"Who says it is a translation?" Issues of community ownership and global responsibility

¿Quién afirma que sea una traducción? Dificultades relacionadas con la propiedad comunitaria y la responsabilidad global

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Summary: We are living during the era of the greatest acceleration of Bible translation (BT) in history. It seems legitimate to raise the question within the BT community of practice: *is there an obligation to recognize all translations as legitimate translations*? While we are usually confident that if a translation is sponsored by a local community or denomination and published by a recognized BT agency, then we know that the BT program went through appropriate drafting and quality control protocols. But what about other situations, such as that of a single translator or a small group of individuals who work alone and without sponsorship? They intend to publish on their own and at the time when they say it is suitable. Or perhaps a mission agency declares unilaterally that a translation they sponsored is acceptable for a language community. In light of unprecedented acceleration, "Who says it's a translation?" is a relevant question for BT practice and process. We must find a shared understanding about how to discern a proper balance between community ownership of the task and global responsibility in reporting overall progress and the size of the remaining task.
Keywords: Bible Translation, Bible translation acceleration, Bible translation progress, global Bible translation progress database, Forum of Bible Agencies, Eugene Nida.
Resumen: Vivimos en una era en la que se ha producido la más grande aceleración de la historia de la traducción bíblica (TB). Por ello resulta muy legítimo que la comunidad de expertos en dicha traducción se plantee la siguiente pregunta: *¿existe la obligación de reconocer a todas estas traducciones como traducciones legítimas?* Si bien es cierto que, normalmente, si una traducción está patrocinada por una comunidad o denominación religiosa local y se llega a publicar por parte de una institución de TB acreditada, confiamos en que se ha llevado a cabo un proceso de traducción bíblica adecuado que haya incluido las necesarias revisiones y los debidos protocolos de control de calidad.

Pero, ¿qué ocurre en otras circunstancias, como por ejemplo un traductor solitario o un pequeño grupo de personas que trabajan solas y sin patrocinio? Su intención puede ser publicar por su cuenta y en el momento que consideren más apropiado. O quizás los miembros de una institución misionera declaran unilateralmente que una traducción por ellos patrocinada declaran que esta es aceptable para una determinada comunidad lingüística. A la luz de dicha aceleración sin precedentes, ¿quién dice que esto sea una traducción? Es una pregunta muy pertinente para la práctica y los procedimientos de traducción bíblica. Debemos llegar a un acuerdo sobre cómo discernir donde se ha de situar un equilibrio adecuado entre la propuesta propia de una comunidad religiosa y la responsabilidad global de conseguir que haya progresos y el tamaño de la tarea restante.
Palabras clave: Traducción bíblica, aceleración de la TB, progreso de la TB, base de datos del progreso global de la TB, Foro de Instituciones Bíblicas, Eugene Nida.

> *"It depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is."*
> *Former US President Bill Clinton*

INTRODUCTION: THE BIG PICTURE

What is the "Big Picture" regarding global Bible translation (BT) work?

We are living in a time period in which there is more BT work underway than ever before in history. The current number is at least 2712[1] languages which have something underway today.

Combine that with the fact that Scripture has been published in more languages than at any time in history. 3419[2] have something in print, that being either a full Bible, full New Testament (NT), full Old Testament (OT), or portions! The data on current work in progress, plus published work already in the hands of the public, leaves us astounded.

Our data on what is happening, and where, is better than ever, and it is collected across agencies, massaged, and managed on a daily basis.

It is not coincidental that this astounding acceleration comes at a time of unprecedented intentional and effective collaboration among agencies.

The recent launch of the Roviana Bible in Solomon Islands is one illustration of that kind of multi-agency collaboration. Roviana is one of the largest minority languages in the country, and for many decades has served as a major church language of the region. It was not a translation done within a vacuum, but within a true, multi-agency context. What we encounter in Roviana-like collaboration is now the norm more than the

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[1] From progress.Bible™. SNAPSHOT. October 2020.
[2] From progress.Bible™. SNAPSHOT. October 2020.

exception in the BT world.

More people are involved than ever before, including the rise during this decade of new seats at the table-of-decision by financial donors.

The brief data points I have presented come from trusted sources within the BT community of practice. These figures have been verified and accounted for from various channels of input. They reflect the confidence of the global community to represent accurately the work in language communities across the globe. The data reflects the unprecedented inter-connectedness of the wider BT community of practice.

In a research interview, I found the following to be a very insightful question from a member of data group leadership: "*How can you illuminate data without judgment?*" They went on to say, "*When publishing statistics, we need to know the assumptions behind those statistics*".

You might have guessed that while those assumptions perhaps are not universally agreed upon point by point, there is major consensus on what is acceptable. Somewhere in this is a statement about *legitimacy*, which leads to acceptance. Which leads to inclusion in the proper counts.

And so we wrestle with what qualifies a translation to get counted in "the global count"….we know about submissions from the SIL / UBS / PBT / LBT/ pick-your-agency *et al.* world as they go through this "verification of data process"…but what if translator Joe, Sally, Muhammed or Maria, living and working somewhere that few have ever been or heard of, "turns in a translation"—oh, and does that through the Paratext 'submission to DBL' feature—what do you do with that info? *How do we regard, and include (or not), and count (or not) the solo work which is underway —done either by an individual or an agency that is not actively seeking to be part of the community of practice?*

In light of the Big Picture, with these kinds of publishing numbers, demonstrated interest, and acceleration like we've never before seen, how do we respond on both a global level and local level to reports of new translations either anticipated or underway?

This paper is not an attempt to provide a definitive set of guidelines for determining whether or not a translation is legitimate. Nor is it an attempt to provide a prescriptive set of rules by which if one 'does' a translation, then surely it is one.

This paper is an attempt to raise the issues of responsible translation practice, outputs, recognition, and 'counting' within global and local communities. Basically, is there a standard by which the global BT community of practice recognizes a BT as legitimate, useful, and one which

meets the needs of the language community? And thus, as such, it would be counted among the fellowship? It is one thing to say, "Translation in BlaBla is either underway or finished!" (and BlaBla is the shortened name of a language group, Blablanga, on the island in the Pacific where we have worked…) It is another to ask: "Is the BlaBla translation one that is valid?" But wait a minute, I thought all translations are legitimate? It is a noble effort, no matter who does it! If you say it is not, then who are you to say that?

Is it a translation? Back to President Clinton, who famously replied to a particular question regarding certain of his behaviors with, "It depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is."

Probably the question is not, "is it a translation?" But the questions are:

Is it a legitimate translation?
Credible?
Commissioned?
Authorized?
Useful?
In use?

I believe these are fair questions. Hence this paper is presented to this community of practice. An overriding thesis and concern of mine is this: *Bible Translation is not done in a vacuum. And as such there is a community which has organically developed that is serving to define the acceptable space by which legitimate translation takes place.*

COMMON CONSENSUS ON LEGITIMACY

What is the common consensus on legitimacy? Is there an *imprimatur* that guides us? I am not using the term to reflect an official license by the Roman Catholic Church to print an ecclesiastical or religious book, but a common use of the term as "a person's acceptance or guarantee that something is of a good standard." In American consumerism, since 1909, The Good Housekeeping Magazine has offered its seal of approval for products. It actually had to do with warranty, but it is used now in common language as a "seal of approval". But generally, we sometimes use the term to rephrase the question: Is there a Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval for BT? What can we say about any kind of imprimatur for translation outputs?

The answer is yes, there is an imprimatur or seal of approval, and within the leading BT global community of practice, and this imprimatur is acquired in different ways, which include at least the following:

If there is an:

Agency imprimatur from an agency in the Forum of Bible Agencies International, or as it is commonly known, FOBAI (note: FOBAI is a group of a couple of dozen BT agencies which has agreed on certain standards for appropriate translation),

Consortium of Agencies imprimatur, such as agencies working together in a national forum of Bible agencies (and that being a group that perhaps has their own protocols)

Data repository imprimatur, such as the Global Bible Catalogue of United Bible Societies (UBS), or the Digital Bible Library of Every Tribe Every Nation, or SIL's Repository for Electronic Archiving and Publishing (REAP)—if it is in one or multiple of these (and noting that these are linked and talk to and relate to each other), then currently, it has got the imprimatur of legitimacy.

And thus we say these have been deemed to be called legitimate translations.

All of these means of imprimatur speak to starting, supporting, maintaining, finishing, publishing, distributing translations that are recognized as legitimate in terms of the process in which they were produced. They have the Seal of Approval, and when the information on the translation is passed from an agency to one of the data repositories (and again, recognizing that the major repositories are linked, either automatically or manually), for example, questions are not generally raised regarding legitimacy; what I call "the process channel" is approved as an active and legitimate means for inclusion.

That is why I could share, with confidence, the BT statistics in the introduction of this paper: various imprimaturs are in play, intersecting with each other, and all speaking to a common solution to a common problem. Namely, what is happening where, and for that which is happening, is it legitimate work or does something else need to be done in order to ensure legitimacy?

LEGITIMACY COMPARISONS

Before going further with specific BT-related analysis, we could considercross-disciplinary achievement or status and any related issues of

legitimacy. I have chosen two comparisons, one in academia and one in the wider church world.

When we say that so-and-so "has a doctorate degree", or, "is/has a PhD in XYZ discipline," as is heard in English, what are the ramifications, if any, of its legitimacy? Rightfully, as a point of discussion, a number of questions immediately come to mind:

Is this an earned degree?

Is an earned degree different from a degree honorarily granted?

If earned, from where? Same question for if granted *gratis*, from where and why?

What do we know about the institution? About its standing, reputation, accreditation (noting that the term accreditation means different things in different international settings and vocabularies)?

What will this doctoral degree allow the holder of it to do (teach at the university? What about at another university? Represent the granting university in certain settings? Use the 'degree authority', if you will, of the university in a business setting? Or, actually nothing at all?)

Here is my point: all doctoral degrees are not created equal. And I am assuming the readers of this article know this, *but they can be purchased*. How does one regard a doctoral degree that is from a diploma mill, or purchased, or one received for "life credit and experience"? In a short sentence, the research trail I followed on this topic on the Internet was astounding.

Most people will signal that a diploma mill degree is not legitimate for most purposes; if you want one in order to be called or self-identify as "Doctor so and so" then more power to you. But in terms of academic legitimacy, that approach is weighed in the scales and found wanting.

Anecdote: I was serving on a university board of trustees. In vetting one candidate for a senior academic leadership post, one astute board member who had spent many years in academic university leadership simply asked the president, "Where is the individual's doctoral degree from?" The answer came back with a specific university, which was a major, well-known, public university in the Midwestern US. And that was the end of the

discussion. That affiliation, that granting of PhD by that university was enough to say: this person is *legitimately* credentialed in the academic realm. We accept this individual's educational credentials. If the answer had been "Theological Seminary XYZ which operates out of a storefront in Toldeo, Ohio, you know the one, right next to the Hamburger Place", that would have generated more discussion. We may have come out in the same spot in terms of hiring or vetting; probably not, but we may have. But the University President's answer I referenced was decisive. What became evident to me as I stepped back and analyzed the situation was this: the experienced and highly credentialed member of the academic community of practice was satisfied with the candidate's qualification because he was confident *there is a protocol and a process in place for determining the legitimacy of the product*. In this case, this person's PhD degree was from a university recognized in the academy community of practice as legitimate…if that university granted this person that degree, then I am satisfied. *That is the imprimatur I need to make my decision.* I inherently trust the process.

Some might say, "Well that's just academic snobbery—a degree is a degree, and I know what I can do! Who's to say my degree is not sufficient? Who are you to say that a PhD from Harvard is better than ThD from Theological Seminary XYZ in Toledo where I got exceptional hands-on help and instruction; sure they aren't accredited like Harvard, but….?" My response is that degrees are not granted or recognized or legitimized in a vacuum; academic degrees, truly, for better or worse, are part of the academy—a wide-ranging term for this scholarly community of practice. An academic degree is not granted in a vacuum.

I find similar comparisons with ministerial ordination:

Consider the case of Sam Trujillo of Kennebunkport, Maine.

"I got ordained online by Universal Life Church (ULC) to start a ministry up here in Maine. $40 later, and my life was changed. [Then he makes a statement I have no idea the meaning of:] I'd recommend to anyone feeling lost."

In the ranks of the ordained of Universal Life Church, you would join a ministerial fellowship which includes not only the aforementioned Sam Trujillo, but Conan O'Brien, Sir Paul McCartney, Richard Branson, and my personal favorite in the list, Lady Gaga. Sorry, *Rev. Lady Gaga.*

For those who take ordination seriously, or are ordained themselves, sure this is good for a few laughs, and the need for restraint from some fairly decent jokes about all this. Just one quick one, when considering these ordained by ULC, I cannot help but think of the question posed to a potential missionary candidate: "How much Bible do you have?," and the classic answer was, "about four."

I think we can agree this is not a legitimate ordination, *as ordination is historically practiced and understood in the Christian faith.* It is the equivalent of the diploma mill—"you pays your money, you takes your ordination." Though it is not regulated, and there is not one prescribed path to ordination, generally speaking ordination is an involved, serious, often multi-year process of at least experience in ministry, plus training, mentoring, and examination. (And by the way, ULC does not say they are "Christian", they say they are a "non-profit, non-denominational religious organization whose members have open hearts and minds"; and that opens up all kinds of layers of discussion.)

My point is that the title "Reverend" means something in the global body of Christianity; I did not say it means the same to everybody, but it does mean something… the simple act of registration on a web page with a credit card payment is probably not enough to be legitimately recognized widely in the Christian community of faith.

While harder to identify and define the boundaries of acceptability in comparison to the doctoral degree of the academy, there is a process of imprimatur in the minds of many which comes into play concerning ordination. As with the granting of doctoral degrees, ordination is not granted in a vacuum.

Before going further, I am not suggesting that there are intentional, unscrupulous translation efforts underway; some may argue that, but that is not my approach today. I am simply trying to connect some dots between legitimate BT practice and other disciplines such as academia or ministerial recognition. Some will tout their degree granting institution as a vehicle of imprimatur for academic recognition; the same can be said for those excited about their ordination in the Universal Life Church. But are those really valid and legitimate outputs? I will leave it there as a kind of systems comparison.

The question before us is, "What is the legitimate process channel for Bible Translation imprimatur?"

There is a path to legitimacy in place. I have found that many seek, or rely on, this imprimatur of BT legitimacy.

There was the case of a major New Testament revision of an English translation in the early part of this century. That scenario became a very public problem. Why? The publisher announced that the Forum of Bible Agencies International (FOBAI) had "approved it," making it a "FOBAI approved translation." That is what their publicity said. Before going further, hear the language: if the trusted FOBAI group—a group that has agreed-upon protocols and process for legitimate and effective translation, if that group has said this is good, then we accept that imprimatur and hope that you will also [and you will buy the book!].

The problem was, the appeal to FOBAI was inappropriate, and FOBAI responded in kind. FOBAI does not approve any translations. It does not say any translation has an imprimatur *per se;* FOBAI is an association and consortium of agencies who have agreed to certain standards about appropriate processes and norms and guidelines—but any one member of the FOBAI group is free to publish whatever they want to.

A similar thing happened three years ago; a particular agency touted publicly that the translation consultants working with them and for them were "FOBAI approved". Again, in the language of this paper, they had *FOBAI imprimatur* regarding consultant training, experience and protocol. Ergo, their work then was 'accredited', and thus it is going to be fruitless for you to raise doubts about their work. The problem again was, and was pointed out to said agency, FOBAI does not approve any translation consultants.

On the other hand, some just want to get started, and if we do a translation, and a translation will come out the other end—say a new Portuguese translation done through Google Translate!—is that a translation? And by the way, *what is not to like about a new translation effort?!*

But that scenario helps to clarify the question: the question is not, "Is this a translation?" My answer to that, which will surprise some readers perhaps, is that "Yes, this is a translation." I did not say a good, bad or indifferent translation. I said it is a translation. Again, it depends on what the meaning of is, is. But I do not believe that is the right question. Just like the question is not, does Sally Sue have a doctoral degree? Or is Rev. Joe an ordained minister? The question in BT is, *"Is this a legitimately recognized translation, acceptable to and within the community of BT practice?"* It is not an existential question, if you will, of existence, it is actually a question of legitimacy.

One more anecdote to frame the issue: a man called me one day, sent to

me because of my academic leadership position in SIL. He had heard about the unreached language groups, groups without Scripture. He said to me something that I could scarcely believe, which I had only read about in Nida's work (which apparently happened to Nida as well): "If you will send me a dictionary and a grammar of one of these untranslated languages, I will do a translation for them at night from home. I'll have to clear it with my wife, but I think I've got the time…"

If we consider that this well-meaning brother did get hold of a dictionary and a grammar and did it at night (with his wife's permission!) for 10 years; would it be a translation? Perhaps. But again, that is not the right question. I doubt that any serious translation practitioner would accept this man's work as legitimate. So, it is not going to be a translation counted in the global registry, nor more importantly, will it be a translation acceptable to the local language community and help them to meet their spiritual needs. Why? *His work would bypass the established protocols and processes which give legitimacy to a product.*

Concerning the much-maligned translation of the Jehovah's Witnesses, the New World Translation: is it a translation? Usual answer: yes. Is it legitimate, noting the theological biases and the places where it smashes through the guard rails, then no, it is not.

Sometimes people will say, "Yes, there's a translation, but it's not a good translation! We need a new one!" What are they really saying? I do not believe they are saying, "We need a translation, something, anything! Let's just get started!" But I believe they are saying, "We need a *legitimate* translation! Can you help us?!" If I can convince you that my protocols and processes lead to a great product, then maybe you will look to me for help…

For the local community, I think there is a misconception: that is, if we know that someone in the community wants it, it must be legitimate and something we need to not only support but recognize as legitimate. After all, is this work not all about the language speakers or language community? Are they not the ones who have the final say about what is good or not, or *what is or is not*? Should the very fact that someone in some language somewhere has taken initiative to start not be considered, is that not grounds for including said translation in a global data repository, and thus coming under that imprimatur?

Consider the following scenario: a church leader came to me at our SIL office in Solomon Islands to inquire about translation work in his language. The NT had been finished in a related language (the one I had worked in as part of a team, sponsored by the Anglican Diocese). He made it very clear

that they needed one. He mentioned that there was one underway, but one of the leaders of the language group who was doing it was not letting anyone see his work or read it, much less check it for accuracy, clarity and naturalness. The man had shared it, at least some of it, with his family and "they liked it." So, he was pressing on to "translate the Bible." But this church leader said very clearly to me, "We can't do anything new until this man dies. But when he does, I'm coming to see you about how to get SIL involved in starting a translation project." I took that to mean involved in a 'legitimate' and 'recognized' translation project. Some time later, he came to see me, announcing, "The man I told you about? He has died…so how do we get started?" A footnote to the story: there have been dozens of people involved in a vibrant community-based program and the NT is approaching publication.

Some say the only community that really matters is the "local" community. Well, that is hard to define, especially when the "local community" can number in the millions…and crosses centuries of tradition, denominations, theology, opinions, outside agencies and inside church "power". (My fear is that too often we use the term "local language" or "language group" to refer to a distinct, homogenous minority language group that numbers from a few hundred to several thousand, functioning within a self-sustaining container of activity and society—and then those who hold that perspective judge all languages on that same scale, though the scales are not the same.) My point is that "language community" can in fact number in the millions—and the more the hairier, in terms of complexity, agreements, conflict resolution, key terms, government concerns, etc.

Translations which are vetted and scrutinized as to legitimacy are not about the *people* who are involved; the *discussion is about the process of legitimacy*. People should not take this question personally! There is an internationally recognized community of practice—I did not say international law-making body in regards to a translation; I did not say approving body; I did not say accrediting body; I said community of practice. And translations are vetted against that registry and against those standards and process.

What do we, in the global community of practice (including translation practitioners, translation publishers, translation distributors, translation financial donors), recognize as legitimate process for translation production and publication? *Again, translation is not done in a vacuum. It is done in community.*

QUESTIONS FOR LEGITIMACY, ESPECIALLY AS THEY RELATE TO THE DATA REPOSITORY

In the introduction, I mentioned the question, *How can you illuminate data without judgment?* And, *When publishing statistics we need to know the assumptions behind those statistics.*

The answers come back to *legitimacy* and *imprimatur*.

Just a mention: Financial givers and donors give to clarity; they want to know that if they are giving to a translation, then that translation meets certain agreed-upon standards within the community. The FOBAI standards are one benchmark, agreed upon by the agencies doing translation. That is a great thing. And one in which they express confidence in the process.

Some questions for sorting through the legitimacy question:

a) Who did it? Who published it/is publishing it?

b) Was/were the person(people) endorsed or approved by a church or governing body? (or if one is working in a persecuted area, and of course there are many such in the world today, what does the network of believers say about it, should there be one?)

c) Does the church say, "This is our translation!"? Does "the church" (and that is a slippery term in itself, that is, it can be hard to define) recognize it as sufficient and useful?

d) What is the general and specific feedback regarding the translation?

Interestingly, a scenario and request were presented to a leadership group (of which I was a part for some years): "Can you please take action to remove a certain major language translation from the main data repository, the Digital Bible Library (DBL)? We do not think it's legitimate!" How do we deal with this feedback issue?

e) What is the revision history, if any? (i.e. which of the versions in the revision history is 'the one'?)

f) Is there a denominational bias shown in the translation?

g) Does it show theological bias? Example: what if in every case *pneuma* or *ruach* is mentioned, the team insists on using spirit which equals spirit, *minus holy*, i.e. human spirit. That is going to miss the mark in a lot of places…but if it does, will it be labeled as a "translation"? Is it enough that the reply will be "that's how they translated it"? In living with that answer, will that disqualify it from being a translation…and on the global level, how does it count? Is it in the DBL or not?

h) Has it been *done in secrecy, privacy,* or perhaps a better word, done in *isolation*—and the translator(s) will not let it be read, critiqued, judged? That is a red flag.

Then, I submit to you that there are perhaps a number of things we do not normally ask, perhaps because we cannot get our heads around them. I raise those in the next section.

WHERE DO THESE QUESTIONS FIT IN THE LEGITIMACY DISCUSSION?

a) *What was the source text*? In English, (a language that has had more than 500 published translations since the time of John Wycliffe), what Greek text do we use? Does that ever enter into discussion? (I was once blasted in phone call for perhaps 30 minutes over not insisting that all SIL-involved translations were using the Textus Receptus manuscript tradition—thus all SIL translations were discredited in the caller's eyes.)

b) *How much time was involved in the production?* (one group promotes on their website that this process of an entire NT can be done in 'weeks'). For database inclusion we do not ask how much time did it take. And longer does not mean better; shorter does not necessarily mean 'worse'; but there are some legitimate time-related numbers somewhere which reflect appropriate training and drafting and checking minimums in order to reach a 'legitimate' translation. There is a time frame related to what I call a 'valid output point' somewhere that speaks to legitimacy. As with earning the PhD degree, the academic community does not recognize doctoral degrees completed within 9 months—think of coursework, qualifying exams, comprehensive exams, thesis research, thesis writing, thesis rewriting, thesis rewriting. We do not know what the actual minimum is for BT work; and

there is no maximum necessarily. But we do know upon inspection, there is some kind of inherent time minimum that speaks to legitimacy within the BT community, as there is within the academic community.

c) *What does the translator call it?* Ken Taylor called the Living Bible a paraphrase, and stated that right on the cover as such … Eugene Peterson said of *The Message*, if you want a proper translation, there are plenty of those; this is not that.

d) *Is a portion regarded as an adequate translation product for the long haul?* What if the language group decision maker wants Mark, 1 Peter, and Proverbs, and that is it, and they will use a national language version for the rest. Does that count as a 'translation'? Or to put this on another level of question: is the translation need met?

e) *Where do stories fit in as* an overall scripture-product approach? Are these regarded by the language group members/leaders as 'enough' and as such, 'legitimate'?

f) Where do *Oral approaches fit, such as the use of Render software*? Is the translation product now in use and language community need is met?

g) *Drafts done with Adapt-It software*, and never have any other work done; is it a 'finished and acceptable translation for a language community'? Is it worthy of the DBL?

h) How do we represent the work of a priest translating into his local language without any governing body of support?

And I cannot help but mention,

i) Where does Nida's thinking come in, which I have called the Nida Challenge. He said the ideal would be 3 translations for each language group—a common language one, another acceptable for liturgical reading and worship, and another that was literary (one that really called upon the creative literary minds of the language group to make the translation "sing"). How do we discern those categories within our repositories? Do we? Or should we?

EXPANDING THE PROCESS OF LEGITIMACY?

As we think of the current path to recognizing and representing work as legitimate work on the global stage, we who are part of that system certainly see it as a valid notion. It is valid in order to understand the importance of accurate data so that we will all have access to an accurate Big Picture. It is important to represent that Picture faithfully to organizations who are assigning workers to assist or lead, and to financial donors who are generously supporting.

But let me venture to ask:

Is the notion of legitimacy in BT, as discussed in this paper, a valid one?

If so, is the current path to legitimacy a valid path?

What are the anticipations, if any, regarding a modified and improved path?

One historical precedent on that: In the very early days, The British and Foreign Bible Society required translators working in "foreign places" to translate their work back into English and send that back translation to an office in England, where a Biblical expert would "check" the work for accuracy. This was a protocol in place to ensure a *legitimate* translation. Nothing wrong with that as a motivation. Obviously, that has now changed. The journey is modified. I found the same in place in the early and mid-1990s with Scripture Gift Mission (SGM, now LifeWords) and the booklets which we were translating and submitting to them for publication in dozens of languages in SIL; the back-translated text originally had to be submitted to their office for vetting and approval. But through foundational relational efforts of my highly esteemed predecessor, Dr Katy Barnwell, that was changed to: if SIL consultants say it's good, then we in SGM accept that! They changed their path of validation and legitimacy. The basis for their imprimatur was adjusted as the journey continued. *Basically, will there be new inputs to give eventual validation to new outputs?*

How can we help those who are flying solo to understand the flight path of the wider community? What will be the response of the community, upon

the solo learning of the path, when the solo says, "No thanks, I don't want to be part of that", but yet we come to grips with the reality that they are in fact doing work towards a common goal?

Perhaps a better question is: how open is the community to incorporating the work of the solo? And, *how open is the wider community to learning from the solo?*

As compared to rather wide paths for obtaining doctoral degrees or ministry ordination, are there any lines in the sand, so to speak, which the wider BT community is just not willing to cross, because if they were to do so, there is a fear of misrepresenting the Big Pictures of progress and need? Plus, even more importantly, knowingly (at least to them) they would be participating in a process that does not yield a legitimate translation with and for the language community. *Thus, what are the non-negotiables for legitimacy?* We know what is currently in place from a global perspective; will those non-negotiables continue to hold up? Perhaps a forum will arise to specifically address this.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

One observation from me over significant years in this enterprise and endeavor, is that too often *Bible translation work has been reduced to a destination rather than understood as a journey*. The 'remaining languages' do not just represent a number (that we are trying to see get to zero). That is certainly noble, but it is not the whole story. Is this ever a work that will be truly finished?

The "remaining languages" represent people who need the Word— people who are on a life journey. Those who need the Word are even those who (might) have had the Word in some form, whether archaic, or in a few pieces, or in an inadequate approach. The journey involves and includes large numbers of players and participants with many different needs and in contexts of many scenarios. The acquisition of legitimacy is part of the journey. Those who belong to the "remaining languages" speak into the journey.

Following on from that, the journey aspect is that of a journey *taken within community, even if that journey is not identical for any two groups.*

But currently there are agreed-upon standards and protocols which are in place to provide confidence to those who participate in and assist with the journey, helping them to view their destination track as legitimate. And we do not need to fear or run from the basic question raised today. It is highly appropriate that we continue to consider questions of legitimacy in Bible translation efforts, and be open to strengthening protocols, developing new boundaries, and incorporating new participants.

The journey is just that, a journey, and one that adapts to the terrain.

How do we respond to the terrain, and even unknown and unchartered parts of the path ahead in order to achieve and ensure legitimacy?

That is a question for the esteemed BT community of practice, a community that is highly committed to and sold out to the importance of the journey. A journey that leads to sufficient, legitimate, useful, and credible translations. It is a journey worth taking.

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