



OBT Handbook

Oral Bible Translation
with Heart, Mind, and Body

Marcia Suzuki
YWAM's University of the Nations



OBT

Handbook

Oral Bible Translation
with Heart, Mind, and Body



YWAM's University of the Nations
www.uofn.edu

“You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your being:
all your **heart**, all your **mind**, and all your **body**.”

The pictures used in this handbook (from pages 14 to 49) are from the translation work among the Sanuma people of the Amazon jungle in Brazil. These images were chosen because they reflect the heart of the Oral Bible Translation approach and philosophy presented in this handbook.

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Foreword



Image by Daniel Holmberg.

*Dr. Bryan Harmelink (seated, fifth from the right)
with his YWAM cohort of Consultants in Training — April 2022.*

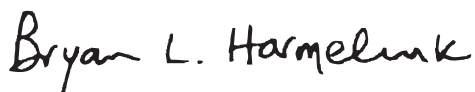
The Power of Orality

I'll never forget the day I was invited to a neighbor's house in Chomio, Chile to hear her sing a traditional song in Mapudungun. I was captivated for more than half an hour as she sang the history of several generations of her family, their trek over the mountains from Argentina, and other episodes of their lives. I experienced the power of oral performance. This same power has recently sparked a new movement in Bible translation: oral Bible translation.

This *OBT Handbook: Oral Bible Translation with Heart, Mind, and Body*, by Marcia Suzuki will give you a great introduction to this movement. She is well qualified to write this Handbook since she and her husband were already involved in oral Bible translation processes long before OBT became a thing. Their time among the Suruwaha years ago gave them experience in translation that not only yielded fruit there but continues to do so now in YWAM's work in OBT.

As described, the OBT Handbook will introduce you to YWAM's holistic approach to OBT. In this brief introduction, you will encounter creative and profound insights into the process of OBT. These insights are evidence of Marcia's long experience and thoughtful reflection on the significance of orality for the Bible translation process.

It has been my privilege to work closely with Marcia and other YWAM colleagues as they have explored how YWAM can engage in the Bible translation movement. As Marcia points out, we find ourselves in the era of greatest ever collaboration in Bible translation and I thank God for what He is doing and will do through YWAM. I highly recommend this OBT Handbook to you as we continue our journey of learning together how to communicate the Word of God to all.



Dr. Bryan Harmelink
Wycliffe Global Alliance



Introduction



Image by Steve Learned.

OBT Leaders Workshop — July 2022

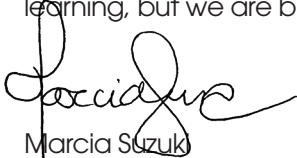
Finding YWAM's Niche

God is doing something powerful in the world of Bible translation, and OBT is part of it. The College of Applied Linguistics & Languages (CALL) of the University of the Nations is supporting YWAM's End Bible Poverty Now (EBPN) movement and the OBT 1000 initiative, by doing research, developing curriculum, providing training, and supplying resources.

In the last few years, we have learned a lot from the OBT partner organizations. Because of their generous investment in teaching our schools, we have been able to grasp how each organization does OBT according to their unique characteristics and cultures. We are profoundly thankful to Dr. Bryan Harmelink (WGA) who has spent hundreds of hours with our teams and students, teaching, telling stories, mentoring, and helping us find our niche. Based on what we have learned (not just in recent years but since our OBT experience with the Suruwaha in 2000), we have adjusted some of the procedures to fit YWAM history, culture, and values, creating our own approach to Oral Bible Translation. We call it Holistic OBT.

This handbook is here to briefly introduce OBT for any YWAMer who cares about ending Bible poverty or wishes to get involved. It defines the OBT concept, describes our holistic approach, discusses some of our values, and proposes a training model based on storytelling. It is written for OBT school leaders/teachers, project managers, practitioners, advocates, or anyone interested in understanding OBT.

This material was developed as a result of the first **OBT Leaders Workshop**, which took place at the YWAM Los Angeles base in the summer of 2022. I want to thank each one of the participants (most of them pictured here) who contributed their difficult questions, creative ideas, and unstoppable passion for the Lord and His Word. We are still learning, but we are building something beautiful together.



Marcia Suzuki
International Dean
College of Applied Linguistics & Languages – UofN/YWAM

“God Doesn’t Need that Little Game of Yours!”

After living for many years among the Suruwaha, one of the most isolated tribes of the Amazon, it was finally time to teach them how to read and write.

As dedicated YWAMers, trained linguists and Bible translators, my husband Suzuki and I had already learned and analyzed the language and had it reduced to writing. We had compiled a huge dictionary, created a pedagogical grammar, and completed the discourse analysis. In addition, we had also created the first primer book in their language. With that little primer in our hands, we selected some interested young people and set out on our literacy adventure.

We were fascinated with our students’ ability to crack the alphabetic code so easily, even though the primer was one of the first books they had ever touched. It was like a game to them. Some would spend hours sitting near our hammock, reading the words out loud, laughing delighted at the ingenuity of the system. They loved it, and we were absolutely thrilled, of course! We imagined it wouldn’t take long before the entire tribe would be literate and would be able to read the Bible in their own language. What a milestone it will be!

During those years, we had been witnessing a spiritual awakening among the Suruwaha. The shaman had a powerful encounter with Jaxuwa (Jesus), and many were asking questions, very hungry to learn more about Him and His power to change their hearts. Because they were so

Kuzari, our dearest Suruwaha friend.





ready, we told them that it was time for us to start translating the Bible into their language so they could read and understand the words of God for themselves.

What a shock! We were not prepared at all for their reaction. "We are disgusted that you would even consider using your mundane little game to convey God's sacred words! God certainly doesn't need that! That game of yours is fun and all, but it is not appropriate to carry such a powerful message. That's not how spiritual truth is communicated. Are you kidding?!"



The Suruwaha, in their unapologetic wisdom and common sense, forced us to think outside the box. The Suruwaha did not see any value in learning how to read and write, so they rejected literacy altogether. Their reaction to literacy led us into a long quest to understand the interaction between spirituality, orality, and literacy in different cultures. It took us another couple of years to understand the implications of that and to come up with an alternative that would honor both the Bible and their culture.

So, in the year 2000, we started translating Genesis using a completely oral process. It included internalization of the passages and cycles of rendering, recording, testing, and refining. It was beautiful to see how the Suruwaha would totally internalize a passage and then recount it with so much beauty and accuracy.

The first man to listen to a passage from Genesis was Ikiji, a friend who had not yet met Jesus. He listened carefully to the recording then walked away silently into the thick jungle. Several hours later, he came back glowing. In a spontaneous and inspired response to the power of God's word, he sang for us a collection of eleven beautiful chants he had just composed in worship of his newly found Savior.

That's how our journey with OBT started—way before it had a name.

Why Is Everyone Talking about OBT?

Around 145 million people in the world are disenfranchised from the fullness of God's revelation because they still don't have any portion of the Bible translated into their language. Bible poverty is sad and unacceptable. But things are changing.

We are living in exciting times. YWAMers from all over the world are coming together in unity and purpose toward making the Word of God available in all languages in a format that can touch and transform people's hearts.

During the last decade, our beloved co-founder Loren Cunningham has been intentionally and passionately calling YWAMers from all nations to engage in the Bible translation movement. Does YWAM have a little piece of the puzzle that could help get the job done, so all languages will have access to the Bible? We don't know yet, but like that little boy with five small loaves and two fish, we are giving all we have toward the effort.

And we are not alone. YWAM has been inserted into a never-before-seen collaboration of all the major, established, Bible translation agencies together with an additional emerging group of translation-minded organizations like ourselves. In this context, YWAM has been recognized as a legitimate player, and Oral Bible Translation (OBT) is celebrated as an innovative emerging methodology that can be a game changer.





The Definition

What Is OBT?

Oral Bible Translation (OBT) is a mother-tongue, speaker-centered approach to Bible translation in which both translation and quality assurance processes are carried out mostly orally, with the end result being an oral Scripture that is trustworthy / trusted, appropriate, intelligible, and appealing.

A BIBLE READ ALOUD IS NOT AN ORAL BIBLE

When the text of a written Bible translation is **read aloud** and recorded, the result is simply an audio product, not an oral Bible.

An **Oral Bible** is the recorded audio of a Bible that was translated using orality-based methods and tools. Someone renders an internalized passage by heart, and their voice is recorded.

Unpacking the Definition

- Some people from a bibleless group express a desire to orally translate a passage or a book of the Bible into their mother tongue.
- A small team, from a missionary agency or from a church, teams up with the aspiring translators to support them. The team has been previously trained on how to facilitate an oral translation and on how to train the new translators.
- Because the translators and their community communicate much better through orality than through print, the whole process of translation will be carried out mostly orally.
- This way people from the community can have active roles in the translation and can exert leadership in the project, regardless of their literacy status.
- Facilitators also learn to operate orally, so their participation does not disrupt the oral dynamics of the translation process. They internalize passages so the whole exegesis can be done orally using a conversational approach.
- During translation sessions, facilitators use a bridge language and a variety of orality-based resources to help translators with exegesis and internalization of each passage. Then translators produce and record an oral translation draft of each passage in their mother-tongue language.
- The recorded draft is checked for quality assurance by other translators, by members of the community, and by mentors and/or consultants.
- The translation team receives feedback and continues to improve their oral draft until the translation of the passage reaches approval by all involved parties.
- The approved translation is recorded and officially validated by the appropriate body (it can be the local church, a translation agency, a local Bible society, or a committee chosen by the community).
- The recording is produced and is now regarded as the authoritative oral translation of that passage of the Scriptures in that language and is distributed to the community for their engagement with the Word of God.

Why Holistic?



ho.lis.tic (hō-lis'tik) *adjective* relating to or concerned with wholes or with complete systems rather than with the analysis of or dissection into parts.

We want to see the team members' **whole person** being addressed and impacted during the translation project. We want to be sensitive to their reality and needs beyond the project, and we are committed to doing translation as discipleship.

We want to see the teams having a **whole experience** with a biblical passage during the translation sessions; not only an intellectual experience of understanding the text in their mind, but a fully embodied experience, encompassing their whole being. Thus we are committed to a *Heart, Mind, and Body* methodology.

We want to see the teams operating from a **whole language** perspective. Language is a complex and intricate manifestation of our God-given identity as His image. When we reduce language to a mere object of structuralist analysis, we miss a lot of its communicative power. Thus we are committed to creating an environment where translators are freely operating from the tacit knowledge of their language, without being primed to dissect or analyze it.

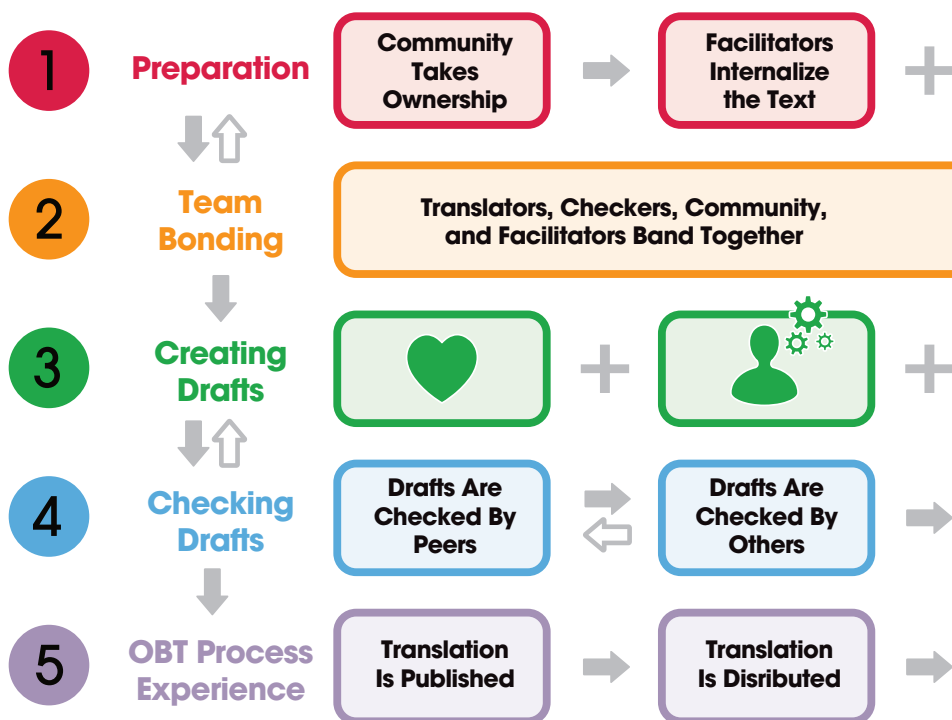
**Holistic OBT engages the WHOLE person
in a WHOLE experience with a biblical passage,
through a WHOLE language perspective.**

"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your being:
all your **heart**, all your **mind**, and all your **body**."



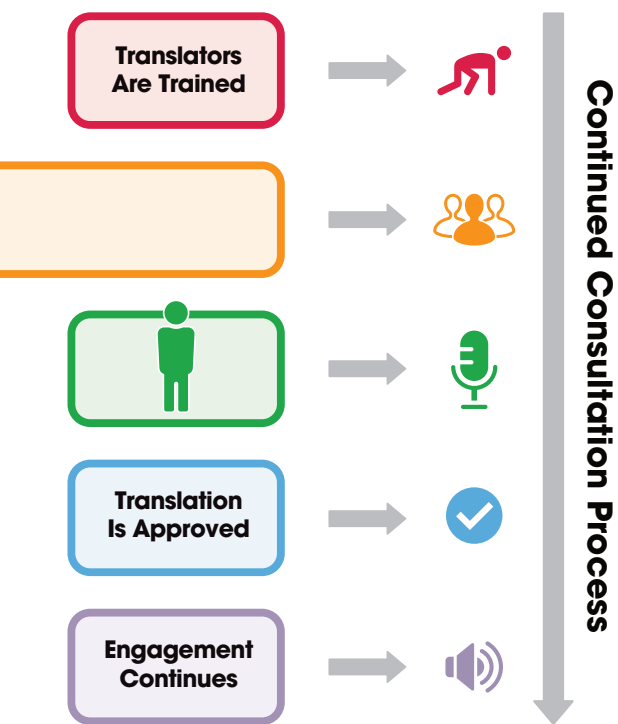
The Process

OBT in a Chart



First Things First

It is not supposed to be OUR project, but THEIR project. It belongs to their community. Before they enter the Preparation stage (1), it is important that the community, a local church, or at least a group of people, really want the Bible in their language. They need to be committed to make it happen. A lot of projects stall because they did not start as a response to a felt need of the community.



This chart illustrates the whole process of holistic OBT. It involves five fundamental, color-coded stages. Each **stage** has its own internal **steps** and clear **outcomes**. The five stages are listed in the left side of the chart, the thirteen steps in the center, and the five outcomes in the right.

The arrows and symbols indicate the temporal or logical relation between the components of the process, showing that most of the process is not linear but multi-directional. In the next five pages, you will see a description of each component of the chart.

Some communities are not ready to start an OBT project because they have no real motivation or interest. In those cases, DTS, EBPB, Word by Heart, One Story, or *Jesus* film in the bridge language may help people develop a desire to have the Bible in their own language.

1 Preparation



1A. Community takes ownership

The YWAM approach to OBT puts a lot of weight on the local translators/community as the driving force in the translation process. Our role is to come alongside them; to serve and provide the resources they need.

The process described on this chart assumes that the community/church wants the oral Bible translation project and that they are engaged in planning and decision making process. They take ownership of the translation, as protagonists, ready and eager to invest time and resources to see the Word of God translated into their language.

During the Stage 1A, the translators/facilitators/church/community will collaborate on a *translation brief*, or *translation plan*, explaining what kind of translation they want, how they want to run the project, which books to translate first, the pace of the translation, the financial requirements, the system of approval, and more. After discussion and prayer, that plan will be recorded and will serve as a guide throughout the process. A “validation board,” or another mechanism, will be appointed by the community and will be responsible for validating the translation at the end of each book or passage.

1B. Facilitators internalize the text

In a holistic oral process, internalization and exegesis are naturally connected. The facilitators listen to the audio of the passage in different versions and/or languages, and spend time learning about historical and cultural background and preparing all the materials they want to use during the translation process (props, maps, videos, etc). They will be exploring the story orally, counting and recounting it in various forms, with more or less degree of detail. In the process, they deepen their understanding of the context and their ability to tell the story.

This process will naturally lead to the internalization of the whole text. The idea is that, when the facilitators start working with the translation team, they are ready to tell/perform the story without having to refer to the Bible or any other written material. This way they are modeling the use of orality as part of the translation process.

1C. Translators are trained

Receptor-language speakers with a natural ability to become excellent OBT translators will emerge naturally in open Bible storytelling events conducted by the team. At these events, through the strategic use of translanguaging, some speakers will stand out for their ability to communicate the stories in the target language with accuracy, naturalness, and eloquence. These speakers are then invited to become part of the team, receiving training related to their role.

The translators are guided to reflect on the different genres and styles of discourse in the Bible and to compare them with the traditional, oral literature of their community, focusing on the genre of the text being translated. Translators learn basic principles of translation as well as differences between languages and how they are reflected in translations. The **Embodied Principles of OBT** interactive tool, developed by Marcia Suzuki and based on the Forum of Bible Agencies International (FOBAI) documents, can be used as part of the translator training.



2 Team Bonding

**Translators, Checkers, Community,
and Facilitators Band Together**



2A. Team Bonding

A very important part of the process is to establish the team dynamics, because it will impact the quality of the translation. Everyone involved in the process is a legitimate part of it. Team bonding in inter-cultural contexts takes time and cannot be taken lightly. Only when real trust and vulnerability exists within a team, can the team work together adequately. There should be no hierarchy or control from any part or group. The cultural differences and expectations need to be addressed openly and with love. This step cannot be rushed, because people are more important than the task.



Image by Amanda Ellen.

Team bonding in intercultural contexts takes time.

2B. Team Bonding Outcome - Serving as Peers

The local, mother-tongue translators and the trained facilitators will serve alongside each other as peers. The relationship between the team members should not be hierarchical, with one member dominating or leading the other. We seek relationships based on friendship, where each member serves, respects, and prioritizes the interests of the other.

The translation process should not be seen as a task only, and a group of people should not be seen as means for another group to reach their goals. The team needs to grow continuously in unity and togetherness; one serving the other in love and respect. Everyone on the team needs to maintain the perspective of one on a perpetual learning journey.

The facilitators will serve the translators by providing resources and guidance on how the translators can hone their skills as translators and storytellers.

The translators will serve the facilitators by providing expert advice on the culture, the language, and the context of the translation.

And all will grow together as they engage more and more with the Word of God.



3 Creating Drafts



3A. Connecting with the Text at Heart Level

The whole team will spend some time connecting with the text at the HEART level. They will share stories of their life and community, searching for personal, meaningful connections with the text. This is a moment of vulnerability, reflection, revelation, prayer, and meditation. The text will come alive and touch hearts, bringing transformation and unity.

3B. Mastering the Text at Mind Level

The team will explore the text and try to make sense of it collectively. This is the moment where important questions are addressed (who? what? to whom? when? where? how? why?), always in a conversational manner. The historical and cultural backgrounds of the text are discussed. The structure and genre of the text is addressed. For some passages, referencing the original language might play an important role in mastering the text at the MIND level.



Image by Amanda Ellen

Oral exegesis and internalization should be done using a conversational approach in an environment of freedom, love, and respect. The translators need to be in the center of the process.

3C. Internalizing the Text at Body Level

The facilitators will lead the process of internalization using a method that is adequate for the translators. They start by performing the text several times in the bridge language and naturally transition to the process of internalization. They may choose to play the audio Bible of the passage, if available. They may use gestures, props, pictures, or any other culturally-appropriate resources. The translators will start internalizing and telling the story in the bridge language and will gradually transition into the target language.

When the text is internalized, the translators will record the first draft and will keep refining it, and recording again and again, until all the details are included and everyone on the team is happy with the result. The computer application Render, from Faith Comes by Hearing (FCBH), can be used to guide the general flow of the work and help organize the audio recordings. Audacity, Pratt, or other similar applications can also be used to edit audio. Some teams have been using Descript to both organize and edit the recordings on their computers, while others utilize apps on their phones.



4 Checking Drafts



4A. Drafts are checked by peers

If the OBT project team is working with different teams of translators, this is the moment to swap recordings and ask for peer input. Each team of translators will listen to another team's drafts and make comments regarding their content, style, word choices, etc. Then the different teams will meet, discuss the suggested changes, and arrive at a "final team draft."

4B. Drafts are checked by others

The team draft will then be checked by people who were outside the process of translation. This will include people in the church, in the community, pastors, consultants, exegetes, etc. This external checking process may take some time and several rounds of drafts to complete.

4C. Translation is approved and validated

Approval: The team(s) will approve the external draft check and proceed to discussing and approving any final changes and improvements that may have surfaced. Once these final changes are made, and the team(s) are happy with the final rendering of the text, the translation is declared "approved" and the passage is recorded in its final form.

Validation: After approval and recording, the validation process is implemented to guide the team toward publication and distribution. A validation board, chosen by the community in conjunction with the team, will verify that the translation process (established by the community/church in Step 1A) was accurately and completely followed. The board will check if the team worked with integrity and responsibility, etc. throughout the process. Only after successfully completing the validation step will the translation be declared “approved for publication and distribution.”

Current translation practice relies on the professional translation consultant as the quality control expert. The Innovation Lab is suggesting that quality translation can be better achieved through an integrated holistic approach that draws upon and develops resources within the Church and language community to authenticate Scripture through iterative processes.

(From ETEN Quality Assurance Innovation Lab recommendations, 2022)



5 Publishing



5A. Translation is published

Copies of the approved and validated translation are produced and published in the media decided together by the community/church and the translation team.

5B. Translation is distributed

Once published, translation will be distributed to the community according to the decision and policies determined by the community and the translation team.

The media piece can be confidently distributed as an authoritative oral version of the Scriptures in that language.

5C. Engagement Continues

The process of Bible engagement doesn't start after the text is published and distributed. The very process of translating, engaging with the text, checking with the community, and so on, is considered Bible engagement. This process will continue, as the team continues to grow and engage with other stories, resulting in more texts being translated.

In a community where oral literature tradition is present and alive, people will naturally use orality to spread the story that was recorded. In this process they might innovate and adapt, or might use other types of oral expressions, such as chant or poetry, to retell the same story. This is what real Bible engagement will look like in a community with strong oral tradition. In addition, depending on the importance a community places on literacy, some may choose to transcribe the audio into a written translation.

With an oral translation, the community should always have access to the original recording for reference, clarification, and correction.



What to Expect at the End of Each Stage



The translation team is chosen and ready. They know what kind of translation the community/ church wants. They have received training, and they know what is expected from them. The facilitators have internalized the passage to be translated.



A healthy team dynamic is established. The team has achieved a level of trust and friendship that will allow everyone to contribute without reservations. They have learned how to function as peers despite their educational or social background.



The translators have experienced the passage/ book at a heart, mind, and body level. They have internalized and translated it orally and recorded a final oral draft. They are ready to send the audio to be checked and to receive feedback.



The checkers have sent their feedback and the team has reviewed the drafts. A final version is approved by the team, recorded and validated according to the protocols decided by the team/ church/community.



The translation is published and distributed, and the community starts engaging with the Word of God in their mother tongue. The team prepares to translate the next passage or book.

The whole process of translating a small book might take a few weeks or many months, depending on the needs and level of commitment of the community and team. The facilitators need to be sensitive to the community dynamics and must not hurry the process. A healthy and holistic translation process will have life on its own, causing the local team and community to thrive and desire other books; even the entire Bible.

A Word about Quality Assurance

We are embracing consultancy as a continued process provided by one or more mentor consultants who will engage with the team or facilitator throughout the program, providing input, training, resources, and feedback. The idea is to distance ourselves from a model in which a sole person has the responsibility and the attribution of approving an entire translation by checking it only at the end of the process.

The team or the facilitator will have an important role in requesting mentor consultant services according to their needs. The mentor consultants will assist in different stages of the project, according to their competencies, with the objective of serving and training the team or the facilitator.



Continued Consultation Process

Multiplicative Utilization of Consultant Expertise

To support a growing, global, Bible translation movement that is a ministry of the Church, translation consultant expertise needs to be maximized for multiplicative effect. The role of translation consultant must be reshaped as a servant of the global Church who comes alongside to invest in others and build their capacity for the consultancy processes through coaching, training, and facilitating group processes, rather than serving as a production-line, quality-control checker.

What Is a “Mentor Consultant”?

- The mentor consultant is someone who mentors either an OBT team or a facilitator who works with an OBT team.
- In the first case, the mentor consultant is directly involved in guiding and assisting in the discovery of what the team needs for their internalization process.
- In the second case, the mentor consultant works alongside the facilitator who is responsible to guide and assist the team in their discovery process.
- The focus is always on mentoring into greater and greater skill and capacity.
- This could contribute to the natural growth of facilitators into mentor consultants.

—Bryan Harmelink, Wycliffe Global Alliance (WGA)



Continued Consultation Process





Setting the Tone



Image by Amanda Ellen.

The physical setting of a translation session sets the tone for the whole process, affecting the quality of the translation. Here, the translators felt they needed to internalize and translate outside of the office, where they could “hear the sound of the wind blowing the leaves, instead of the noise of the machines.” After the change of location, everyone in the team was amazed with the improvement in the translators performance and with the consequent better quality of the translated material.

A Conversational Discovery Approach

“Talk Story” is a Hawaiian expression that means “to chat informally” or “to shoot the breeze.” Karen Ann Watson describes it as “a rambling personal experience mixed with folk materials.”

What we do could also be called **“Talk Story OBT”** because it might look like a group of friends chatting about Bible stories and mixing it with personal stories. It doesn’t feel like a formal class or a work session, nor as an interview or test—it feels more like a talk story event.

To create a talk story dynamic, we avoid the use of predetermined lists of questions because they tend to cast the questioner as too professorial or directive affecting the nature of team interaction. Questions usually prime, or influence, the perception of the person being questioned and can be intimidating. The person being questioned usually feels that they are being “tested.” We prefer to use a conversational discovery approach. Conversational approaches provide the right environment for the team to achieve what is known as “collective sensemaking.”

In collective sensemaking, a group of people “intentionally come together for the purpose of using their varied perspectives and cognitive abilities to make sense of an issue or problem they are mutually facing.”

—Nancy Dixon, in the Conversational Leadership blog

The “problem” the team faces in orally translating the Bible is remarkably complex. The source passages were produced thousands of years ago in linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic contexts to which we have only partial access. The best chances we have to get this done correctly is by doing a proper oral exegesis of the passage together as a team and then relying on the translator’s expertise in their language and culture. To create team interaction dynamics in which the translators are in the **center of the process** and have freedom to thrive, we must let go of our assumptions about expertise and believe in the power of collaborative knowledge. This is not an easy task—it requires humility, practice, and trust in the work of the Holy Spirit.



A team of consultants in training observe a conversational exegesis session where the translators are the real protagonists of the process.

When planning translation sessions, we need to look for a physical environment and a time of the day that is culturally and psychologically conducive to optimal oral dynamics. In a specific community, what are the places and times that people have long, meaningful conversations or tell stories?

The Physical Setting of the Session

What is the best physical environment for an oral translation session? A classroom? A living room? A church? An air conditioned office? A recording studio? A kitchen? A tent? Some benches in the backyard? A porch? A bonfire under the stars? A walkabout trail in the desert?

Environment psychology research shows how the architecture and setting of a room affects people's behavior, interaction, creativity and focus, depending on their history and cultural background. It also communicates a message regarding roles and expectations between participants. In some settings, the organizer seems to be in the spotlight and the participants feel that they are extras. Some other settings invite people to interact more between themselves. For instance, armchairs, sofas, or coffee tables, create a familiar atmosphere suitable for openness, creativity, and reflection.

A good physical setting for a written translation might not be a good setting for an oral translation because the cognitive processes involved are very different. We need to find a third space.

When working with people from different cultures and from strong oral tradition we need to be mindful of what works better for them. When we imagine a good setting for OBT, we tend to think about a working office or a recording studio. What feels like the perfect translation setting from the perspective of the expatriate facilitator, is usually a setting that is not conducive to a relaxed atmosphere where translators are able to naturally and openly express themselves.

Translators need to feel relaxed and inspired to be able to operate through the tacit knowledge of their language and culture. They might need an open room or a view of the trees. They might need to internalize the passages in the evening, under the stars or around a bonfire. They might need to have their hands busy weaving baskets. They might feel uninspired or uncomfortable to record a passage if they have to speak while looking at a computer screen or hooked up to the latest generation headset. That sense of uneasiness negatively impacts the quality of the oral delivery.

Friendship As a Missional Practice

As we seek to genuinely serve a bibleless people group to provide the Bible in their heart language, we are invited to reflect on the meaning of **friendship**. We want to avoid the temptation of seeing people groups as mere numbers to check off our language list. Numbers are not our goal. We are not in the business of OBT, OBT is a byproduct of bringing glory to God by loving our neighbor as we love ourselves.

But can we really be friends with people from diametrically opposed backgrounds? And do we even need friendship to do OBT well? Wouldn't it take too much time? Isn't a cordial, benevolent relationship good enough?

During the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910, V. S. Azariah, a young Anglican bishop from South India, shocked the missionary audience with a heartfelt cry:

**"You have given your goods to feed the poor.
You have given your bodies to be burned.
We also ask for love. Give us FRIENDS!"**

Azariah believed in the power of cross-cultural friendships. Sadly, more than a century after his famous remarks, we can still attest that missionaries in general are unable to develop genuine friendship with the "locals."

Friendship is more than **condescending love**.



Image by Amanda Ellen.

The translator, Renato, and facilitator, Mimica, are decades-long friends who deeply love, understand, and respect each other.

"Friendship within the triune God sets the example of divine and human friendship. An intimate relationship with the triune God in community and friendship with others forms the most basic foundation for mission.

"...we have to be committed to friendship, and this has missional impact because friendship between people of all socio-economic, religious and other class differentiations gives God glory and serves as a visible demonstration of God's kingdom."

—Kirk Franklin

"Mission, then, is less about our efforts to help or evangelize "them," and more about how we can live into the kingdom together. Friendship puts the focus on relationships and offers an alternative to models of mission that are more formal, professional or bureaucratic."

—Christopher L. Heuertz and Christine D. Pohl



Methodology

Internalization

In Oral Bible Translation, **internalization** is the oral process by which practitioners grasp the meaning of a biblical passage so thoroughly that they can use the tacit knowledge of their language to orally retell that passage in a way that it is intelligible, appropriate, trustworthy/trusted, and appealing to their intended audience.

How do we internalize a passage?

There is no universal or infallible technique to internalize a passage from the Scriptures. The actual techniques employed to achieve a **“thorough grasp,”** as mentioned in the definition, may vary from culture to culture and from person to person. What seems to be an excellent technique for a literate person might be useless for a person of oral preferences. Some teams use props or objects. Others may prefer picture boards. Some will use gestures, or other mnemonic strategies, to help them remember the passage. A technique that seems reasonable and useful for the facilitators might appear silly or even culturally inappropriate for the translators. Each team (facilitator, translators, etc) needs to dialogue, experiment, and explore together what is the best way for the translators to internalize a given passage.

Even though the actual internalization techniques may vary, our *Heart, Mind, and Body* methodology offers a clear framework to guide the process in a holistic way.



Heart Connection: After listening to the passage performed by the facilitators, the team will share stories of their life and community, searching for personal, meaningful connections within the passage. This is a moment of vulnerability, reflection, and prayer. The emotional connections will prepare them for the next level.



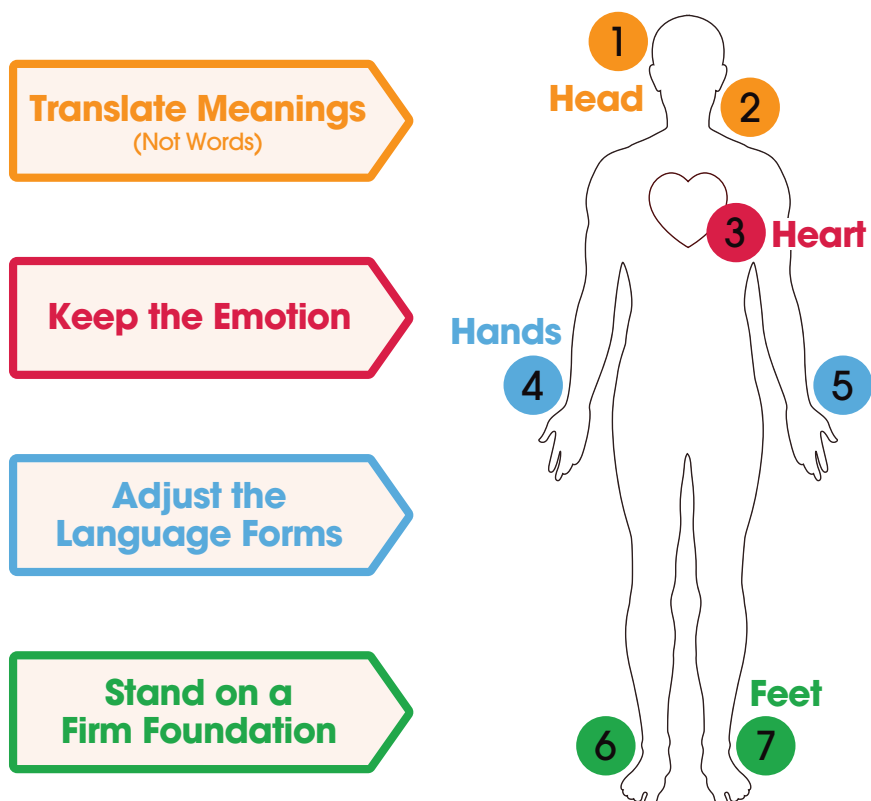
Mind Connection: The team will explore the passage using a conversational discovery approach and will try to make sense of it collectively. The relevant exegetical questions that will help to master the passage will be embedded in the discussion. The historical and cultural backgrounds of the passage will be explored together. The structure and genre will be addressed. And, if necessary, the intent and nuances of the original language will be introduced.



Body Connection: Finally, the translators will embody the passage, making it their own by retelling the passage several times using their whole body; voice, gestures, posture, and facial expressions. Naturally, the process will begin with telling a more general version of the passage, but it will gradually progress toward a more detailed version until eventually every detail in the passage is covered. Translators may want to employ translanguaging, starting the process using the bridge language and naturally transitioning to the receptor language.

“You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your being:
all your **heart**, all your **mind**, and all your **body**.”

Embodied Principles of Oral Bible Translation



It is important that everyone in the team understands some of the basic principles of Bible translation, recognized by the Bible translation agencies. We have developed this simple tool using parts of the body as a live metaphor for Bible translation. It helps the team to internalize and remember the seven main principles recommended by the *Forum of Bible Translation Agencies* (FOBAI).

The principles were grouped into four categories and each category paired with one or two body parts. When these principles are internalized, the team can refer to them any time they face a challenge during the translation process, without the need to consult a book or the FOBAI document.

USE YOUR Head TO TRANSLATE MEANINGS

1 with Accuracy

The head represents the need to reflect on and understand the passage deeply so it can be translated accurately. You cannot translate well what you don't understand well. Without a careful examination of the meaning, our translation will not be accurate. It is not about words. Some meanings that use only one word in one language will need several words to be accurately translated into another, and vice-versa.

FOBAI Principle 1

"To translate the Scriptures accurately, without loss, change, distortion or embellishment of the meaning of the original text. Accuracy in Bible Translation is the faithful communication, as exactly as possible, of that meaning, determined according to sound principles of exegesis."

2 with No Distortion

The neck represents the risk of distortion or bias in a translation. The neck controls the head. To avoid distortions, use your neck to keep your head looking straight at the meanings of the original, so you can translate without biases or personal preferences.

FOBAI Principle 2

"To make every effort to ensure that no political, ideological, social, cultural or theological agenda is allowed to distort the translation."

USE YOUR Heart TO KEEP THE EMOTION

3 Communicate Emotions, Feelings, and Attitudes of the Original

The emotional content of a passage is as integral to the message as the facts and information it conveys. When we engage with the original Scripture, we are not just dealing with words and facts, but we are also touched by the underlying sentiments and intentions of the authors—be it hope, sorrow, joy, or anger.



By Feeling the Text in Your Heart

If a translation fails to capture and convey these nuanced emotions and the attitudes that shape the original communicational context, it risks becoming lifeless—a mere shell of the original work. To avoid creating a translation devoid of vitality, it is essential to breathe life into the words by imbuing them with the same spirit and emotional depth that animates the source text.

FOBAI Principle 3

"To communicate not only the informational content, but also the feelings and attitudes of the original text. The flavor and impact of the original text should be re-expressed in forms that are consistent with normal usage in the original language."

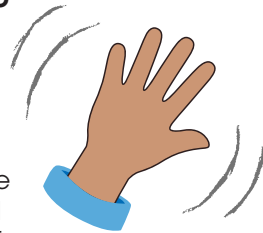
USE YOUR

Hands

TO ADJUST THE LANGUAGE FORMS

4 Gather a Rich Variety of Forms from the Original Text

Let one hand gather a rich variety of linguistic forms. This includes narratives, poetry, songs, unique rhetorical techniques, grammatical structures, and diverse styles. This hand will capture the full array of forms used in the original text to convey ideas.

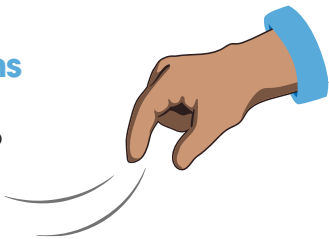


FOBAI Principle 4

"To preserve the variety of the original. The literary forms employed in the original text, such as poetry, prophecy, narrative and exhortation, should be represented by corresponding forms with the similar communicative functions in the receptor language. The impact, interest, and mnemonic value of the original should be retained to the greatest extent possible."

5 Select the Corresponding Forms in the Receptor Language

The other hand will select the most fitting ways to convey these ideas in the new language. This might mean altering the word order, seeking out new phrases that carry the same meaning, or employing a different style or genre. For example, a story told in prose in one language may be more authentically communicated as a chant in another, reflecting the cultural context and communication style of the audience.



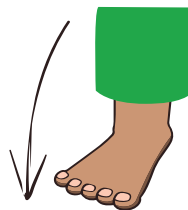
FOBAI Principle 5

"To recognize that it is often necessary to restructure the form of a text in order to achieve accuracy and maximal comprehension. Since grammatical categories and syntactic structures often do not correspond between different languages, it is often impossible or misleading to maintain the same form as the source text. Changes of form will also often be necessary when translating figurative language. A translation will employ as many or as few terms as are required to communicate the original meaning as accurately as possible."

USE YOUR Feet TO STAND ON A FIRM FOUNDATION

6 Understand the Biblical Context

One foot stands firmly in the context of the original text. It's about being anchored in the time and place where the Scripture was first written. Understanding the cultural, historical, and social framework is essential—it's like having a map that guides you to comprehend the customs, beliefs, and daily life of the people who first heard these words.

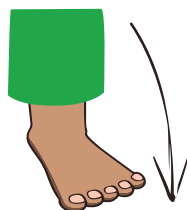


FOBAI Principle 6

"To represent faithfully the original historical and cultural context. Historical facts and events should be expressed without distortion. Due to differences of situation and culture, in some passages the receptor audience may need access to additional background information in order to adequately understand the message that the original author was seeking to communicate to the original audience."

7 Understand the Biblical Languages

The other foot stands steady on the nuances of the Bible's original languages. Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek are rich with meaning that often don't have a direct equivalent in other languages. Here, the translator might need assistance to help him in incorporating those nuances into the translation in the receptor language.



FOBAI Principle 7

"To use the original language Scripture texts as the basis for translation, recognizing that these are always the primary authority. However, reliable Bible translations in other languages may be used as intermediary source texts."



Image by Amanda Ellen.

Biblical context and languages serve at the firm foundation of an accurate translation.

Storification Pedagogy

Bible translation is not only perceived globally as the ministry of established organizations, it is starting to be seen as a **ministry of the Church and of emerging atypical forces**, like YWAM. This change of perception reflects the shift in the world demographics due to globalization, urbanization, mass migration, and multilingualism. As the Bible translation ministry demographics shifts, the training strategies need to shift as well.

The typical OBT practitioner, the translator of the future, is a multilingual and multicultural individual, from a non-Western country, who learns and operates more efficiently in the context of orality. They see and perceive language in a holistic way, not as an object of logical-scientific analysis but as a fully integrated aspect of life in a multilingual world. Translating, interpreting, and translanguaging (shifting from one language to another), are part of their daily routine. How can one harness this *tacit knowledge* (the unconscious knowledge of how language functions, that is only acquired through life experience) and at the same time help activate the right kind of linguistic awareness so they can continue to grow in their translation skills?

We are rethinking our approach to training to put the mother-tongue translator at the center of the training methodologies. The ways they learn, the ways they teach, and the ways they use language are the focus of OBT training and the entirety of the OBT process.

We tend to conceptualize teaching according to the Western pedagogical traditions, which require a verbal ostensive manifestation of generalized knowledge as the main teaching strategy, relying on paradigmatic cognition and logical-scientific analysis.

The model we are proposing embraces natural pedagogy and storytelling as the primary teaching strategies, focusing on narrative cognition, which is considered the default mode of human thought. Stories have been successfully used for centuries as a superior ostensive communication strategy to produce inferential learning.

“...narratives have a **‘privileged status’** in human cognition. These benefits should not be assumed to come from simplicity, as coherent narratives demand a high level of complexity in both internal complexity and alignment to cultural and social expectancies. Instead, narratives seem to offer intrinsic benefits in each of the four main steps of processing information: motivation and interest, allocating cognitive resources, elaboration, and transfer into long-term memory.”

—Graesser and Ottati

Logical-scientific communication follows deductive reasoning, or top-down logic, while narrative communication follows inductive reasoning, or bottom-up logic.

How to Teach a Story-Lesson

The *Heart, Mind, and Body* methodology is at the core of both our OBT approach and our training approach.



In each lesson-story, the Heart, Mind, and Body methodology used to train OBT practitioners includes all four types of learning as defined by the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT); experimenting, reflecting, thinking, and acting.

Instead of designing the curriculum around abstract conceptual generalizations, as the traditional Western pedagogy does, we design it around stories. The stories need to be carefully chosen in order to allow the students to abstract generalizations from them. The teacher needs to have a clear **desired outcome** for each story-lesson, so he can choose the right story.

Let us say that the desired outcome of a particular story-lesson is that the students will “*understand that each community has a culturally adequate way of conducting their meetings.*” In order to produce that outcome, the instructor can use a story from the book *Bruchko*. Once the desired outcome and the story are paired, use the following methodology.



STEP I – Recording the Sample Story

- 1 Write down a short, simple, and straightforward narrative that illustrates what you want the students to learn. It can be something you have experienced yourself or something you have heard from someone else. Or you can use a passage from a book like *Bruchko*. As you write your story, don’t explain it. Don’t give reasons or much context. Just write exactly what happened.
- 2 Read your narrative aloud, and make sure it is not more than ten minutes long. If necessary, edit it to make it shorter and clearer.
- 3 Record yourself reading the story aloud. Make sure you dramatize it well so your final recording is clear and appealing.
- 4 Send the audio recording to your students, and ask them to listen to it several times and meditate on it.

STEP II – Heart, Mind, and Body Exegesis & Internalization

- 1** Guide the students in a process of deeply engaging with the story, creating the right dynamics to allow personal reflection and emotional engagement. This is done using a conversational approach and will result in a heart connection.
- 2** Naturally transition the class into a conversational exegesis of the story, exploring all the cultural, historical, and geographical aspects relevant to full comprehension of the background, the nuances, and the meaning. This is done using a conversational approach and will result in a mind connection.
- 3** Facilitate the process of internalization so each student has a chance to embody the story by retelling it. As students learn how to tell the story using their own words, gestures, body posture, voice, and intonation, they will make it their own story. The process of internalization is conducted using a conversational approach and will result in a body connection.

STEP III – Recording and Checking Drafts

- 1** Ask students to record or film their performance of the story.
- 2** Have students compare it with the Sample Story (in STEP I) to check for possible omissions, additions, or distortions.
- 3** Use the Embodied OBT Principles to guide the students in checking and refining drafts.
- 4** Ask students to record a final version of the story.

An added benefit of this approach is students learning to produce, record, and check oral, intra-language, translation drafts throughout the school. Later, when working with a translator, they will apply these principles to an inter-language situation.

OBT Training Opportunities

Introduction to OBT School

Introduction to OBT is a twelve-week, in-person intensive training that prepares YWAMers to join a translation team and assist with oral exegesis, internalization, drafting, recording, and translator training. Six weeks are dedicated to story-based classes with the remaining six weeks focused on student observation and participation in an active OBT project.

Oral Biblical Hebrew Online

OBH Online prepares students to master Oral Biblical Hebrew so they can serve the teams that are translating the Old Testament. Our Hebrew program provides 1,000 hours of highly-effective and appealing immersion, through stories, videos, worship songs, and other activities. Students commit to four hours of immersive study, five days per week for one year. As a hybrid program, OBH online combines online asynchronous classes and activities, with in-person leadership and support.

AA in Oral Bible Translation

The **Associates of Arts in Oral Bible Translation** prepares the student to serve as a translation practitioner for Oral Bible Translation projects using a wide variety of approaches and different oral methods. They will learn how to internalize and oralize their knowledge of the Bible and the biblical contexts in a such a way that oral learners can understand and relate to the Scriptures. They will serve as mentors and trainers for mother-tongue translators and for facilitators egressed from the Introduction to OBT schools. They will be able to teach and provide mentorship on translation principles, oral exegesis, internalization and oralization of the biblical text, exegetical resources, as well as lead holistic OBT projects.

BA in Oral Bible Translation

The **Bachelor of Arts in Oral Bible Translation** prepares students to serve in Bible translation ministries, with an emphasis on OBT. They will be competent to work alongside native speakers to help them translate the Bible into their languages both in traditional written ways, as well as using oral translation methodologies and approaches. They will be able to apply principles of translation theory, pragmatics, semantics, discourse analysis, hermeneutics and exegesis in their ministry. They will have skills to internalize the biblical text and mentor others in internalization and performance.

Regarding Biblical languages, after receiving immersive training in reading, writing, speaking and translating in living Biblical Hebrew and/or Greek, they will achieve a communicative proficiency equivalent to at least intermediate level (ACTFL). They will be able to internalize and perform biblical passages/books in the original languages, with the goal of facilitating Bible Translation for communities of oral preference. They will also be able to teach biblical languages, to mentor both translators and facilitators, and lead holistic OBТ projects.

Mali BT—Master's in Applied Linguistics for Bible Translation

Mali BT is a two-year program created by the UofN in partnership with Wycliffe Global Alliance (WGA) and the Institute of Biblical languages & Translation (IBLT). It prepares students to perform specialist roles in Bible translation service among minority language groups. Our graduates will have the tools to serve OBТ teams and projects by providing mentorship and training. They will also be prepared to teach in the Introduction to OBТ schools and to create/adapt resources and materials in multiple languages to serve the OBТ movement worldwide. Mali BT is structured around four two-week, in-person, intensive blocks combined with assignments, practicums, and a capstone project.

Mali CT—Consultancy Training

Mali CT is an eighteen-month mentored pilot program created by the UofN in partnership with Wycliffe Global Alliance (WGA) and Wycliffe US, with the goal of providing further growth for Mali BT graduates. It was conceived with the goal of rethinking the concept of consultancy and the search for a model that would reflect the change of paradigms involving the emergence of the OBТ movement.

Mali CT is structured around two, in-person workshops and three, mentored, in-person, field sessions. Each workshop consists of two weeks of intensive instruction. Each mentored session consists of one week of field experience with mentoring by Bryan Harmelink in active language translation projects. These mentored sessions will be followed by additional online mentoring sessions. In addition, there will be a number of regular online meetings, readings, and assignments, as well as some specifically-required training courses.

Glossary of Terms

Approval – In OBT, approval is the process by which a team, after going through all the steps of quality assurance (including peers, community and consultant review), declares an oral draft as “final” and ready to be validated by the appropriate overseeing body. Traditionally, the approval of a Bible translation used to be the final step which was attributed to the consultant. Today, in the emerging models, the role of the consultant is redefined as one who is part of the *team*, and the *team* gives the final word of approval.

Bridge Language – is the common language spoken by the translators and the facilitators used in communication by the team during translation discussion sessions. It can be a regional lingua franca, or any language of wider communication.

Cognition – Is the mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, senses, and experiences.

Consultant – In the *emergent models of Bible translation*, the consultant is a trained practitioner who specializes in providing quality assurance for an OBT project. As part of the team, he assists, guides, and mentors the facilitators and translators throughout the process of exegesis, internalization, drafting, and checking the translation drafts. Even though the consultant is not expected to be physically present in all sessions, he will be as present as possible and remotely available when the teams need him. The acronym CiT is sometimes used to refer to a Consultant in Training.

Conversational Exegesis – A collective, conversational approach to critically interpret a biblical text to discover its intended meaning.

Embodiment – is the idea that mind and body are connected and that one influences the other. The functioning of the brain reflects, and is reflected in, the body’s physiology. Thus, we emphasize the importance of “embodying” a passage as part of the process of achieving a thorough understanding before translation begins.

Emerging Atypical Forces – The growing number of missionary organizations who are not typically Bible translation agencies, but that have, in recent years, joined traditional organizations in the task of giving the Bible to every language group. Organizations like YWAM, Faith Comes by Hearing, Spoken, etc., are some which represent the atypical forces. Indigenous churches are also considered atypical forces, as more and more of them take on the challenge of translating the Bible into their languages.

Established Methods – The methods of Bible translation and quality assurance used by traditional Bible translation agencies.

Emerging Methods – Oral Bible Translation, Church-Based Bible Translation, and Artificial Intelligence Bible Translation are recognized emerging methods.

Facilitator – An OBT practitioner who serves the translation team orally by assisting the translators in the process of exegesis, internalization, translation, checking, recording, and assists in the approval process on completed biblical passages. Some organizations use the term TA – Translation Adviser.

Holistic – An adjective relating to, or concerned with, wholes or with complete systems rather than with the analysis of, or dissection into, parts. Holistic OBT engages the whole person in a whole experience with a Bible passage, through a whole-language perspective.

Internalization – is the oral process by which practitioners grasp the meaning of a biblical passage so thoroughly that they can use the tacit knowledge of their language to orally retell that passage in a way that it is intelligible, appropriate, trustworthy/trusted, and appealing to their intended audience.

Narrative Cognition – A type of learning that occurs when someone processes information in the context of a story. An example is, when someone learns about what foxes eat by listening to a story about foxes.

Oral Bible Translation – OBT is a mother-tongue, speaker-centered approach to Bible translation in which both translation and quality-assurance processes are carried out mostly orally, with the result being an oral Scripture that is trustworthy/trusted, appropriate, intelligible, and appealing.

Orality – Orality refers to the use of speech as a means of communication, especially in communities where the tools of literacy are unfamiliar to most of the population. However, orality is not defined as the lack of literacy, since orality is the default mode of human communication, present and prevalent in most societies.

Paradigmatic Cognition – A type of learning that occurs when someone processes information as a member of a category. An example is, someone learns what foxes eat by recognizing them as members of the Canidae family.

Practitioner – A person who has experience working in an OBT project. The term can refer to the facilitator, the translator, the consultants, or anyone who works directly with the team in the translation process.

Receptor Language – The language for which the OBT process is used; the target language of a translation process.

Storality – a blend of ‘Story’ and ‘Orality’, is an educational approach that is centered on the internalization and performance of oral narratives. It seeks to engage the mind, heart, and body, facilitating visceral understanding and transformative learning.

Storification Pedagogy – The method and practice of teaching through story telling. In Storification Pedagogy, the syllabus is organized around stories, not around abstract topics.

Tacit Knowledge – A kind of knowledge that is subjective and acquired through experience. An illiterate person has a tacit knowledge of his language, evidenced by his ability to use it proficiently and skillfully, even artistically. But if asked, he would not be able to articulate or explain the same grammatical forms or discursive structure that he uses so well. That is the reason why being literate is not a requirement to being a good Bible translator.

Translanguaging – is an act, commonly performed by members of multilingual communities, of using different languages simultaneously to maximize communication. It is a natural way for multilinguals to communicate, and it enhances the level of cognitive exchange and social interaction among its users.

Translation Brief – In OBT, a *translation brief* is a video (or audio) document recorded by the team which describes the OBT project, including the purpose, type of translation, timing of the work, participants in the project, and similar information. The brief is recorded after various discussions with the community and functions as a kind of oral contract or agreement between the community, the church, the involved agencies, and the team. The brief belongs to the translation team and can be revised throughout the process as the team and community acquire more experience or learn more about their needs and aspirations.

Translator – The translator in an OBT project is the mother-tongue speaker, not the foreign missionary. The whole process is centered around the translator, who is the main protagonist of the entire project. Since the process is oral, the translator is not required to be literate or to know how to use computers. Other organizations sometimes refer to translators as Mother Tongue Translators or MTTs.

Validation – In OBT, validation is the process, defined by the community/ church/team, in which an oral translation is confirmed as the authoritative Word of God and deemed ready to be published and distributed. The church leadership, for instance, can act as the validation body. To be validated, an oral translation must be previously approved by the team. *Note: This step of validation was added to the YWAM OBT process. Its aim is to give voice and honor to the local community leaders, even when not directly included in the translation process. They will not check the quality of the translation itself, but they will examine the integrity of the process performed by the translation team, as defined in the translation brief. This makes the translation team locally accountable while empowering the community.*

Note



Notes



About this Book

This handbook was written as an introduction to the emerging Oral Bible Translation movement. It was written for YWAM OBT school leaders, teachers, project managers, practitioners, advocates, and anyone else interested in understanding OBT and ending Bible poverty. This book explores the OBT concept, describes the holistic approach, discusses the methodology and principles used, and proposes a training model based on storytelling. This material was developed out of the first OBT Leaders Workshop; an international gathering hosted by YWAM Los Angeles in the summer of 2022.

About the Author

Marcia Suzuki was born in Rio de Janeiro. Her favorite childhood book was a thick, black, Portuguese dictionary. She joined YWAM in 1982 and pioneered the ministry among Indigenous tribes, leading the first team to live among the Sateré-Mawé Indians in the Amazon. She did her first training in Linguistics with Wycliffe/SIL in Brazil in 1982. Since then, she has never stopped learning languages and studying linguistics. She is fluent in eight languages and has published several articles on theoretical linguistics. Marcia is currently a doctoral candidate at the Universidade Aberta de Portugal, where she develops research on Cognitive and Educational Linguistics.



Marcia Suzuki

After marrying Suzuki, a Brazilian-Japanese YWAMer and linguist, Marcia joined Suzuki in one of the most isolated tribes of the world; the Suruwahá tribe in Brazil's Amazon rainforest. Together, they both lived among this tribe, learned their language and culture, and started the first known Oral Bible Translation project in 2001. Suzuki and Marcia are also co-founders of ATINI, an NGO dedicated to offer sanctuary for indigenous families fleeing tribal infanticide. Marcia is currently the International Dean of the College of Applied Linguistics & Languages of YWAM's University of the Nations and lives at the YWAM Los Angeles base with Suzuki and their Suruwahá daughter Kanani.

"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your being:
all your **heart**, all your **mind**, and all your **body**."

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