A Forum on the Ministry of Bible Translation
BJU Seminary
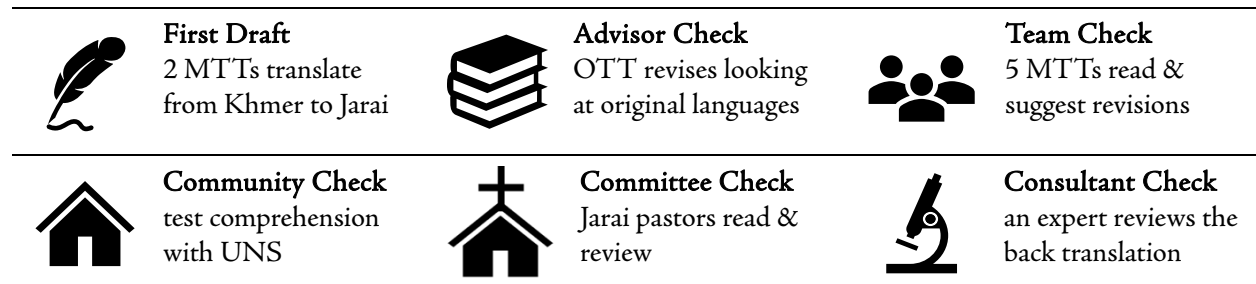Joshua Jensen
26 March 2024

> [T]ranslation is necessary, but never enough. (Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "On Bible Translation and Hermeneutics")

My Background

1986 – baptized at Hampton Park Baptist Church
1997 – 11th-grade grammar
1999 – began BA in English, with biblical languages minor at BJU
2002 – first visit to Cambodia
2003 – began MA in Bible Translation at BJU
2006 – three months in Cambodia taking wordlists in Jarai
2007 – began PhD in Linguistics at UT Arlington
2008 – married Amy
2014 – moved to Cambodia
2018 – began translation in Jarai

Translation Process

Figure 1: Our process for translating the Bible into Jarai

First Draft 2 MTTs translate from Khmer to Jarai	**Advisor Check** OTT revises looking at original languages	**Team Check** 5 MTTs read & suggest revisions
Community Check test comprehension with UNS	**Committee Check** Jarai pastors read & review	**Consultant Check** an expert reviews the back translation

MTT: Mother Tongue Translator – **OTT**: Other Tongue Translator – **UNS**: Uninitiated Native Speaker

Some Shaping Influences

⇒ Hebrews 12:15 (NIV)

> See to it that . . . no **bitter root** grows up to cause trouble and defile many.[a]
>   a Deut. 29:18, "Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the Lord our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no **root** among you that produces such **bitter poison**."

⇒ Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*

> The use of *theleiai* [in Rom 1:26] rather than *gynaikes* ("women"), and later in v. 27 *oiarsenes* ("males") rather than *andres* or *anthropoi* ("men"), suggests an allusion to Gen 1:27 (*arsen kai thelu epoiesen autous*: "male and female he made them"). Most English translations, however, translate here as "women" and "men" respectively, thus **obscuring the link** to Gen 1:27 for readers.

⇒ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* and *The Five Books of Moses*

> [We can] understand biblical narrative more precisely, if the questions we ask of it assume a fairly high degree of **literary purposefulness**. (*The Art*)

> The unacknowledged heresy underlying most modern English versions of the Bible is the use of translation as a vehicle for *explaining* the Bible instead of representing it in another language, and in the most egregious instances this amounts to explaining away the Bible. (*Five Books*)

⇒ Anthony Howard Nichols, *Translating the Bible: A Critical Analysis of E.A. Nida's Theory of Dynamic Equivalence and Its Impact upon Recent Bible Translations* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Sheffield, 1996) and his (much shorter) "Explicitness in Translation and the Westernization of Scripture," *The Reformed Theological Review* 47, no. 3 (December 1988): 78–88

> [A] Western grid is guaranteed by the commitment to **explicitness** in modern Bible translation. The translator avoids ambiguity and selects the meaning he regards as most likely, closing all other interpretive options. ("Explicitness")

> With regard to the question of form and meaning, the translation theorist cannot think in terms of **disembodied meanings**. (*Translating*)

⇒ Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "On Bible Translation and Hermeneutics," in *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation*

> [T]he normative context for biblical meaning is the whole Scripture and *its* world. Bible **readers need to learn** . . .

> The Bible creates **a world of meaning**, and we need to enter it and make ourselves at home in its strangeness, all the better to understand our world, which is insufficiently strange to us.

⇒ Samuel Bray and John Hobbins, *Genesis 1—11: A New Old Translation For Readers, Scholars, and Translators*

> **Form** is not a husk to be taken off, so one can get at the kernel of content.

> [T]he preference [in our translation] for simpler and more picturesque words tends to match the diction of the original, which is famously **spare** and insistently **physical**.

⇒ Layton Talbert, "'Greater Is He Than Man Can Know': Divine Repentance and a Brief Inquiry into Anthropomorphism & Anthropopathism, Impassibility & Affectability," *Journal of Biblical Theology & Worldview* 2, no. 2 (spring 2022): 73-93

> Is it possible that while God as spirit certainly has no *physical* hand or arm or mouth or eyes, he may, nonetheless, actually have hands and arms and mouth and eyes—in short, the very "features" that **he keeps saying throughout Scripture that he has**? And if not, how would we know?

> A genuinely biblical-theological approach to God's self-revelation [and translation! -jmj] must be prepared to affirm both **what** God has chosen to say and **how** he has chosen to say it.

⇒ Peter J. Leithart, *1 & 2 Kings* (Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible)

> [W]e get to the rich and richly varied *sensus plenior* of the sacramental word not by moving past the letter to a spiritual sense, not by treating the letter as a husk for removal. We get at the riches of Scripture precisely by **luxuriating in the letter**, by squeezing everything we can from **the text as written**. (*Deep Exegesis*)

⇒ Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*

> "The best meaning is the **least** meaning." (citing a paper in *Language* by Martin Joos)

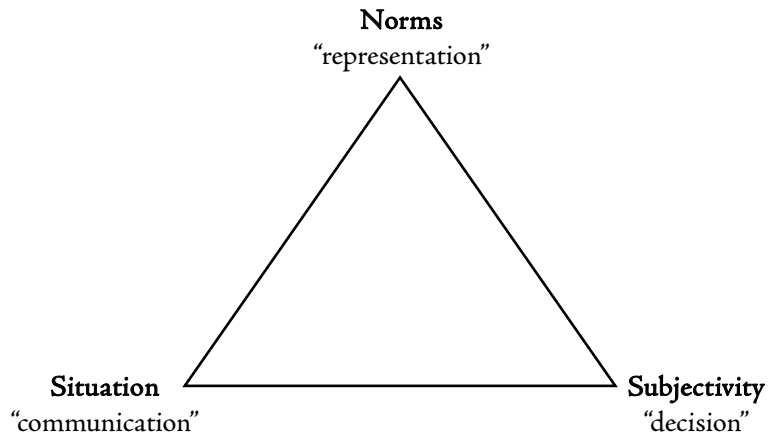⇒ John Frame's consistent emphasis on knowing the Bible intimately in its details

⇒ Paul Kroeger, "Basic Concepts in Information Structure" diu.edu/documents/gialens/Vol11-1/Kroeger-Basic-Concepts-Information-Structure.pdf

> [W]idespread practice of interlingual communication, particularly translation activities, must be kept under constant scrutiny by **linguistic science**." (Roman Jakobson, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," in *On Translation*)

Figure 2: John Frame's Tri-Perspectivalism Applied to Translation[1]

⇒ In the **normative** perspective, translation is viewed as a *representation* of the original

      o key question: what kind of thing is the original? (inspiration, language, culture, canon, relationships among texts, style, &c.)

⇒ In the **situational** perspective, translation is viewed as *communication* to people, especially the church

      o key question: what are audience members like? (current situation: Christians, language, culture, education; use in the situation: evangelism, discipleship, worship, &c.)

⇒ In the **subjective** perspective, translation is viewed as a series of *decisions* made by translators

      o key question: how do translators make decisions?[2] (translators' preparation, disposition, motivation; team dynamics, processes, &c.)

> Any translation of a great piece of writing is bound to be imperfect, and in what follows I will be offering some examples of imperfections in my own efforts. (Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Translation*)

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[1] See https://frame-poythress.org/what-is-triperspectivalism/ and references there.
[2] Key questions to ask about Bible translations involving Large Language Models (i.e., AI): What are the inputs to the model? Can an automated model of a low-resource language be adequately trained (and how would you know)? How does the model make its decisions? (Hint: no one knows.)

Some Issues in Translation

1. Genesis 1:1

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא **אֱלֹהִים** אֵת **הַשָּׁמַיִם** וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ │ *in the beginning,* **God** *created* **the heavens** *and the earth*

ម៊ឹង កុន ធ្ងែង យ៉ាង អ្ឈែយបៃ មជ្រង់ អាបៃ ឈិះ ហាប៉ ឩន គ្ន នៃ ។

"in/at (the) source~beginning, **spirit/divine God/sky** create (the) **distant** [distal demonstrative] **God/sky** and this [proximal demonstrative] earth/land"

⇒ A quick grammatical profile of Jarai:
- o subject—verb—object word order
- o nouns
  - ▪ no number marking (book/book*s*)
  - ▪ no gender system
  - ▪ classifiers used for numbered nouns (five books = *"book five CLF"*)
  - ▪ no articles (*a, the*)
  - ▪ three-way distinction in demonstratives (this [proximal], that [medial], that [distal or indefinite])
- o verbs
  - ▪ no tense-aspect-mood marking (I *see/saw*)
  - ▪ no infinitives or participles
  - ▪ no agreement marking (I *see*, she *sees*)

⇒ Issue: God vs. sky

2. Genesis 7:2

מִכֹּל הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה תִּקַּח־לְךָ שִׁבְעָה שִׁבְעָה **אִישׁ** │ *from all the clean beasts take to yourself seven-seven, a*
וְאִשְׁתּוֹ │ *man and his wife*

ប្រ៊ែយ អ្ញ៉ែម៉ ទគ ជិម-ជ្រ៊ែម គគ្គ៊ែ នៃរ ម៊ឹង ជិម-ជ្រ៊ែម លគោះ មា ណាវ ហ្ឭ អ្ញ៉ែម៉   ហា នៃរ ឈុះ គ្ឫ ហា នៃរ ឈុះ គ្ឫ   គ្ឫ ញ៉ាហ៉ គ្ឫ ញ៉ាហ៉

"give/let you [sg] take animals~[redup] (of) every kind from clean animals~[redup] (and) lead~go with you [sg], one kind seven pairs one kind seven pairs, **male.non-hum female.non-hum male.non-hum female.non-hum**"

⇒ Issue: depiction of animal mates
- o Special meaning of אִישׁ and אִשָּׁה (the NASB's "male" and "female")?
- o Individuating or situational use of אִישׁ and אִשָּׁה (Exo. 26:3, "the five curtains [fem.] shall be joined, *each* [אִשָּׁה] to her sister [אֶל־אֲחֹתָהּ]")?
- o Humanization? cf. Gen. 8:19 (all the animals "went out by their *families/clans* [מִשְׁפָּחָה] from the ark")

3. Genesis 32:6 [32:7 Heb.]

בָּאנוּ אֶל־אָחִיךָ אֶל־עֵשָׂו וְגַם **הֹלֵךְ** לִקְרָאתְךָ │ *We* **went** *["came" ESV] to your brother and he was already* **on his way** *["coming" ESV] to meet you*

មើយហ៎ ណារ ពើ អេសារ យ៉ង អ៊ុះម៍, ប៉្លេ ញ ប៉ៈ វក ណ៉ ពើ អ៊ុះម៍ យ៉ឹះ

"we [excl] **go** to Esau your [sg] older-brother, but 3s while still/dwell **come** to you [sg] already"

⇒   Issue: *come* vs. *go*
- o   בוא – Clines: *come*; HALOT: 1. *to enter*, 2. *to come (to)*; BDB: *come in, come, go in, go*
  - ▪   actually: 'goal-oriented movement, *to go (in)to*'
- o   הלך – Clines: *go*; HALOT: *to go, walk*; BDB: *go, come, walk*
  - ▪   actually: 'process- or manner-oriented movement; *to be going, to walk, to travel*'

4. Exodus 16:6

לִקְטוּ מִמֶּנּוּ **אִישׁ** לְפִי אָכְלוֹ עֹמֶר לַגֻּלְגֹּלֶת מִסְפַּר֙ נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶ֔ם **אִישׁ** לַאֲשֶׁ֥ר בְּאָהֳל֖וֹ תִּקָּֽחוּ	*you [pl.] gather from it, **a man** according to the mouth of his eating; an omer per head, the number of your [pl] persons, **a man** according to whoever is in his tent, you [pl] should take*

ច្រើយ គអ៊ុះម៍ ហា រ៉ុង ហា រ៉ុង ឈញ គ៉ាល់ កុ បង់   ច្រើយ គអ៊ុះម៍ ឈញ ទុស តាម មន្ទុស វក តា៎ សាង សែង កង់ គអ៊ុះម៍   ហា រ៉ុង ហា អ្ងមៃ   ហា រ៉ុ ង ហា អ្ងមៃ

"give/let you [pl] **one clf.hum one clf.hum** pick-up enough (to) eat, give/let you [pl] pick-up according-to (the) human(s) dwell in your [pl] tarp house(s), **one clf.hum** one *omae*, **one clf.hum** one *omae*"

⇒   Issues:
- o   Gender and audience (male heads of house?)
- o   Grammar of instructions (variation between singular noun phrases and 2nd person plural verb forms)

5. Acts 26:6

ἐπ' ἐλπίδι τῆς εἰς τοὺς πατέρας **ἡμῶν** ἐπαγγελίας γενομένης	*[Paul to Agrippa:] because of hope in the promise made to **our** fathers*

យ៉ា កវ ចាង-ម៉ាង គ្លើយ អ្ងើយប៉ៃ អ្ងាំ ម៉ឹង អ្ងើយ ប៉ន មក មើយហ៎

"because I wait-for/hope-for (the) matter (which) God promise with/to **our [excl]** distant grandfather(s)'"

⇒   Issue: Is Agrippa *included* or *excluded* in Paul's "our"?

6. Matthew 15:23

καὶ προσελθόντες οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ **ἠρώτουν** αὐτὸν λέγοντες· ἀπόλυσον αὐτήν, ὅτι **κράζει** ὄπισθεν ἡμῶν	*And his disciples came and **were requesting** ["begged" ESV] of him, saying, "Send her off, because she **is crying** ["keeps crying" NIV] out after us."*

នុន មក ហ្ជៀន ទុយ ណ៉ ពើ យេស៊្ង   គញ ហ្វ៉ៈ ខំម៉ៗ ថ្វែក ៖ «ពនើយ ញ ថ្វ៉ វ៉ំ យ៉ា ញ វក ទុយ អ្ជារ ពគី តា»

"then (the) group learning~following come to Yesu, they **request with-effort/repeatedly** say(ing): 'command 3s (to) depart IMPTV, because 3s **still/dwell follow call bother** us [incl]'"

⇒   Issues: sense of imperfect and present verbs

7. Matthew 9:21

ἔλεγεν γὰρ ἐν ἑαυτῇ· ἐὰν μόνον ἅψωμαι τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ σωθήσομαι	*[she touched the hem of his garment...] for she **had said** ["was saying" NASB] in herself, "If only I touch his garment I will be healed."*

ឃ្លា ញ យឺត តាំ ថ្ងៃ ខ្មែគ ៖ «ឆ្ងី ការ ញ្ញៈ កាន់ អារ ញ ទើច   នុន ត្លើយ រ័:ហ៍ ការ ទី ហ្ញៃម៍ ប៉ីៈ»
"because 3s think in heart say: 'if I touch just 3s shirt only, then (the) matter-of my being-sick will heal already'"

⇒ Issue: iterative or pluperfect
  o ("The picture painted seems to be of a desperate woman who repeats over and over again, 'If only I touch his garment,' attempting to muster up enough courage for the act." Wallace)

8. Luke 2:34

ἰδοὺ οὗτος κεῖται εἰς **πτῶσιν** καὶ **ἀνάστασιν** πολλῶν ἐν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ	*[Simeon to Mary:] behold this one is set for **falling** and **raising** of many in Israel*

ហ្ញិ ហម៍! អ្ឪៃបៃ ឋបត ត្រើយ ណាគ នៃ   ទី ម៉ៈ ត្រើយ មគ សុន-សាគ អ៊ីស្រាអ៊ែល ល ឡ្ញិ ធ្ងុន   ហ៉ាប់ ពគ ឌឹគ មនុស ល ម៊ីន ។
"Listen IMPTV! God set for this child, to make for many (of the) group (of) ethnicity Isra-ael (to) **fall [vertically] descend**, and **lift ascend** many people also."

⇒ Issues: What kind of fall are people experiencing? Is the same group rising that fell?

9. Acts 1:18

καὶ **πρηνὴς γενόμενος** ἐλάκησεν μέσος	*and he [Judas] **became prone** (and his) middle burst open*

ញ ឆ្អៀ ម្ឌង-ម៉ុ   ពចៈ ច្យាន ញ
"3s **died/was-dead face-down**, burst (in) 3s stomach"

⇒ Issue: How did Judas get face-down?

10. Exodus 20:2-3

אָנֹכִי֙ **יְהוָ֣ה** אֱלֹהֶ֔יךָ אֲשֶׁ֧ר הוֹצֵאתִ֛יךָ מֵאֶ֥רֶץ מִצְרַ֖יִם מִבֵּ֣ית עֲבָדִ֑ים׃ לֹֽא־יִהְיֶֽה־לְךָ֛ אֱלֹהִ֥ים אֲחֵרִ֖ים עַל־פָּנָֽיַ׃	*I am the LORD **your** [sg] God who brought **you** [sg] out from the land of Egypt from the house of slaves. There shall not be to **you** [sg] other gods in front of my face.*

ការ ប៉ីៈ យេហ្ញូវ៉ា យ៉ាង គម្អ៉ិម៍   ព មា ឮ្យៈ គម្អ៉ិម៍ ម៊ឹង ចាល អេឈ៊ុប   ម៊ឹង សាង គម្អ៉ិម៍ ម៉ៈ ហ្ញិន ។   គម្អ៉ិម៍ អ្ញា ហ្ញុរ យ៉ាង ពគន់ អុៈ ទី ណាប់ ការ ។
"(It is) I indeed/already (who am) Jehovah **your [pl]** spirit/god, the-one (who) lead/carry **you [pl]** from (the) country (of) Egypt, from (the) house **you [pl]** did [i.e., worked as] slave(s). **You [pl]** don't [neg imptv] have other spirit(s)/god(s) in-front-of me."

⇒ Issues:
  o use of 2ⁿᵈ person singular ("thee/thou") versus plural ("you/ye") in the OT