

Translators' News

Institute for Bible Translation

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What's it like to translate the Bible?

"This book is alive, it is God Himself speaking to us from its pages. It doesn't take long before a person working on Bible translation feels the presence of God in his soul. It is evident that God's Word is full of life."

Bible translation is a complicated process that no one can do totally alone. In this Newsletter you'll read about all the various aspects of the exciting, interesting, and challenging work known as Bible Translation.

When Institute for Bible Translation organizes translation in a language of the former Soviet Union, it is necessary to not only find a translator, but to find an entire translation team. This team is made up of one or more *translators*, whose mother tongue is the language into which they translate, an *exegetical checker*, who compares the translation with the original text, a *philological editor*, who is an expert in the language, a *stylistic checker*, a *tester*, a *translation consultant*, and a *project coordinator*. First, the manuscript passes through various stages of checks, edits, and reviews. The text is then comprehension tested by a random selection of readers from the general population. And, at the very end, a highly qualified translation consultant makes the final review and approves the text for printing. It takes from 5 to 10 years to translate the New Testament alone! Thus, Bible translation in the former Soviet Union is a team effort that involves Institute for Bible Translation, Wycliffe Bible Translators, the United Bible Societies, local Bible Societies and Churches.

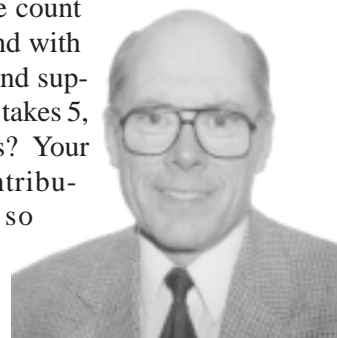
Organizing seminars and courses for translators and checkers is one of IBT's foremost responsibilities. These seminars train team

Translators, checkers, reviewers and you!

In this issue of Translators' News, we described the day-to-day activities in the time-consuming process of Bible translation. This work is not completed in a day! Far from it. Many projects take from 5-10 years, or even longer. Neither is the team put together by an easy or haphazard process. After all, we are working with the Holy Word of God. Translators, checkers, reviewers and readers are people with problems like you and I. They have families, challenges, needs, and cultural boundaries that affect their work and progress. Add to this the spiritual aspect of working with God's Word in a world where another power is active. Opposition is often a very real hindrance.

There is no doubt that God wants His Word to go out to the Tatars, Tuvins and Kalmyks who are receiving the New Testament for the first time, and to the Georgians receiving a new, complete Bible. These people will read about Jesus in their mother tongue. Fifteen people groups are scheduled to receive the New Testament by 2005! Imagine their joy when they hold The Book in their hands for the first time. Can we count on you to stand with us in prayer and support, even if it takes 5, 10 or 15 years? Your personal contributions mean so much.

Thank you!



Curt Gustafsson
President of IBT North America



"I have prayed to God for many years that the Bible would be available in the Khakass language. Now my daughter is a part of the Bible translation team," says this Khakass woman.

members in the tasks and processes involved in Bible translation. It is a constant challenge to find people, i.e. Bible translators, who not only speak their native language but who are also educated in theology, as well as in Hebrew and Greek. Therefore, training is necessary.

Misunderstanding Bible translation

We were pleased to have three Siberian individuals with us at the seminar for beginning translators in Moscow in December, 2000. They represented a language in which we had long desired to begin a translation of the Bible. They were very excited to begin working on the translation of their language. Ivan, a university professor would translate, Sasha, also a teacher, would check the use of language, and Igor, a historian, would eventually test the translation among his people. At the seminar they learned the basics of Bible translation. "This seminar has been very important for us," said Sasha after the course. "Now we finally understand what the Bible is all about. I read the Old Testament before, but I did not understand much of it, but now I do, and I know how to begin the process of translation."

Together with Natasha, the project coordinator, a contract was drawn up and Ivan agreed to read through certain books and to do a trial translation of a few chapters from the Gospel of Mark. When he was finished with this trial translation, the exegetical checker would meet with him, review his translation, and give him advice for the continued translation process.

By June it was time for another Seminar in the Siberian city of Abakan together with the teams working on the

related languages of Altai, Tuvin, Khakass, and Shor. Everyone was present except Ivan. Where was he? He wasn't available to answer phonecalls. After the Seminar, he was finally reached by the exegetical checker who traveled to his home to find him. It turned out that he didn't read the recommended literature, had already completed translation of six chapters of Mark, and was angry and irritated that he had not received any compensation from IBT for all his work.

"We had a long conversation, trying to solve all the problems," says the checker. "It was a misunderstanding. A breakdown in communication had occurred. We continued by reviewing the six chapters translated by Ivan. That exposed the weaknesses in his translation which had resulted from his lack of experience. Much of the translation was done literally from the Russian text, with his own interpretation, and not considering the true meaning of the original text."

"A practice run"

"To my great surprise," the checker continues, "Ivan readily accepted my comments and suggestions for improving his translation and stated that he is a person who often learns best from his mistakes." "We decided that he would continue working on a first draft of the Gospel of Mark, and we would meet again in mid-September. We agreed to consider this first translation as a practice run. I believe strongly that Ivan is now aware of the seriousness of the translation work, and there is hope for excellent progress!"

What word will we use?

How can we best translate the word "Lord" in Altai?

Finding the correct terms for words and expressions such as "Lord", "bless", "baptize", "grace" and "mercy" can be extremely difficult and may even slow down the entire



Darima translates the New Testament into the Buryat language



Testing the Altai New Testament's readability with local Altai villagers

translation process. There has been an ongoing struggle over the proper translation of the word “Lord” in Altai. The believers have long felt that the word previously used in the gospels of Mark and Luke was inappropriate in their culture. Now, the whole New Testament is being prepared, and it is of utmost importance to find the right word that will be acceptable to all Altai Christians. Andrei, translation consultant for the Altai project, has just returned from a visit to Gorno-Altai. He reports: “We returned to a term suggested by the translator eight years ago, which was then discarded, but is now well accepted by all Protestants in the area. There is also good indication that the word is acceptable to the Orthodox believers as well.”

“To carry out to the prairie”

The Buryat translator, Darima, says: “You encounter so many various types of problems in translation work. Actually it is not strange, since there are many differences between Palestinian culture at the time of Jesus’ life on earth, and the culture of today’s Buryat people. Not only are there differences in language but also of people’s perception of the world. Take for example the burial customs of the Jews and Buryats, which I have analyzed. The Buryat term for ‘bury’, literally means ‘to carry out to the steppe or prairie’—since that was the burial custom in the Shaman culture. In the translation of the gospels I tried to find a better term, that would clearly convey to the reader that Jesus’ body was not merely left out on the prairie.”

How is a translation tested?

After the Bible text is translated and carefully checked both exegetically and in use of language and expression, it is necessary to test it with people who will read it for the first time in their mother tongue. One person from the team will travel to a typical village and ask various people to read the Bible text and answer questions about the con-

tent. In the Spring of 2001 a seminar was held to help team members prepare for such testing. They learned what type of questions to ask, and what kind of contacts to make in order to gain the cooperation of the local readers.

Lena is right now in the process of testing the Book of Proverbs in the Tuvin language. “The job is very interesting,” she says. “I meet so many different types of people. Sometimes I work with people from the church—they know exactly what I need from them, and it’s very quick and easy. Sometimes I take the Bible text out to a local village, where things move more slowly! First we have to drink tea, then I have to tell the people about my family—my parents’ health, what my brothers and sisters are doing, and how my tomatoes are growing. Maybe after that we can discuss a verse or two. Then it’s time for another cup of tea and a discussion about the weather before we can return to reviewing the text. It can be time consuming to review texts with people. Nevertheless, it is well worth the effort, very interesting and especially important to take time to communicate. What I learned last Spring at the seminar has been very useful as I have worked on testing the Bible texts.”

How are the translators affected?

“This book is alive”

“It is my great desire that this book not be left standing on someone’s bookshelf but that it will be read, and that people will come to know God,” says the Buryat translator Darima. “I had, of course, read the Bible in Russian before beginning the translation project, even though I did not understand much of it. I felt it was impossible to understand Russian or European art and literature without knowing something about the Bible. However, as I began working on the translation project I met Christians who also were translating the Bible in various languages. Through talking with them, it became clear to me that this book is alive. God Himself speaks to us from its pages. It



IBT organizes regular Seminars for translators and text-checkers

doesn't take long before a person working on Bible translation feels the presence of God in his soul. It is evident that God's Word is full of life."

"It gives meaning to my life"

"Bible translation is a way to preserve our language and culture," says another translator. "But more important than that is the fact that through the Bible our faith grows. After the Soviet Union broke apart there was confusion and people did not know which direction to take. There were no longer any heroes or any applicable ideology. Only God can lead to the true and living way. Our people desperately need to find their way to faith in the Living God. I'm so thankful to God for the opportunity to work with Bible translation. Times are difficult, and many are complaining, but deep inside I feel a joy, being able to sit and think about the truths in the Bible texts. It gives meaning to my life."

Barbro Lindstrom



These Tuviv children will receive the Children's Bible in their language just in time for Christmas!

CURRENT PROJECT

In this newsletter we have focused on Altai, Tuviv, Khakass, Shor and Buryat people. All of them live in Southern Siberia, and they number between 17,000 (Shor) and 500,000 (Buryat). Intensive Bible translation is ongoing in all of the languages.

During this past year we have unexpectedly been able to restart translation in the Shor language! Nothing has been budgeted for this project—therefore the translation in Shor is in great need financially.

You can help the Shor people and others with your gift for Bible translation at this time!

Institute for Bible Translation

Institute for Bible Translation was founded in Stockholm, Sweden in 1973, its main task being to publish Bibles for "non-Slavic peoples in Slavic countries." In the CIS 130 different languages are spoken. Since then we have worked on Bible translation in more than 80 of these languages. We have printed the Bible or portions of it in about 50 languages, including two first whole Bibles, in Moldavian and Tajik, and 13 New Testaments. We welcome your support for our continuing efforts in bringing the Word to those in the former Soviet nations. All peoples of the world should have the Bible available in their native language.

We sincerely invite you to support Bible translation work.

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