
Diglot New Testaments — Pros and cons¹

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Arguments against a diglot version focus on matters of cost, production time, and difficulty, and bulkiness versus ease of handling. Arguments for the diglot are mostly in the area of factors which will promote the use of the publication. The author relates all this to his specific language as he draws a conclusion for his particular situation.

The New Testament on which I have been working is now at press, and will shortly be published as a diglot. The village language and a common language translation of the national language appear on each page in parallel columns. The decision to publish in diglot form was reached only after considerable debate. I want to list some of the issues of that debate, and to ask for opinion and reaction from others on this topic.

Reasons for diglot

1. The inclusion of the national language is likely to extend the usefulness of the publication beyond the boundary of the dialect of the village language. Dialect studies of this language show that, as in most places, there are no sharp dialect boundaries, but rather the language varies as a continuum over a considerable geographical area. Where a grammatical form or lexical item is used that is not current in a particular area, readers from that area can use the national language parallel version to clarify any obscurity. In this way, they extend their knowledge of other dialects of their own language and the published version, which is necessarily in one particular dialect, will become more widely useable.
2. A major function of the diglot is to reassure the government and other authorities that the material published in the village language is not of a seditious nature. We have ourselves seen the effectiveness of this even in a country which is officially opposed to Christianity. On one occasion, when books in a village language were being brought into the country, the customs official was suspicious until the material was verbally translated for him into

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the national language. At this point, he approved the importation of the books, even though they were gospels.

3. Sociolinguistically, speakers of this minority language have very strong aspirations to identify with the national language and culture, and do not wish to exclude themselves from the national mainstream in any way. In the churches, likewise, there is a strong feeling that village believers should be part of the national church. Consequently, we judge that a diglot version will enhance the market appeal of the publication.
4. So far as we are aware, all of the churches with which village believers have any fellowship use the national language in their services. Thus, the provision of the national language, in parallel column to the village one, enhances the usefulness of the book to the believers in worship and Bible study in the churches.
5. For some years, we have felt personally that the major Scripture need of this nation is a national language version which is understandable to the ordinary villager. The common language translation used in our diglot New Testament has only just been published. By using this translation in parallel to the village language one, we are helping to promote its distribution and use.

Arguments against diglot

1. The time required to produce a diglot version is considerably greater during the printing phase. For our version, processed at the Dallas Printing Arts Department, the time needed was perhaps three or four times the standard for a monoglot version. This is a significant factor because of the scarcity of trained manpower in this vital technical side of corporation effort.
2. The cost of the diglot production is probably twice that of a monoglot one since, in fact, two New Testaments have to be processed through the computer.
3. The bulkiness of a diglot volume is another very important consideration. In a country like ours, where there is very little in the way of roads or motorized transport, colporteurs and evangelists have to take literature around by trekking long distances over rough terrain. Our diglot version used 1,039 pages, whereas a monoglot version of the same type and page size would have been about 690 pages, some two-thirds the weight and thickness of the diglot version. (The national language is printed in a smaller type size and narrower column than the village language.)

Summary

Arguments against a diglot version do focus on matters of time and cost, production time and difficulty, and bulkiness versus ease of handling. Arguments for the diglot are mostly in the area of factors which will promote or hinder the use of the publication. In our situation, the villagers' attitude to their own language and the national language, and the degree of identification desired with the national scene seemed to outweigh the opposing factors.

I have heard one other argument raised against publishing in diglot form, namely that our concern is exclusively the promotion of the vernacular Scriptures and not those in any national language version. Personally, I prefer to think that we are in the business of promoting the use of Scripture, in whatever language people choose to read and obey it. I also believe that it is a narrow and shortsighted assumption that our decisions about publication will influence the direction in which the language of village communities will develop as the years go by.