What is the definition of 'translation' and why? By Durk meijer

For a long time, many have been trying to come up with a definition of translation that most people agree on. Still, there are many different ideas, but it would be good to have a clear and uncomplicated basic description. In that context Miriam Webster's dictionary definition for translation is quite simple: a rendering from one language into another; also: the product of such a rendering.

But, to what purpose or goal? Such a rendering will only be of use if it communicates the intended meaning of the source so that the audience can understand the message and engage with it.   Can we agree that: **Translation is to communicate a message with the intended meaning of the one giving it, so that the audience can understand the message and engage with it**? With this agreement, we have a solid foundation to work from.

If we agree on this definition as a norm, then we should also recognize that the translation will be naturally transferable and maintainable by the people. By 'transferable' and 'maintainable' I mean several things.

- The message as told is well fitting as a communication in their language so that new listeners **are comfortable in engaging** with the message and **consequently retell it**.
- As language shifts, the people will have the ability to **continue communicating it accurately**, in spite of any language changes. The message needs to be recorded in a relevant way, so that people **have a standard to go back to** and they can revise it when the language has shifted.

It is crucial to think of the goal of an audience engaging with the message, rather than the audience just feeling good about having 'an authoritative source' in their language.   I will use the picture of the communication art form of a message being like a container. That container needs to be one that familiar to our intended audience and functional for them. The container of the translator should not be the focal point, which consequently would make the message subject to that specific container. For example, we as translators should not dictate that a translation has to be a written document. If we can agree on that, then the following definition of 'translation' from Google is not workable: the process of translating words or text from one language into another.

Also, if I assume that authority is transferred through the use of specific 'words', then I still obligate myself to the process of translating words or text from one language into another. But I consider that validity is communicated through people accepting a message. This means that they have to understand it and engage with it. Therefore, it is important to express that message in a way that my audience can engage with it. Through their engagement, they will recognize God's authority in that message. Their consciousness of that authority grows through their continued engagement. People need to be able to individually embrace God's authority. It should not be dictated by the church. They then perceive the Bible as God's message to them. They no longer perceive it as belonging to others (for example, foreigners or denominations).

A definition of translation is not related to how much we translate. The criteria of what 'translation' is should stand on its own. The definition of 'translation' is only influenced by the goal of what we are aiming to achieve. We have established this goal as communicating a message that can be understood accurately, clearly, and naturally in another language, as well as it being acceptable by providing the opportunity for the audience to engage with the message. This goal will help people choose the most suitable 'product' of such a rendering. Let us look at what kind of products are possible:

- **Written translation** is a carefully planned written text that is processed, evaluated, and documented in the preparation of a printed Bible. Even though it can also be distributed as an audio recording, it best serves an audience that primarily engages through written materials and for whom reading has become a comfortable and relevant component of daily life.

· Validity (credibleness) of the message is attributed by readers only as they would attribute any authority to a specific published document.

· Engagement is often minimal, since people today (including Christians) mostly learn by audio and visuals based on oral principles, rather than by reading.

- **Oral translation** is a carefully planned oral communication that is processed, evaluated, and documented by audio recordings in the preparation of an oral Bible. In this case validity is recognized by the audience because the message is spoken by persons who have engaged with the message. It is a live rendering that is recorded and verified for accuracy. Since it uses people's language in a natural spoken way, it serves everybody that can hear well, which is about 99%

of the world's population. For blind people and oral preference learners, an oral translation is by far the most suitable translation. For some it is the only

·   Validity of the message is attributed by the listeners from their trust in the speaker.

·   Engagement is probable, since people naturally motivate themselves through oral messages.

- ***Signed translation*** is a carefully planned signed communication that is processed, evaluated, and documented by visual recordings in the preparation of a signed Bible. In this case validity is also recognized by the audience because the message is signed by persons who have engaged with the message. It is a live rendering that is recorded and verified for accuracy. It specifically serves the deaf population, since for them written and oral materials are not a realistic option. This covers about 1% of the world's population.

·   Validity of the message is attributed by the viewer (of live signing or video) from their trust in the signer.

·   Engagement is probable, since the viewers naturally motivate themselves through signed messages. Hindrances to engagement are minimized because the message is straightforward in the signed media.

Sadly enough, most people still consider that the end product must include a printed publication. Bible Translation should never be governed by the goal to produce a printed product. With print as a goal, translation teams will continually bring in practices and tools that produce a literate based product, instead of a principle-based product that has a message that people understand and can engage with. The only way to develop a suitable Scripture translation program is to make engagement with the message the foundation and to integrate engagement in the whole process.   Therefore, translation processes need to be relevant for each unique audience in order to facilitate engagement by the receptors.

Just to be clear, when I write 'accurate', I mean the concept that nothing extra is added or left out from what is communicated in the source. Implicit information in a translation should only reflect the actual meaning and only be included so the message will be communicated accurately, naturally, and clearly. In the process of accurately translating, we should never shape

passages to emphasize a teaching, ideologies, or supposed emotions of the participants of a narrative. We also should not facilitate a specific story telling philosophy. Nor should information from parallel passages be included. Even though we may not see the purpose of some details of the passage as is, if we see the Scriptures as an authoritative source, then we should keep those details, but never delete details and still call it a translation. One should only consider shifting between more generic and more specific expressions if needed for people to understand the message. In that case it, is normally safer to go from specific to more generic, but the other way around is most of the time a form of adding information that is based on specific teaching, ideologies, or feelings of the translator.

Considering that each audience needs to be able to relate new information within their worldview, the process of choosing a sequence of passages should be addressed. Effectiveness of translation is conditioned by only using messages that our audience can relate to. Because this is an essential part of communication, it is an essential part of translation. The people we are serving should choose the sequence of the passages. If they are not able to do so, then we should facilitate them learning how to choose. The choices should not be dictated by our worldview, nor by any specific theological ideologies or teachings that we may hold. We should encourage the people we are serving to base their sequencing in relation to issues within their worldview. In that way their audiences can relate to a message and are able to engage with it.

This would mean that we offer help, so the local translation team can connect to the over-arching message through passages that they can relate to and may have interest in. They need to keep connecting to what they already know with the aim to provide a basic understanding of the meta-narrative. (Meta-narrative is defined in Google's dictionary as 'an overarching account or interpretation of events and circumstances that provides a pattern or structure for people's beliefs and gives meaning to their experiences'.) It is helpful to continue adding passages that relate to passages already having been translated. Consequently, translation is an approach where messages need to be added like adding details in a panorama. This simple process facilitates a natural growth in engagement, since it helps people interact with new information. If a translation team integrates this idea, Scripture engagement becomes a natural pattern.

A simple definition of 'translation' is possible, but it is essential to first define the goal of translation and give enough explanation to make it functional. Thus, in our context, it is reasonable to define translation as:

To communicate a message with the intended meaning of the one giving it, so that the audience can understand the message and engage with it.