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS)

<sup>6</sup> These translators included New Testament scholar and retired UBS Translation consultant, Dr Peter Renju and as well as Dr Leonidas Kalugila, a former professor of Hebrew at Makumira University in Tanzania, who had a PhD in Old Testament Studies (Aloo Mojola, personal communication)

determine the Greek equivalents (through the literal English translation) and those who do not know Greek are not helped by the heavy use of transliteration.” (Newman and Nida 1972: v).

Later Handbooks eventually adopted the format of presenting the RSV and the TEV versions side by side before providing a commentary and translation advice for the passage. This was in line with what was to be called the base – model text approach to translation (see Fehderau 1979). One translation, considered closer to the Hebrew or Greek (such as NRSV or Louis Segond), would be chosen as the *base source text* in terms of exegetical and textual decisions, and the second, a more dynamic translation such as TEV or BFC would be considered the *model* in terms of style and simplicity. Thus the handbooks served to encourage this approach.

This *base-model text* approach to translation through an intermediary language was really the only viable solution for many translation projects, where mother-tongue speakers did not have knowledge of Biblical languages. It did provide a certain stability in the accuracy of the translated text, and it allowed the translation work to move ahead at an acceptable speed. These handbooks are quite helpful for those who speak English. However production of handbooks in other languages such as French or Portuguese is still lagging far behind<sup>7</sup>. As a result, translators with little or no knowledge of the Biblical languages or adequate English are susceptible to committing many more interpretation and translation errors than an Anglophone translation team.

In the 1990's began a movement towards training translators at University level biblical studies, translation, linguistics and Biblical languages courses. UBS and SIL collaborated with institutions across Africa to provide Biblical language training for translators and exegetes. These have included translation programs at Nairobi Evangelical School of Theology (begun in 1989), Faculté de Théologie de l'Alliance Chrétienne in Abidjan (begun in 1999), and Faculté de Théologie de Bangui (begun in 2000). The Centre of Bible Translation in Africa was founded in 1995 at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa because of their concern “that in most Bible translation projects, English, French or Portuguese are used as source texts” and “that indigenous translators are seldom sufficiently trained in Biblical languages and cultures.”<sup>8</sup> Intensive Hebrew courses were organized by the Home for Bible Translators in Israel, and since 1994, HBT has trained over 60 African translators (personal communication, HBT). Translators have also come out of other theological schools with training in Biblical languages. And since 1996, both SIL and UBS have initiated courses in Biblical Hebrew in workshop settings. Don Slager, the current editor of the UBS handbook series states that the current handbooks being produced in English do allow more direct reference to Greek and Hebrew, thus recognizing the increasing knowledge of the original languages among the translators (personal communication).

As a result, the number of translators competent in Biblical languages is steadily growing. Nowadays, many Bible Society and SIL translation teams do have at least one member who serves as an

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<sup>7</sup> The Translation Handbooks in French, to date, are : Gen, Lev, Ruth, Jonah, Daniel, Micah, Mark, Luc, Jean, Philip, Heb, I, II Thess. In preparation are Joel, Hab, Eph, Gal, Philemon. (personal communication, Lynell Zogbo). Portuguese handbooks are even further behind with 12 unpublished drafts of handbooks being prepared for publication (personal communication, Vilson Scholz).

<sup>8</sup> Quoted from the website of the Centre for Bible Translation in Africa: [www.cebita.org](http://www.cebita.org).)

exegete for the translation project and has at least some knowledge of a Biblical language. These exegetes are increasingly first language speakers.

While this emphasis on Biblical language training is growing, there is a need to carefully consider both the advantages as well as the challenges for such a venture as we seek the best way forward.

## **Translating from Biblical languages: the advantages**

First of all the advantages:

There is really no debate on the value of translating from the Biblical languages especially if one knows the Biblical languages well:

- 1) It can help a translator avoid semantic interference of the intermediary language
- 2) It can facilitate the understanding of textual and interpretational problems.

In general consulting the original manuscripts can contribute to a higher quality and critically acceptable translation.

We discuss each of these points here.

### **1 Avoid the interference of the intermediary language**

Dr. Harold Fehderau and others who have promoted the base – model approach have fully recognized the limitations of this model. Fehderau (1984:5) states : “Since many teams are not able to translate directly from the original languages, secondary language bases are needed (French, English, etc.) as source texts. This gives rise to special THIRD-LANGUAGE PROBLEMS”.

When one is translating, it is extremely rare to find an exact semantic correspondence between the terms of the two languages. Therefore translation is always an approximation of the original. Thus **when translating from an intermediary language, one is producing an approximation of an approximate translation.** The effect is similar to that of trying to count on the veracity of second and third hand information, where the information is more likely to be distorted, misleading, or just plain false! In the case of Bible translation, the challenge is even greater as the translator attempts to understand Biblical language and culture through the lens of a European language, both of which are likely to be quite different from one’s own culture and language. Let’s look at a few examples.

**One problem is what the word in the intermediary language may trigger in the mind of the translator.** In Genesis 26:17, a translator rendered the verse “Isaac left there and set up camp in the valley of Gerar.”<sup>9</sup> by saying “*Mount Gerar*”. The translator thought he was making the text more clear and explicit by saying ‘Mount Gerar’, because in his mind, the word for ‘valley’ necessarily evokes the image of a mountain, and not of a rolling plain through which snakes a river valley and

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<sup>9</sup> The Hebrew word *naxal* is a waterway or river valley that is dry most of the time except during rains, at which time it can become a rushing river. The word *wadi*, or *oued* in French, has become a technical term borrowed from Arabic which is a very close semantic correspondence to the Hebrew *naxal*, and is used frequently in the Israeli context. Unfortunately, though, anyone unfamiliar with that context is unlikely to understand this word.

which is dry most of the year. When he understood better the Hebrew word for valley, *naxal*, he was able to make a direct correspondence with a term in his own language (*water-road*), since there are plenty of *naxal* in his own physical environment.

But the problem does not stop there! The word 'valley' in English and in French is used to translate at least three terms in Hebrew. So the translator cannot count on translating *water-road* everywhere he sees the word *valley*! For that reason, it would be quite advantageous for the translator to know what Hebrew word is used in each context, and of course, to better understand the geography of Israel.

**A second problem** is the **occasional apparent conflict between the base and model texts**. In Ruth 3:2, the NRSV translation says that Boaz will be *winnowing* barley on his threshing floor. However the Good News translation (GNT) states he will be *threshing* barley on the threshing floor. BFC apparently copies the GNT and says that Boaz will be *beating* (*battre*) the barley. An African in the Sahel area of West Africa would be fully confused if he looked at his base and model texts, knowing very well the distinction between winnowing and beating during the harvests of millet and other grains. However, if he simply checked the meaning of the Hebrew word for 'winnow' *zarah* in a variety of contexts with the help of a concordance, he will find that nowhere else is this word translated as 'thresh'.

Now an African may wonder why the dynamic translations would make such a 'mistake'? In the modern western world, all harvesting and threshing and winnowing is often done by a single machine. Many people have little familiarity with the harvesting process all hidden away in the threshing machine, and even less of the ancient methods used by the Israelites. Many rural Africans, on the contrary, are perfectly familiar with ancient Israelite notion of winnowing the tossing up of the grain so that a light breeze can blow off the chaff and let the grain fall directly to the ground. Access to and proper knowledge of the Hebrew text and resources would most quickly clear up the confusion.

These two examples show that sometimes the semantic correspondence between an African language and the Biblical languages is more direct. When this is the case, an intermediary language serves only to muddy the waters, so to speak. A good understanding of both the original languages and one's own language will allow the translator to make such discoveries.

The matter becomes even more complicated for the translator when he encounters **variant intermediate language translations for certain key Hebrew words** because of the fact that there is no clear semantic correspondence of the Hebrew notion with any word in that language. Such is the case for the translation of *xesed* into French. In Psalm 103:4 NBS and TOB translate this word with *fidélité* (faithfulness), Louis Segond and BFC say *bonté* (goodness), and PDV renders it with *amour* (love). A translator unfamiliar with the rich meanings associated with *xesed* may be slightly confused with the variation among the translations, and then simply choose his favorite version and translate the French term directly into his language. And that translation may or may not adequately reflect the meaning of the Hebrew word. It would be a whole lot better for the translator to be fully aware of the sense of Hebrew word before seeking the appropriate equivalent in his language.

Using an intermediary language may also lead to **certain concepts simply being lost in translation**. This can happen for certain grammatical and discourse markers especially those that signal emphatic expressions in the Hebrew language, such *hinneh* (See Ruth 2:4; 3:2), word order change (See Ruth 2:4; 3:2), or the infinitive absolute (See Exodus 21:15-17). With a better understanding of the Hebrew, the translator will be able find the most appropriate term or expression in his own language.

## **2 Gain better understanding of the textual and interpretational problems**

Another problem which becomes more acute with the increasing variety of translations in the intermediary languages is the matter of textual problems, particularly in the case of the Old Testament. In French, the base text (either TOB or Segond) and the available model text (BFC or PDV) frequently have differing textual and interpretational decisions. This is especially confusing when the base text is difficult to understand and the model text is not at all helpful in providing understanding for the base text, but instead gives a different interpretation. It is true that footnotes can in some cases help out, but good French commentaries and translation handbooks are lacking for many books of the Old Testament.

For example, in Isaiah 8:6 the TOB French translation talks about people who will **rejoice over** Rezin, while the BFC says that the people will **lose courage** in the face of Rezin.... A little knowledge of the Hebrew and use of the resources will lead the translator to realize that the Hebrew words behind these expressions have a similar pronunciation but a different spelling<sup>10</sup>. Knowledge of Hebrew and skills in textual criticism will more quickly allow the translator to understand the problem.

**Another problem is that interpretations in English translations sometimes differ from the interpretations found in French translations.** This makes the task is even more difficult and confusing for the francophone translator who does use English language resources. For example, the word ARUMAH in Judges 9:31 can be understood to be a proper name of a place or the expression meaning 'in secret'. English translations tend to follow the first interpretation<sup>11</sup> while the French translations follow the second<sup>12</sup>. Even the interlinear Hebrew English and French glosses follow along this divide<sup>13</sup>!

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<sup>10</sup> The Hebrew words for *joy* and *melt* have essentially the same pronunciation, *masos*, but different spellings, since there are two letters for the sound 's' in the Hebrew language. The Hebrew Massorettes text, which is the base Hebrew text for translation, uses the spelling for *joy*, but the context and other factors have led a number of translations to interpret the sense of *melt in fear*.

<sup>11</sup> NRSV, GNT, NET and other English translations.

<sup>12</sup> TOB, FC, PDV, NBS, Jérusalem, Semeur, Segond family of translations and a few English translations KJV, ESV, and NIV.

<sup>13</sup> Fortunately, some English handbooks including the forthcoming Judges handbook, does remark on the variant interpretations between French and English.

The more the translator has some understanding of Hebrew and how textual problems and interpretations can be handled, the better he can come to an understanding of the issue, and make an informed interpretational choice for his translation.

### ***Produce a higher quality and critically acceptable translation***

Attention to these kinds of issues will ultimately lead to a higher quality translation. This is especially important for African languages spoken by millions of people. Not only would such a quality be appreciated and lead to better comprehension, model translations in major African languages can be used more effectively as guides to those translators of minority languages.

### ***Translating from the Biblical languages: the problems***

While there is no real question as to the value of translating from the Biblical languages, some understandable questions and objections have been raised. And in order to see the way forward, we must consider them seriously.

The **first matter** concerns the question of competence in Biblical languages. It has been argued that a little Hebrew/Greek is worse than none at all, perhaps reflecting Nida's statement that "A little learning is sometimes a dangerous thing even in the hands of a translator" (1947:51). It is true that inadequate training can lead to some undesirable results:

1. **Translators may assume that a literal translation from the Biblical languages is the best translation**, when in actual fact it could produce a less natural and even incorrect translation<sup>14</sup>.
2. Translators not understanding the complexity of textual problems **may simply assume that a translation which does not follow the Hebrew text is incorrect**, when in actuality; it may have been the best textual choice. The knowledge of the Biblical languages must be accompanied by a competence in understanding and handling textual problems.
3. Knowing a little Hebrew/Greek also cannot eliminate **the potential for misinterpreting idiomatic expressions and cultural information within the text**. If a translator is not aware of the differences between his culture and the culture of the Biblical era, he could make some erroneous interpretations. While there may be some direct semantic correspondence between the original languages and the receptor language, the translator must still be able to know when that is not the case.

The **second objection** is **the amount of time it would take for translators to acquire adequate competence**. Clearly, not only do translators need to know the Biblical languages, they also need to be quite familiar with the content of the Bible and its historical, cultural, and geographical background. They need to know how to handle textual problems in translation. They need to understand the linguistics features of both the original languages and the receptor language, and they need to have a solid competence in principles of translation. For a translator to acquire enough

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<sup>14</sup> This can happen particularly when the translator depends on an interlinear translation for his comprehension of the Hebrew. A better understanding of Hebrew structure and semantics as well as basic translation principles is obviously necessary in order to overcome these incorrect notions.



knowledge and competence, he would need several years of intensive training at university level. It is rare that translators are hired with this competence, so if a translation organization is committed to this high level of education, it would have to have the time and money to train the translator.

While institutions are available to provide university level intensive training for Bible translators, this kind of training appears to be beyond the scope of some Bible translation institutions in Africa for the possible reasons of financial and time restraints, lack of vision, and in a few cases, lack of competent candidates.

The **third concern** is **the amount of time it could take for a translator to read and pore over the Hebrew or Greek text in the translation process**. One consultant told of a translation team who spent a year studying Hebrew in Israel, and when they came back, the translation process initially slowed down considerably in the zeal to understand the text well, and get the translation right. Translators will need to sort out what is important, and not get bogged down with details, and matters that have already been dealt with by other scholars.

The **fourth problem** is the **potential lack of Biblical language resources and/or training**. In the 1990's, SIL provided Hebrew training for the francophone translators in West Africa and sent them to Israel for further studies. When they returned they each had Hebrew Bibles, but they were fortunate if they had a dictionary. At that time there was no Hebrew-French Interlinear Bible. If they were to use their Hebrew in translation, they had to open their Hebrew Bible and be able to read fluently, which was not the case. As a result, a number of translators and especially those with only elementary Hebrew have not been able to use it at all, especially since the SIL and UBS handbooks did not, as a rule, quote from the Biblical languages. Sending translators to Biblical languages courses does not automatically guarantee that they will be able to use that knowledge.

Recruiting translators that are already Biblical scholars also seems to be a particular challenge. Yorke and Renju (2004: 3) lamented: "It has been usual, for example, to find translations of the Bible into African languages, which have been completed entirely without the personal and prolonged participation of African theologians and biblical scholars *amongst themselves*." (Italics mine). While there may be a lack of scholars, there are many who could be involved but who are not. The reasons for this situation need to be addressed<sup>15</sup>.

### ***The way forward: how to be practical in seeking the ideal***

How then can we be practical as we seek the ideal ?

Ideally, translators should translate from the Biblical languages. This, however, does not mean that they should ignore other respected translations, dictionaries, commentaries, or translation handbooks to help them along. A brief survey of interpretational choices in highly acclaimed French

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<sup>15</sup> Some reasons are: lack of finances, lack of mobilization of the African churches for the Bible translation task, and in some cases lack of expert knowledge of one's own first language or parents' languages, and lack of motivation of the scholars themselves.

and English translations show that the translators consulted other versions, and in many cases, followed them<sup>16</sup>.

In order for translation projects in Africa to reach this ideal, the following factors need to fall in line:

1. Adequate training and qualified personnel
2. Resources to facilitate exegesis of the Hebrew and Greek texts
3. Enough time
4. Enough finances
5. and a mobilized support base at the heart of the national church structures.

**A church constituency** mobilized for Bible translation is perhaps one of the most important key factors. If African churches are motivated to invest their best qualified personnel and their finances into Bible translation projects, then it will be much easier to achieve the goal of translating from the Biblical languages<sup>17</sup>.

**Training** is absolutely essential for all translators, even those who come with a high level of education and plenty of Hebrew and Greek. While it may not be possible for all translators to participate in a four year training program, there are numerous ways to build up a translator's competence so that they can effectively use any knowledge of Biblical languages, whether small or great, for the benefit of a higher quality translation. One way is to provide **guided reading, exercises, and workshops**, which can be very helpful in building up competence. Once a translator has a basic notion of a Biblical language, each workshop can serve to enforce his competence, with frequent reference to words and phrases in the Biblical language<sup>18</sup>. Manuals on translation principles need to give tips for understanding and translating the expressions in the Biblical languages.

**Source language software** has become a very useful tool, enabling translators to do their own word studies based not on the words of the intermediary language but rather on the Hebrew or Greek words<sup>19</sup>. Training in the use of this concordance feature and the use of dictionaries<sup>20</sup> will help the

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<sup>16</sup> This shows up when one observes the divergence in interpretation between English and French versions. The English versions tend to follow each other, and the French versions tend to follow each other. In the same vein, the dynamic versions tend to borrow ideas from each other, as we noted above for the Français Courant and the Today's English Version.

<sup>17</sup> Bible Societies will not be complaining that they do not have the money for hiring university trained persons as translators, and neither will churches resort to offering candidates with 'free time' and few qualifications. In the last few years, there have been efforts at raising awareness of the vital importance of Bible translation, through developing courses on translation for Bible schools, and through speaking at church organized conferences and workshops at the local, national, and regional level. Bible translation organizations partnering with Theological Faculties in different parts of Africa also contribute to this awareness raising.

<sup>18</sup> For example, a PowerPoint presentation on geographical features can include the Greek and Hebrew names for those features, along with a discussion of the meaning of those words.

<sup>19</sup> This has been the goal of the Paratext software, initially developed by Reinier de Blois of United Bible Societies.

<sup>20</sup> This includes specialized dictionaries on fauna (Hope 2005) and man-made Things (Pritz 2009), which are very helpful in describing and distinguishing in detail specific semantic domains.

translator discover the meanings of the words for himself, which will enable him to think directly of possible translation solutions in his own language.

Comprehension of the Biblical languages would be greatly enhanced if the **original language expressions would be referred to in handbooks** According to Don Slager, editor of the UBS translation handbooks series (personal communication), current handbooks now coming out allow for more transliteration of the Biblical language words in the recognition of the growing competence among translators. He hopes that a new series of handbooks in the future will be geared to those with knowledge of Biblical languages<sup>21</sup>.

As the translator builds up his knowledge of Hebrew or Greek and applies it to translation, he will initially need **guidance in how to most efficiently use his knowledge for the translation task**, in accordance with the demands of time, finances, and quality. In fact, as Biblical language training becomes more and more an integrated part of the translation training program and resources, the translator will continue to build on his understanding of these languages and on his competence in translation.

### ***Concluding thoughts***

With proper training and tools, a translator can effectively use Greek and Hebrew knowledge in translation even when his knowledge of the languages is minimal. However, all other factors being equal, the more Hebrew or Greek a translator knows, the better his translation will be.

The key to encouraging orientation towards translating from Biblical languages is the development of resources that empower the translator in this direction, in English but especially in French and Portuguese for the continent of Africa. This is a large challenge, but if translation organizations move ahead with this goal in mind, one can envisage a revolution in the practice of Bible translation across the continent of Africa and beyond, a revolution that will produce Bible translations that will be treasured for many years.

At the same time, the use of the base – model text approach may need to be revisited in the light of these new developments in the Biblical languages and Bible translation practice.

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<sup>21</sup> Perhaps one intermediate solution could be to create an electronic version of the current series where original language expressions could show up in a hyper linked pop-up window.

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