Trustworthy and Trusted

Equipping the Global Church for Excellence in Bible Translation

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Executive Summary – This paper describes the difference between the trustworthiness of a Bible translation and the trust that the element of the global church that speaks the language has in it. It examines the means by which trust can be established, as well as the two key milestones through which every translation goes to arrive at trustworthiness. It considers historical precedents and suggests that while excellence must always be the goal, ongoing revision of Bible translations is to be expected, not avoided. It then describes the various means by which the church determines the trustworthiness of a Bible translation and considers how a systematic and comprehensive checking model could both improve the faithfulness of a translation and accelerate the process of achieving it. Finally, it proposes collaboration in the provision of resources and tools that implement the model.

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The first version of this paper was published in August 2017 and has been minimally edited in version 2.

Glossary of Terms

Certain important terms and their definitions as used in this paper are listed here:

- **church network**: interconnected local churches that share a common leadership structure and doctrinal persuasion. *This term includes formally-structured networks such as denominations as well as unstructured networks such as simple house church movements.*
- **global church**: the household of God (Ep 2:19), the body of Christ (Ep 1:22-23), the sum total of all believers in the one faith (Ep 3:8-10), including all languages and cultures (Mt 28:19-20), and including all traditions that are faithful expressions of sound doctrine (Ep 4:4-5), at the current time.
- **lingual church**: an element of the global church that is linguistically homogenous, speaking either the same language or variants that have a sufficient degree of mutual intelligibility, and including all traditions that are faithful expressions of sound doctrine (Ep 4:1-6; 1Ti 6:3; Tt 2:1). *This term is proposed with the intent to affirm the unity of the global church, while also recognizing the ecclesiological and missiological implications (particularly in terms of effective use of Bible translations and biblical resources) inherent in the existence of one global church that speaks many languages.*
- **local church**: a church body in close geographic proximity that meets together regularly. *This term attempts to define a local church with regard to its geospatial existence, not essential ecclesiological functions.*
- **regional church**: local churches that share a common geographical location (e.g., a city “the church in Ephesus” (Re 2:1) or a region “churches of Galatia” (Ga 1:2)) and, frequently, cultural distinctives (e.g., “the Western church,” “the church of the Global South”).
- **universal church**: the global church, through all time.
- **precision**: the degree to which a translation is consistently exact in terms of faithfulness and clarity with regard to its communication of the intended meaning of the original texts.
- **trustworthy translation**: the objective reality of a translation that faithfully and clearly communicates the meaning of the original languages as it was communicated to the original hearers in their cultural, historical, and linguistic context.
- **trusted translation**: the subjective perception of the trustworthiness of a translation by the lingual church that speaks that language, as indicated by their reliance on it for all matters pertaining to “faith and good doctrine” (1Ti 4:6).
- **church-centric Bible translation**: a Bible translation that is commissioned by leaders of a lingual church (see definition above) and done by believers translating into their own language, to meet their own needs pertaining to evangelism, discipleship, and spiritual formation.

1. Introduction

In order for a translation of the Bible to be effective, it must be both trustworthy and trusted by the element of the global church that speaks that language. Alignment of the objective reality (the translation's trustworthiness) and subjective perception of the translation (the lingual church's trust in it) is important, but is not always achieved. This is a significant problem.

For example, in some parts of the Middle East, recently completed translations of the New Testament are not being used by the lingual church. They do not know of any actual problems with the new translations, but that is not sufficient for them—they want to verify for themselves that their translations are trustworthy. In other parts of the world, translations of books of the Bible are in the final stages of publishing and are eagerly awaited by the lingual church. The translations have been through multiple rounds of checking, but the absence of many verses suggests even to people who do not speak the language that the translation is not yet trustworthy.

In these examples, as well as many others like them, we see the potential for misalignment of the trustworthiness of a Bible translation and the trust placed in it by the lingual church. This paper attempts to show that it is not only possible but missiologically imperative to equip the entire global church with the resources and tools to confidently and reliably assess the trustworthiness of any Bible translation in their own language.[1]

2. Trustworthiness and Trust in Bible Translation

The trustworthiness of a Bible translation is not necessarily correlated to the lingual church's perception (and subsequent trust) of the translation. In order to conceptualize this, consider the chart below. The vertical axis represents the objective reality of a given translation as "trustworthy" or "not trustworthy." The horizontal axis represents the lingual church's perception of that translation as "trusted" or "not trusted."

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[1] Some of the underlying concepts on which this paper builds, including a description of the church-centric Bible translation paradigm, are described by the author in "The Gateway Languages Strategy."

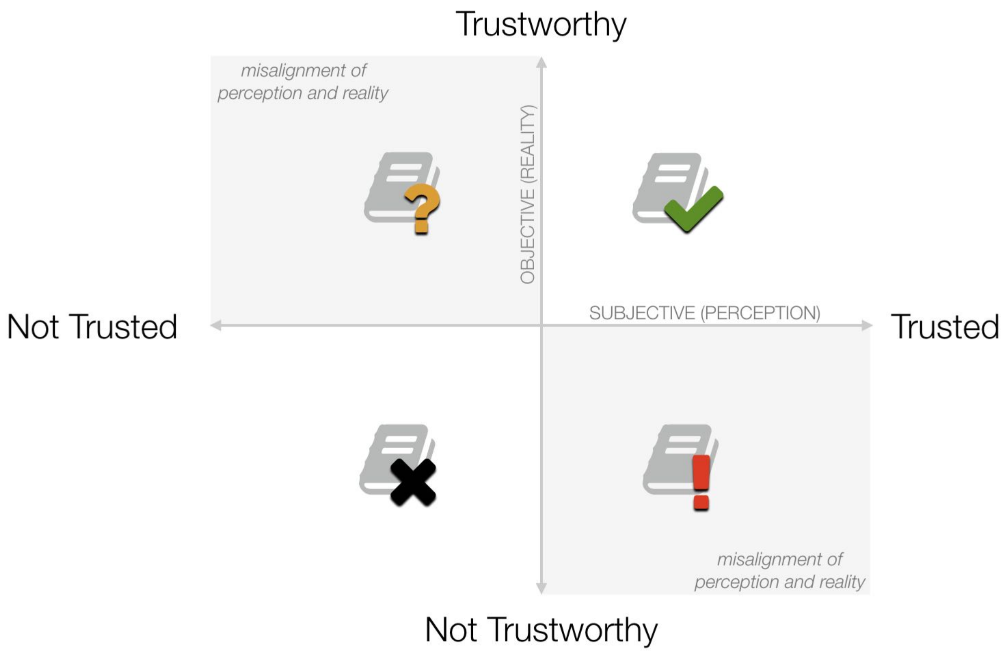

Diagram 1: Trustworthy vs. Trusted

In this model, any given translation exists in one of the four quadrants.[2]

✔ = **trustworthy + trusted** *(top right: alignment of reality and perception)*

The objective of every translation is to arrive in the top right quadrant: the translation is both trustworthy and, because the lingual church that speaks the language knows it to be so, confidently trusted. If there is any further need at this point, it would be objective **confirmation** of the trustworthiness of the translation.

✖ = **not trustworthy + not trusted** *(bottom left: alignment of reality and perception)*

Not every translation is trustworthy, however, as is evident in some outlying translations.[3] If a translation is not trustworthy, and if the lingual church recognizes that fact and withholds their trust from it accordingly,

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[2] This is a generalized conceptual model that may not account for all situations. For example, an otherwise trustworthy translation may have a number of problematic areas, but to the extent that the lingual church is aware of the issues and effectively employs some mechanism to avoid them (e.g., explanation by pastors and teachers), the translation may still be reliably trusted. But this is obviously a suboptimal solution, as not everyone will be aware of the problems in the translation or how to avoid them. For example, a Bible translation published in a Southeast Asian language reportedly mistranslated the commandment "Do not commit adultery" as "Do not have sexual relations," resulting in confusion and even reports of lengthy periods of marital celibacy by devout Christians who had not been informed of the error in the translation.

[3] Bible translations may be untrustworthy for many reasons, including hyper-contextualization (e.g., *The Cotton Patch Gospel*: "When Jesus was born in Gainesville, Georgia, during the time that Herod was governor, some scholars from the Orient came to Atlanta and inquired, 'Where is the one who was born to be governor of Georgia?...' (Matthew 2:1, p. 6)), ideological bias (e.g., *The Inclusive Bible* which states in the introduction "We also used the phrase 'Loving God' as a substitute for 'Father'... In referring to Jesus, we use 'Only Begotten,' 'God's Own,' and 'Eternally Begotten' in place of 'Son of God' (page vi), and doctrinal error (e.g., *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* by the Jehovah's Witnesses that translates John 1:1 "The word was a god" (where the original Greek reads "the Word was God")). Even in some translations produced by doctrinally-sound, well-intended translators, glaring errors in translations have been encountered by the church, requiring significant effort in order to maintain trust in the problematic translation. For example, in South Asia, the number and severity of errors in the translation of the Bible in a national language reportedly required the publication of a companion resource written by leaders of church networks to identify and correct the errors.

the reality of the translation and its perception by the church is aligned. The need here may be for **refinement + confirmation** of the translation to achieve trustworthiness.

? = trustworthy + not trusted *(top left: misalignment of reality and perception)*

In some situations, the lingual church may not be aware of anything specific in the translation itself that renders their translation untrustworthy, but they do not trust it. This may be for many reasons, including not knowing who did the translation, or knowing the translators but having unresolved questions about their ability to create a trustworthy translation, or lack of trust in the process by which the translation was created. Regardless of the cause, it is likely that some objectively trustworthy translations are not trusted by the lingual church, indicating a misalignment of reality and perception. The need at this point could be for objective **confirmation** of the trustworthiness of the translation, hopefully overcoming whatever is preventing the church's trust of it.

! = not trustworthy + trusted *(bottom right: misalignment of reality and perception)*

The most problematic quadrant is where the misalignment of reality and perception results in a situation where the lingual church may be unknowingly trusting a translation that is not trustworthy. The church in this situation would appear as exuberant and thankful for their (not yet trustworthy) translation as a church whose translation *is* trustworthy. But the lingual church would not be able to tell the rest of the global church that there are problems in their translation, because the same knowledge that would enable them to explain the problem would have caused them to recognize it in the first place and withhold their trust in the translation until it is resolved. Unless the lingual church is able recognize the aspects of their translation that make it untrustworthy, they may be blindly trusting a translation that is not yet fully fit to be trusted. The need in this scenario may be for **illumination + refinement + confirmation** of the translation to achieve trustworthiness and well-placed trust.

3. Getting to Trusted

For people who are aware that not all Bible translations are trustworthy, there are two ways by which they may become willing to trust a Bible translation in their language: either through **direct** or **proxied** assessment of its trustworthiness. Some people may be able to check the trustworthiness of the translation themselves (direct assessment), but most tend to rely on the testimony of someone they trust who has checked the translation (proxied assessment). In the latter scenario, a checking methodology is implemented in an assessment of the translation which results in an affirmation of the translation (or not).[4] The affirmation influences the perception of the translation by those who consider the person providing the affirmation to be authoritative.

When a new translation is published in English, for example, the publishers may seek the endorsement (affirmation) of prominent leaders of the English-speaking element of the global church. Assuming they are willing to do so, the leader employs a checking methodology to assess the translation (likely using various original language and exegetical resources) and, if they conclude that it is a trustworthy translation, endorse it. Their endorsement may influence those who trust them as leaders in the church to also trust the translation. The diagram below shows how the propositions in this conceptual framework are connected:

[4] The checking methodology implemented in the assessment only reveals some degree of the faithfulness and clarity of the translation. A methodology that is detailed and robust will reveal more of the true state of the trustworthiness of the translation than one that only implements a rapid, cursory check. The checking methodology, therefore, informs the affirmation of the translation.

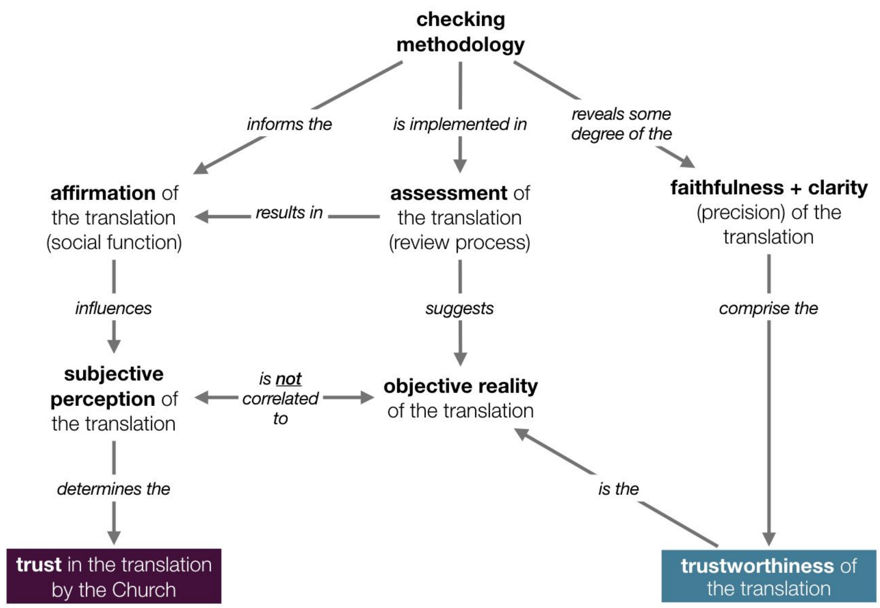

Diagram 2: A conceptual model of trustworthiness and trust

Scripture seems to suggest that the theological formation of a given element of the global church (particularly pertaining to its establishment in sound doctrine) directly affects a number of important ecclesiological functions, including the development of a faithful hermeneutic, which is a prerequisite to creating a trustworthy translation of the Bible (c.f., 1Co 3:1-3; He 5:11-14; 2Pe 3:15-16). [5]Thus, a complication arises when the lingual church lacks the capacity (in terms of theological formation, translation experience, available biblical resources, or a combination of these) needed to confidently and reliably assess the trustworthiness of the translation.[6]

In these situations, there may be only three options: assume the translations are trustworthy (no assessment), rely on experienced translators who are not native speakers of the language to assess them by means of a back-translation (an external, indirect assessment), or increase the capacity of the leadership of the lingual church so that they have what they need to assess it directly (an internal, direct assessment). Blindly trusting translations that have not been adequately assessed and affirmed to be trustworthy is not a viable option, so we are left with the latter two, illustrated in the following diagram:

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5 Most agree that translation of any type requires some degree of interpretation. In *Translating the Word of God*, Beekman and Callow state: "While it is granted that interpretation of the text is an inevitable part of the process of translation, it cannot be overemphasized that every interpretation should be based upon sound exegetical conclusions which have adequate support from the context." Crisp asserts "...any translation of the Bible is an act of theology, in which the presuppositions of the translator... will inevitably influence the outcome." Crisp, "Translation Consultancy: Set in Stone or Historically Conditioned?" 4.

6 For the purposes of this paper, we will assume an element of the global church that is established in sound doctrine (c.f., Co 2:6-7; 1Th 3:1-5; Tt 1:9; 1Ti 1:3-5) but does not have a history of translating the Bible into their own language. The important consideration of how church-centric Bible translation is affected by the lingual church's theological formation, understanding of the Word of God (c.f., 1Co 3:1-3; He 5:11-14; 2Pe 3:16), translation experience, and the availability of biblical resources is beyond the scope of this paper.

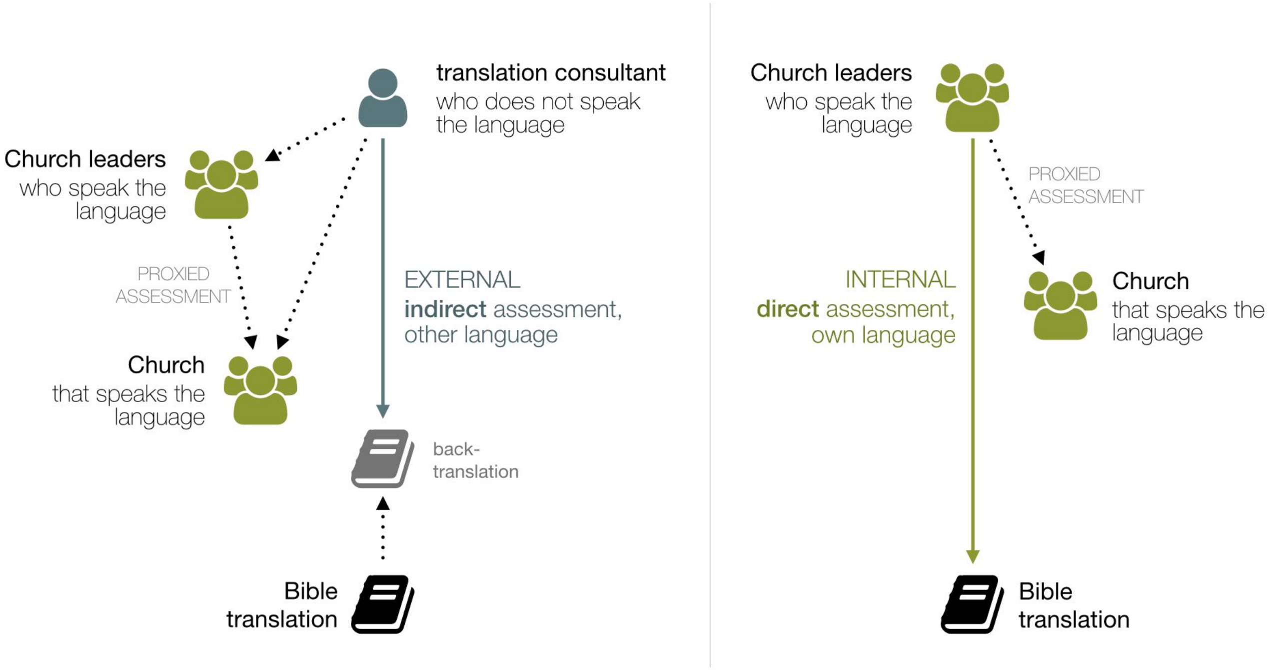

Diagram 3: Two means of assessing trustworthiness

The dominant paradigm of affirming the trustworthiness of Bible translations in recent history depends on the external assessment of the trustworthiness of Bible translations by translation consultants from member organizations of the Forum of Bible Agencies International. In a paper written in 1968, Eugene Nida of the American Bible Society described translation consultants as the ones who test the acceptability of Bible translations before they are published.[7] This model was adopted by the United Bible Societies and, since then, has become the *de facto* model for assessing and affirming Bible translations before the lingual church trusts them.

The number of translations waiting to be checked and affirmed in this manner is rapidly increasing and the need to address this bottleneck is well-known. New models for checking more translations for more language communities within the global church have been proposed, with the objective of increasing the capacity of the existing "external assessment" paradigm. For example, some approaches assign many consultants-in-training to do some of the less demanding aspects of the assessment process, reserving the limited time the consultant has for the more demanding aspects.[8] Others implement a parallel checking process whereby a translation consultant can check more translations at the same time.[9] Such approaches provide valuable

7 "He or she has two functions: educational and advisory. In his educational function he assists translators with their particular problems; in his advisory function he helps Bible Society administrators to understand some of the complex problems of translation as they are related to other phases of Bible Society programs... He or she will give expert opinion, test the acceptability of translations, prepare the manuscript for the printers, and even arrange for proofreading. His advisory function is in two directions, enabling information and understanding to flow between Bible Societies and translators." *Taking the Word to the World,* 141-142.

8 Jones describes one such approach: "A metaphor for this team approach would be a licensed physician working with physician's assistants. Up to now, all consultants have been expected to have attained (or be attaining) qualifications equivalent to that of a medical doctor. What I propose here is that some of a consultant's roles could in fact be carried out by people trained to carry out specific skilled tasks associated with the consultant's role. This is comparable to a physician's assistant who carries out certain tasks, under the aegis of a qualified medical doctor." Jones, "Consultant Qualifications," 11.

9 Krüger and Funnell describe a parallel, multi-language checking process that produces good results: "Group consultations also provide good training opportunities, not only to translators, but also to exegetes, and hence we are finding from one consultation to the next the quality of work is steadily improving in all teams. A consultant can easily miss an error in the text,

insights and ideas regarding the process of assessing the trustworthiness of a Bible translation. It is important to note, however, that they are all alike in that they assume that an external assessment of a translation by people who do not speak the language is necessary.

Leading translation consultants from prominent Bible translation organizations have frequently expressed the need for rethinking the existing Bible translation checking paradigm with a view to increasing capacity within the language community for all aspects of checking. Harmelink observes:

> …our current model of consulting reserves tasks that 'only the consultant' can do, thereby creating a type of ceiling beyond which the translation team is not expected to go. I suggest that the changing times and changing realities of many translation teams call us to develop a different model of consultancy.[10]

Crisp writes:

> A culturally more appropriate model of empowerment would be to privilege the choices, traditions and solutions of local communities, with the expectation that outside direction and guidance would over time become truly unnecessary. Next, and as a consequence of this locally rooted and appropriate capacity building, we could expect to see the key functions of text checking and quality control, traditionally associated with external translation consultancy, delivered in future by members of the host community rather than by outside experts… What I am proposing is an extension of local ownership and control of translation projects into the area of translation consultancy, and specifically to text checking and quality control. This, I contend, is a localised model which is more appropriate for the twenty-first century than the emphasis on outside expertise which has characterised Bible translation consultancy, and in essence represents a significant shift from external gatekeeping to local empowerment.[11]

Jones suggests that Bible agencies will need to recast their classic role as stewards of God's Word on behalf of the church "to be servants of the global church to enable her to steward the Word."[12] Maxey suggests the importance of translation consultants moving beyond merely doing more but also "equipping translators and national consultants with the same skills in the process, which leads to improved quality along the way."[13] Toward the end of his career, when asked what advice he would give to a young translation consultant, Dr. Eugene Nida replied, "If I had my consulting time again, I would spend less time reviewing what has already been done, and more time discussing what will be done next. I would put more focus on training the team and preparing them for the next stage of their work."[14]

In keeping with these suggestions and proposals, the model described in this paper shifts the focus from external assessment to internal assessment by equipping each lingual church with the resources, training, and tools needed for them to reliably check and confidently affirm the trustworthiness of Bible translations in their own languages. Not only does this approach vastly increase the scale with which assessment of Bible translations can occur (especially in light of the need for frequent revisions through time), but it strongly

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but with several eyes looking over his/her shoulder several problems are picked up which could have been overlooked." Krüger and Funnell, "Translation Checking through Group Consultation," 18.

10 Harmelink, "Developing Team Consultancy Skills" in "Translation Consultancy: Ways Forward," 5-6. Later in the same paper, Harmelink observes, "We value exegetical and consulting expertise and I'm sure consultants have played a key role in improving translation quality, just as Nida envisioned. There are, however, some liabilities of our expertise. One liability is the potential for seeing our current consulting practices as the only way to ensure acceptable levels of quality and fidelity in translation. I stated previously that translation consulting, as we know it, is a very recent phenomenon. It's also a very *peculiar* phenomenon of a very brief period in translation history. Just because consulting has developed as we know it today, doesn't mean that it's the best or only way to achieve the values we strive for in translation." 9, emphasis in the original.

11 Crisp, "Translation Consultancy: Set in Stone or Historically Conditioned?" 6, 8.

12 Jones, "Consultant Qualifications," in "Translation Consultancy: Ways Forward," 12.

13 Maxey, "Translation Consultancy: Ways Forward," 24.

14 Barnwell, *A Handbook for Translation Consultants*, 36-37.

supports the critical missiological objective of establishing the church in each people group with mature leadership and a solid understanding of the Word of God.[15] This is essential for the preservation of sound doctrine within the church as well as for equipping the church to reliably accomplish all aspects of Bible translation and checking in their own language, through time.

4. Two Key Milestones

In any Bible translation process, there are two key milestones for any portion of translated content (e.g., verse, chapter, book, etc.). The first milestone is when the translation is "**text complete**", meaning translated text exists for that portion. The achievement of "text complete" for that Scripture portion does not imply anything as to the suitability of the translated text, merely that it exists.

The second key milestone in the process is when the translated text becomes **trustworthy**. At this point, the translated text is worthy of the trust of those who speak the language, as it faithfully communicates what the Holy Spirit intended to communicate to the original hearers of the original texts. These two milestones can be diagrammed like this:

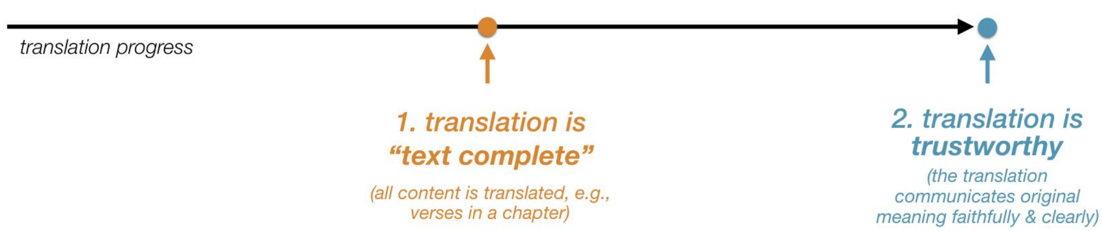

Diagram 4: Two key milestones in Bible translation

In general, less effort is expended early in the process to get from zero to "text complete" than is expended to get from "text complete" to "trustworthy."[16] This suggests two fairly distinct stages, with the first being predominantly focused on creation of an essentially faithful and clear translation (production), and the second focused on fine-tuning the translation in order to achieve full trustworthiness (precision). The following diagram shows effort expended on the horizontal axis and content created or changed on the vertical axis:

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15 The leaders of the churches in the New Testament were responsible to safeguard sound doctrine in their congregations (c.f., Ac 20:28-31; 1Ti 1:3-5; Tt 1:5-9). Given that the Bible is the authority by which sound doctrine is defined, it seems correct to assume that the leaders of the lingual church are also the ones who are responsible to affirm the trustworthiness of a Bible translation in their language. This does not imply that all lingual churches are equally established in sound doctrine or share the same depth of theological knowledge. It assumes that establishing the church is an (if not "the") essential objective of the missional mandate (Mt 28:18-20) and that part of that process includes the equipping and training of leaders who are "approved... rightly handling the word of truth" (2Ti 2:15). The establishing of leaders with the ability to "rightly handle" the Scriptures would seem to apply both to their use of the Scriptures in the defense of sound doctrine in the church as well as to the translation of the Scriptures into the language spoken by the church. Finally, it is important to note that the responsibility of the leadership of the lingual church does not imply or encourage an unbiblical independence or fragmentation of the unity of the church. As Peters observes, "While the Bible upholds the autonomy of a local assembly, it knows nothing of *independence* in the absolute sense of the word. Biblical independence is always balanced by absolute *dependence* upon the Lord and *interdependence* among the churches" (Peters, "The Church and Missions", 202, emphasis in the original).

16 For relatively straightforward texts that are easily understood or familiar to the translator, the translation may simultaneously achieve "text complete" and "trustworthy," even though additional effort may be expended in the confirmation of the trustworthiness of the translation.

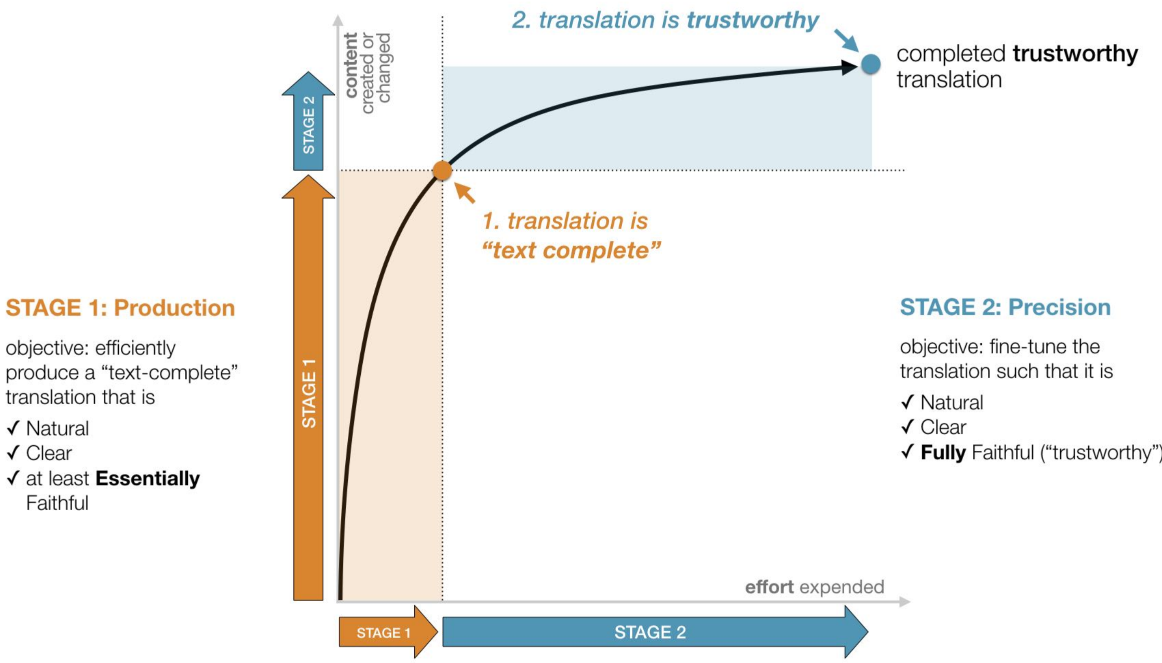

Diagram 5: Two stages in Bible translation

These stages can be seen in the following examples. In computer-assisted translation, drafts of new translations can be generated very rapidly, sometimes in a matter of minutes. If the software is capable and tuned correctly, these drafts may be fairly useful. But there is always a second, precision-focused aspect of the translation that is performed by human translators, and it requires significantly more effort, though it changes less content overall.

A second example is evident in the translation processes used by lingual church Bible translators in various parts of the world. Descriptions of many different methodologies consistently indicate that most of the content is drafted rapidly in the first stage of content creation, followed by a review stage during which the amount of effort spent in the subsequent checking stages is frequently many times more, though less content is changed.

At least two observations about these examples should be noted. First, both of them shift the majority of the detailed exegetical and review effort to the latter part of the translation process, rather than prioritizing them in the first stage. While this may seem to be a significant deviation from what may be expected, it reflects the historical process of Bible translation review and revision through time (addressed in the following section). When an essentially faithful translation is available to the language community early in the translation process, together with an invitation to review it (though not yet fully depending on it) in light of the translation(s) available in languages of wider communication that the church speaks, at least three desirable outcomes tend to occur: the review process becomes decentralized (and thus moves rapidly), the faithfulness of the translation steadily improves, and the lingual church's ownership of the entire process is strengthened.[17]

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[17] Gravelle observes: "A very significant reason for enabling wider community involvement in the translation drafting and checking process is because it engages the community in reading (or hearing) and discussing the source text and the translated text and then grappling with its meaning. They must work together to produce the best translation they can for their people. As a result, they own the translation from the very start because they see that their own contributions make a difference in the translation work. This is the difference between a community doing translation together for one another in

Second, both of these examples suggest that a shift in the perception of a translation occurs at the point where it becomes "text complete." Before the point that the text of a translation is complete, the status of the translation is unambiguous—by virtue of the fact that it is not complete, it is not trustworthy. But at the point that the text is complete (e.g., every verse in a chapter has translated content), the lingual church's perception of the trustworthiness of the translation becomes ambiguous. The text that was unambiguously not trustworthy by virtue of its incompleteness is now ambiguously trustworthy by virtue of the fact that it is no longer incomplete. That is, there is something translated in every verse, so it might be trustworthy, but it might also not be sufficiently checked to know if it is trustworthy.

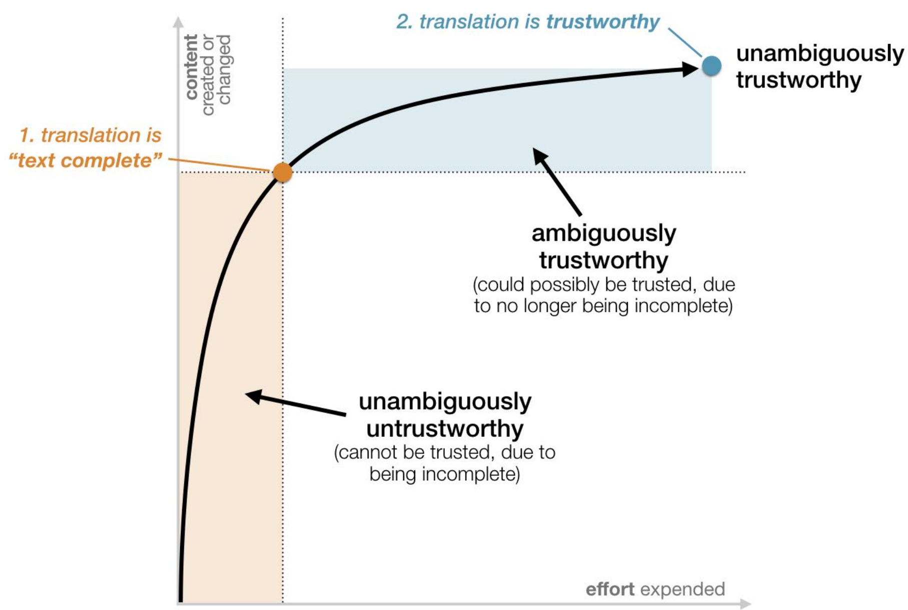

Diagram 6: Church's perception of trustworthiness

This raises an important question: how will the believers who speak the language know when their "text complete" translation (which is easy to verify) is "trustworthy" (which is not easy to verify)? Or, to put it more directly and in terms of the "trustworthy" and "trusted" axes in a preceding diagram: *How will a lingual church know if their subjective perception of their translation aligns with the objective reality of its trustworthiness?* Before answering this, we will consider the ongoing and iterative nature of Bible translation.

5. Trustworthiness Through Time

Martin Luther, with help from other scholars, completed his translation of the New Testament into his native German from Greek in about ten months, at which point he published the first edition in 1522. Three months later, he published a second edition which "contained many corrections and improvements."[18] He published a total of five editions and it is said that he "never ceased to amend his translation. Besides correcting errors, he

comparison to a small closed group of people doing translation 'for' the community." Gravelle, "Rearrangements: New Ways of Doing Old Things," in "Translation Consultancy: Ways Forward," 22.

18 Schaff and Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 7:346.

improved the uncouth and confused orthography, fixed the inflections, purged the vocabulary of obscure and ignoble words, and made the whole more symmetrical and melodious."[19]

In 1522, William Tyndale received an illegal copy of Martin Luther's translation into German. Tyndale was a biblical scholar (and a gifted translator who spoke eight languages) and was inspired to begin a translation of the Bible from the Greek and Hebrew into his native English. In spite of persecution and risk to his life that forced him to flee England, he published the first edition of his New Testament four years later. Tyndale revised his translation in 1534 and observers have noted that it contained "scores, and indeed hundreds, of improvements, the products of greater finesse with English, of greater knowledge of Greek, and particularly of the impact of Tyndale's Hebrew studies".[20] In the preface to the revision in 1536 (the year of his death), Tyndale made it clear that he was still improving the work and welcomed input and suggestions from readers to further refine it.[21]

In 1604, a new translation of the Bible in English was commissioned and completed in 1611: the Authorized Version, commonly known as the King James Version. Though commissioned as a new translation, it could properly be called a revision of Tyndale's translation.[22] In 1885, the AV was revised and became the Revised Version (RV). In 1901, the RV was revised into American English, becoming the American Standard Version (ASV). In 1952 the ASV was revised and became the Revised Standard Version. The 1971 revision of the ASV was used as the basis for the English Standard Version, published in 2001 and subsequently revised in 2007, 2011, and 2016.

It seems safe to assume that Luther, Tyndale, and the scores of Bible scholars involved in the AV, RV, ASV, RSV, and ESV did not publish translations that they knew were not trustworthy. Through painstaking effort, the trustworthiness of these translations was confirmed and then the translations were published, with the intent that the church would trust them. The obvious complication with this assumption is the presence of (frequent) revisions of the translations, especially as some of the revisions undeniably contained corrections, not merely linguistic improvements. The ensuing questions are understandable. If the translation was trustworthy in the first version, why was it revised? But if it was untrustworthy in the first version, why was it published?

These examples, and many others like them, seem to suggest that the history of excellence in Bible translation is one where translators publish their very best work, and then iteratively publish updates to their very best work as their capacity for excellent Bible translation increases through time. It is this increase in capacity (e.g., skill in their own language, theological depth, biblical knowledge, ability in original languages, etc.) that enables a translator to identify aspects of their translation that can be improved or corrected.[23] This process of increasing capacity and thus being able to improve an existing translation is apparently an

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19 Ibid., 347–48. Schaff indicates that at least some of these improvements were linguistic and theological corrections identified by some of Luther's opponents: "Dr. Emser, one of the most learned opponents of the Reformation, singled out in Luther's New Testament several hundred linguistic blunders and heretical falsifications. Many of them were silently corrected in later editions." Ibid., 360.

20 Daniell, *William Tyndale*, 146.

21 "If I shall perceive either by myself or by the information of other, that ought be escaped me, or might be more plainly translated, I will shortly after, cause it to be mended." Tyndale, *The 1536 Tyndale Bible New Testament.*

22 "Nine-tenths of the Authorised Version's New Testament is Tyndale's. The same is true of the first half of the Old Testament, which is as far as he was able to get before he was executed outside Brussels in 1536." Daniell, *William Tyndale*, 1.

23 In "Ladders and Wheels," King provides a conceptual model for an iterative approach to Bible translation. "The model is intended to capture the local church as the key player in Bible translation, which is then equipped through training to be involved in the language work of Bible translation, which feeds back into and strengthens the church, motivating others to be involved in getting trained to continue the work." King, "Ladders and Wheels," 6.

unavoidable part of Bible translation, and while all diligence should be exerted to minimize the need for it, it would be a mistake to see it as anomalous.[24]

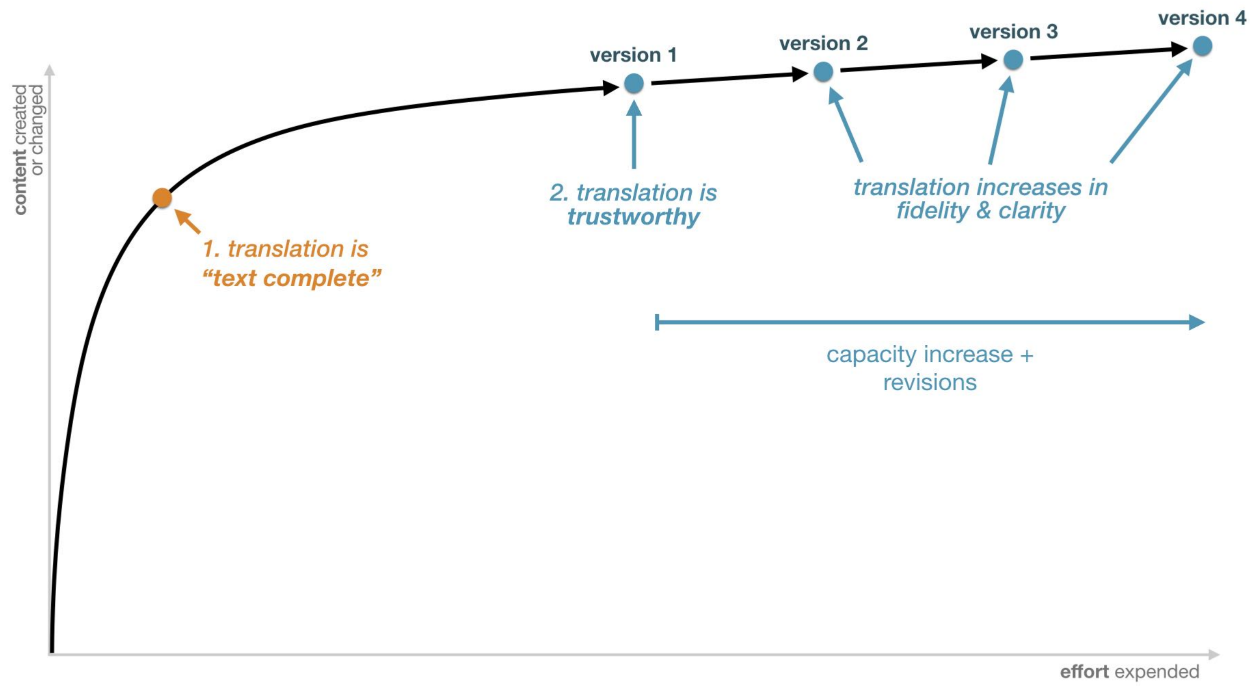

Diagram 7: Trustworthiness through many revisions

image alt text

Given the need to maintain the trustworthiness of a translation through time, it follows that the global church needs to be able to revise translations of the Bible when needed and to publish revisions in a manner that clearly indicates the changes between them.

6. Getting to Trustworthy

Throughout the history of Bible translation, the global church has employed numerous assessment methodologies with a view to achieving trustworthy translations. Certain elements of these methodologies are consistent and seem to form foundational means of achieving trustworthiness. These means are knowledge of Bible translation principles, use of multiple source texts, networked hermeneutical communities, alignment with original languages, and systematic and comprehensive assessment of translation. Each of these is described below.

[24] Philip Schaff describes this ongoing and iterative process and links it directly to the church's increasing comprehension of the Bible through time: "There is, however, a gradual progress in translation, which goes hand in hand with the progress of the understanding of the Bible. Jerome's Vulgate is an advance upon the Itala, both in accuracy and Latinity; the Protestant Versions of the sixteenth century are an advance upon the Vulgate, in spirit and in idiomatic reproduction; the revisions of the nineteenth century are an advance upon the versions of the sixteenth, in philological and historical accuracy and consistency." Schaff and Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 7, 365-366.

6.1. Knowledge of Bible Translation Principles

We intuitively know there is something problematic with a translation that has Jesus being born in Gainesville, Georgia.[25] Regardless of the translator's intent to make the Bible more relevant to the people in his community, it is a clear violation of Bible translation principles and no trustworthy translation would say such a thing. But when the same kind of translation decision must be made in other contexts, the lines are less clear. For example, a team commissioned by the leaders of their church network in the Middle East to translate the Bible for the church encountered great difficulty translating the verses that state Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a young donkey (Mt 21:7; Jn 12:15). Because of the cultural difficulties this presented for them, they were considering translating the passage with Jesus riding on a camel instead.[26] Once they understood that one of the principles for excellence in Bible translation is to always translate historical occurrences without modification, they realized that they could not compromise the historical integrity of their translation, regardless of the challenges this created in their cultural context.

Throughout the centuries, the global church has endorsed and affirmed (implicitly, if not explicitly) certain principles for faithful translation of the Word of God. These principles provide the guardrails within which all trustworthy Bible translations exist. In order for elements of the global church who are involved in translation of the Bible into their own languages to align with these principles, they must be aware of what they are and how to apply them in making translation decisions.[27]

6.2. Use of Multiple Source Texts

Translation involves transmission of meaning between two languages and cultures that do not align perfectly. This requires the translator to make difficult decisions regarding what aspects of the original must be lost or changed in order to achieve a faithful, understandable translation. This problem can become magnified when a translation (already compromised to some extent by virtue of it being a translation) is then used as a source text from which to translate. Since most Bible translators tend to work primarily from translations of the original languages, this is an important problem to overcome in church-centric Bible translation.

One way to mitigate it is to use multiple source texts when creating a translation, instead of translating from a single source that is itself a translation. When a translator works from two source texts (even if they are in the same language), it can result in a better translation because the different texts bring out different aspects of the original. The process of synthesizing these two perspectives of the original provides the translator with a better understanding of the intended meaning which, in turn, facilitates and promotes a more faithful translation.[28]

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25 Jordan, *Cotton Patch Gospel.*

26 They explained that in their culture, the only time a man would ever be found riding on a young donkey in this kind of context would be if he had been found to be in an immoral relationship with a woman and the community leaders were parading him through the village to publicly shame him. The translation challenge this posed for the translators is obvious.

27 One resource that attempts to provide an explanation of these Bible translation principles is translationAcademy (**unfoldingword.org/academy**).

28 The only context where a "single source text" model appears to work well is in languages that are structurally very similar, which is relatively rare in Bible translation worldwide. Accordingly, translation teams have long recognized the value of translating from two (or more) translations. In "Toward Systematic Translation Checking," Fehderau explains this 'base model' approach (using a more literal translation that reflects the original language base as well as a second that translates theological terms and figures of speech into plain language): "The base model approach makes the analysis of complex structures easier. Much of the analysis required lies before the translator already done; this approach therefore requires a largely passive knowledge of principles and procedures, which are often not understood sufficiently by translators to enable them to apply to any degree." Barnwell recommends the same approach: "Translators should use at least two versions of the

An example of this occurred during a recent checking workshop in northern India. The translators realized they had translated "hardness of heart" in Ephesians 4:18 literally, thinking that it meant that the person could not feel anymore, that they are numb. When they read the text in a second version, one that had translated the metaphor "hardness of heart" as "refuse to listen to his message," they realized their mistake and corrected their translation accordingly.

6.3. Networked Hermeneutical Communities

As Christians work together to understand the Bible and translate it into their common language and culture, they function as a "hermeneutical community."[29] Together, they critically consider the passage to be translated, discussing it together and with reference to other resources that enlighten their understanding of the cultural and historical context of the original audience, as well as the linguistic elements of the text.[30] This is done with the intent of correctly interpreting the text as a prerequisite for faithful translation of it.

To the extent that a team works to translate the Bible into their own language in isolation from the rest of the church, the trustworthiness of the translation could be at risk. This has nothing to do with the intent and motivation of the translators, but with the intrinsic challenges facing an isolated team. A translation team that is not connected to a broader network may be less likely to recognize problems in the sources from which they translate, or if their understanding of the author's intent is inaccurate. They may be unaware of unintentional doctrinal skew in their translation, due to unique aspects of their own language and culture, together with the translation choices they have made. Furthermore, to the extent the translators are of a single denominational persuasion, they may not recognize when their interpretation has been unduly influenced by their convictions and ideologies.

These challenges can be overcome, at least in part, by functioning as "*networked* hermeneutical communities" in the Bible translation process—interconnected and interdependent as one church that speaks many languages. As translators and church leaders compare and check translations of the Bible across multiple languages and through multiple interpretive lenses, limitations in source texts, misunderstandings in translation, and doctrinal skew can be mitigated.[31]

Bible for constant reference when translating. One should be a fairly literal version... The other should be a more meaning-based version..." Barnwell, *Bible Translation: An Introductory Course For Mother-Tongue Translators*, 15.

29 The translation of the Bible into German by Luther and his team provides an example of a hermeneutical community involved in Bible translation. Schaff writes: "In the progress of the work he founded a *Collegium Biblieum*, or Bible club, consisting of his colleagues Melanchthon, Bugenhagen (Pommer), Cruciger, Justus Jonas, and Aurogallus. They met once a week in his house, several hours before supper. Deacon Georg Roerer (Rorarius), the first clergyman ordained by Luther, and his proof-reader, was also present; occasionally foreign scholars were admitted; and Jewish rabbis were freely consulted. Each member of the company contributed to the work from his special knowledge and preparation. Melanchthon brought with him the Greek Bible, Cruciger the Hebrew and Chaldee, Bugenhagen the Vulgate, others the old commentators; Luther had always with him the Latin and the German versions besides the Hebrew. Sometimes they scarcely mastered three lines of the Book of Job in four days, and hunted two, three, and four weeks for a single word. No record exists of the discussions of this remarkable company, but Mathesius says that 'wonderfully beautiful and instructive speeches were made.'" Philip Schaff and David Schley Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 7, 347.

30 Harmelink suggests using a similar Bible study process in translation, because "...translators would learn to directly engage with the text so that they also are observing, asking questions, and seeking answers from evidence in the text." Harmelink, "Developing Team Consultancy Skills," 7.

31 Maxey summarizes the value of this kind of group checking in terms of both increased speed of checking as well as increased learning by the team: "The goal is not just to speed up translation, but to leverage the skills and experience of all of the translators in one setting at the same time. This results in the translators training and teaching one another through the checking process by means of conversations, explanations and illustrations from the translators, themselves." Maxey, "Translation Consultancy: Ways Forward," 3.

An example of this occurred in a translation workshop in Africa where the drafting team translated in Mark 1:4 that John was proclaiming "repent and be baptized," which was firmly in line with their doctrinal convictions. In the review process, others on the team who were from a different denomination graciously pointed out that this was an unnecessarily interpretive translation of John's proclamation of "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."[32]

In another checking event in India, while checking the book of Philemon, the team compared their Punjabi translation against English, in addition to the languages they had been using as source texts. By so doing, they discovered that they had translated the word "joy" as "favor" (Phm 1:7). They discussed it together and discovered that both of the source texts they had been using (in two different languages) had mis-translated the term. Furthermore, they discovered that the translations in the ten languages that had used their Punjabi translation as a source text had, not surprisingly, also translated "joy" as "favor." By checking their translations together and across multiple languages simultaneously, the church was able to identify the problem in the translation, where the problem had originated, all the languages that were affected by it, and then correct all the translations simultaneously.

6.4. Alignment With Original Languages

Church-centric Bible translation is not new—most of the history of Bible translation follows this same pattern.[33] A point of similarity between the historical examples of church-centric Bible translation and contemporary examples is the importance placed on aligning translations with the original languages. This is particularly clear in the Reformation-era Bible translation movement, which was ignited by the publishing of Erasmus' Greek New Testament in 1516.[34]

As the first waves of church-centric Bible translation in the 21st century are completing their translations, the consistent request from lingual church leaders in many different parts of the world is for unrestricted access to the original languages. The expressed need is not only for checking their translations against the originals, but also for inclusion in interlinear Bibles and as part of native-language Bible study programs on computers and mobile phones.[35] Newly-added elements of the global church are realizing that an important aspect of becoming theologically grounded and doctrinally established is gaining a thorough understanding of what the letters and accounts that comprise the Bible communicated to the original recipients. This necessarily requires, among other things, access to the original languages in which those documents were written.

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32 Some languages may be incapable of expressing this abstract concept and could require a more interpretive translation. In this language it was apparently not only possible to preserve the construction of the original, but desirable, and all elements of the translation team agreed to do so.

33 Ulfilas was ordained a bishop and translated the Bible into his own Gothic language (A.D. 360). Jerome was born and raised in a Latin-speaking Roman province and translated the Bible into Latin (circa A.D. 405). Wycliffe and Tyndale translated into their native English. Luther translated into his native German. See Freedman, *The Murderous History of Bible Translations*.

34 "This was the first time that the Greek New Testament had been printed. It is no exaggeration to say that it set fire to Europe. Luther translated it into his famous German version of 1522. In a few years there appeared translations from the Greek into most European vernaculars. They were the true basis of the popular reformation." William Tyndale, *Selected Writings*, edited with an introduction by David Daniell, p. ix.

35 The technical capacity of the global church to create their own Bible study apps is immense. Especially in the more technologically advanced parts of the world, the global church has relatively little difficulty creating the technology tools they need, and then distributing Bible translations using those tools in ways that are efficient, cost-effective, and culturally-appropriate. What is far more challenging for these church leaders and the technologists in their networks is obtaining the rights to existing translations to do so with the freedom they need. Reformation-era Bible translators could make full and unrestricted use of the technologies of their day, as the restrictions enforced by copyright law had not yet been invented.

6.5. Systematic and Comprehensive Assessment of Translation

A final means of achieving trustworthy translations is systematic and comprehensive assessments of translations. As argued above, the methodology that is used in the assessment of a Bible translation reveals some degree of the trustworthiness of the translation. A methodology that is rapid and cursory may provide a general impression, but one that involves detailed and thorough checking will provide a much more reliable assessment. Given the goal of achieving completely trustworthy Bible translations, this suggests the need for a systematic and comprehensive approach to checking.[36] Fehderau suggests a direct connection between systematic checking and the quality of a translation:

> To a large extent, the key to attaining a translation of exceptionally high quality is the ability on the part of the translators to identify problems systematically and to apply the procedures that lead to good solutions. Translators that are able to identify translation problems are already at least half way to solving them.[37]

The challenge with systematic and comprehensive assessment of Bible translations is two-fold: First, the construction of a systematic model for checking the entire Bible seems a daunting task that could require a prohibitive amount of time and resources. Second, the comprehensive checking of the entire New Testament (let alone the entire Bible) of every translation in thousands of languages will undeniably require an immense amount of effort.[38]

Regardless of the amount of time it takes to construct tools that make systematic checking possible, or the amount of time it takes to comprehensively check each Bible translation, this is the felt need that is consistently expressed by many lingual church leaders.[39] From their perspective, the eternal future of their families and community rest on a translation of the Bible that they have created themselves and, from that frame of reference, the strong sense of responsibility they express is both understandable and commendable. In light of the expressed need of the church, we now consider how a systematic and comprehensive checking model might be designed, as well as how the unique opportunities afforded to church-centric Bible translation in the 21st century greatly improve both the efficiency of creating such a model and its implementation by the church.

7. Toward Efficient Achievement of Trustworthiness

The production objective of church-centric Bible translation is to accomplish the best possible translation and to do so as efficiently as possible.[40] A rapidly-produced but deficient translation is of limited value to the

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36 The term "comprehensive" as used in this paper refers to a model that provides sufficient depth such that the checking process surfaces those issues that the church could find to be theologically problematic and thus worth checking.

37 Fehderau, "Toward Systematic Translation Checking: Reference Manual for Bible Translation Checking."

38 Fehderau explains how the amount of time needed for comprehensive checking in the existing "external assessment" paradigm has resulted in some Bible translation agencies adopting a randomized spot-checking approach, inferring the quality of the entire translation based on a small sample of checked passages: "Ideally every verse should be checked by a consultant. This has not usually been possible for UBS personnel because of the limited time that can be spent with each project. This means that checking has to be done by random sample methods, spot checking here and there. Spot checking done in [a] systematic way can cover all of the problem types encountered in translation. When a particular problem type is done well consistently (sic) in a large random sample, it can be assumed that the cases not checked have also been done well," Ibid.

39 This need has been expressed to me personally on numerous occasions in verbal interactions with church leaders, particularly in South Asia and the Middle East.

40 As noted above, the production objective (a trustworthy Bible) should not be confused with the ultimate objective of church-centric Bible translation which is the making of mature disciples by establishing the church in sound doctrine and the whole counsel of God (c.f., Mt28:18-20; Ac 20:27; Co 2:6-7; 1Th 3:1-5; Tt 1:9; 1Ti 1:3-5).

church, particularly if they are unaware of the ways in which it is deficient. Conversely, a perfectly faithful translation that is not available to the church for two more generations is of no value to the people who die waiting for it. An effective process of Bible translation must accomplish both efficient production and precision, rather than achieving one at the expense of the other.

As we have noted above, the “production” stage of church-centric Bible translation tends to progress fairly rapidly, at least by comparison with the subsequent “precision” stage. Given the value shared by many to accelerate the Bible translation process, the essential challenge, then, is to accelerate the “precision” stage without compromising the trustworthiness of the finished translation. In order to undertake this, it is important to consider what makes checking a Bible translation such a tedious process.

7.1. Why does checking a Bible translation take so long?

Achieving the objective of a trustworthy Bible translation requires rigorous checking. This is due in large part to the intrinsic complexity of the Bible (e.g., multiple authors writing to different audiences in various cultural contexts that span thousands of years) and the consequent need for care in mapping the intended meaning of the original text to the contemporary language and culture of the people group for whom the translation is intended. There are at least three reasons that rigorous checking tends to require a lot of time.

1. Checking requires exhaustive knowledge – While many people may be involved in various stages of the checking process, the final decision regarding the trustworthiness of a Bible translation in the existing paradigm has generally been relegated to translation consultants—people who have (or are assumed to have) thorough knowledge of what needs to be checked (e.g., the theological terms in a passage, the literary devices used by the author, the principles that govern the translation decisions, etc.) The accumulation of this knowledge is time-consuming and difficult to achieve, resulting in relatively few who attain it. This, in turn, results in limited scalability of the existing checking paradigm.[41]

2. Checking depends on pattern recognition – Checking processes generally rely on the ability of the checker to recognize and correctly address everything that occurs in each verse that could create a problem in translation. For example, a given verse may contain multiple key terms, a metaphor, a double negative, implicit information, and an instance of metonymy. The assumption underlying many checking procedures is that each of these elements in the text will be recognized and correctly addressed by the person (or people) making the final decision regarding the trustworthiness of the translation. This process of confirming that all patterns were recognized (“Did I miss anything?”) is time-consuming and error-prone.

3. Checking proceeds sequentially – In general, checking processes are sequential, starting at the beginning of a passage and continuing through to the end, addressing each translation issue in turn. For example, the checker would progress through a verse: key term #1 ➝ metaphor ➝ key term #2 ➝ double negative ➝ implied information ➝ key term #3 ➝ metonymy, etc. This sequential progression through the text requires the checker to constantly switch between different checking tasks, calling to mind the requisite knowledge

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[41] As complexity in many industries has increased, the response of some has been to shift ever more responsibility from generalists to specialists, and from specialists to “superspecialists” while simultaneously increasing the centralization of the structures of control and decision-making. Many have found, however, that this increased control comes at the cost of agility and scalability. By contrast, the most innovative solutions in many domains have implemented the opposite approach as a more effective means of dealing with complexity: providing open access to domain knowledge together with frictionless platforms for communication and innovation, and decentralizing the decision-making process by pushing responsibility and authority out from the center to those who have the immediate context of the situation on the ground. See Gawande, *The Checklist Manifesto*.

for each in turn. This "context switching" is unavoidable when sequentially checking everything that needs to be checked in a translation and it creates cognitive strain that reduces the overall efficiency of the process.[42]

7.2. Realizations

The following realizations lay the foundation for describing a more capable, church-centric Bible translation checking model.

1. A Bible translation has a finite number of things to check – The list of things that need to be checked in each Bible translation may be large, but it is not infinite. The implication of this is that the list of what to check in each passage (e.g., each key term, figure of speech, etc.)—which traditionally required "pattern recognition"—can be systematically "pre-recognized" so that nothing is missed. If the critical points of meaning transfer in each text are identified in advance, the ambiguity of identifying what to check (i.e., the breadth of checking) can be resolved.

2. Complicated processes can frequently be simplified – In many domains, processes that are complicated in the aggregate can be deconstructed into simpler steps that, when systematically performed, produce reliable results. If elements of a Bible translation and checking process can be addressed separately before integrating them together, it may be possible to simplify and streamline the entire process.

3. A pivoted view of the text reduces context switching – The cognitive overhead incurred through continual context switching during the sequential checking of a Bible translation can be minimized by using a topical approach. If the elements that need to be checked are grouped by type and the checker completes each in turn, they will switch context far less frequently, improving the efficiency of the checking process.

4. Checklists establish a higher standard of baseline performance – Checklists have been shown to improve memory recall and clearly set out the minimum necessary procedural steps in professions as far-ranging as medical, construction, aviation, and haute cuisine. Especially in situations of complexity, the simple checklist ensures that the essential elements that lead to success are not overlooked.[43] If those doing the checking are provided with checklists of everything that needs to be checked and each instance where it occurs, the ambiguity of whether or not they have missed anything (i.e., the depth of checking) can be resolved.

5. Computers can optimize the assembly of checklists – The creation of systematic, comprehensive checklists can be accelerated by the use of computers and semantically-tagged datasets (e.g., Strong's numbers, references listing all figures of speech, etc.). Once assembled and reviewed, the checklists can be used in any translation project with negligible additional effort.

6. Just-in-time training can distribute the workforce – If the aspects of the translation that need to be checked are identified (breadth) and checklists that cover each instance where they occur are assembled (depth), the checking process can be distributed across a team. In this way, no single group needs to have all

42 In *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Kahneman notes, "One of the significant discoveries of cognitive psychologists in recent decades is that switching from one task to another is effortful, especially under time pressure." Monsell observes that "Subjects' responses are substantially slower and, usually, more error-prone immediately after a task switch." Monsell, "Task Switching."

43 Atul Gawande explains, "Checklists seem able to defend anyone, even the experienced, against failure in many more tasks than we realized. They provide a kind of cognitive net. They catch mental flaws inherent in all of us— flaws of memory and attention and thoroughness. And because they do, they raise wide, unexpected possibilities." Ibid., 48. He goes so far as to state that "under conditions of complexity, not only are checklists a help, they are required for success. There must always be room for judgment, but judgment aided— and even enhanced— by procedure." Ibid., 79.

knowledge of Bible translation checking—they can work in parallel, with each one focusing only on the task at hand and using resources that provide corresponding guidance and examples, as needed.[44]

7. Abundance is the new normal – In many people groups it is possible to find dozens of motivated believers who are native speakers of their language, fluent in languages of wider communication, and able to make significant contributions to a Bible translation project.[45] Some lingual church Bible translation projects in the Middle East have 25 full-time translators each. Some church networks in South Asia are able to mobilize dozens (in some cases, hundreds) of people, bringing them in by train for a weekend of checking their Bible translation, during which time they can check many thousands of verses—without any of them leaving their day jobs. The abundance of potential contributors to translation projects in the church-centric Bible translation paradigm opens up new possibilities for massive parallelization of the work—large teams in many translation projects working concurrently across many languages.

Taken together, these realizations suggest it is theoretically possible that everything in any Bible translation could be checked by the lingual church comprehensively, systematically, and even redundantly. Not only would this lead to the potential for more reliable confirmation of the trustworthiness of every Bible translation, but the process could potentially be far more efficient than is possible in existing models. Turning the theory into reality is the topic of the final section.

8. Faster + Better: A Proposal

Many Bible translation projects that are undertaken by a lingual church stall somewhere between "text complete" and "trustworthy." Using any number of different production methodologies, church-based translators complete the "Production" stage. Their translations undergo some degree of checking, but frequently the lingual church is not convinced of the translation's trustworthiness and desires to more fully check it in order to resolve the ambiguity. In the words of a leader of a church network involved in church-centric Bible translation:

> We know we will score off the charts in everything when it comes to naturalness and clarity. What we don't know is if our translation is accurate to the source. We need some kind of resource that will help us be able to assess if the draft that we have in our hands would be approved of by the global church, if they knew our heart language.[46]

The objective of this proposal is to invite collaboration toward the provision of the necessary **biblical resources** together with a **computer application** that uses them to implement a systematic and comprehensive **checking model**. It is intended to equip lingual church leaders with a means of taking any "text complete" translation in their language (regardless of how it was derived) and rigorously check it against multiple sources and the original languages in light of established Bible translation principles in order to affirm—and improve, where needed—the trustworthiness of the translation. The proposal is intended for Bible translation agencies and church networks who desire to work together to equip the global church for excellence in Bible translation.

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44 This distributed and topical approach to checking may benefit from an integrative final review process where the naturalness and clarity of the translation is assessed and improved, if needed.

45 The concept of the aggregate free time of humans worldwide as a novel resource that can be employed in new ways through modern technology is described by Shirky in *Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age.*

46 Personal communication, 2016.

8.1. Biblical Resources

Accomplishing the objective of this proposal depends on the provision of certain biblical resources. At a minimum, these include:

- **Two source texts** – One that increases the translator's understanding of the lexical and grammatical composition of the underlying text, by adhering closely to the word order and structure of the originals and one that increases the translator's understanding of the text, by unpacking dense theological terms and presenting the plain meaning of figures of speech.
- **Exegetical helps** – Pertinent historical, cultural, theological, and linguistic insights that provide translators and checkers with the information they need to help them make the best possible translation decisions.
- **Lexical helps** – Clear, concise definitions and translation suggestions for every important word in the Bible that provide translators and checkers with essential lexical information to help them make the best possible word choices in their translations.
- **Original language resources** – Greek and Hebrew texts, together with lexicons and grammars that help translators and checkers gain the best possible understanding of the meaning of the original texts.

In order for these resources to be optimally useful in technology tools, they need to be comprised of both content (the words themselves) and metadata (the information about the content). In this way, the interlinking of content and assembly of checklists can be automated. In order for the resources to be useful to the entire global church, they need to be available in all the Gateway Languages of the world and without legal restrictions that would hinder them from being shared, extended and used as needed. In this way, these biblical resources will be the common property of the global church, perpetually available to believers in every people group and language, through global patterns of multilingualism.[47]

8.2. Computer Application

These biblical resources will provide the greatest help to the global church when they are provided by means of a computer application that simplifies and streamlines the checking process. This tool will be designed for the unique needs and opportunities of church-centric Bible translation. Among other things, it will provide an intuitive experience for new users while also enabling a parallel workflow, so that many people can check the same translation simultaneously. It will also provide a straightforward means of publishing multiple revisions of a translation, in a variety of digital and print formats.

The user interface will be translated into all the Gateway Languages, so that Bible translators in the global church who do not speak English are not hindered from using it. As with the biblical content it delivers, this tool will be made available under an open license so that it can be freely used without cost or license requirements by the entire global church, as well as extended and expanded by others as needed.

Machine translation technologies in the Bible translation domain have traditionally been applied to the production stage, with the intent of producing good quality drafts that can be further checked. As we have already seen, the most urgent need of the global church is in checking. Accordingly, this computer application will utilize machine translation technology to automate and expedite as much of the checking process as possible, through such tasks as predicting translation alignments and identifying some potential errors in the translation (e.g., missing terms).

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[47] See Jore, "The Gateway Languages Strategy," **unfoldingword.org/gateway**.

8.3. Checking Model

The checking model to be implemented in this computer application assumes that some checks are intrinsic to the text itself and applicable across all translations, but that church leaders may desire to extend this baseline checking with specific theological and doctrinal checks pursuant to their cultural and religious context. For example, there may be verses that are particularly susceptible to misinterpretation in their context that may need to be checked across all translations in that region. A checklist could be assembled for these verses to enable the church leaders to systematically confirm the faithfulness and clarity of these verses in each translation.

The checklists themselves can be built from available datasets, e.g., lists of figures of speech in each book of the Bible, and lists of key terms and their senses. Checks will be provided to address specific lexical, literary device, and discourse features in the text, as well as potential historical, cultural, or linguistic issues that could be misunderstood. The checklists will implement a pivoted view of the translation, enabling the checker to complete each checklist in turn (e.g., one key term at a time, then metaphors, then double negatives, etc.).

Together with each check, relevant translation training will be provided for reference. When checking the metaphors in a book, for example, a training module on what metaphors are, why they are used, examples in Scripture where they occur, and acceptable means of translating them faithfully will be available on-demand. In light of this information, and by comparing their translation against multiple source texts, the original languages, exegetical information, and lexical helps, the checker will be better able to understand the passage and affirm (or improve, as needed) the trustworthiness of their translation.

8.4. New Possibilities

This approach to checking Bible translations suggests a number of new possibilities:

- The structure of the checking process makes it possible to generate an objective list of items that were checked. The potential for **quantification of the checking** process has implications not only for improvement of the translation itself (through customized reports as to the kinds of changes made, where they occurred, and why they were made), but could also lead to improvements in translation training resources (e.g., by identifying consistently problematic passages).[48]
- The manner in which the translation and the checking data is stored provides **transparency of changes** to the translation over time. In addition to providing the church with clarity regarding the identity of the editors involved in making the changes, the rationale for each change can also be provided. When publishing revisions of a translation, this makes it possible to automatically generate a companion "changelog" for those who want to know precisely what changed and why between any two revisions.
- The tool could be extended to make **parallel checking** of multiple translations in many different languages as simple as possible. The intent would be to make the naturally corrective function of "networked hermeneutical communities" a normal part of church-centric Bible translation.
- The process of executing the checks will create an alignment of the words and phrases in the Bible translation with those of the source text and also the original languages. This alignment data makes

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[48] Fehderau has suggested that a systematic approach to Bible translation could make possible a means of quantifying the quality of a translation. Regardless of whether or not this is possible (or even desirable), he observes that a systematic approach to checking would make the entire process less subjective and more objective: "We should have procedures that are standard enough that any consultant will come to essentially the same conclusion about the quality of a particular translation. My assessment is that this is not the case at the present time." Fehderau, "Toward Systematic Translation Checking: Reference Manual for Bible Translation Checking."

possible the relatively straightforward creation of in-depth **Bible study resources in any language**, including Greek and Hebrew interlinears, as well as customized combinations of translations in various languages (aligned at word or phrase levels), with tagged key terms linked to indices and lexicons.

- The alignment data also suggest significant implications for **machine translation**, where lack of aligned texts is one of the greatest impediments to rapid creation of high quality draft translations by computers. The potential uses for the alignment data range anywhere from the possibility of drafting the Old Testament in languages that have completed the New Testament, to generating high quality drafts of other biblical resources, e.g., commentaries, study resources, etc.

8.5. Early Progress

An open-source software application that implements this checking model is in active development as part of the unfoldingWord project.[49] Contributors are also creating open-licensed source texts, exegetical resources, original language resources, and publishing tools. Working together with church networks globally, these resources are being translated into the Gateway Languages of the world. Although much progress has been made, there is immense need for other Bible translation agencies and church networks to help equip the global church with everything that is needed for excellence in Bible translation, in every language.

9. Conclusion

Earlier in this paper we considered this question: "How will a lingual church know if their subjective perception of their Bible translation aligns with the objective reality of its trustworthiness?" The answer proposed here is to provide each lingual church with a means of systematically and comprehensively checking any Bible translation in their language so that they can confirm for themselves that it faithfully and clearly communicates the meaning of the original texts. In this way, a lingual church will know that they are trusting Bible translations that are, in fact, trustworthy.

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[49] unfoldingWord (**unfoldingword.org**) is a collaborative project to create open-licensed resources for Bible translation and discipleship. It is managed by Distant Shores Media (**distantshores.org**).
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