

TRANSLATING MORMON THOUGHT

Marcellus S. Snow

As the L. D. S. Church has increased its membership in non-English-speaking countries and has become in fact as well as intention a world-wide church, the importance of effective translation of Mormon scriptures and other writing has also increased. In this article, Marcellus S. Snow, a graduate student in linguistics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who has published AN ENGLISH-GERMAN L. D. S. DICTIONARY, examines some of the problems of translation and some of the steps the Church has taken to solve them.

Most of our distinctly Mormon heritage, scriptural and otherwise, has been first spoken, recorded, or translated in the English language. In declaring that this heritage has worth for people of cultures and languages different from our own, we affirm that the message of Mormonism transcends whatever these differences may be. A translator must prove this by preserving the essence and impact of the original English material in all that he translates.

His task increases as these differences become more pronounced, and his challenge is stiffest when non-Western, non-Christian cultures speaking non-Indo-European languages are to be reached.

Christian missionaries of other faiths have encountered this challenge in its extreme form in translating the Bible for many of the primitive tribes of Africa and South America. How can one best

translate “grace” into Mixtec?¹ How can one be sure that an Indian tribe accustomed to planting seeds one at a time understands Christ’s parable of the sower who scattered seeds by the handful?² How can one convey to natives living on a small island with low hills an impression of the Judean mountains in their own language, which has a term for “hill” but none for “mountain”?³ What does one do if the transliteration of “rabbi” into an African dialect is dangerously close to an obscene word?⁴

Translators of L.D.S. scripture and other literature face many problems like these. And translating is only one of a host of language problems which arise when L.D.S. literature and the Mormon religion, couched as they are in the native English of most Church members, confront people who speak another language. What is the nature of these problems? What are their broader implications above and beyond communication between speech communities? How can these problems be solved, and what measures are being taken to do so?

The following considerations, unique to the history and proselyting efforts of the Mormon Church, must temper our assessment of the problems involved in translating Mormon scripture into other languages and, by extension, in introducing Mormon thought into other cultures.

(1) The “source language” of L.D.S. scripture is English, and native speakers are available for purposes of exegesis.

(2) There is no canonical language in Mormonism. Sacramental prayers, temple ceremonies, and meetings may always be conducted in the local idiom.

(3) The cultural setting of Mormon origins, the frontier America of the early nineteenth century, is a more familiar, more sympathetic, and better documented era than that of ancient Palestine.

(4) All translations of Mormon scripture into a particular language have been preceded by Bible translations into that language. Hence a ready-made source of Christian words and phrases has always been available for L.D.S. missionaries and translators to use or to modify for their own purposes.

(5) Mormon missionary effort has been and remains heavily concentrated in technically advanced, predominantly Christian, Western nations speaking Indo-European languages.

¹ Eugene A. Nida, *Bible Translating* (New York: American Bible Society, 1947), p. 223.

² Eugene A. Nida, “Linguistics and Ethnology in Translation-Problems,” *Language in Culture and Society*, ed. Dell Hymes (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), X, Part II, 92.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

How do these facts interact with specific problems which the L.D.S. translator faces?

TRANSLATING THE BOOK OF MORMON

The Book of Mormon, the best-known of distinctively Mormon scriptures, will serve as a casebook of problems involved with L.D.S. scriptural translation. Immediately, the question of style arises: Should the translator try to imitate the rustic, archaic, Biblical style of Joseph Smith's English translation, or should he produce a smooth, polished document in modern idiom? And if he decides on some degree of "archaicness" in his translation, what should be his guide? Should a German translation follow the style of Luther's Bible, as the present German edition tends to? Should an Arabic Book of Mormon, when one becomes available in that language, use difficult Classical Arabic, as the Koran does?

Questions of this nature show that the translator must do much more than decide about equivalence of meaning in two languages. Language is used not only as a means of transmitting information by using linguistic signs (words) paired with non-linguistic objects or concepts; it is also used as a means of conveying and arousing emotion by the very nature and internal relationship of these signs themselves. More simply and concretely, "the people waxed great in iniquity" and "the people became very wicked" both *mean* more or less the same thing. Quite evidently, however, they convey very different moods and styles while transmitting identical messages.

The linguist Karl Bühler made a distinction germane to this problem of style. Language, he said, functions on at least three different planes: the representational (*Darstellungsebene*), the emotive (*Kundgabeebene*), and the persuasive (*Appellebene*).⁵ Speech, in other words, besides transferring information from a speaker to a listener (representational plane), can also be used to convey the mood and character of the speaker (emotive plane, as in lyric poetry) or to influence the mood of the listener (persuasive plane, as in oratory).

The persuasive plane figures in the Book of Mormon translator's dilemma of style. He must ask not only, "What sentence in Norwegian will have the same meaning as this sentence in English?" but also "What Norwegian style will affect the Norwegian reader the same way the English style of this sentence affects the English-speaking reader?" And although strict stylistic correspondence is

⁵ Quoted in N. Trubetzkoy, *Grundzüge der Phonologie* (3rd ed., Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1962), pp. 18-29.

more difficult to attain than semantic equivalence, there is no reason to believe that it is any less important. Many of the most crucial empirical arguments for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, in fact, hinge on the unabashed roughness and rusticity of its style, which are said to reflect the fact that it is a translation and to reveal the origins and upbringing of its first translator.

An example of this style is in 1 Nephi 5:6:

And after this manner of language did my father, Lehi, comfort my Mother, Sariah, concerning us

A phrase like “after this manner of language” is awkward to modern ears and is certainly neither idiomatic, archaic, nor Biblical; nor was it so in Joseph Smith’s time. Its very awkwardness and foreignness, however, can very well be argued to be the result of an overly literal translation of a Reformed Egyptian idiom. Here, then, is a very important stylistic turn in the Book of Mormon. Similar curiously worded, unauthentic sounding phrases can be found on every page.

Yet this very meaningful phrase almost disappears in translation. The German version reads “with such words” (*mit solchen Worten*); the Spanish edition has “with these words” (*con estas palabras*); the Dutch version renders it by “this speaking” (*aldus spreken*), the French translation comes closest with “in this language” (*dans ce langage*). What has happened is this: Well-meaning, doubtless highly educated European translators have attempted to “smooth over” the rough edges of Joseph Smith’s English to produce a stylistically more presentable document in their own native languages, much as sophisticated city dwellers might advise their small-town relative on a visit to say “you were” and “he did” instead of “you was” and “he done” so that neighbors and acquaintances might not be unfavorably impressed.

It is easy to accuse translators of tampering this way with the persuasive level of their material, but it is much more difficult to come up with a workable alternative. Translating a clumsy English phrase into (say) a clumsy Danish phrase which is equally clumsy in all senses of the word is an impossible task. One might justifiably contend that only the English translation of the Book of Mormon should be the repository of its stylistic curiosities, and that interested researchers should be referred to that edition for stylistic material. Most Mormons, however, would probably argue that a slick, highly readable foreign language edition of the Book of Mormon might fail to retain the internal linguistic persuasiveness of the original, much as a missionary very adept in his foreign language often encounters

only suspicion on the part of his contacts, while his linguistically more unsophisticated companion inspires confidence and sympathy. To what extent one's conviction of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon (or of the missionaries' message) should be based on empirical criteria such as these, of course, is another matter.

A conflict such as this one between readability of the translation and faithfulness to the original is really insoluble on a general level and must be appraised separately in each case. A sensitive, intelligent bilingual translator, well versed in linguistics and Mormonism, is best equipped to meet such a challenge and to navigate the difficult course between devotion to original style and concern for an acceptable translation.

There is also the problem of Biblical citations in the Book of Mormon. By far the lengthiest of these extends from 2 Nephi 12 through 2 Nephi 24, where Nephi quotes from the brass plates of Laban. In English, these chapters correspond almost word for word to Isaiah 2 through Isaiah 14, respectively, in the King James Bible. Joseph Smith, in fact, is said to have used his King James Bible as a basis for this part of the translation, deviating from it only where significant differences arose.⁶

Now what should the Book of Mormon translator use as a basis for his own translation of the brass plates? Should he do nothing but translate from Joseph Smith's rendition, or should he remain as close as possible to a well-known Protestant Bible translation in his own language, deviating from it only where Joseph Smith deviates from the King James Version?

On this point, translators are almost unanimous in their close adherence to Joseph's translation, and for good reason. The differences among modern translations of the original Hebrew text of Isaiah 2 through 14 (i.e., the brass plates) are considerable, and lack of uniformity would result if various modern translations of the Bible were followed closely. A revised German Luther Bible has "at the last time" (*zur letzten Zeit*), for instance, in Isaiah 2:2 where the King James Version reads "in the last days," and has "Gentiles" (*Heiden*, a loan translation of Latin *paganus*, from which "pagan" is derived) for English "nations." A modern Italian Protestant Bible reads "the eternal" (*l'eterno*) for "the Lord" in the same verse.

The only real alternative the translator has here is to search for a rough emotive equivalent of the King James Version in his own language; this is at best a vague and difficult task.

⁶ Brigham H. Roberts, *Defense of the Faith*, p. 279, quoted in Francis W. Kirkham, *A New Witness for Christ in America* (Independence, Missouri: Zion's Printing and Publishing Co., 1942), p. 203.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT WORD 1400 YEARS AGO

Translation of the Book of Mormon, other scriptures, and supplementary literature into a foreign language is only part of the larger problem of religious contact across linguistic and cultural borders. And this entire process of contact hinges largely on arbitrary choices of terminology to characterize doctrines and to describe the organization of the Church in languages other than English.

The Mormons are not the first religious body to seek proselytes in a language community different from their own and thereby to face a baffling gamut of word choices in a strange tongue. The period during which pre-Norman Britain was Christianized by foreign missionaries provides an illustrative and rather well documented case of this process of nomenclature selection in action.⁷ The devices these early proselyters used centuries ago are the same as those used today. It will be instructive to consider some of them in detail.

Christianity was new and very different to pagan Britain. Some sort of linguistic innovation was necessary to reflect this difference, and at least three common methods of innovation were used for this purpose:

- (1) Extension of meanings of already existing words;
- (2) Formation of "loan translations," i.e., literal translations of foreign terms, in this case from Old French, Latin, or Greek, into Old English;
- (3) Introduction of foreign terms, with minor alterations for ease of pronunciation.

The name of deity is the foremost example of extended meaning. "God" was very different before the Christians came to Britain, but the old term persisted after they arrived. "Easter" (Old English *eastron*) was at first a spring festival named after Austro, the goddess of spring, before it became a celebration of Christ's resurrection.

Loan translations were at first the most common method of expressing unfamiliar Christian ideas in Old English, which showed peculiar genius for coining these native terms exactly and often quite picturesquely. "To baptize," for example, was *dyppan* ("to dip") or *fulwian* (cf. German *voll* and *weihen* "to consecrate completely"). "Trinity" was *thryness* or *thrines* ("threeness").

Nearly all of these ingenious loan translations, however, were eventually replaced by foreign words, as were originally pagan words

⁷ All examples of terminological innovation during this period are taken from Otto Jespersen, *Growth and Structure of the English Language* (9th ed.; Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday Co., n. d.), pp. 41-47.

which had brought too much pre-Christian baggage along the road of extended meaning. Latin “patriarch” replaced *heahfaeder* (“high-father”); “altar,” for obvious reasons, succeeded *weofod*, derived in turn from *wigbeod* (“idol-table”); *husl* meant sacrifice or offering, but originally in a non-Christian sense. After a brief period of use this word was replaced by Latin terms, and the very act of replacement was a symbolic severance of relations with the pagan world.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT WORD TODAY

The Christianization of Britain was gradual and leisurely compared to Mormon proselyting efforts in new areas. These efforts are usually rapid and highly organized. The translator making L.D.S. scripture and other literature available to members of a new language community usually chooses terminology and style by employing the methods of extension of meaning, loan translations, and foreign words mentioned earlier. His decisions are of necessity arbitrary and rather self-conscious. Words for “ward,” “Relief Society,” and “stake center” must often be coined decades before such institutions actually exist in the new culture.

The missionary work the Church has carried out in non-Christian, non-Western cultures speaking non-Indo-European languages provides a sharp focus on the credentials necessary to pass by linguistic border-stations and, in particular, on the crucial nature of terminological choices for the “image” of Mormonism abroad.

The Church in Hong Kong and Taiwan, for example, is the beneficiary of rather extensive earlier efforts of Catholic and Protestant missionaries to preach Christianity to the Chinese.⁸ Chinese Bibles and Christian terminology were already available to the first Mormon missionaries to arrive there. Since Chinese is notoriously resistant to importations from other languages, the Catholics and Protestants had coined most new words by two juxtaposed Chinese characters. “God” (in the Christian sense) was *sheung tai* or “exalted ruler,” in contrast to the older Chinese concept of divinity expressed by *shan* (“spirits, deities, the divine”). “Baptism” was *sai lai*, “washing ordinance,” and “revelation” was *kai shi*, something like “to separate or open.” The sacrament or Eucharist became *sing tsaan*, “holy meal.”

L.D.S. translators have adopted these terms in nearly all in-

⁸ I am indebted to Gary Towers, who served a mission for the Church in Hong Kong, for all examples taken from the Chinese language. All of these examples are given in the Cantonese dialect, which is spoken in Hong Kong. For typographical reasons, diacritical marks indicating tone contours have been omitted.

stances, and this means that Mormon missionaries to the Chinese must rely on extension of meaning to bridge the semantic gap between exclusively L.D.S. ideas and conventional Christian concepts incorporated into a single Chinese expression. More simply, the words are the same but the ideas are different, and the danger is that the old words will continue to connote the old ideas.

Unique L.D.S. terms and usages are also taken from native Chinese word-stock. A branch, for instance, is *fun wui*; this combination also has other meanings in Chinese, such as a branch of a bank, of a chain of stores, etc. A ward is designated by *chi wui*; this two-character combination was invented. *Chi* alone means “branch” (of a tree) while *wui* corresponds roughly to “organization.”

Japanese translations for L.D.S. terminology are quite different from corresponding translations into Chinese.⁹ There are numerous foreign borrowings; for example, “ward” in Japanese is *wadobu*, “stake” is *sutekibu*. The presence of these foreignisms reflects not only the ability of the Japanese language to accept non-Japanese words; it also shows that extension of word meanings, although natural in English and Chinese, is difficult in Japanese. And the same tension between foreign words and native loan translations which was noted in Old English is also present to some extent in Japanese. The standard Protestant and Catholic term for “baptism” in Japanese is *shin rei*, literally “dipping ritual”; early Mormon literature also employed this term. Japanese Church members, however, instead of extending the meaning of the word to include baptism by immersion, tended to associate it with the sprinkling ordinances performed by these other churches. This, it should be noted, was due more to the extremely limited semantic extensibility of Japanese words than to doctrinal obtuseness on the part of early Japanese Saints. Retranslations of Church literature after World War II substituted the foreign borrowing *baputesuma* for “baptism” to emphasize the distinctive nature of the L.D.S. form of this ordinance. A new native word for “priesthood,” *shin ken* (“God-authority”), was also coined to underscore the uniqueness of the Mormon version of this concept.

The translator of L.D.S. literature must also frequently change old terms or introduce new ones in languages which are more closely related to English than are Chinese or Japanese. An early Italian

⁹ Tatsui Sato of Tokyo graciously provided all the material taken from Japanese, as well as information about the Japanese language. Brother Sato has translated the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price into Japanese and was the first Japanese member baptized after World War II. He is now in Salt Lake City doing work for the Genealogical Society.

Book of Mormon translation (which, incidentally, was never published) rendered “priest” by *prete* quite uniformly; but to an Italian *prete* is a generic term of rather indirect reference and falls far short of specifying what Mormons mean by a priest. The word *sacerdote*, which occurs in all Italian Bibles and is a much more appropriate translation, is used in the present Italian Book of Mormon. German translations of Mormon scripture render “Gentile” by *Nicht-jude* (“non-Jew”), although all German Bibles read *Heide* (“pagan”; cognate with “heathen”) for “Gentile.”

ONE-TO-MANY OR MANY-TO-ONE CORRESPONDENCES

Until now we have spoken as though religious terms had a one-to-one meaning correspondence between English and any other given language, and that the translator is faced only with the problem of choosing the proper method of establishing this correspondence (meaning extension, loan translations, foreign words, etc.). This, of course, is not the case. One English term might cover a variety of meanings and require one of a number of different translations in another language, depending on context. The converse is also often true.

“Priesthood” becomes *Priestertum* or *Priesterschaft* in German, for example, depending on whether an authority or a collection of bearers of that authority is meant. The president of a stake or mission is a *Präsident* in German; the president of a branch is a *Vorsteher* (this word is a loan translation of “president”); and the president of a Relief Society or a Primary is a *Leiterin* (“leader”). On the other hand, the study guide once used by missionaries in Hong Kong translates the character *shan* as “God the Father, God the Son, or God the Holy Ghost.” This sounds slightly blasphemous to English-speaking persons and shows that English can be overdifferentiated as well as underdifferentiated with respect to another language. German *Geist*, for example, effectively covers English “spirit,” “mind,” “intellect,” “genius,” “soul,” and “essence.”

Many supposedly important distinctions, however, are nearly impossible to translate from English into other languages. The difference between “faith” and “belief,” for instance, has provided subject matter for a great many Sacrament Meeting speakers, and Talmage holds forth for three pages in differentiating between the two.¹⁰ Yet *Glaube* is the most acceptable German translation of both of these words. In their German translation of *Articles of Faith*, Max Zimmer and Georgius Y. Cannon translate “belief” with *Fürwahr-*

¹⁰ James E. Talmage, *A Study of the Articles of Faith* (12th ed.; Salt Lake City, Utah: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1952), pp. 96-98.

halten to give Talmage's dichotomy a semblance of acceptability to German readers.¹¹ Yet this is a cumbersome, rare word in German and has nothing of the familiar simplicity of "belief"; moreover, *Fühwahrhalten* is not even listed in a source as reliable and complete as *The New Cassell's German Dictionary*. Is this distinction really language-independent, or have English-speaking saints merely hung their hats on two synonyms and then consciously created a hard-and-fast distinction between them?

Church writers also often distinguish between the Holy Ghost and the Holy Spirit. This is convenient in English because two different-sounding expressions are available. A glance at foreign language translations of the Doctrine and Covenants, however, shows that this differentiation is consistently obscured in languages other than English. In five verses where "Holy Spirit" appears in English (45:57, 46:2, 55:1, 55:3, 99:2), the current Swedish and an old (1914) Hawaiian edition use the same word which translates "Holy Ghost" in 130:22 and generally elsewhere. Swedish has *Helige Ande* and Hawaiian *Uhane Hemolele*. The translator of the German edition, by contrast, has carefully examined the context of these verses to determine if by "holy Spirit" the Holy Ghost is meant or rather if the spirit or influence of one or more members of the Godhead is intended. If the former is the case, *Heiliger Geist* appears; otherwise, *heiliger Geist* does. This usage is now more or less customary in German lesson manuals and other written material. The French translator renders both "Holy Ghost" and "Holy Spirit" as *Saint-Esprit* except in 99:2, where *Saint Esprit* appears.

Here, then, a supposedly important theological distinction is either ignored or is made by humble punctuation marks and spelling conventions (hyphens, capital letters) in languages other than English. If a distinction is this language-bound, is it really an important one? Instinctively, we want to say yes, but to do so consistently seems to require the invention of unnatural new terms or undue reliance on punctuation and spelling. We, like the student in Faust's study, might well deserve Mephistopheles' gentle chiding for an overreliance on the power of words:

In short, you pin your faith on words, my friend,
Make words your safeguard, so that you ascend
To certainty's high temple in the end. . . .
For if your meaning's threatened with stagnation,
Then words come in, to save the situation;

¹¹ James E. Talmage, *Die Glaubensartikel*, trans. Max Zimmer and Georgius Y. Cannon (4th German ed.; Berlin, Frankfurt a. M. and Basel: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1950), pp. 106-108.

They'll fight your battles well if you enlist 'em,
 Or furnish you a universal system.
 Thus words will serve us grandly for a creed,
 Where every syllable is guaranteed.¹²

The other side of the coin is a proliferation of different terms in foreign languages for what is essentially a uniform concept expressed by a single word in English. The notion of stewardship, for instance, is a recurrent theme in the Doctrine and Covenants, and in seven separate appearances there (42:53, 42:70, 64:40, 70:4, 104:11, 124:14) the word “stewardship” is used in more or less the same way. Yet the German Doctrine and Covenants comes up with three different words for this concept (*Treuhänderamt* in 70:4; *Verwalterschaft* in 104:11; *Verwaltung* elsewhere). French vacillates between *administration*, *bien*, and *intendance*, and Swedish uses *förvaltareplats* once (42:53) and *förvaltning* elsewhere. The 1914 Hawaiian edition is consistent, reading *malama waiwai* everywhere for “stewardship.”

Recognizing the importance of consistent usage in cases like these, the L.D.S. Church Translation Department is in the process of compiling glossaries of technical terms and phrases¹³ in each of the ten key foreign languages (Danish, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish) in which its efforts are concentrated. These glossaries will be stored in an electronic computer for rapid access. Availability of these lists will help greatly in standardizing usage and in eliminating conflicting translations of single English terms.

IMPLICATIONS

Much more could and should be said, and many more examples could be given, of the challenges confronting our Church missionaries and translators. At least two conclusions seem clear, however, from what we have already said:

- (1) Language interacts with thought and culture.
- (2) Translation is an art as well as a science. Special tools of the religious translator include intimate knowledge of two cultures, two languages, and at least two religions; a good writing style; and a sound familiarity with linguistic principles.

¹² Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust, Part One*, trans. Philip Wayne (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1949), p. 97.

¹³ Thomas J. Fyans, director of the L.D.S. Church Translation Department, was kind enough to supply this and all subsequent information in this article concerning the Church's translation program. More specific information relating to the work of this department can be found in an interview with Elder Fyans in *The Improvement Era*, LXIX (October, 1966), 864-67, entitled “The Era Asks about the Translation of Church Literature.” Also, see the talk given by Elder Victor L. Brown of the Presiding Bishopric in General Conference, April 6, 1967 (reported in *Deseret News*, April 7, 1967).

To these a third assertion should be added which is not directly supported by our considerations up to now:

(3) Foreign-speaking L.D.S. missionaries do well, often remarkably well, in overcoming language problems, but they can do much better with more consistent and more competent help.

The first conclusion, that language interacts with thought and culture, implies first of all that language is affected by thought and culture. This consequence is clear, since language is the undisputed mirror of thought and culture patterns. But the second notion that our conclusion implies, namely that language exerts a reciprocal effect on thought and culture, is more obscure and difficult to argue. The American anthropologist-linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf has stated the case for the influence of language on one's world-view as succinctly and convincingly as anyone: ". . . people act about situations in ways which are like the ways they talk about them."¹⁴

An interpreter of Whorf reads more direction into Whorf's causal chain:

. . . the structure of the language one habitually uses influences the manner in which one understands his environment. The picture of the universe shifts from tongue to tongue.¹⁵

There is no one metaphysical pool of universal human thought. Speakers of different languages see the Cosmos differently, evaluate it differently, sometimes not by much, sometimes widely. Thinking is relative to the language learned.¹⁶

Applied to the predicament of the Mormon translator, such generalizations boil down to these questions: In introducing new terms into a foreign language to describe a new religion, is the translator actually manipulating the world-view of the foreign reader by means of his language in order to make him more receptive to an unfamiliar religion? Does the new term pave the way for a new concept, or is the new term a natural consequence or reflection of a new concept? Is any religious concept ever really independent of the language in which a word for it was first coined?

This fusillade of irksome questions has been posed many times before in other settings and gains additional relevance for Mormonism as missionary efforts are deepened and expanded throughout the world. Given the state of human knowledge now or in the foreseeable future, these questions cannot be answered on a cosmic scale. But an awareness of such conflicts and of how they affect individual

¹⁴ "The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behavior to Language," *Language, Thought and Reality, Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, ed. John B. Carroll (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1964), p. 148.

¹⁵ Stuart Chase, foreword, *ibid.*, p. vi.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. x.

cases cannot help but aid those charged with translating Mormonism into foreign tongues.

TOOLS OF THE TRANSLATOR

Our second observation focuses on important skills of the translator. Church translators often possess a fine writing style and deep linguistic knowledge; they frequently command an admirable knowledge of Mormon doctrine. But often they do not have both. The intersection of religious and linguistic proficiency is certainly not a natural one. Professional translators who are not members of the Church are sometimes hired. Often, too, well-meaning Church members with no really fine style in their own language and no sound knowledge of English are enlisted to translate on a volunteer, piece-meal basis.

But perhaps we in the Church who speak English as a native language are most to blame for this problem. We must insist upon accurate, well printed, inexpensive editions of L.D.S. scripture and other literature in foreign languages and match the spread of English as a *lingua franca* of world Mormonism by a desire to learn or to improve our command of languages other than our own. This heightened sensitivity to the minority of Mormons who speak languages other than English is a logical first step in providing them with the best available translators and translated material.

A recent reorganization and centralization of all Church translating does promise to channel the top talent into translating and to coordinate efforts more effectively. A complete revision of scriptural translations into the ten key languages mentioned earlier is also anticipated. English lesson manuals and other annual material are being translated on a strict schedule directly from manuscripts so that they can be available concurrently with the English editions.

MISSIONARIES AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES

The missionary, who is the subject of our third conclusion, is too often left to the tender mercies of his first companion for his initial exposure to a foreign language. Lack of previous experience and inaccurate, haphazard training sometimes combine to put even his most heroic subsequent efforts to learn the language at an insuperable disadvantage.

Missionaries called to areas in which Spanish, German, or Portuguese is spoken now receive intensive language training for about three months in the Language Training Mission at Brigham Young University before departing for their mission fields. Emphasis is placed on lesson memorization and sound mastery of grammatical

rules. Mission presidents have been unanimous in their praise of this type of advance preparation.

Such large-scale training might not be feasible for less common languages, but a period of intensive language training in the field, even at the expense of several days of proselyting, would help missionaries learn to use their second language more effectively.

But there is often little incentive or even opportunity for foreign-speaking missionaries to develop speaking proficiency which surpasses communicative adequacy in strictly religious topics. Indeed, there are enticements in the opposite direction: a missionary with a poor command of the language is less easily drawn into discussions of polygamy or United States foreign policy, and working-class people, who often make up the majority of a missionary's contacts, identify more readily with hauling mastery of their own language.

Even so, there is a strong case for improved language competence in the mission field. First companions should be good teachers and speakers of the language. Mission presidents and their wives can set convincing examples by reaching the members in their own language. And printed, accurate, standardized lesson plans, word lists, and language study schedules are a great help to the missionary after he leaves for the field following an initial period of language training. In the confusion and pressure of administration, new proselyting programs, and long hours of tracting, language learning is often left to chance. This should not be.

Mormon missionaries certainly have more important assignments than acquiring language proficiency. An artisan's creations, however, depend to some extent on the quality of his tools. In practicing the art of teaching the gospel and convincing people of its worth, the missionary has few tools more critical than his ability to communicate.

Though the process of pondering and accepting the gospel is largely spiritual and highly personal, one's introduction to the gospel comes through spoken or written language. Should this introduction be any less impressive in a foreign language than it is in English?

Only through constant awareness that the Church and its message are universal, and through concern for those who have yet to hear it in their own language, can modern scripture be fulfilled:

For it shall come to pass in that day, that every man shall hear the fulness of the gospel in his own tongue, and his own language, through those who are ordained unto this power. . . .¹⁷

¹⁷ Doctrine and Covenants 90:11.