A Grammar for Translation Strategy

Andreas Joswig, SIL Global Grammar Services

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Abstract

For quite some time it has become apparent that a way needs to be found to give linguistic support to Bible Translation teams that don't have regular access to a linguist. This is especially important with regard to the target-language grammatical structures that impact BT the most – when the target language provides more or different grammatical choices than the source language of the translation.

A new strategy now focuses on the translation consultants, who usually still have some linguistic understanding, and who often provide the only regular point of contact of a translation team to the professional translation world. A specifically trained translation consultant can make the mother-tongue translators aware of their target language choices, and work alongside them to increasingly incorporate the best choices into the translation, by giving feedback on already translated texts. In order to do that, the consultant needs to have brief summaries of the grammatical features of the language that matter most for translation.

For the strategy this implies three main areas of focus:

1. Training translation consultants in the importance of target-language grammatical choices. This happens in special workshops with which we have recently had very encouraging first experiences.
2. Providing grammatical summaries for the languages that they consult with – for this we can employ the help of remote volunteer linguists, who also need to be trained for this job.
3. Provide full-scale grammars that by necessity need to be the basis for such summaries. For many languages this is a huge problem. We need to either recruit well-trained linguists to write such grammars, or attract academic linguists to write grammars for the languages where we see the biggest need.