

FINISHING TRANSLATION

Finishing Bibles is what we are about in UBS. It is our ultimate goal! We may inherit a translation project from another consultant and participate in finishing that project, or we may be granted the privilege of seeing and participating in the birth, the hard labor, and the completion of an entire Bible, ending in its joyful dedication¹. We are certainly excited to be involved in New Testament production, the creation of selections and various audio products, but there is nothing quite like the thrill of holding an entire completed Bible in our hands, and knowing that an entire people now has the entire Word of God in their mother tongue—even if, being realistic and humble, we know that this product will eventually need to be revised.

Finishing an entire Bible, however, takes more time and work than we ever imagine at the start of our labors.

TIME FRAMES

Translating an entire Bible can take between 7 and 20 years, and sometimes we inherit projects that have been in the pipeline for an even longer period. The longer a translation has been in the works, the harder it is to finish, due to problems of momentum and mind-set. However, with organization and optimism as his or her main tools, the “chef d’orchestre” (the TC!) can lead the product to a successful completion.

While structures are changing and hopefully improving, the TC should never underestimate the time it will take to finalize an entire Bible. At present, for inherited projects, we are spending one year to prepare the manuscript and at the very best, two years for the page-proofs to be received, read, corrected, the Bible printed and received². The TC and Bible Societies are the first who need to understand this is a very long process and they, likewise, need to make this clear to the “client”, the churches anxiously waiting, that the completion stage can be very long.

We cannot stress enough the fact that work needs to be done early on and throughout the duration of the project on all extra-translation exercises: writing of introductions, choices of cover, page prelims, key terms, glossaries, illustrations and all manuscript matters. This is the only way to cut down on last minute panic, which leads to poor choices and poor quality in the overall product.

¹ If you are a new TC, however, note that this can take a very long time and will not be a road without difficulty. Having begun work with UBS in 1985, my first “whole Bible + DCs” was the Moore Catholic Bible, dedicated in 1996. In the inevitable shuffling of projects which happens in our career as TC, I have “given over” several NTs and Bibles, which other TCs were able to complete. After 20 years, I will now see the completion of several Bibles which I have spent 15-20 years working on: Bobo Madare, Gulmancema, Jula... And I am, myself, involved in finishing other colleagues’ NTs and Bibles. It is very important to never lose sight of Paul’s principle: I planted the seed, Apollos watered the plant, but it was God who made the plant grow (1Cor 3.6).

² To be honest, some Bibles are only arriving 4-5 years after translation draft completion. But we fully expect new procedures to cut this time at least in half.

THE KEY PLAYERS

At the end of a project, there are several key players who must be present to work harmoniously together. These include the translation team, or, if this has been disbanded, because the big part of the drafting is over, the head translator, the manuscript examiner, and the TC. The ideal context for ending the translation is a team which is still up and functioning, especially with the revision or reading committee ready for consultation on last minute details. However, this is rarely, if ever, the case. The TC must identify and preserve a link with at least one person (mother tongue speaker from the translation team³) who can be available at any time, for last minute questions and problems. Bible Society general secretaries, church/mission sponsors, and translation management committees must be fully informed about the steps involved in finishing a Bible. As the completion of a project draws near and if unfortunately deadlines are not met with precision (as is very often the case), key players tend to tire, to become discouraged, and wonder if the end will ever come. The TC must set timely and realistic goals, so the key players can make it to the finish line with joy!

THE TC's JOB : orchestrating the people and the steps

As mentioned above, at the end of the day, it is the TC's job to orchestrate the final notes in the symphony. This takes much skill and organization, but even the most skilled tend to, as we say in French, "perdre les pédales" =have our feet confused on our bicycle pedals, especially if we are dealing with many projects at the same time. Checklists are a very good way to make it to the end.

Attached is one of my attempts at trying to coordinate and remember that I have checked all that needs to be done. But I will make some comments. Almost all of these revolve around one word: harmonization—not in the sense of one word, one translation, but in the sense that a Bible needs to be a "whole", from a theological, stylistic (translation style and formatting), and literary viewpoint.

Introductions: These should be started when translation starts. I personally request teams to write their introductions to each book of the Bible immediately after completing the translation of that book. This is because the translators have "soaked in" the structure and message of that book. They have assimilated the key themes and terms and so should be able to write something in their language which can tell the reader what the book is about, draw the reader into the book, comment on any cultural or historical fact that needs to be explained for the readers of the target culture, make an appropriate outline (if so desired), and highlight a key verse (if so desired).

After years of experience, now I usually set this rule with my teams: I will not check the book until they assure me they have done their introduction. I check the book and then, having gone through the book with them, I check their intro. Elements which need to be highlighted come to the forefront and we are usually able to improve on their efforts.

³ As we move away from missionary-directed translation, we still need to give a warning. This person for last minute details should never be an "expatriate". It is tempting to rely on an exegete or coordinator, oftentimes retired by this time, and no longer living in the country of the translation. All last minute decisions MUST be made on the ground, by the translation community. Expatriates can be involved through email or other means in participating in last minute discussions, but I maintain only one point of reference: the translation team in the country concerned. In the last 4 years, I have been involved in finishing 5 Bibles, and 4 out of 5 cases, it was possible to rely more on expatriates no longer living in the country than on the translation team. Despite problems of communication, war, etc., the choice is still clear: **the Bible belongs to the speech community** and not to the mission who has so faithfully supported the work both financially and logistically.

Writing intros is much, much harder for translators than translating. In French we do not have any model that "fits" the African mold, so I have made my own models (see attached), which have been very successful and which cut down enormously on translator and TC time.

Nevertheless, despite all these steps, at the end of a translation and before sending off the Bible, the TC must ensure that all the intros are done, that they are harmonious in style and content (Old, New, DCs), that they contain no doctrinal irregularities or irrelevant materials (see attached).

Illustrations Again, I instruct each team to begin marking where they want illustrations from Day 1. Where do we need a picture showing how wine is pressed, what is a yoke, etc.? If possible, pictures and picture styles should be chosen early on. Realistically, this usually happens towards the end. If possible, pictures should be harmonious in style, well spaced and acceptable and limited to UBS standards (100 for the whole Bible, 60 for the OT and 40 for the NT). Most teams prefer to have captions or at the very least references. I check every illustration and every caption! If done early on, these need to be reviewed at the end.

Preface, Prelims, Table of Contents, Covers Amazingly these items are always forgotten, left til the end, and done in haste. Try to counteract this tendency. What will the Bible be called? What color will the cover be? This is NOT a team decision, but a community one! Be on the outlook for inconsistencies and especially for last minute additions that are too personal or doctrinal. I once found my name in a Bible preface!

Imprimaturs are the "stamp of approval" of the Catholic church, which is printed inside any Catholic or inter-confessional Bible. It is the Bishop or Cardinal of the region from which the Bible comes who gives his permission for his name and this mark to be placed in any Catholic or inter-confessional version. Again, planning ahead is very important. Letters of request need to be written and signatures obtained, often at a distance. It goes without saying TCs must have met, been in close contact with and have gained the trust of these high church authorities to be able to obtain this permission.

Key terms The days are gone (or should be) when manuscript examiners used to check to see that the "Kingdom of God" is rendered everywhere in the same way. While acknowledging the difference between key terms that essentially stay the same ("angel", "covenant box") and those that often change according to context (like "Kingdom of God", "sin"...the list is very long!), time and discourse constraints (pronominalisation, shortened noun phrases, verbal-nominal interplays) do not make this a realistic goal. However, before finishing a Bible, the TC needs to ensure that all key terms in the Old and New Testament are well justified, well expressed and harmonious in the Bible as a whole. In our experience, though the team begins work on key terms from the very beginning, and hopefully consistently throughout the project, in conjunction with the community and qualified committees representing them, still at the very end, there are adjustments. It is only when all the actors have come out on the scene that translators can see the full picture. At the very end, each and every name for God seems to fall into place, as do words for prophet, apostle, angel, messenger (sometimes confused). Or suddenly the community realizes that transliterating the name for Yahweh is perhaps not the best solution. Thus as the Bible finally takes its final form, surprisingly, there will be last minute adjustments. The TC and main translator(s) will be tempted to make these changes to the manuscript at the Bible House in the capital or some other major city. Fight this temptation and have all these last minute changes brought to the knowledge of the community to be understood and approved by them.

Glossaries

Again, this element which needs to be in the works from Day 1, encounters team resistance from Day 1! Like introductions, these are among the most difficult items to compose because they need to be culture-specific and non-doctrinal in nature. Most translators feel incompetent and do not know where to turn to compose these items. Checking sessions are the best time to explain when glossary items are needed, how they should be written, etc. I check glossary items as I go (book by book, checking session by checking session). Nevertheless a final glossary check must be done and is always incredibly revealing! It reveals transliterations which should have been dealt with in another way and other inconsistencies.

MSS matters

Procedures are rapidly evolving as to finalizing manuscripts. Up til now, manuscript examiners attached to TCs (serving several countries) or Bible Societies carried out essential checks, including chapter-verse, punctuation, word lists, etc. Done correctly, manuscript checking is a long and detailed process. It is NOT the TC's job, but the TC's responsibility. Systems must be put in place whereby teams produce better manuscripts, which pass through the channels as laid out by UBS. For now, this means a manuscript examiner or person responsible who ensures that OVERALL, the spelling is consistent, titles, intros, footnotes, glossaries, illustration captions, and Bible texts are well keyed in. Each project is unique but the goal is the same: a consistent and well-keyed in manuscript.

We make use of special courier, telephone and email, to do all we can to cut costs and lessen time in manuscript examination. TCs have to be in constant contact with the key players: their MSS works, the translation team, exegetes, coordinators, who are in turn in contact with their revisors/readers in order to ensure that all changes are well-founded and acceptable to all. Oftentimes, as mentioned above, the team has disbanded or changed (!), the exegetes or coordinators have moved on to other countries, the TC is him/herself in another far-away location! Still a coherent manuscript must be prepared. Ideally (budget-wise and logistically) it is good for the MSS examiner to travel to the team, to finish up last minute queries. However, the network of communication between all the actors must be very tight, so that the TC is involved in any serious last minute changes.

Since procedures are changing it is hard to generalize. However, what must be kept in mind is that we need to budget time and money for complete Bible readings. This needs a minimum of two qualified people, normally those who can pick up errors, at least one with a history in the project, and a time frame of 3 months of full time work. Bible Societies, project sponsors, and translation teams must be informed of this crucial step, not just once at the beginning of the project but continually throughout the project. Everyone except the TC and MSS examiner seems to "jump the gun", expecting that the project to be over, once the translation per se (day by day drafting of verses) is over.

In MSS matters, we must move closer to the source, that is the translation team themselves. For the past ten years, it has been written in the bylaws of one society I work with that no translator will be hired unless s/he knows how to key in texts in mother tongue OR be willing to learn. With the exception of one case, this has been respected. No project has ever been started without at least one high quality computer, but we recommend one computer per translator, a procedure which has proved its worth. We are encouraging and have succeeded in some cases in having translators translate directly on the computer (a skill that is quite hard

for some to master). Over the past 20 years, we have had the luck to have expatriate exegetes and coordinators who could produce clean manuscripts, through knowledge of basic manuscript checks (chapter verse, word list). This job needs to transfer to team mother-tongue level, if this is not already the case. The fewer hands the MSS goes through to production, the better⁴.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

TC's struggle to assist Bible societies to set up translation projects. They travel to and fro, from project to workshop, putting in long hours, training, pushing for quality, oftentimes having to expand her or his role from technical advisor to that of encourager, referee, and at times peace-maker. We are not administrators but we must give our input into timing and budget. We are not editors but we are responsible for a manuscript. Finishing a Bible includes tasks none of us bargained or trained for. For a TC, it is a very costly undertaking, in terms of time, energy, and nerves.

Fore-warned is fore-armed! We need organizational skills and vision, but also perseverance, patience and prayer, as the psalmist said (the repetition there for a reason):

*Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,
and prosper for us the work of our hands--
O prosper the work of our hands!
(Psa 90.17 NRSV)*

Lynell Zogbo
Abidjan, April 15th, 2007

⁴ For the past 10 years, I have excluded the post of "keyer-in" from the translation team, because in our experience, this person has slowed down the process and introduced more errors. We only allow translators to "key in". This is not UBS policy but my personal one. On the other end, there has been some talk of reducing manuscript examiners. In my experience, the MSS examiner is a key to a well done manuscript and the only person who can effectively teach the team to produce a worthy product. In my opinion, a TC already has far too many other tasks (training, product development, ensuring translation quality) to step into this go-between, very technical role, so crucial to our ultimate goal.