8.12 The translation process

Learners will take into account the importance of considering their target audience when translating key terms and other features of language. They will think through the process of translating Mark 2:1-12 for a specified target audience.

Feeling the Dilemma of the Translator

By now it should be clear that Bible translation is a very complex process. It's not an *impossible* process, but it is a *difficult* process requiring a serious commitment of time and effort. A major focus of this module up to this point has been to allow you to work through some of the steps a translator would work through and experiences some of the challenges a translator would face.

If some of the steps in these Bible translation tutorials have seemed a bit daunting—or even overwhelming—that is okay. I want you to feel a bit of the dilemma that translators face—not to discourage you, but to give you a more realistic understanding of what is really involved in Bible translation. I want you to realize that in Bible translation, there will often *not* be easy answers to the questions you will face. But even through the answers are not easy, there will indeed be an answer to every question.

The sobering weight of the task of Bible translation often drove me to my knees in prayer. I was constantly reminded of the huge responsibility I had taken on. But God was faithful every step of the way. When the Lamogai New Testament was finally published and put into the hands of the Lamogai believers, I can honestly say that I felt good about every translation decision we had made. I won't pretend that the Lamogai translation is perfect. There is no such thing as a perfect translation in any language. But I honestly believe that by God's grace, we were able to give the Lamogai church a translation of the Scriptures that is faithful and clear.

Up to this point, our focus has been on exegesis—unpacking the meaning of the original. In this module, you will get a chance to try your hand at actually translating, but first there are a couple more steps that we need to take care of: **target audience** and **key terms**.

Source Text and Target Audience

The activity worksheets for this module all use the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB). The NASB translators leaned heavily toward the literal side of the translation spectrum. That means that even though the NASB is a good translation, it often does not follow conventional English literary style. No one actually speaks "NASB English," but hopefully we can all understand NASB English well enough to use it as our source language text for the simulated translation exercises in this module.

If the NASB is our source language text, then who is our target audience? I am going to leave that up to each of you to decide. I want you to choose a target audience, but it must be a target audience of English speakers. For example, you may choose a particular age group: a five year old child, a ten year old, a high school student. Or you may choose another category of English speakers like un-churched university students or inner-city adults with little or no education. As you work your way through this simulated translation process you will need to keep your specified target audience in mind with each translational decision you make.

Key Terms

Before you begin translating, you need to consider a few key terms included in our passage, Mark 2:1-12. You need to be sure you translate each term in a way that will be clear and natural to your specified target audience. Below are a few terms to consider:

Capernaum. When we translated for the Lamogai people we knew they would not automatically know that "Capernaum" was the name of a place. For that reason we translated it "the city called Capernaum" or "the place called Capernaum."

Paralytic. Will your target audience be familiar with this word? If not, you may need to translate it "a man who was paralyzed" or "a man who could not walk" or something similar.

Pallet. What does this word mean to you? When I hear the word "pallet" I think of a wooden skid used for transporting cargo, or a painter's pallet with primary colors of paint. Depending on your target audience, some better options may be "mat," "stretcher," or "bedroll."

Scribes. Originally, "scribes" were copyists. They were the ones who painstakingly made handwritten copies of the Hebrew Scriptures because they had no printing presses. By Jesus's day, however, the scribes were much more than mere copyists. Since they spent more time with the Scriptures than anyone else did, they became the experts in the written word (which was often

referred to as "the Law"). They ended up being the teachers and religious leaders of the Jews. Depending on your target audience, you may choose to translate this word as "Teachers of the Law" or "Jewish leaders," or something similar.

Blaspheme. Is this a word your target audience will understand? In Scripture "blaspheme" means to "speak badly to or about God" or to "try to take the place of God." One point to remember is that "blaspheme" is an extremely strong term. You need to make sure your translation of this term conveys the intensity of the original term.

Other Terms. There are several other terms you will need to consider specifically with your target audience in mind. Will they clearly understand words like "faith," "sin," "forgive," and "glorify"?

Son of Man. This is one of the more difficult terms translators often have to face when translating for a minority language like Lamogai. For the purpose of this simulated exercise, I will not ask you to try to unpack this term; just translate it "Son of Man." However, you may need to consider whether or not your audience will correctly understand the way Jesus used this term. He used it as a third-person reference, which could sound like he was talking about someone else—not himself. If necessary, it would certainly be appropriate to translate it "*I, the Son of Man*" to make sure it is clear who Jesus was talking about.

Dug [an opening in the roof]. Don't get hung up on the word "dug." If "dug" is the best word to paint the correct picture of this event for your specific target audience, that is fine. But you should know that "dug" is not the only correct way to translate the Greek word used here. This Greek word only occurs one other place in the New Testament, in Galatians 4:15, where it is translated "plucked out" in some versions: "...*I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me." (In that context, "plucked out" sounds bad enough—I'm glad no one translated it "dug out," even though that would have been an acceptable rendering.)*

Reasoning in their hearts. Again, don't get hung up on literally translating "reasoned in their hearts" if that will not sound natural to your audience. What does it mean to "reason in our hearts"? Even the highly-literal NASB often chose not to translate this phrase literally. Here are a couple examples:

- Genesis 27:41
 - o HEBREW: "Esau said in his heart"
 - o NASB: "Esau said to himself."
- 1 Samuel 27:1
 - o HEBREW: "David said in his heart"

• NASB: "David said to himself."

Ambiguity

There is an ambiguous statement in this passage. Some translations interpreted it one way and others interpreted it another way. The ambiguity is in verse 3, where it says, "*And they came, bringing Him a paralytic, carried by four men.*" How many people came with the paralytic? Was it only the four who carried him, or was there a larger group of people and just four of them were carrying him? The way this is worded in the original, it could mean either of these possibilities. As a translator, you may have to choose one.

Translating the Text

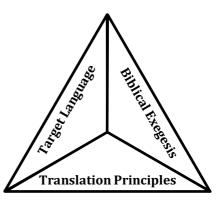
So far, our focus in this module has been on the "downward arrow" of the translation model illustration. We have been trying to discover and unpack all of the meaning. Some of the features we have considered are:

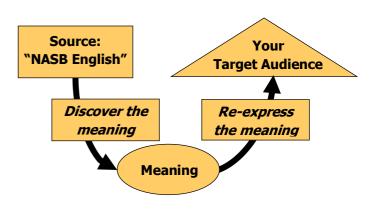
- Communication Situation
- Discourse Genre
- Groupings: Cohesion and Boundaries
- Skewing
- Semantic Paragraphs
- Semantic Propositions
- Case Roles and State Relations
- Key Terms

Now we will shift our focus to the "upward arrow"—re-expressing the meaning we have discovered, using forms that are appropriate for our selected target audience of English speakers. As we worked through the previous tutorials in this module, we produced some useful tools that can help us translate this passage. But along with these tools, we need to go back to the source (in this case, the NASB translation). In translating this passage you will work from the Scriptures and use the analytical tools we have created as a supplement.

Three Key Roles in Translation

When a team of translators undertakes an actual translation project, the team must include individuals with proficiency in the following three areas:





- The Target Language
- Biblical Exegesis
- Translation Principles

The Target Language. The mother-tongue speakers of the target language should always be recognized as the experts in their own language. This is true from the beginning of a translation project all the way through to the end. No matter how many years a non-native speaker has spent learning and speaking a particular target language, he or she will *not* be an expert in that language in the way a mother-tongue speaker will be.

Biblical Exegesis. In many cases, one or more of the non-native (expatriate) members of the translation team will be expected to be the "experts" in biblical exegesis. That does not mean they have to be true experts in all aspects of the Bible; but they should have direct access to the writings of qualified biblical scholars.

Translation Principles. Initially, when a new translation project is launched, the non-native (expatriate) team members will normally take the lead in properly applying translation principles. It is their job to know how to correctly transfer the meaning of the source language text into the target language. However, as the translation project progresses, the mother-tongue speakers on the team will grow in their understanding of translation principles. Ideally, the responsibility for properly applying translation principles will eventually be shared equally between the mother-tongue speakers and the non-native members of the team.

A Shared Effort

Even though the mother-tongue speakers are the *experts* in the target language, non-native members of the team who have learned the language can give input into the wording of the translation. Also, even though the nonnative (expatriate) members of the team often have greater access to the writings of biblical scholars, the mother-tongue speakers can make a significant contribution toward making sure the translation reflects the pure biblical message. This will especially be true once the mother-tongue speakers have been well-taught in biblical truth and have begun teaching it to others.

Some expatriate translators have overestimated their proficiency in the target language, translating the Scriptures on their own and then reading the translation to a mother-tongue speaker to see if it sounds okay. Generally, that strategy produces a substandard translation. Also, there have been cases where mother-tongue speakers were given more responsibility for *biblical exegesis* and *translation principles* than they were equipped to handle. Each member of the translation team needs to recognize his or her particular areas of proficiency and use those proficiencies, joining with the other team members, to produce a high-quality translation of God's Word.



- 1. Choose a specific target audience of English speakers.
- 2. Translate Mark 2:1-12 into an appropriate form in English with your chosen target audience in mind. This will be your initial "rough" draft.
 - Work from the Scriptures and also from the semantic analysis tools you have created.
 - At the top of the page, specify your target audience.
 - Include verse numbers within the text.
 - Use appropriate paragraphing, based on the paragraph divisions you found. In other words, do not just put each verse on a separate line.