THE SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF BIBLE TRANSLATING[*]

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At the beginning of 1993, at least one book of the Bible had been translated and published in 2,009 languages, the greatest accomplishment in interlingual communication that the world has ever known. This means that some portion of the Scriptures exists in the languages of 99 percent of the world's population, but there are still approximately 45,000,000 people who speak at least 1,000 more languages that have nothing of the Scriptures.

In order to complete the translation and publication of the Good News in these languages still without the Scriptures and in order to prepare fully meaningful translations in languages that may have only old-fashioned and awkward-sounding translations, serious consideration must be given to the sociolinguistic features of language, because these are so closely related to the culture and historical experience of a society.

Translational problems involve far more than rules of grammar and the words suggested by translation helpers. For example, in one situation a missionary attempting to translate the Gospel of Luke asked the people for their word for 'virgin' so that he could have an appropriate term to speak about Mary the mother of Jesus when the angel announced to her that she would have a baby. The people gave the missionary a word for 'virgin,' but it specified not only a virgin but also someone who participated in certain puberty rites involving ritual sexual intercourse. When the New Testament had been produced and was read by the people, there was great enthusiasm for this puberty-cult ceremony, and of course the

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missionary preached strongly against it. The people, however, protested and said, "How is it that you can speak against this practice when the mother of Jesus belonged to this cult?"

Such problems of relations between a word and a culture are not restricted to remote societies in faraway places. In Spanish the common word for 'to take' is "coger," but in the Rio Plata region of South America, as well as in some other areas, this word primarily refers to sexual intercourse. As a result, it was essential to eliminate this relatively common word from the Bible distributed throughout the Spanish-speaking world.

In other cases the issue is one of language level. One missionary, for example, was very much concerned to communicate the Good News of Jesus Christ in the ordinary colloquial Arabic of Egypt, but unfortunately this particular form of the language is used primarily in comic strips and pornographic literature. Hardly an appropriate level of language for the Scriptures! As a number of persons have commented, medical doctors have a certain advantage over Bible translators because the doctors can bury their mistakes, while translational errors can haunt a translator and a church for a long time.

Many problems of translation involve strictly linguistic factors of grammatical constructions, literary figures of speech, and semantic classes of words, but a high percentage of problems go beyond such purely linguistic issues and relate to the ways in which a language is used and valued by speakers. These sociolinguistic aspects of language include especially the associative meanings of words. It is not enough to check a dictionary or a grammar for the formal features of a language. A translator must also know who uses such words, under what circumstances they occur, and for what apparent purpose they are employed.

In order to more adequately understand some of these crucial sociolinguistic aspects of Bible translating, it is essential to know something about the nature of languages. First, they are open systems, that is to say, words can be added or lost and grammatical constructions can be extended to areas not previously included. Second, languages are constantly changing, and they do so directly proportionate to the density of communication: the more a language is used the faster it changes. In many countries languages are changing so quickly that no

translation of the Bible is likely to be acceptable for more than fifty years without serious revision. The meanings of some words may change radically; for example, the English word gay no longer refers primarily to happy lightheartedness, but to homosexuals. Third, languages are subjected to linguistic cosmetics for social upgrading of words. In English a janitor has become a building manager or in some instances even a building engineer. Note also how such expressions as for abortion and against abortion are now usually changed to pro-choice and pro-life. Fourth, the semantic boundaries of most words are fuzzy. For example, how big does a shoe have to be before it becomes a boot? No one really knows! Or how thick does a cord have to be before it would be regarded as a rope? And for a Bible translator, what is the real distinction between soul and spirit?

We not only add words to a language by borrowing from other languages, but we even construct words from within our own language, for example, stagflation, a combination of stagnation and inflation. We can also take a suffix and make it into a full word, for example, ism, and behavioral scientists frequently use etic (from phonetic) and emic (from phonemic) to mark the differences between items that are formally distinct but not necessarily semantically distinct.

The analysis of a language becomes particularly complex when one realizes that there are no ideal speaker-hearers. No one, in fact, makes complete use of any language. All English speakers use various parts of the English language and often in rather distinct and even idiosyncratic ways. Note, for example, the variations in British, Australian, Indian, and American English.

Some linguists have tried to analyze languages as being strictly rule-governed systems, but many aspects of language are not logical and cannot be subjected to strictly logical rules. In fact most human behavior is neither logical nor rule-governed, even though it may be said to be rational and hence to make sense. For example, different cultural presuppositions may give rise to very different kinds of expressions. In some parts of Africa one speaks of a generous person as "someone having a small heart" and a stingy person as "someone having a big heart." The expression "small heart" is based on the concept that generous persons have given away as much as possible and therefore their hearts are small, but stingy people keep everything

for themselves and therefore their hearts are big.

Sometimes the way a society talks about the past or the future represents quite a different world view. Among some Quechuas in South America, the future is regarded as being behind a person and the past is ahead. This seems strange in terms of the way people move about, but the Quechuas will argue that in the eyes of their minds they can see only the past, not the future. Therefore, the past must be ahead of them, and the future is behind.

In order to appreciate the significance of the sociolinguistic factors in translation and communication, it is important to study the functions of language, both psychological and sociological. The psychological functions of language are those that do not necessarily involve communication with other persons, but they are crucial for every person's symbolic relation to life. One of the most obvious psychological functions is that of naming, the capacity to employ verbal symbols for objects, events, and the features of such objects and events. Perhaps the most powerful illustration of the importance of naming comes from the story of Helen Keller, who at last found a symbol that she could use in communicating about water with her teacher. Children all sense the power of names because with names for things they can talk about objects that are not present. Older people also want to know the names of new things because such names give them a feeling of power over objects and even a sense of solidarity with the various features of their environment.

Language, however, must go beyond naming; it must also involve selecting a topic and making a comment whether in stating or questioning. This so-called topic-comment construction exists in all languages, but with a number of minor variations.

Language also provides a kind of verbal model for the world in which we live. Taxonomies consisting of orders, families, genera, species, and even races give us a picture in words for the structure of our world. We know that lions, tigers, cheetahs, and mountain lions are all in the family of felines, that is to say, cats, and all of these are mammals, and all mammals are animals. Similarly, wolves, coyotes, and dogs are canines, and they likewise are mammals and animals. But not all societies have taxonomies based on similarities or diversities of formal features. The Venda in the northern part of South Africa do not

classify birds on the basis of their size and shape but on their behavior, and the distinctive behavior is primarily a matter of eating together. For example, they classify as relatives a large mountain pigeon that pecks through the rind of fruit, a small white-eyed bird that loves to eat the sap, and flycatchers that eat the flies drawn to the spoiling fruit. Since the Venda people would not think of eating with anyone other than their own family or clan, they believe that birds that eat together must somehow be related in families, and so they speak of such birds as related to one another as uncle, grandfather, cousin, sons, etc.

Verbal models, however, may involve problems of overlapping. In New Testament theology there is a classical difference between the trichotomists, who separate body, soul, and spirit into three distinct categories, and the dichotomists, who, although they use three terms, nevertheless believe that the essential difference is between the physical and the non-physical aspects of human personality. Now, however, there are philosophers and theologians who believe it is a mistake to separate the physical and nonphysical.

Another important function of language may be called the "reactive function," sometimes spoken of as consisting of interjections and exclamatory expressions such as Wow!, Hurrah!, Ouch! In the Bible there are the classical expressions Hosanna!, Hallelujah!, and Amen!, used not only in association with other persons but primarily as expressions of a person's own reaction to some verbal or non-verbal event.

The most important psychological function is undoubtedly thinking, because this is involved in all complex cognitive activity. It is possible to think almost exclusively in terms of images and formulas, but any complex thinking usually requires verbal symbols. Most psychologists would say that thinking is the most common use of language; in fact, people spend more time thinking than they do anything else. Whether or not their thoughts ever amount to very much is, of course, a different question!

Although the psychological functions reflect primarily the needs of individuals to sort out and react to their world, the sociological functions are those that bring about some change in other persons. The most obvious sociological function is informative, in which a speaker or writer attempts to change the content of people's thinking by means of

communication, although probably not more than 20 percent of the use of language is primarily informative. If language is to be informative, however, it certainly must be relevant to the persons and to the setting of the communication, and it needs to be true insofar as a speaker or a writer can determine. At the same time this maxim of truthfulness in communication is frequently violated, especially by politicians and advertisers, not to mention horse traders and car dealers.

The imperative function is designed to change the behavior of other persons, but not necessarily by means of imperative commands. Frequently a joke is more persuasive in influencing the behavior of others, and certainly the parables of Jesus were the most effective means for influencing people's behavior.

The performative function of language involves a change in the status of persons. For example, when a priest or government official says "I now pronounce you man and wife," this may cost only a few dollars, but to have such words undone through a divorce may cost thousands of dollars. The sentencing of a criminal is another instance of performative language, and so are the biblical expressions involving blessing and cursing. Some prophetic blessings, as in the blessing of Judah by Jacob recorded in chapter 49 of Genesis, are really quite misleading apart from their particular cultural context. For Jacob to bless Judah by saying that "he will tie his donkey to a choice grapevine" would seem to imply that Judah would be a fool, because no one would do that without realizing that the donkey would soon eat the grapevine down to a stump. But the point of the blessing is simply to indicate that Judah would be so wealthy that he could afford to do this kind of seemingly foolish thing.

The emotive function of language is particularly important in changing the emotional status of people, that is to say, using language to make people cry or laugh, mourn or rejoice, or be sad or overjoyed. Politicians and demagogues are always experts in the emotive function of language, because in this way they can sway the crowds and obtain their support without ever promising anything tangible.

The aesthetic function of language provides a medium whereby persons with artistic sensitivity can produce balance, proportion, unity, and symmetry in the medium of language, whether in poetry or prose. While some people express their creativity by carving wood into beautiful

shapes, others use words to produce equally beautiful poems and essays.

The most important sociological function of language is interpersonal, and it uses language to establish and maintain relations with other persons. When an Old Testament biblical character refers to himself as "your humble servant," he is not focusing upon his own humility but upon his relative status in society. In the Greek New Testament the independent use of first, second, and third person pronouns carries a great deal more significance than do similar pronouns in English, because in Greek the endings on the finite verbs always indicate clearly whether the subject is first, second, or third person. The independent pronouns are thus very much more emphatic than corresponding pronouns are in English.

In some languages the social status of persons is indicated clearly by so-called honorific expressions, which may involve both lexical and grammatical usage. A number of languages in the Orient constantly represent different social statuses: an upper class, a middle class, and a lower class, with usage depending upon the relative status of the speaker and hearers. There may even be a fourth category for words addressed to or about deity. In some European languages, for example, German, French, and Spanish, there are different pronouns for you, and these indicate significant distinctions between the speaker and the hearers.

An even more important factor is the use of different registers or levels of language, for example, ritual, formal, informal, casual, and intimate. The ritual use of language is usually highly formalized and occurs especially in liturgical expressions. The formal use of language is employed primarily in talking to or about people whom one does not really know personally. When, however, people know each other quite well, they inevitably shift to a more informal use of language or even to a casual level. Among members of the same household, language usually becomes quite intimate.

In addition to the interpersonal use of language for establishing and maintaining social relations, there is a sense in which language can also be used interpersonally as competition. In Arabic-speaking countries there has been a traditional pattern for persons to recite poetry, one against another, often with musical accompaniment and with very strict rules about rhythmic patterning and the sequence of content. A similar type of competition occurs in English when people engage in one-

upmanship in storytelling, jokes, or anecdotes.

In any actual discourse there are a number of these sociological functions that combine in various ways. For example, in the story of the Father and Two Sons (Luke 15), note how the older brother speaks to his father about his younger brother as "your son." And although the first part of the parable tells about the younger son being engaged in "reckless living," the older brother spells it out as "wastes his money on prostitutes." Note how the younger son returns to his father and claims that he would even be willing to be a servant, since he confesses that he had sinned against his father and against God. The father, however, doesn't even answer his son, but turns to a servant and tells him not only to select a choice calf for a banquet but to provide the son with the symbols of his sonship, namely, shoes on his feet (he would therefore not be a slave), a ring to symbolize his being a son, and a garment indicating his complete acceptance.

Too often we think verbal communication involves only a single code rather than a bundle of codes, including paralinguistic, extralinguistic, and competing or reinforcing codes. The most common paralinguistic codes are oral, for example, the tone of voice, intonation, speed of utterance, loudness, and dialectal accent. A growling tone of voice can turn the statement I love you into an expression of contempt or even hatred, and a falling and rising intonation on the word yeah can actually mean no. Excessive speed of utterance can indicate intense nervousness and uncertainty, while loudness often makes people think that the speaker is trying to disguise a weak point by shouting. A particular manner of speaking may indicate the social status of a person, whether upper, middle, or lower class, depending primarily on educational advantages. Or it may indicate that a person comes from a particular area of the country or belongs to a special social group.

Written paralinguistic features are almost equally important. For example, in German the difference between Gothic type and modern type reveals a great deal about the book in question. The use of bold letters in Bibles often indicates special importance, but this usage seems strange if people already believe that all Scripture is the result of plenary inspiration. Some Bible translations use italics to mark those words that are not literally in the original but are necessary for grammatical or lexical purposes. The curious thing is that in English italics normally

signal something that is very important, and for Bibles to have italics just to indicate what is essential for grammatical purposes seems to be extremely misleading. Differences in punctuation can, of course, alter radically the meaning of a statement, and format is also very important. One rather popular translation in English has paid close attention to certain features of Old Testament poetry but has actually printed all of the poetry as prose, precisely in order to indicate to many American readers that the text is true. Unfortunately, many people think that poetry is something that people have simply dreamed up and therefore likely to be false, while prose indicates that something is unquestionably true.

In addition to the paralinguistic features of codes, there are the extralinguistic features for both oral and written language, which consist typically of gestures (with the hands, face, and especially the mouth), stance, tenseness, and space. One may say "We love our boss," but if at the same time two fingers of the right hand are drawn across the neck, precisely the opposite meaning is implied. And even though one may proclaim love, the eyes and face, as well as the body language or position, may communicate quite a different emotion. A sloppy stance may indicate that one really doesn't care about the subject matter, while too great intensity may signal insecurity.

Space is a particularly important element in communication. In Latin America persons normally stand approximately half an arm's length apart when conversing, while North Americans usually are a full arm's length apart. When Latins and North Americans are chatting, there is a tendency for Latins to approach closer and closer to the person being spoken to. This, however, may imply to North Americans that the Latins are being aggressive, while Latins almost inevitably feel that a North American is stand-offish and unsympathetic.

In written language there are also important extralinguistic features. The kind of binding, the paper, the name of the publisher, the color of the cover, and the quality of printing all reveal something about the presumed worth and significance of the content. During the time of a rightist dictatorship in Argentina, university students approached the Bible Society for permission to publish the book of Amos, because this seemed to be such a revolutionary document and therefore important for the purposes of these students. The Bible Society immediately

offered to prepare the text on good paper with excellent typography and good binding, but the students quickly objected. They said they merely wanted to reproduce the book in mimeographed form and even smudged, because then the material would be received as a genuine revolutionary publication.

In addition to the verbal message, whether oral or written, there are often competing or reinforcing codes and messages. For example, multimedia involves not only words but pictures and music, and sometimes the pictures of present-day scenes do not fit the words of a biblical passage. At the same time the music may be completely contrary to the content of the biblical message. In fact, it is sometimes so loud that the message itself is lost.

Dramatization of the biblical message is especially difficult because the words must fit the action. A special aspect of this doubling of codes is found in lip synchronization. A translation of a text to be incorporated into a television scenario must be most carefully done. Otherwise, the audience will be seriously handicapped in understanding what is being presented.

Music is also a very important competing and/or reinforcing code. Words must fit the music, whether in a poetic structure involving certain musical units (or feet) or in the somewhat looser type of chant forms. All of this makes opera one of the most difficult types of combination of codes, because it involves music, words, and action. The music must fit both the action and the words, and similarly the words must be selected so as to be appropriate for the music. It is one thing to sing an aria with an open a-sound, but it is almost impossible to sing an aria with a high midvowel, which sounds more like groaning than joyous exhilaration.

Some people are dismayed by the fact that almost all words have several different meanings. Such persons want to develop a theological vocabulary that will be more like mathematical vocabulary, in which each term has one and only one possible meaning. But multiple meanings of words are inevitable, and it would be simply impossible for any language to have a different word for every distinct entity, activity, characteristic, and relation. This would imply billions of words, because everything about existence is unique. Except for proper names (and even these are sometimes confusing because they may refer to more

than one person or object), it is essential to use words to refer to classes of experience, and the meaning of such terms depends directly on the context. For example, the English word stock has quite different meanings depending on who is talking. A farmer will usually speak about stock as referring to sheep, goats, cattle, horses, etc., while a merchandiser will use the word stock to refer to goods that are stored and ready for sale. A broker will use stock in referring to equities in the marketplace, and a nursery grower will use stock in the sense of good genetic quality of plants. The word stock may also be used in a context such as "he comes from good stock," meaning that he comes from a reputable family.

The role of context is well illustrated by the differences in the meanings of double in the following contexts: he doubled his money, he doubled the blanket, he has a double, he hit a double, and he rented a double room. In the first instance, he doubled his money indicates that as the result of his activities he had twice as much money, but to double the blanket simply means to fold it once. He has a double indicates that there is someone who to some extent resembles him or at least is able in certain respects to take his place, either in a drama or in some gathering. The statement he hit a double is used in baseball to indicate that the ball was hit sufficiently far that he was able to reach second base. But in the statement he rented a double room, the room is not twice as large, but it either has a double bed or is available for two or more persons. Consider also the idiom to double up, with two quite different meanings depending on the context: the families doubled up, meaning that two or more families lived in the space normally occupied by one family, or he was doubled up in pain, implying a particular position of the body and also the intensity of the pain. But note he was doubled up in laughter, which suggests a similar body position but a very different emotional state.

The semantic relations between words are often quite diverse, for example, the so-called possessive construction, either with pronouns or written with 's on the first word. Consider the following possessive phrases: John's car, John's house, John's arm, John's father, John's partner, John's country, John's work, John's boss, John's punishment, John's god, John's heir, John's wife, John's memory, John's death, John's attacker, and John's folly.

The first phrase, John's car, does represent a possessive relation

because he owns the car and he can sell it. In the case of John's house, the situation is somewhat different and ambiguous. It may refer to the house John actually owns and lives in, but it may also refer to a house that he owns and doesn't live in or to a house he lives in but only rents, in which case there is no real possession. In the case of John's arm, the arm is a part of John, and in John's father, the two constituents are related biologically in lineal descent. But in the case of John's partner, the two individuals obviously share in certain activities with some mutual obligations and benefits. In John's country, John is only a part of the country. In John's work, John is the one who does the work, while in John's boss, it is the boss who commands John, and in John's punishment, he is the one who experiences being punished. The oral form of the phrase John's god may refer specifically to the God that John worships, but it may also have a different meaning in the statement John's god is making money. The phrase John's heir is somewhat more complex because it refers to a relation in which John is to provide certain benefits to someone after John's death. John's wife refers to a matrimonial relation, and in John's death it is John who experiences death. In John's attacker there is someone who attacks John, while in John's folly, John does something that proves to be foolish.

Unfortunately, a number of translators have the impression that there is something sacrosanct about grammatical relations in a source language, and therefore in a translation one must somehow represent these grammatical relations in a completely consistent manner, matching construction for construction. But in the same way that different lexemes (morphemes, words, or idioms) have different meanings, so syntactic constructions likewise may represent a great variety of relations.

Some of the problems of translating syntactic relations can be readily illustrated by Romans 1.5, which in the King James Version reads "By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to faith among all nations, for his name." This literal translation of the Greek text obscures a number of very important points. Note, for example, that the Greek preposition at the beginning of verse 5 is not hupo, which would normally be translated as by, but dia, with ellipsis of the final vowel, indicating not primary agency but secondary agency, because God is the causative agent and Jesus Christ is the one through whom this "grace and apostleship" became a reality.

The next word, elabomen, is literally 'we received,' but since Paul insists upon his special commission as an apostle, the reference is no doubt directly to Paul and is rightly translated in several versions as "I received." The verb elabomen is an active form, but in reality it is a kind of pseudo-active because receiving something, especially something such as charis 'grace,' is a relation of experience, and semantically it is a passive. But what then is the relation between grace and apostleship? In many translations the phrase is not rendered as two coordinate things, because the apostleship is regarded as the essence of this grace, and so it is often rendered as "a commission as an apostle" or "the privilege of being an apostle." In many constructions kai does not represent two coordinate elements but a kind of apposition.

But in contrast with this formally coordinate expression, charin and apostolen, the relation in hupakoen pistios is formally one of dependence, in which pistios is an attributive to hupakoen 'obedience.' But is this simply obedience characterized by trust and faithfulness, or is it a coordinate semantic relation, namely, 'to believe and to obey'? The latter seems to be the more appropriate relation, because obedience follows on belief or trust.

The phrase "in all the nations" refers to the fact that it is Paul's responsibility to preach this message among all the Gentile nations so that they will come to believe and obey. The final phrase, for his name, is really a direct reference to Christ; it is for Christ's sake that Paul receives this privilege of being an apostle so that people among all the nations will both believe and obey. Note that in the phrase literally grace and apostleship, the relation is formally coordinate but semantically appositional, while in the expression obedience of faith, the formal relation is subordinate or dependent, but from the standpoint of the semantics it is a coordinate relation in a specific time sequence.

In the same way in which the meaning of lexical units can only be determined by context, so in the case of syntactic relations it is the context that provides the basis for determining semantic relations. If a translator fails to recognize these semantic relations, the results of the translation can be both misleading and/or obscure.

There has been a tendency in biblical exegesis to maximize individual words rather than the context. As a result, a kind of glamour has developed about so-called "word theology," that is to say, trying to

determine the theological background and basis of a text primarily by so-called "word studies," following much of what Kittel and his colleagues have done in the Theological Dictionary. This same adherence to word theology and proof-text interpretation of the Scriptures results in separating words and verses from their contexts. This is most unfortunate, because it is the wider context that always provides the clue to the meaning of individual units.

Sometimes biblical terms are given an aura of sanctity that is beyond their real significance. Note, for example, such terms as justification, sanctification, purgation, propitiation, expiation, terms that are more Anglicized Latin than English. The words may exist in dictionaries, but they are not on the tongues of people nor are they really understood.

The problem of understanding biblical terms is not restricted to polysyllabic words. Some very simple words have radically changed in meaning and therefore are in some instances inappropriate in a translation. Take, for example, the extreme case of the word grace in English. This word does not occur in the Contemporary English Version of the New Testament because the word no longer communicates what the Greek term charis is really talking about. The word grace in English can be the name of a girl or woman. It is also used when speaking about ten days' grace before bills have to be paid. It can refer to a brief statement or prayer made before eating, and it can also represent attractive movement and aesthetic form. But these meanings certainly are not what the charis of God represents in the New Testament. This charis is God's kindness and goodness, precisely what should be said if one wants to communicate the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Even the word word is to some degree an unfortunate translation because it does not do justice to the Greek word logos. There are two other words in Greek that would normally be employed if one were only talking about words as such, for example, epos and rhema, both derived from earlier words for 'speaking.' But logos is more than words; it is a reasoned message, a meaningful communication, and refers not only to the form but particularly to the content. If the Greek term logos had been translated as message, more people would have more readily and accurately grasped the significance of Jesus Christ as God's message. The incarnation is essentially God's revelation of himself to human beings through his Son.

The sensitivity of a translator to both the linguistic and the sociolinguistic contexts is indispensable. These sociolinguistic factors have often been neglected in the past but are now being recognized as crucial to effective and true communication. Exegesis is not simply a matter of consulting a dictionary and a grammar and coming up with an interpretation. One must be equally aware of all of the sociolinguistic implications that come from the various uses of language and the values associated with these functions. Without this perspective, translators will inevitably distort or shortchange the meaning and relevance of the Word of God.

ABSTRACT

Translation involves far more than linguistic factors of grammatical constructions or semantic classes of words, but more subtlely, the sociolinguistic aspects of language. In order to appreciate the significance of such aspects, it is important to study the functions of language, both psychological and sociological. The former reflect primarily the needs of individuals to sort out and react to their world, and the latter are those that bring about some change in other persons. Psychological functions may involve primarily naming and reacting. These are the capacity for employing verbal symbols either for objects or emotional state. Sociological functions, on the other hand, involve informative, imperative, performative, emotive, aesthetic, and interpersonal. Being sensitive to different levels of language, and non-linguistic codes such as paralinguistic and extralinguistic features are indispensable to an adequate rendering of the source text.

撮要

翻譯不僅要考慮文法結構或字意的因素，更要兼顧社會語言學的層面。若要了解這方面的重要，讀者不得不明白言語的心理及社會功能。言語的心理功能主要反映個人對世界整理及回應的需要；言語的社會功能就是令人有一些改變。言語的心理功能主要包括表達和理解，這是用說話描述事物或表達情緒的能力。言語的社會功能包括提供資訊、祈使、敘述行為、表感、交感，及反映人際關係。總言之，要把原稿譯得準確，不得不準確掌握言語不同層面的意義，還要明白非言語表達的意

義，如說話時聲浪的大小、輕重，和表達的方式。以上兩者都是缺一不可的。