

The total set of skills required to translate the Bible

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The paper [Essential Bible Translation Skills](#) presented a list of the skills that are deemed necessary to produce a good quality translation of the Bible. This paper fills in the details of that list.

1. Language and Bible skills

This set of skills has to do with the correct understanding of the source text. The skills in this set are: Knowledge of biblical languages; knowledge of the national language; biblical knowledge and exegetical skills.

1.1 Knowledge of biblical languages. At a minimal level, this skill enables one to make use of lexicons and other reference materials on biblical languages. This includes the ability to access the Biblical source texts and other resources available on *Paratext* and *Translator's Workplace*.

1.2 Knowledge of the national language. This skill focuses on those languages that will be used as a source text (for example, English or French). This skill implies understanding the national language well, plus a basic knowledge of its morphology, syntax and discourse structures. It also includes the ability to make use of commentaries, lexicons and other reference materials in that language.

1.3 Biblical knowledge. This includes a knowledge of the culture, physical environment and historical background of the Bible, along with the ability to access this kind of information in translation handbooks, Bible dictionaries, etc. It also includes a good understanding of the overall flow and unity of the purpose/message of the Bible.

1.4 Exegetical skills. This is the ability to discover and analyze the meaning of the source text. It also includes the ability to deal with issues related to the original manuscripts, and the ability to assess the specific merits of each major language translation used in the project.

2. Target language and culture skills

This set of skills has to do with a correct understanding of the target language and culture. The skills in this set are: Intuitive knowledge of the language and culture and analytical knowledge of the language and culture.

2.1 Intuitive knowledge of the language. This enables someone to confidently state, "this is how we express this naturally in our language." It is also the ability to express oneself naturally in different genres, using the appropriate language forms for each genre.

2.2 Intuitive knowledge of the target culture. This knowledge helps someone to know how the translated text will be interpreted through the cultural grid of the target audience.

2.3 Analytical knowledge of the language. This includes a solid knowledge of the linguistic details of the target language. It answers the question why a particular construction is a good

one. It also includes the provides answers to questions about the linguistic differences between the source language and the target language.¹

2.4 Analytical knowledge of the culture. This refers to a knowledge of anthropological principles in general, and a specific knowledge of the culture of the target audience in particular. Outsiders notice the way in which people behave more quickly than insiders, and this extra insight into behavior can be very helpful in Bible translation.²

3. Transfer skills

This set of skills has to do with the actual transfer of a text from one language to another; it includes both intuitive and analytical knowledge of translation principles.

3.1 An intuitive knowledge of translation principles. This is the native insight to recognize specific translation problems and how to deal with them. This knowledge is usually the result of being bilingual and having previous experience in translation or in interpreting between languages. Most people growing up in minority language communities tend to have considerable intuitive skill in how to make adjustments when switching to another language.

3.2 An analytical knowledge of translation principles. This includes the knowledge of the various types of translation problems and the translation strategies to handle each type of problem. It also includes understanding various translation theories and their strengths and weaknesses.

4. Skills related to producing an acceptable translation

This set of skills has to do with producing a translation that is acceptable to the target community. These include both intuitive as well as analytical knowledge of the culture, as well as communication and promotion skills.

4.1 Intuitive knowledge of the culture. This knowledge allows one to see how the translation project can be executed in such a way that the people will regard it as “their” project. It also includes understanding how to work together with the various factions in a society, including religious factions.

¹ Native speakers of a language will intuitively use the right constructions in speaking their language, but when they are translating, they will often be following the linguistic features of the source text, producing an un-natural translation. In the Kapingamarangi language for example, the MTTs working in this project were wondering what to do about the English past tense in narrative texts. In their language, future tense markers double as continuative aspect markers. They asked me, “The English has a past tense here, but it is more natural for us to use the future tense. What should we do?” My analytical knowledge of their grammar helped to demonstrate to them the validity of using this future tense-aspect marker, rather than a past tense marker, which would have changed a continuative aspect into a perfective one.

² In order to enter into a house on Tikopia, you have to crawl on hands and knees through the low entrances. Just before entering, you clap your feet together as a sign of good manners, much like we wipe our feet when entering a house. The Tikopian translator had correctly translated the meaning of Matthew 10:14 “And if some home or town will not welcome you or listen to you, then leave that place and shake the dust off your feet.” (TEV) but he had failed to notice that the average Tikopian reader would get a totally wrong meaning of “shaking the dust off your feet”, because of the cultural grid through which they view such an event. After this was pointed out to him, he was more than willing to add something to the effect of “to show their bad behavior.”

4.2 Analytical knowledge of the culture. This knowledge will aid us in designing a project that is organizationally appropriate to the target culture. It helps us to know which mechanisms foster acceptance of a new idea and which don't.

4.3 Communication and promotion skills. These skills will help us know how to promote the translation project both internally to the target audience, and externally to church leaders, publishers and other interested partners.

5. Administrative and technical skills

These skills are needed to process materials in an orderly way from the first draft to the ultimate publication of the Scriptures. Skills in this set are: Team building, training, management, administrative, keyboarding, computer and financial management.

5.1 Team building skills. Someone has to have this skill, so all the members of the team will work together harmoniously, with each member performing to the best of his or her ability, and each member being trained to as high a level as possible.

5.2 Training skills. This skill requires passing on knowledge to other members of the team. For example: the consultant trains the advisor, the advisor trains the translators and the translators train the community reviewers. All members of the team should be actively encouraged to pass on their skills.

5.3 Management skills. These are an essential part in translation planning and management as presented in this paper. The skills include:

- Setting out a clear plan for the translation project and keeping the translation process moving along at a good pace.
- Assessing the skills available in the translation team and determining how to train the various members to their highest potential.
- Accessing outside resources such as finances, computers and resource materials.

5.4 Administrative skills. These skills allow one to process materials through the various stages. All team members should be trained in those administrative aspects that will help them do their specific part of the work.

5.5 Keyboarding skills. This is the ability to type the translation into the computer, along with typing any special codes or scripts that may be needed for the language.

5.6 Computer skills. This includes the ability to use programs like *Paratext* and *Translator's Workplace* to their full potential, besides the basic ability to type, to file documents, to format and to print texts, and expertise in trouble shooting computer and printer problems.

5.7 Financial management skills. These skills involve handling the financial side of the project with integrity.

Conclusion

This list of skills provides some of the details that had been left out in the paper explaining how these skills work together in a translation project. Much more detail could be given, and any comments to that effect will be most welcome.