

About Bible translation by Durk Meijer, August 7, 2016

Translations of the Bible have been categorized in being written, signed, and oral. All three categories have sub-categories of “informal” and “formal”.

An **informal translation** is a spontaneous impromptu rendering that a translator makes as his brain automatically processes the information. This can be by hearing the message or reading personally a text in a language that he or she understands. Typically, these kinds of translators are pastors, evangelists, Sunday school teachers, or the few individuals who know the source language well. They often struggle to produce a clear, accurate, and natural translation, sometimes automatically resorting to give a personal interpretation. One particular You-Tube video shows a hilarious rendering of how miss-communication can happen during impromptu translation (see link below), but the danger is very real and sometimes much damage is done.

Sometimes we may be in a position where there is no formal translation of Scripture available. A friend of mine personally was in that position many times, as were many believers among the people where he worked. They did the informal translation with a combination of anguish and hope. Anguish at the idea that they were not experts in Hebrew or Greek, nor experts in the language they were translating from or into. Hope at the idea of getting the word of God to people who would not have it if they did not do an informal translation at that exact time and place. We should not discourage people to give the Word of God, even if it is informally, but we should be very careful, seeking God for His leading through prayer. It should never become an easy solution to opt out of helping people being able to directly access God’s Word in their language through a formal translation.

Informal translation can be done without specific training, but good quality will depend much on the expertise of the translator, including familiarity with idioms, gestures, intonation, and an understanding of the worldview of the person who is listening.

Formal translation requires relevant training and expertise and can be defined as follows:

- **Written translation** is a carefully planned written text that is processed, evaluated, and documented in the preparation of a printed Bible.
- **Oral translation** is a carefully planned oral communication that is processed, evaluated, and documented by audio recordings in the preparation of an oral Bible. It is a live rendering that is recorded and verified for accuracy.

- **Signed translation** is a carefully planned signing that is processed, evaluated, and documented by visual recordings in the preparation of a signed Bible. It is a live rendering that is recorded and verified for accuracy.

Formal translation, whether written, oral, or signed, leads equally to producing a quality printed, audio, or visual product that then can serve as a Biblical standard. It can be distributed and used for reference, study, memorization, and meditation as an authoritative source. It might be a complete Bible, a partial Bible, like a New or Old Testament. It might be a panoramic Bible that presents a selection of books, partial books, or even passages that can stand on their own. Bibles are categorized by at least by four general translation styles: literal, meaning-based, paraphrased and contextualized. I will be focusing next on various art forms of how Scriptures currently are being published:

- **Written Scripture** is any communication that uses visual marks (letters, symbols, or pictures) and formal literate grammar and discourse rules to tell the meaning of the Bible message accurately, clearly, and naturally. It generally arranges the messages according to the Canon and separates the documents by chapter and verse. Some recognized authority has reviewed it for accuracy and approved it for distribution. This Scripture might be distributed as a printed version on paper as a book or as a digital document for use on computers, mobile phones or other relevant technology.
- **Audio Scripture** is typically an audio version of written Scripture and it generally uses the Canon and the chapter and verse definitions of the messages. Audio Scripture might be dramatized and, as such, it has different voices speaking as the different persons of the stories. It might have sound effects that reflect the setting, as well as background music. It is produced and distributed for use on relevant audio devices.
- **Oral Scripture** is any oral communication that tells the meaning of the Bible message accurately, clearly, and naturally in meaningful chunks. It needs to include all necessary nonverbal communication. The choice of words, verbal expressions and oral discourse help to communicate the message most effectively. Like written materials, it should be reviewed by a consultant for accuracy. When satisfactory, someone needs to approve it for distribution as an audio recording. Technically oral Scripture is also audio Scripture.
- **Signed Scripture** is a visualized version of the Bible that signs the meaning of the Bible message accurately, clearly, and naturally in meaningful chunks using sign discourse. Like written materials, it should be reviewed by a consultant for

accuracy. When satisfactory, someone needs to approve it for distribution as a video recording.

- **Visual Scripture** is typically a dramatized version of Scripture that includes a vocalized text of a written or oral Bible in meaningful chunks without any additions or changes. It is a visualization of the Biblical texts acted out in a setting that reflects a Biblical historical and cultural context. There are opportunities to communicate better through voice intonation, sound effects, music. The challenges are that such modifications may not communicate well and even miss-communicate. Those innovations also will likely add anecdotal information by virtue of creating the visuals. Technically a signed Bible is also a form of a visual Bible, with the difference that the scripture message is signed. It is produced and distributed for use on relevant video devices.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKFkuJHwfnw>