

Duplication of Effort?

The Inevitability of Multiple Bible Versions in Multiple Language Variants (and Why This is a Good Thing)

Version 2 – March 2023

Tim Jore

Available at unfoldingword.org/duplication under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License (CC BY-SA)
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>.

DOI: [10.6084/m9.figshare.22303696](https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.22303696)

Executive Summary – As more church networks around the world begin translating the Bible into their own languages, the concern is often raised about “duplication of effort.” Perhaps there is already a Bible translation in that language, or a translation project already underway. This paper considers where the assumption of “one Bible translation per language” came from and how this sets up the value of avoiding “duplication of effort.” It then describes some of the reasons that the church in a given language may see things differently. The paper proposes that the multiplication of Bible translations in a given language is actually a good thing and that what we are seeing is merely the alignment of external perceptions of the need of Bible translation with the actual Bible translation need of the church. Finally, the paper suggests practical ways in which we might support the church in meeting every Bible translation need without delay.

Table of Contents

1 Introduction | 2

2 Why Do We Assume “One Bible Translation Per Language”? | 3

3 What If the Church Assumes Differently? | 5

3.1 From “One Bible Translation” to “Multiple Versions” | 5

3.2 From “Per Language” to “in Many Language Variants” | 8

4 Three Reasons Why the Multiplication of Bible Translations Is a Good Thing | 9

5 How Might We Meet the Church’s Need for “Many Bible Versions in Many Language Variants”? | 11

5.1 Shifting Thinking: From Scarcity to Abundance | 11

5.2 Shifting Targets: From Individual to Regional | 12

5.3 Shifting Resourcing: From English to Strategic Languages | 13

5.3.1 Increasing Bible Translation Production Capacity | 13

5.3.2 Funding the Capacity Increase | 14

6 Conclusion | 14

The first version of this paper was published in March 2023 and has been minimally edited in version 2.

1. Introduction

In light of the high cost and time needed to produce a Bible translation in the established model, Bible agencies have tended to assume that “one Bible translation per language” is sufficient. Some even maintain that it is preferable to have only one translation in a language, as it minimizes confusion and conflict. Agencies generally coordinate together so as to not infringe on existing translation projects, thus avoiding a waste of resources on “duplication of effort.” But what happens if the number of church-assessed Bible translation needs is considerably higher than most external lists suggest? If this were true, we could expect that when the church meets their own Bible translation needs, the number of Bible translations produced in the language will be greater in both the number of versions in the language and the number of language variants needing translation.

This is, in fact, what is happening in many scenarios around the world today. As the church proliferates Bible translations in languages where translation is already underway, concerns are raised about “duplication of effort.” It seems to some that the production of redundant or “overlapping” translations is a waste of resources. In this paper, we will consider why the proliferation of Bible translations (more versions in multiple language variants) might actually be a profoundly good thing and how we might foster a massive increase in Bible translation all over the world. Before we do so, we will first consider where the assumption of “one Bible translation per language” came from and how this sets up the traditional value of avoiding “duplication of effort.”

Author’s note: This paper includes various assertions that would seem to warrant robust sourcing but that appear to be stated as fact without documentation. Such statements are usually attempts to synthesize general trends in the emerging model of Church-Centric Bible Translation, for which there is not (yet) a robust literature. Thus, the sources for these statements are often direct observation of the phenomenon in various parts of the world or personal conversations with leaders of church networks (and others) involved in the work. This paper is intended as an invitation to dialog, warmly welcoming evidence for and against the theses it proposes. See also “When the Church Translates the Bible” (2024) by the author for a more thorough consideration of Church-Centric Bible Translation.

2. Why Do We Assume “One Bible Translation Per Language”?

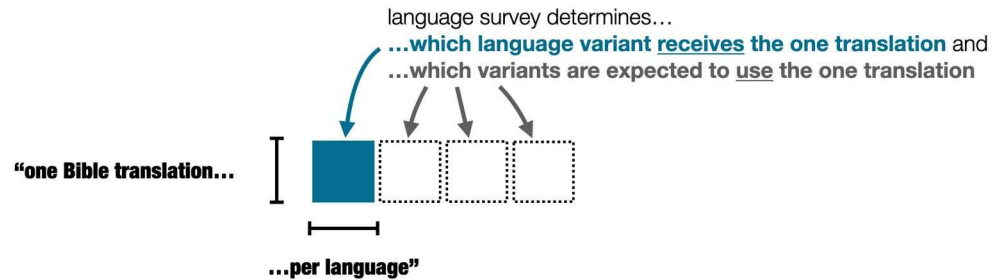
The established model of Bible translation generally works from the (often unspoken) assumption that “one Bible translation per language” is all that a lingual church needs.¹ This assumption is rooted in the values of a Bible translation context that was constrained by scarcity—Bible translations done for the church are costly and time-consuming to produce.² While translators may want to provide every dialect in a language with its own translation, this has simply never been possible.

Managing this scarcity became an important part of the work of Bible translation organizations, the goal being to maximize the return on investment. Funders, understandably, do not want to invest hundreds of thousands of dollars for a Bible translation that is not needed or is not used by the lingual church. This led to the development of sociolinguistic survey as an important element of strategic planning. Surveyors were

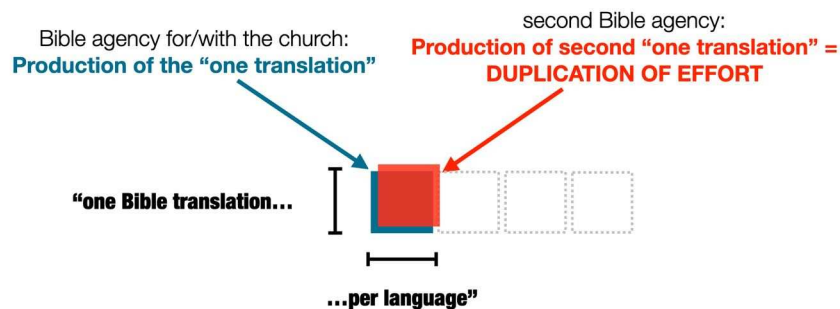
¹ The term “lingual church” refers to the element of the global church that speaks a given language.

² One study in Papua New Guinea found the average New Testament translation to take 20 years at a cost of USD \$1 million (SIL Papua New Guinea. “Scripture Use Research and Ministry.” Unpublished Report. 22.).

tasked with two important objectives. First, they were to determine the *viability* of a language—specifically: would it still be alive and in use by the time the Bible translation was finished? Second, they were to determine which *language variant* (i.e., dialect) was the best candidate for receiving the one Bible translation in that language, such that the speakers of the other dialects could also (presumably) use it. We can visualize this on a two-axis diagram showing number of translations on the vertical axis and language variants on the horizontal axis:



Bible translators have done very important work for (and often with) the church for many decades. It is, however, important to acknowledge that the general assumption of “one Bible translation per language” is an external constraint that not only originates from an era of scarcity, but also from the unverified assumption that each lingual church is able and willing to use only one translation. For a language with many variants, the assumption is that **a translation in any one of them meets the need for a Bible translation in that language**, and this is generally reflected in Bible translation progress metrics.³



This assumption also led to the assumed value in the established model of Bible translation of avoiding “duplication of effort.” Given the high cost and time commitment required to produce a Bible translation, Bible translation agencies generally coordinate together so as to not infringe on existing translation projects. If another agency is already at work on a translation in a given language (or any of its variants), other agencies agree to not start a competing translation. In the established model of Bible translation, it is important to avoid wasting resources through “duplication of effort.” But when the church translates the Bible into their own language(s), it is helpful to revisit these assumptions and values.

³ With few exceptions, this “one translation per language” assumption is reflected in the way languages have traditionally been identified in the Bible translation world. The Bible translation world has generally identified languages using a single 3-letter code (the ISO 649-3 “Ethnologue code”), which is scoped to individual languages—not language variants (dialects, etc.). Thus, a translation in one of the dialects is usually presumed to meet the translation need for the entire language. Thankfully, this is starting to change, as IETF Language subtagging (BCP-47) is adopted. This is backward compatible with Ethnologue codes, but provides a far more robust and standardized means of identifying language variants. (See: McDonnell and Spanne, “Benefits of Using BCP-47 Language Tags.”)

3. What If the Church Assumes Differently?

The actual Bible translation need of a lingual church has not typically been the deciding factor in allocation of Bible translation resources in the established model. As lingual churches all over the world continue translating the Bible into their own languages we are only now starting to discover just how misaligned from ecclesial reality our “one Bible per language” assumption has been.

To be clear, the need of the church is not what is changing. What is changing is this: when an element of the church translates the Bible into their own language(s) *we become aware of what **the actual church-assessed Bible translation need** has been all along*. The church is not usually aiming for the production goals and lists of the established model of Bible translation—they generally don’t even know about these lists and, when they do, often find them misaligned with their needs. The leaders of these church networks are focused entirely on the needs of the church, as assessed by the church. This is why, when viewed through the scarcity-constrained lens of “one Bible translation per language,” it looks like lingual churches are duplicating effort all over the place. In reality, they are meeting the *actual* Bible translation need of the church—a need that is much larger than we may have realized before.

When an element of the church translates the Bible into their own language(s), what if the outside assumption of “one Bible translation per language” is found to be in conflict with the actual need of “multiple versions in many language variants”? We will consider this in two parts. First, from “*one Bible translation per language*” shifting to “**multiple versions per language**.” Then also from “multiple versions *per language*” shifting to “multiple versions **in many language variants**.”

3.1. From “One Bible Translation” to “Multiple Versions”

*What if Bible translation is shifting from “one Bible translation per language” to **multiple versions in each language**?*

It is hoped that, as the emerging model of Bible translation develops, church networks in a region will prioritize the completion of the last remaining unmet Bible translation needs. Sometimes, the need of the church in the region aligns with the production objectives of the Bible translation agencies. But frequently, church leaders choose to first (or concurrently) begin work in languages that are deemed by the outside world as already having a finished Bible translation. For example, the Usarufa lingual church in Papua New Guinea and the Sagloi⁴ in Vietnam both started new translations in their languages only 20 years or so after the publication of the New Testament that was translated for them by professional linguist-translators. Both lingual churches knew about the existing translation in their language but opted to start over instead of revise it.

This is becoming a common pattern all over the world. The church in languages that are listed as “need met” are increasingly asserting that the existing translation does not meet their need. Furthermore, they are also often inviting help from others, whether in the form of training or financial assistance (or both). From the perspective of those seeking to finish the task of ending “Bible poverty” this seems like a poor use of resources. Is it right (or prudent) to help provide “best Scriptures” when some languages are still waiting for their “first Scriptures”?

This question points to one of the essential differences between the global perspective of outsiders and the perspective of leaders in a lingual church. Even though the official Bible translation progress tracking lists

⁴ A pseudonym.

indicate many of these languages already have their “need met,” the church-assessed reality is that the existing translation does not meet their need. There may be any number of reasons for this, including the use of an archaic and incomprehensible form of the language, use of inappropriate terminology that prevents use of the translation in church, theological errors that urgently need correction, use of an orthography that is unreadable for the church, etc.⁵ When their “first Scriptures” are unusable, the felt need of the church in these kinds of situations is often to address the need for usable Scriptures immediately. In addition, some of these languages are immensely important to the life of the church and may also be catalytic for equipping the church to complete the remaining Bible translation needs in the region. This amplifies the need for an excellent translation in each language that is usable by the church.

Ordinarily, we would assume that in such scenarios, a revision is needed. Yet frequently, instead of revising the existing translation, the lingual church decides to do a new translation. Why? It seems there are two main reasons that a lingual church may choose to start a new translation rather than revise one that is in need of updating. First, revising someone else’s work is generally more time-consuming than starting over, and the result is often not exactly what the church needs. Frequently, the church desires to do a fresh work of theology in culture, using more natural forms of the language and better theological terminology, and providing increased clarity—all reflected in a different translation philosophy that can only be effectively implemented in a new Bible translation. As one church leader notes:

I am sure that in your experience, you will agree that **correcting another work is far more cumbersome than working from a clean sheet** ... There were far too many mistakes [in the original work we corrected], and at the end, it was not completely the style we wanted, as we could not change the entire flow.⁶

Second, even when the lingual church is willing to revise an existing translation in their own language, they usually do not have the legal freedom to do so. The copyrights to the Bible translations in languages all over the world are generally not owned by the lingual churches, and the translations themselves are usually restricted by an “all rights reserved” license. The copyright and right to revise the existing translation is usually owned by a mission organization or publisher. Even when the copyright owner is willing to permit a church-led revision, the legal overhead involved in granting formal permission for a revision of the existing translation can slow the process down considerably. But all too often, even the willingness is not there, as in one recent scenario:

... [One lingual church] some years ago, wanted to update the translation, but **the mission agency who did it would not let them modify [it] at all**, saying that “making any changes to the text would dishonor all the years of sacrifice that the missionaries had made to translate that.” So, [the church] is wanting to ... do their own translation now.⁷

In addition to factors pertaining to a translation’s **usability** (e.g., language style, the choice of language variant, theological terminology, doctrine, etc.) the church must account for the **adequacy** of the Scripture translated. They may need to complete an unfinished translation or translate the Old Testament to complement an already translated New Testament.

Another pressing need of the church relates to the **timeline** of current translation work in progress. When the timeline to completion of a Bible translation led by a Bible agency is longer than what it would take the

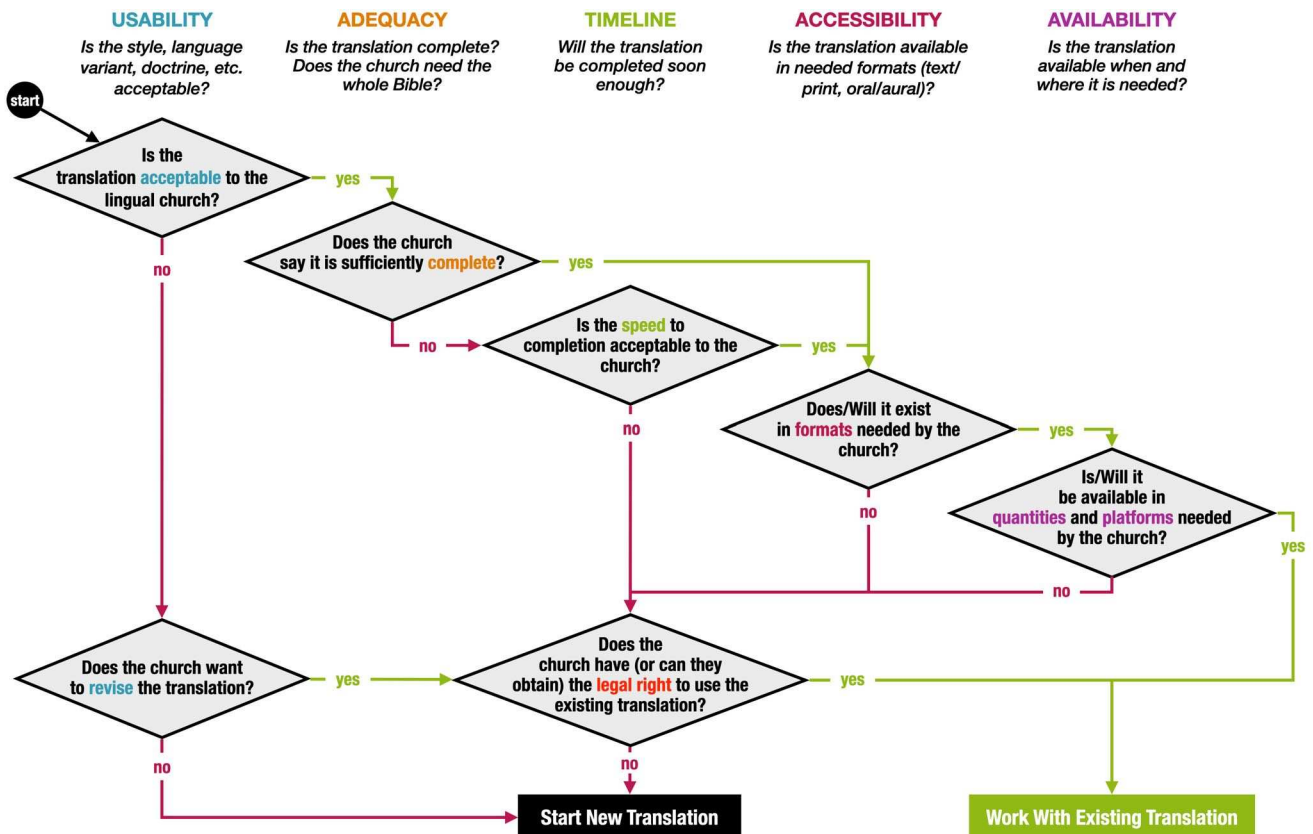
⁵ All of these examples are sourced from actual scenarios in various parts of the world. The frequency of each translation issue varies, but none are hypothetical.

⁶ Name withheld, email, November 2022.

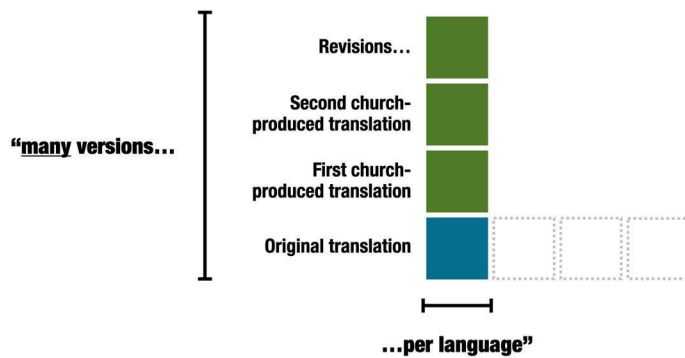
⁷ Name withheld, email, October 2022.

church to start and finish their own translation, the church is understandably reluctant to wait. Some have expressed a willingness to wait if the existing translation project will be finished within three years. Otherwise, the urgency of the translation need compels them to start their own translation project, as they will be finished within that time frame.

Even when a translation is usable and adequate, the church may need it in different formats to address issues of **accessibility**. For example, a completed text translation may be needed as an audio Bible. In addition, the church may encounter needs pertaining to the **availability** of the translation. They may need greater quantities of a printed Bible or the freedom to use a digital Bible on a new technology platform. These factors can be considered as a flowchart:



For all of these factors, when the copyright of the existing translation is owned by an outside entity and the translation itself is not openly licensed such that the church can meet their needs with the existing translation, the church may have no recourse but to start a new translation. Regardless of the driving factors, it is likely that the needs of many lingual churches will result in multiple translations of the Bible in the language.



When a lingual church translates the Bible into their own language, it seems that the inevitable result is more than one version of the Bible in that language, each implementing a different translation philosophy or making improvements to a previous version.⁸ But the full scope of the Bible translation need is not only greater along the axis of number of Bible translations (i.e., contrary to the assumption of “one Bible translation per language”), it is also greater along the axis of number of language variants (i.e., contrary to the assumption “one Bible translation *per language*”).

3.2. From “Per Language” to “in Many Language Variants”

*What if Bible translation is shifting from “one Bible translation **per language**” to many versions in many language variants?*

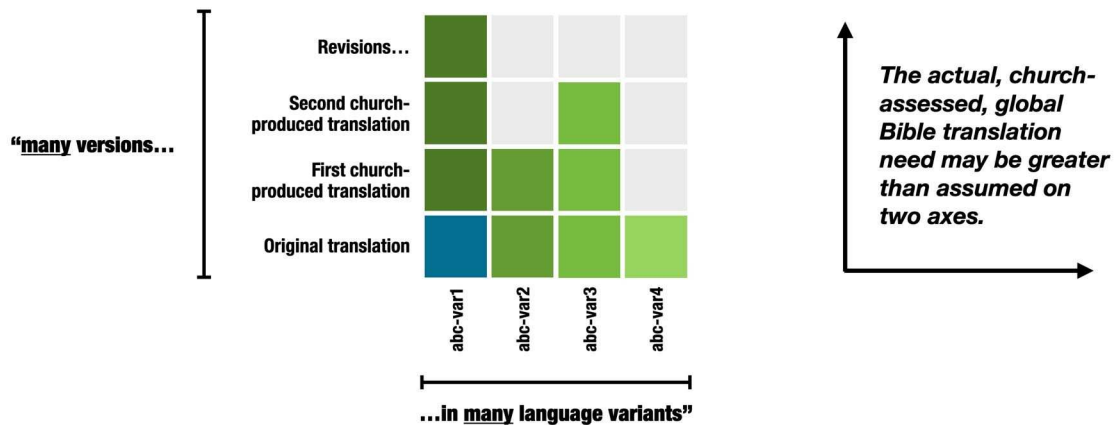
Sometimes, when the church translates the Bible into their own language, they choose to produce one translation that works for all dialects. In this way, Bible translation supports the unity of the church by providing a single common text across all language variants. For example, one church network in Southeast Asia wanted a single Bible translation that worked across their entire people group, speaking three quite distinct dialects. They worked hard to agree together on wording decisions in their translation that were acceptable across all three dialects. Once these decisions were made, they completed the translation of the Bible in less than three years.

This example of the church making their own decision to use one translation for all their dialects is something of an outlier. More often, the church decides that every one of their language variants needs its own translation. This is especially true with oral Bible translations, where differences in speech variants are more discernible. In this way, Bible translation supports the unity of the church by providing everyone in the people group with the Bible in their own speech variety. For example, the church in one South Asian language created and published a translation of the Bible in their language and then discovered that it was not ideally suited for the dialects used in the central and south of the region. So they also created a translation for each of these dialects, resulting in a unified church where each one has the Word of God in their heart language (variant).

In addition, the assessment by the church of the translation need changes over time. A lingual church may start with one common translation for the whole language and then discover that they need to have multiple translations in different language variants in order to increase understanding of God’s Word across the whole

⁸ In the report “The UBS Translation Program in the Next Decade” given at the UBS Executive Committee meetings (March 28-30, 1977), Eugene Nida argued that in major languages there was need for three different types of translation, “traditional, common language, and literary” (cited in Noss, “Definitions and Identity”). This suggests that the recognition of the value of having multiple translations in a given language is not a new phenomenon, but that this value extends beyond only “major languages.”

church. Thus, a lingual church's assessment of their own Bible translation need is fluid, changing as needed to reflect their linguistic and ecclesial reality over time.



When the church translates the Bible into their own language(s), the actual extent of the Bible translation need may be greater than previously realized both in terms of the number of translations needed in a language and the number of language variants in which multiple translations are needed.

4. Three Reasons Why the Multiplication of Bible Translations Is a Good Thing

If observable patterns are indicative of broader trends that continue on into the future, multiple versions of the Bible in most languages is not only possible—it may be inevitable. But rather than seeing this as wasteful or problematic, what if it is actually a very good thing?

First, it **indicates a maturing church**. When viewed in light of the biblical model of mission that emphasizes the establishing and equipping of the church, multiple translations in a language is a wonderful development. It is evidence that the church is assessing their own Bible translation needs and taking responsibility for meeting those needs. This indicates an important and desirable phase in the formation of the church.⁹

The missiological objective of Bible translation is not merely the production of a Bible translation. Nor is it merely the transformation of individual lives by understanding the Scriptures in the mother tongue. An equally important objective of Bible translation is the theological formation of the lingual church as God's family (1Ti 3:15), grounded in the gospel (Co 1:23), obedient in everything Jesus has taught (Mt 28:19-20), and equipped to build themselves up to full maturity in Christ (Ep 4:11-16). This process is modeled clearly in Scripture and shows a transition over time from new believers who are dependent on the one who lays the foundations (e.g., Paul) to mature believers who work interdependently as coworkers with other leaders in the church.

Effective missiology *wants* to see the church take responsibility for meeting all of their own Bible translation needs and not being dependent on outsiders. The longer a lingual church exists and the more they interact

⁹ Note that the argument here is from the perspective of a brand new lingual church growing to maturity and, in that process, taking up the responsibility to decide for themselves their own Bible translation needs. It is *not* saying that every scenario where multiple Bible translations exist is proof of a mature church! One need look no further than the English-speaking lingual church and our proliferation of Bible translations (for all manner of dubious reasons) as an example.

with Scripture, the more we should expect the church to bring into existence new works of Bible translation in their language, whether by revision or creation of new translations.

Second, the proliferation of Bible translations in a language is evidence that **the actual Bible translation needs of the church are being met**—not merely the reduced determination of need (singular) that reflects outside assumptions and institutional limitations. The intent of the Bible translation agencies has always been to meet every Bible translation need in every language. But there has never been enough capacity to meet every need, so a more achievable goal was prioritized: some languages with a whole Bible, some with a New Testament, some with portions, some that don't need anything, etc. These goals have been further constrained by the assumption that only one Bible translation is needed for a given language. In this context, it is easy to forget that *our perception of the Bible translation need has often been misaligned with the reality of the actual Bible translation needs of the church.*

What we are now seeing is the alignment of our perception of the Bible translation need (which we have assumed to be much smaller than it actually is) with reality. **It is only the lingual church that is able to accurately assess its own Bible translation needs.** When they are equipped to meet their own needs, it stands to reason that the full scope of the church's actual needs will turn out to be far greater than we realized. Almost always, this includes the entire Bible translated into every language (and often every language variant). Many languages listed as “translation finished” are likely to be assessed by the church as in need of a new translation. Many languages, as assessed by the church, need a complete Bible translation in each of the language's variants. Thus, the multiplication of translations is evidence that the (much greater than we realized) Bible translation need of the church is being met.

Along these same lines, as the church assesses and meets all the Bible translation needs in a region, it is likely there will be *hundreds* of translations undertaken by the church in languages listed in outside records as “no translation need.”¹⁰ Why? This is often because Bible translation done for the church is a time-consuming process, so any language not considered to be of sufficient sociolinguistic viability (i.e., a dying language) is usually taken off the list of languages targeted for Bible translation. The same goes for languages that are assumed to be sufficiently multilingual and, thus, able to use a Bible translation in another language. The problem is not that this never happens—sometimes it does. The problem is that frequently this determination is made even though the felt need of the lingual church may be for a Bible translation *in spite of* (and sometimes *because of*) these factors.¹¹ This results in an intriguing irony: **As outside lists are continually trimmed of languages assumed to not need a translation, the number of languages assessed by the church to need a Bible translation continues to increase.**

We have seen that the multiplication of Bible translations in a language indicates a maturing church that is meeting the actual Bible translations needs of the church. Another reason the increase in the number of Bible translations in a language is a good thing is that it tends to **increase the trustworthiness** of all of them. We see this any time we compare multiple translations of the Bible in any language, such as English. Comparison of different versions results in questions about translation decisions and a greater implicit understanding of the nuances of the original languages. In the same way, as a lingual church is equipped to use robust biblical resources to produce trustworthy translations of the Bible in their own languages, the comparison of these

¹⁰ Current estimates indicate over 1,000 languages that have no Scripture and have “likely no need” (Wycliffe Global Alliance, “2022 Global Scripture Access.”).

¹¹ The key is to let the lingual church decide for themselves—but *after* they have been made aware of the support and resources available to them to equip them to do the work themselves. As more church networks become aware of the fact that they are not alone in the Bible translation task and that many are willing to train and resource them to achieve excellence in Bible translation in all their languages, the number of languages in which the church decides to start translating the Bible tends to increase.

translations together and with translations in strategic languages in the region results in a robust mesh of cross-checking across the entire lingual church. With more eyes comparing more texts together, the chance of error slipping through is significantly diminished.¹²

5. How Might We Meet the Church’s Need for “Many Bible Versions in Many Language Variants”?

We have considered how the actual Bible translation needs of the global church are much greater than we assumed. From the perspective of resourcing Bible translation globally, as well as the timeline to completion of all these translations, this could seem daunting to the point of discouragement. But it does not need to be! Here are three practical ways in which we can collaborate together to effectively meet the actual Bible translation needs of the global church without delay.

5.1. Shifting Thinking: From Scarcity to Abundance

First, we should recognize that **Bible translation in the digital age is shifting from a context dominated by scarcity to one of abundance.** This is evident in several ways, including the proliferation of mobile technology that greatly increases the iterative nature of Bible translation processes. In the analog era of print, it was costly and difficult to improve translations. In an era where mobile technology is inexpensive and nearly ubiquitous, the speed of producing, using, and revising Bible translations greatly increases.

Another related factor is the greatly increasing size of the global Bible translation workforce. Church-Centric Bible Translation is scaling up in global networks of churches and disciple-makers all over the world.¹³ Many of these translation projects have been completed with excellent results, and many more are in progress. New church networks—many of them in some of the most challenging contexts—are being trained to incorporate Bible translation into the life of the church.

The addition of new church networks is increasing the size of the global Bible translation workforce. It is also lowering the average cost of Bible translation and increasing the average pace of Bible translation.¹⁴ Multiple church networks have demonstrated that they can produce trustworthy whole Bible translations in as little as 2-5 years. Where lingual churches are younger and do not yet have the same level of production capacity, the integration of Bible translation into the life of the church (rather than a parallel process of translation production) generally results in vastly less expense and much greater engagement with the Scriptures while the church is learning to translate them.

Many of these church networks are committed to producing Bible translations that are released under open licenses, thus removing all legal friction in the production, distribution, and use of the translations. Not surprisingly, abundance begets abundance: **The more new open-licensed translations that are produced by**

¹² Furthermore, we must remember that many of the new translations are being started by leaders in the lingual churches because the church *needs to correct errors in the existing translations.*

¹³ There are many examples of the growth of the global church and its increasing emphasis on Bible translation. One is the 24:14 macro network which reports over 5,000 church-planting movements around the world, many of them in previously unreached people groups (cf. “24:14 Dashboard,” 4.). 24:14 is working toward the objective of “a movement in every people group and place” by 2025, including a focus on training leaders for Church-Centric Bible Translation. Another example is The Global Church Network that is focused on “Synergizing the Whole Body of Christ for the Fulfillment of the Great Commission.” Their Finish 2030 objective is focused on equipping the church to finish the Great Commission by 2030, and it includes equipping the church to meet all remaining Bible translation needs.

¹⁴ cf. Edwards, “My God Speaks My Language.”

the church, the more the church is equipped to rapidly (and legally) produce new translations that are derivatives of these translations. These include audio Bibles, translations in related languages, and the production of interlinear study Bibles and other theological resources.

Thus, we note that the discovery of the much larger actual Bible translation need (“many Bible versions in many language variants”) is occurring at the same time (and for the same reasons) that the conditions for meeting the need are improving in ways that were not possible in the past. However, the abundance of increasing workforce, decreasing cost, and increasing pace of Bible translation are only effective in contexts where the church already has access to the biblical, translational, and technological resources it needs to achieve excellence in Bible translation. The potential abundance of the rest of the global church can be either optimized or diminished to the degree that those who have the resources needed by the church make them available without legal friction and in the strategic languages of the church. We will consider this in more detail in the “Shifting Resourcing” section below.

5.2. Shifting Targets: From Individual to Regional

When outside entities create their own prioritized Bible translation lists of individual languages (i.e., “this language gets resources and funding, but not that one”), they are inevitably only partially aligned with the priorities of the church in the region. Funders are usually most interested in funding “first Scriptures” while the church in the region may also be interested in meeting the immediate need for “best Scriptures” (i.e., revisions/restarts of translations in important languages). Sometimes the church’s greatest need is for a usable translation in a language that is already listed as “need met.” In other scenarios, some of the greatest Bible translation needs of the church are in languages that have thousands of speakers but are listed in external records as moribund and thus not in need of translation at all.

A solution to these challenges is to change the perspective from which Bible translation resourcing and funding are viewed from lists of individual languages to a regional view that encompasses all the Bible translation needs in a given region. By way of analogy, this is like switching from fishing with a pole that catches fish individually (“this one, not that one”) to fishing with a net that catches all the fish—including not only the ones specifically desired, but every other fish in the pond, of which the fisherman may not even have been aware.

This approach has the significant advantage of looking to the church in the region to prioritize their most urgent needs while also accounting for the priorities of outside entities. It provides the church in the region with the flexibility and support needed to meet evangelism, church-planting, and Bible translation needs concurrently and in a more effective, interdependent manner. It also enables the church to meet every Bible translation need—both those that outside entities know about and those about which they do not know. This includes translation needs in all the languages of which outsiders are not even aware, as well needed translations in all the language variants.

Crafting and executing a church-led regional approach to Bible translation might include the following:

- Work with church networks to **define the regional objective**, e.g., all the translation needs in a country, the needs in multiple countries at a time, a region within a single country, etc.
- Provide the church networks with the **best available information** regarding ongoing Bible translation work in the region, as well as the remaining “first Scriptures” needs. All too often, the church is not even aware of usable Scripture that exists (or will soon).

- Equip the church to document and report the **actual sociolinguistic reality and Bible translation needs** in the region. The church in a region is in the best position to do the research regarding patterns of language use and to assess the actual Bible translation need.
- Work with the church to **collaboratively create a plan that enables the church** to accomplish both the “first Scriptures” and the “best Scriptures” Bible translation needs for the entire region.
- Include in the resourcing plan the **translation and distribution of biblical and translational resources in the Strategic Languages** needed by the church in the region. (See the next section.)

5.3. Shifting Resourcing: From English to Strategic Languages

In order to equip the church to achieve excellence in Bible translation in all the languages in a given region, it is important to provide high quality biblical and translational resources in the languages needed by the church in the region. This requires a shift in tactics from merely funding production of Bible translations to funding the increase of Bible production capacity in the church networks all across a region.

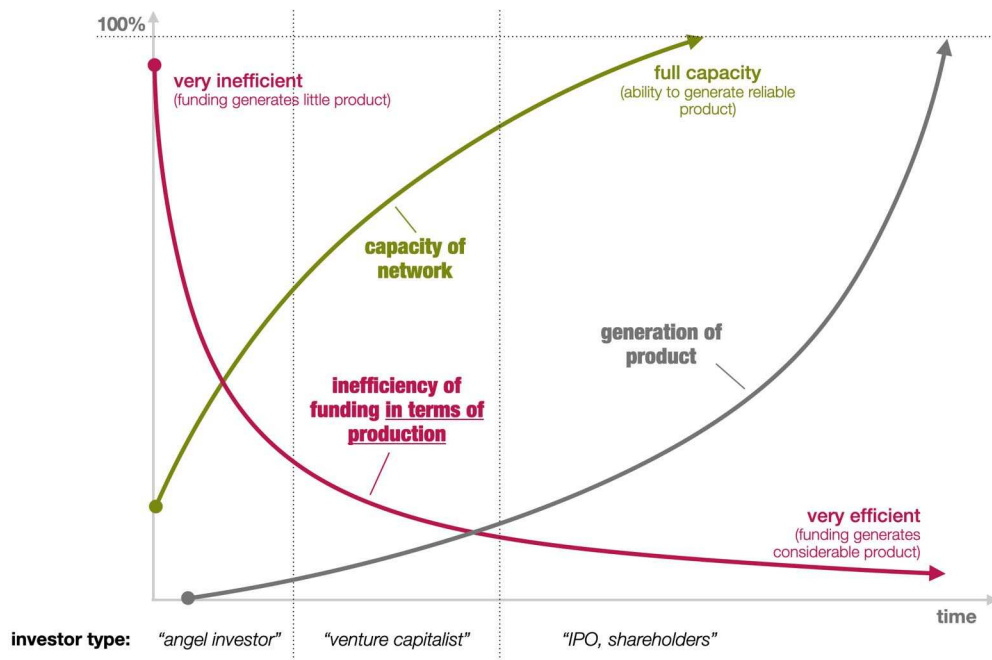
5.3.1. Increasing Bible Translation Production Capacity

Practically, this involves building into every regional Bible translation plan the provision of legally unencumbered, high-quality biblical resources in the Strategic Languages that are needed by the church. This will provide perpetually available foundational resources by which the church can achieve and maintain the excellence of all Bible translations in the region over time. The **Strategic Languages Initiative**¹⁵ is a collaborative project to define the types of resources needed and the strategic languages in which they are needed in order to equip the entire global church for excellence in Bible translation. This is a recommended place to start in order to discover what resources are available and to coordinate with other resource providers to maximize effectiveness in equipping the church.

5.3.2. Funding the Capacity Increase

It should be noted that investing in increased capacity will be more costly at the outset (relative to Bible translation production), but the need for external funding will decrease over time as the biblical resources are finished and made available for use.

¹⁵ See openlanguages.io/sli and bit.ly/eten-sl.



The diagram above shows the general progression of higher capital investment and lower translation production in earlier stages that are focused on creating the resources and equipping the church. When viewed in light of metrics such as “chapters of translated Scripture per year,” the financial resources invested in providing biblical and translation resources, and training church networks to use them is inefficient in early stages. Over time, as the church’s translation production capacity increases, the ongoing funding investment decreases as production of translations by the church increases in all language variants where the church needs a Bible translation.

6. Conclusion

When the church translates the Bible, we should expect that multiple versions of the Bible will be produced in multiple variants of the language. But it would be a mistake to view this as “duplication of effort.” It is more accurate to see this as the church meeting the actual Bible translation needs that existed all along, but that may not have been visible when viewed from the assumption that “one Bible translation per language” is all that is needed.

We have the opportunity to change how we think about Bible translation, how we prioritize translation work, and how we resource the global church to meet all of their Bible translation needs. By doing so, the global church will be equipped not only to meet the remaining known Bible translation needs, but also to create and maintain any number of versions of the Bible in any number of language variants beyond them.

References

- “24:14 Dashboard.” March 2022. <https://2414now.net/resources/>.
- Edwards, Calvin. “My God Speaks My Language: Church-Centric Mission and Translation.” National Christian Foundation, February 28, 2019. <https://www.ncfgiving.com/stories/when-the-word-is-their-own-god-is-their-own-new-methods-in-bible-translation/>.
- McDonell, Rob, and Joan Spanne. “Benefits of Using BCP-47 Language Tags,” September 9, 2022.
- Noss, Philip A. “Definitions and Identity.” *Current Trends in Scripture Translation*, UBS Bulletin, 198, no. 199 (2005): 11–24.
- SIL Papua New Guinea. “Scripture Use Research and Ministry.” April 2017.
- Wycliffe Global Alliance. “2022 Global Scripture Access.” Wycliffe Global Alliance (blog), September 2022. <https://www.wycliffe.net/resources/statistics/>.