

The Bible and Translation
USC Academic Bible Study
Links to resources: jlharmon.com/usc-abs

Week 1: How? How does translation work in general? How is Bible translation different/the same?

Week 2: Which? Which translation should I choose? Which translation is best for my specific purpose?

How does translation work?

Translator as a lens: Translators try to make the original text clear and accurate in the new language, but there are still distortions.

Where can distortion occur?

- Culture
- Genre
- Language specific issues

How do translators clear up distortions?

- Prioritize one aspect (eg. clarity) over another (eg. word-level accuracy)
- Translator's notes
- *Different translations for different uses*

Question: What do we think Bible translators should strive for? Accuracy at the word level? Clear modern language? Keeping genres the same?

Bible-specific translation issues

How do we know what words mean?

- Ask a speaker...but we can't do that with Biblical Hebrew or Koine Greek
- Root words? Can give us some idea of the range of meanings a word can have
- Etymology? Where words come from...what words *used to* mean
- Cognate languages? Pretty much like etymology: where words come from, but not what they mean now (or even meant then)
- **Context: find examples and information about the word based on how it is used.**
- Poetry: Biblical poetry often makes use of synonyms or related words that give us some idea of a word's meaning.

Who actually wrote the stuff?

- By looking at redundancies, contradictions, and changes in vocabulary or style (or, as we learned from Crossan, changes in message), we can (try to) figure out if the passage was written by the person whose name is at the top of the page.
- *Documentary hypothesis* – The Pentateuch is a compilation of different sources (cf. Creation narrative in Gen 1 vs 2)
- *Q source*: Matthew and Luke copied from Mark, and also from a lost source, now called Q

- Paul didn't write all of the letters attributed to him. 1/2 Timothy and Titus are considered pseudepigraphical.

Question: Should we care if the Biblical texts were written by the people it says they are?

What's up with manuscripts?

- Changes, corruptions, additions, erasures all happen over the centuries.
- *Textual criticism* attempts to find the errors and see what the original text was.
- In general though, **the meaning of the text is not significantly changed by these errors.**
- *Masoretic text* – the “authoritative” version of the Hebrew scriptures
- *Dead Sea Scrolls* – Hebrew scrolls with Biblical and non-Biblical texts, written from 408BC to 318AD
- *Septuagint* – translation of the Hebrew scriptures into Koine Greek, quoted by NT authors, copies found in the Dead Sea Scrolls
- *Received text* – Greek New Testament version, has the same status as the Masoretic text as the most “authoritative”
- *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece* – Greek NT with annotations indicating conflicts in different manuscripts: “critical apparatus”. NA28 is the text used by most scholars today.
- Some major differences between manuscripts:
 - o The longer ending of Mark – Mark 16 originally ended at verse 8
 - o The “*Pericope Adulterae*” - John 7:53-8:11, the story of the adulterous woman about to be stoned, was added to John later.
 - o 1 John 5:7-8 – a short passage that has been influential in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity. Was probably added when the NT was translated into Latin. Most modern Bibles don't include it, but the KJV does.

Question: How much should we pay attention to the discrepancies between manuscripts?

How to Greek/Hebrew

- Interlinear Bible – Bible Gateway has a good one for the New Testament
- Concordance – Strong's is based on the KJV, the NIV, NRSV also have concordances
- Expository Dictionary – gives complete definitions for original language words in English
- *21st century: we have so many more resources available for studying than at any other point in history.*

What if you were a translator?

You're translating Psalm 23 into the language of a group of people who live on some islands in the Pacific. They are fishermen, subsistence farmers, and pig raisers. They live in a tropical climate and have never seen a sheep. However, with the current globalization of Western culture, they are somewhat familiar with animals and topics outside their daily life, so there are loan words for things like “sheep”. *What is most important about the psalm? Is it the words that are important here? The form? The message? Can you even separate the message from the form?*