
On promoting vernacular Scriptures where a national language translation is venerated¹

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One of the major obstacles for the acceptance of an idiomatic translation of the Scriptures into a vernacular language where there is some form of established church is that often there is a strong veneration of a translation of the Scriptures in the national language. Even where the speakers of the vernacular are accustomed to having a spontaneous oral translation of the national language Scriptures in their church services, the idiomatic translations that are the goal of most projects may strike the vernacular speakers in the church as too free, at best, or as heresy, at worst. This was the situation in our translation project among the Asheninka Campa people of the central Peruvian jungle and foothills region. There are approximately 15,000 to 20,000 Asheninka. Around 40 percent of the population is monolingual, with the remainder varying in degrees of bilingualism in Spanish, to the point that around 5 percent of the population is comfortably fluent in both languages.

Though most of the Asheninka lay pastors we interacted with were not hostile toward the Asheninka translation of the Scriptures, they definitely conveyed that they thought we were very wide of the mark in the lack of correspondence between that translation and the Reina Valera Spanish version. And they would not use the Asheninka translation, though they were accustomed to explaining the Reina Valera Scriptures in Asheninka. There were no Asheninka hymns or choruses in use by the Church, and all other Church activities were carried out in Spanish.

We engaged in a number of activities to promote the acceptance of the vernacular translation, most of which were intended to educate the audience in translation principles, and in the benefits of an idiomatic translation. These activities, however, met with very limited success because of the staunch and almost mystical veneration of the national language translation.

My purpose in this note is to briefly describe an activity which proved to be a turning point in the acceptance of the idiomatic translation of the Scriptures into the Asheninka language. The publication of an interlinear Greek-Spanish New Testament (Lacueva 1984) gave me the impetus to attempt to get to the heart of the problem by educating the Asheninka lay pastors as to the nature of the venerated Spanish translation. As I compared the interlinear Greek-

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Spanish with the Reina Valera translation, I found that a number of the same types of translation adjustments had been made in that translation as we were making in the Asheninka translation. Of course, the Spanish translation tended much further toward literalness than is our aim. Nevertheless, once the Asheninka lay pastors learned that the same types of adjustments that we make in the Asheninka translation, are also made in the venerated Spanish translation, they were willing to accept the idiomatic Asheninka translation to a significantly greater degree.

Furthermore, they began to grasp the fact that Greek and Spanish are genetically related languages with a number of cognates and similar structures. We talked, for example, about other indigenous languages they knew to be related to Asheninka, to get across the idea of language relatedness. As they began to understand this, and the fact that the Asheninka language is unrelated to Greek and Spanish, and of a radically different typological structure, the lay pastors are now willing to allow for even more idiomaticity than is found in the Reina Valera. And as they feel freer to use the Asheninka translation, they enthusiastically point to verses they never understood in Spanish, but finally do understand from the Asheninka translation, confirming the validity of the translation.

To achieve this degree of acceptance, we staged several regional Translation Checking Seminars, for our translation of Philippians and Colossians. These epistles had already been approved for publication by our entity's internal consultant checks, but we wanted to let the lay pastors give their input before they were printed. In the seminars, we followed many of the activities outlined for Reviewers Courses in Perrin 1983. We also found it to be essential to involve the hierarchy of the existing church denomination in the planning of the seminars, and to have their respected representatives present during part of the seminars. These church leaders were able to help in the discussion with the lay pastors of some of the history of how the Scriptures came into being, and the context in which they were translated, much of which was unfamiliar to the lay pastors. The denominational leaders were also present to affirm what we were saying about the venerated Spanish version as compared to the Greek, so that the lay pastors could be confident we were not undermining what their church leaders thought.

In the introductory session at these seminars, we covered the following topics:

- The language situation in New Testament times (much as in Grimes 1987)
- Language relatedness and change over time and generations
- New Testament use of the Septuagint, as affirming Scripture translation
- Textual variation in New Testament manuscripts
- The Greek alphabet (The lay pastors really enjoyed this.)
- Introduction to interlinear translation

In the following session, we had each participant become accustomed to the interlinear Greek-Spanish translation. These men were, of course, somewhat bilingual in Spanish and, after the initial orientation, had little difficulty in understanding the concept of the interlinear translation.

Finally, we focused on the kinds of adjustments that were made in the translation of the Spanish Reina Valera version. We dealt with nine different types of adjustments, moving from simpler types, to the more complex. We grouped the adjustments into the following categories:

- Adjustments in the order of words within the phrase; for example, in Philippians 1:3 Greek (hereafter, Gk) has (with roughly literal English translation) ‘to God mine’ where Spanish (hereafter, Sp) has ‘to my God’; in Philippians 1:2 Gk has ‘father our’ where Sp has ‘our father’; in Colossians 4:6 Gk has ‘word your’, Sp has ‘your word’; in Colossians 4:9 Gk has ‘faithful and loved brother’, Sp has ‘loved and faithful brother’.
- Adjustments where a single Greek word is translated by two or more words in Spanish, for example, in Colossians 3:17 Gk *eucharistountes* is translated to Sp as ‘giving thanks’; in Colossians 3:25 Gk *proswpolempia* is translated to Sp as ‘respect of persons’; in Colossians 3:18 Gk *hypotasses* the is translated to Sp as ‘be subject’; in Colossians 1:25 *plerwsai* is translated to Sp as ‘so that I-announce completely’; in Colossians 2:20 Gk ‘dogmatizes the’ is translated to Sp as ‘you submit to precepts’.
- Adjustments where a noun or adjective in Greek is translated with a verb in Spanish, for example, in Philippians 2:27 Gk ‘death’ is translated as Sp ‘die’; in Colossians 1:24 Gk ‘in the sufferings’ is translated as Sp ‘in what I suffer’; in Colossians 4:12 Gk ‘will’ is translated as Sp ‘that which God wants’; in Colossians 4:11 Gk ‘collaborators’ is translated as Sp ‘help me’.
- Adjustments in the order of words within the sentence; for example, in Colossians 2:3 Gk has ‘in whom are hidden all the treasures of-the wisdom and knowledge hidden’ while Sp has ‘in whom are hidden all the treasures of the wisdom and of-the knowledge’; in Colossians 3:1 Gk has ‘the above look-for’ while Sp has ‘look-for the things from above’; in Colossians 4:10 Gk has ‘greets you Aristarchus the prison mate mine’ while Sp has ‘Aristarchus, my companion of prison you greets’.
- Adjustments where words which are only understood (that is, do not appear) in Greek, are made explicit in Spanish, for example: in Colossians 2:15 Gk is ‘triumphing over-them in it’ while Sp is ‘triumphing over them in the cross’; in Colossians 2:19 Gk is ‘the growth of God’ while Sp is ‘the growth which God gives’; Colossians 4:13 Gk is ‘those in Laodicea’ while Sp is ‘those that are in Laodicea’; Colossians 2:21 Sp adds ‘such as ...’ to a list of commands; Colossians 2:23 Sp adds ‘but ...’ to conjoin two clauses; Colossians 3:14 Gk is ‘over all of these, the love’ while Sp is ‘and over all these things dress with love’; Philippians 3:2 Gk is ‘mutilation’ while Sp is ‘mutilators of the body’; Philippians 2:10 Gk is ‘heavenlies’ while Sp is ‘of those that are in the heavens’.
- Adjustments where words in the Greek text are suppressed in the Spanish translation, for example: Colossians 2:1 Gk has ‘the face mine in the flesh’, while Sp has ‘my face’; Philippians 4:2 Gk has ‘Euodia I-ask and Syntyche I-ask’ while Sp has ‘I ask Euodia and Syntyche’.

- Adjustments whereby in different contexts the same Greek word is translated by different words in Spanish, for example: Gk apostolon in Philippians 2:25 is ‘messenger’, but in Colossians 2:1 is ‘apostle’; Gk kurio- in Colossians 3:22–4:1 is translated alternately as ‘Lord’, ‘God’, or ‘master’.
- Adjustments made in certain figures of speech, for example: Philippians 1:27 Gk has ‘with one soul’ where Sp has ‘unanimous’; Colossians 2:8 Gk has ‘the members the over the earth’ where Sp has ‘the earthly in you’; Colossians 3:22 Gk has ‘according-to flesh’ where Sp has ‘earthly’; Colossians 3:23 Gk has ‘do-it from soul’ where Sp has ‘do-it from heart’.
- Adjustments in which two or more clauses within a verse are significantly reordered in relation to each other, for example: in Philippians 1:19 Gk is ‘I-know for that this for-me will-result for liberation by-means-of the your prayer and provision of-the Spirit of Jesus-Christ, this will-result in my liberation’; in Colossians 3:10 Gk is ‘of-the renewed for knowledge according-to image of who-created him’ while Sp is ‘that which conforms to the image of-him who created is being renewed until the knowledge full’.

Following this presentation of adjustments made in the Reina Valera Spanish version, we discussed differences in the structure of Asheninka, Greek, and Spanish and discussed the general nature of the types of adjustments it would be necessary to make in an Asheninka translation. We discussed a number of figures of speech in Asheninka that are not well understood by Spanish speakers and vice versa. Finally, we reviewed the translation of Philippians and Colossians into Asheninka, eliciting feedback from the lay pastors, highlighting different types of adjustments made in the translation. After this the lay pastors were ready to endorse the translation.

In summary, in our translation project in the Asheninka language we were faced with resistance to the idiomatic translation in the vernacular, because of a strong attachment to an old Spanish translation. To assuage this resistance we attempted to teach translation principles to the Asheninka lay pastors and to discuss with them the benefits of idiomatic translation. But both kinds of activities met with little success. The key activity that opened the lay pastors to acceptance of the idiomatic translation was a series of seminars which educated them as to the source of the venerated Spanish version and the kinds of adjustments that were made in translating it from Greek to Spanish. The seminars were conducted with the participation of church leaders from the denomination of the lay pastors in order to avoid the appearance of undermining what the denomination had been teaching about the venerated Spanish version.

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