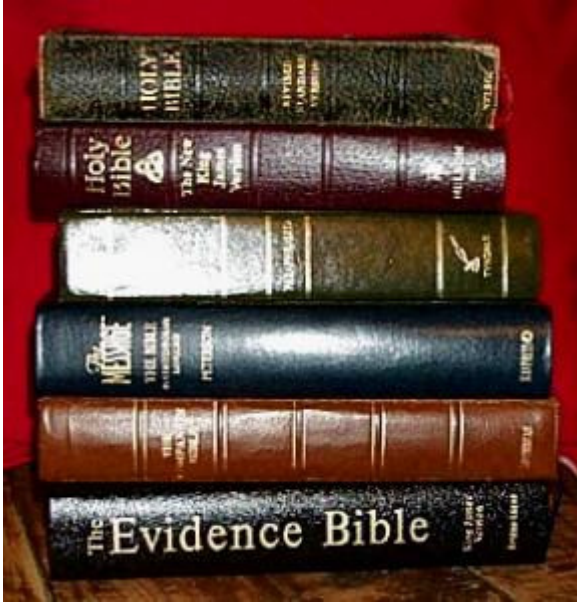


Lesson #2



UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSLATION

Italian saying: *traduttore traditore* roughly means “Translator is a traitor.”

Why do you think they said this? How might it be true? *This is true. No language is exactly equivalent to another language in word meanings, in sentence structure, in idioms, or in grammar. That’s why it is a challenge to translate.*

Translating involves first understanding the meaning of one language and then expressing that meaning as accurately as possible in another language. But language also has mood and connotation and unspoken and unwritten nuances that are very difficult to carry into another language. So those who hear a translation and then find out that the original had an additional nuance that the translator failed to capture feel “betrayed.”

“It loses something in the translation” we say. Why do we say that? How is that true? *This is just a further exploration of the previous question. See the above points. In addition consider that a translator may not have the full semantic range of meanings available to him in our language to capture those of another language. For example our word “love” has to cover Greek **eros**, **phileo**, and **agapaw**.*

“Es tut mir leid” the German says. Literally that translates, “It does me sorrow.” In English this means, “I’m sorry.” Is that an accurate translation? *We would say, “Yes!” That’s what the German meant. That may not be exactly what he said. That’s the challenge of translating. Just saying the same kinds of words isn’t going to provide the exact meaning. There often isn’t even exact correspondence between the words of two different languages.*

For the Leader: The following sentences show what happens when you take an English sentence, translate it into another language using an on-line translator, and then translate that language back into English. Read through the sentences with the class and then go through the discussion questions at the end.

Two Examples:

1) English: Gerald ran a red light and had the brass in the squad cars chasing him up and down the suburbs half the night. When the law finally caught up with him they threw the book at him and put him in the slammer. When he called his parents they were beside themselves and nearly stroked. Fortunately his brother was cool with it and checked him out of there and brought him back to his place.

Spanish back to English: Gerald ran a red light and had a bronze in the police cars chasing him around the mid-periphery of the night. When the law finally caught up with the book he released him and put him in jail. When he called his parents were astonished and touched almost. Fortunately his brother was well with him and check him out of there and brought him back to his place.

Chinese back to English: Gerald ran a red light, and a police car chasing him and the suburbs of brass half the night. When the law finally caught up with him, they threw in his book and his hell. When he told his parents, themselves and their side nearly touching. Fortunately, his brother, cooling, and check his presence, and brought him back to his place.

Russian back to English: Gerald ran a red light and was in command of brass cars chasing him up and down suburban part of the night. When the law finally caught up with him, they threw the book at him and put him in the Slammer. When he called his parents, they were furious and almost stroked. Fortunately, his brother was cool with it and checked it out and brought him back to his place.

2) English: The shy, diminutive girl distanced herself from the crowd when the skirmish began. She was horrified to have caused such a scene. The boisterous boy she had declined to date had gone off the deep end when she had resisted his advance. It was not her intent to hurt his feelings, she was just more a wall-flower than spring blossom when it came to boys. It did, however, peak her interest to see the more reserved boy defending her honor with the hot-headed fellow.

Spanish back to English: The shy girl, short distanced himself from the crowd when the skirmish began. She was horrified to cause a scene. The boisterous boy who had refused to date had gone through the walls when she had resisted his advances. He did not intend to hurt his feelings, was just over a wall flower blossoms in spring, when it comes to children. He did, however, the peak of interest to see the child more reserved defend his honor with fellow visionaries.

Chinese back to English: Shy, diminutive girl away from the crowd when his skirmishes began. She caused such a scene in horror. In the lively boy, she refused to shut down the date has ended, she has been deeply resistant to his advances. It was not her intention to hurt his feelings, she just spent more than spring flowering wall, when it came to the boy. It is, however, the peak to see more of her interest in the retention of boys and hot-headed guy defending her honor.

Russian back to English: A shy, diminutive woman distanced herself from the crowd when the shooting started. She was horrified, called a stenu.Shumnye boy, whom she refused to date had gone to the far end, when she resisted his advance. It was not her intention to hurt his feelings, she was just a wall-flower in spring bloom than when he came to the boys. This, however, the peak of its interest to see more reticent boy defending his honor with a hot guy.

What do you notice about the translations of the other languages back in to English?

- 1) *The pronoun genders are often mixed up.*
- 2) *Some of the idioms come out ridiculous.*
- 3) *The sentence word order is all scrambled.*
- 4) *Sometimes the translation says the opposite of what the original said.*
- 5) *Sometimes words that are meant figuratively are used literally.*
- 6) *Sometimes the language reverted to itself because there was no equivalent in English.*
- 7) *Some slang words are not used correctly, becoming more literal in translation.*

What does this tell you about the task of translating from one language into another? *It's not as simple as just matching up word for word what one language says with the words of another language and in the same order.*

Why is it not possible to simply translate word for word from one language into another? *As mentioned above, semantic choices, grammar rules, word order, sentence structure, and punctuation differences all make this impossible. Very few if any languages match up in all of these areas.*

Discussion

Luther said, "Because someone has the gift of languages and understands them, that does not enable him to turn one into the other and to translate well. Translating is a special grace and gift of God." (cited in Plass 1948:333).

Discuss. Why would Luther say this? What experiences was he drawing upon? *He had tried his hand at it. He knew what he was talking about after translating the Greek into German and then the Hebrew after that. He struggled to "make it speak German."*

Luther also said, “I have undertaken to translate the Bible into German. This was good for me; otherwise I might have died in the mistaken notion that I was a learned fellow” (Plass *ibid.*:105).

Discuss. Why would Luther say this? What does it show about Luther as he approached the task of translating? What does that say to us about translations which we use today? *Luther’s comment is expressing the difficulty with which a person translates from one language into another. It shows his humility and his awareness that he was not perfect as a translator. It reminds us that as we look at translations we shouldn’t expect that any one translation can do it all. Translating is difficult. Making sure that meaning comes through and yet trying to stay as close as possible to the original language is a real challenge. It will not do to simply feed the Greek and Hebrew into an on-line translator and out comes a perfect translation. There is much more at stake.*

Working with some passages:

1 Corinthians 7:39 (NA26)

³⁹ Γυνή δέδεταί ἐφ’ ὅσον χρόνον ζῆ ὁ ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς· ἐὰν δὲ κοιμηθῆ ὁ ἀνὴρ, ἐλευθέρα ἐστὶν ᾧ θέλει γαμηθῆναι, μόνον ἐν κυρίῳ.

Word for Word Translation:

A woman/wife is bound upon how much time the man/husband might live. But if ever the man/husband might fall asleep, free is she to whom she desires to be married—only in the Lord.

1 Corinthians 7:39 (NIV84)

A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.

1 Corinthians 7:39 (NIV11)

A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.

1 Corinthians 7:39 (ESV)

A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

1 Corinthians 7:39 (HCSB)

A wife is bound as long as her husband is living. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to anyone she wants—only in the Lord.

1 Corinthians 7:39 (NASB95)

A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

1 Corinthians 7:39 (AV)

The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.

1 Corinthians 7:39 (GW)

A married woman must remain with her husband as long as he lives. If her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but only if the man is a Christian.

1 Corinthians 7:39 (NLT)

A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but only if he loves the Lord.

1 Corinthians 7:39 (AAT)

A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If her husband dies, she's free to marry anyone she wants to, but it should be in the Lord.

Questions:

Would the word for word translation be a good one to use in an English Bible? Why or why not? *For one thing the word order is not good English. Also "fall asleep" might cause confusion to those who don't already know that the Bible writers, as Jesus himself, occasionally use this to speak of the death of a Christian.*

What does "only in the Lord" mean? *It could mean the man must be a believer. It could also mean that she marries with a clear understanding of the Lord's desire for marriage as a commitment and with the consciousness of the Lord's governance of marriage.*

Why in this case might the NIV84, the NIV11, the GW, and the NLT Bibles not be the best translation? Might this phrase mean what they say? Then why not translate that way? Is this translation wrong? Is it accurate? What judgment do the translators have to use?

The point is that we are not exactly sure what Paul is saying here. It could be that he was saying that the person she married must be a believer. But we aren't certain. In such cases it might be best, as Luther suggested, to stick closely to the original language even though this may not be the best English. The question then remains open and each person can be guided by the Holy Spirit and the rest of Scripture and the context to understand the phrase as best as possible, while accepting that someone else might understand it slightly differently as long as it doesn't go against any other part of God's Word.

Titus 2:11 (NA26)

¹¹ Ἐπεφάνη γὰρ ἡ χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ σωτήριος πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις

Word for Word Translation: For appeared the grace of God saving to all people.

Titus 2:11 (NIV84)

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.

Titus 2:11 (NIV11)

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.

Titus 2:11 (ESV)

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,

Titus 2:11 (NASB95)

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men,

Titus 2:11 (HCSB)

For the grace of God has appeared with salvation for all people,

Titus 2:11 (AV)

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

Titus 2:11 (GW)

After all, God's saving kindness has appeared for the benefit of all people.

Titus 2:11 (NLT)

For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people.

Titus 2:11 (AAT)

God has shown His grace. It brings salvation to all people...

Questions:

What differences do you notice in these translations? *Some use the word "men" and some say "all people." Some say that the grace appeared to all people and some say the salvation was for all people.*

The word *anthrōpos* in Greek most often refers to "mankind" or "people in general" rather than to a male, although it can sometimes be used to mean a male human being. Which do you think fits the context best here? So which is a better translation? *The context strongly suggests all people here so that seems to be the better translation.*

The word "saving" is an adjective in the Greek and modifies the word "grace." However, the question is what is the relationship between the noun and the adjective? In what way is grace

saving? Does it bring salvation? What do you think of the NIV's change to "offers" salvation in the 2011 revision? *Answers may vary. Opinions on this may differ. It isn't so black and white. "Offers" may carry a bit of the idea of not given and complete, but there if you want to take it. However, if you don't take "appeared" with "to all people" then there seems to be the need to add some word to the sentence in English to indicate the meaning—brings, offers, gives.*

Because the adjective in the Greek sentence is not in the "normal" position, but comes after the phrase "grace of God," some have taken the dative object (in English a prepositional phrase: "to all people") to go along with the adjective. Others have taken it to go along with the verb at the beginning of the sentence. These two possible translations result:

The grace of God which brings salvation to all people appeared.

The grace of God which brings salvation appeared to all people.

What is the difference in meaning? Could both be true? In the context does one fit better than the other? *Both could be true. God's grace "appeared" when Christ came. God's grace also brings salvation to all people (of course, who believe, but John 3:16 says, "Whoever believes..." God's grace is indeed "saving grace").*

Is either translation right or wrong? Is either more accurate than the other? *Essentially neither is wrong. A judgment call is going to have to be made. Neither will necessarily be more accurate.*

What must the translator do as he translates this passage? *He has to make a decision. It would be too cumbersome to translate both ways and include them both in the text. Even a footnote doesn't solve the issue. A judgment has to be made based on what the translator best feels the meaning of the sentence is in the context. Clearly the translators of the various translations made different judgment calls.*

Matthew 5:18 (NA26)

¹⁸ ἀμὴν γὰρ λέγω ὑμῖν· ἕως ἂν παρέλθῃ ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ, ἰῶτα ἐν ἡ μία κεραία οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου, ἕως ἂν πάντα γένηται.

Word for Word Translation: For truly I say to you, until whenever the heaven and the earth might pass away, one iota or one horn (hook) will surely not pass away from the law, until whenever all things might become.

Matthew 5:18 (NIV84)

I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

Matthew 5:18 (NIV11)

For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

Matthew 5:18 (ESV)

For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

Matthew 5:18 (NASB95)

“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

Matthew 5:18 (HCSB)

For I assure you: Until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass from the law until all things are accomplished.

Matthew 5:18 (AV)

For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

Matthew 5:18 (GW)

I can guarantee this truth: Until the earth and the heavens disappear, neither a period nor a comma will disappear from Moses' Teachings before everything has come true.

Matthew 5:18 (NLT)

I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God's law will disappear until its purpose is achieved.

Matthew 5:18 (AAT)

I tell you the truth, till heaven and earth pass away, not an *i* or the dot of an *i* of the Law will pass away till everything is done.

Questions:

A “yod” was a letter in the Hebrew alphabet which was very small—something like our apostrophe. Its name in Greek is “iota.” Some Hebrew letters also had little strokes or “horns” on them which completed the look of the letter. So Jesus is telling his Jewish audience that even these slightest features of the written Hebrew alphabet would not pass away from God's Old Testament revelation. What is the difficulty for a translator who is translating this passage into English? *English speakers may not know these Hebrew letter details and so might miss the meaning of the passage. The challenge for the English translator is to reproduce the thought in the language of his audience.*

Why is the translator *not* being inaccurate if he changes “iota” and “horn” into concepts that would more readily communicate to an English reader familiar with an English alphabet? *The meaning of the words is what is most important. The Hebrew letters will mean little to an English speaker. It is better to convert this (as all translations above do) to an English equivalent. The translator has to decide how best to do this. Some tried to describe what the Hebrew letters were like (small stroke of a pen). Others tried to substitute similar things in the English alphabet (dot) or grammar marks (period or comma). The point is the same, so the translation is accurate.*

Do any of these translations communicate better than another? If so, how?
Answers will vary.

Leader’s Note: You might mention again to the class that more information can be found at www.wels.net/translation.