GeekSpeak

Transcreation

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The GeekSpeak column has two goals: to inform the community about technological advances and at the same time encourage the use and appreciation of technology among translation professionals. Jost also publishes a free technical newsletter for translators (www.internationalwriters.com/toolkit).

In 1611, King James I unveiled an English Bible translated by a royal commission. For the longest time this version had no official "name" since it was the only one that was authorized and in wide use within English-speaking Protestant Christianity. Not until the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century did two "names" for this translation emerge into common use: the King James Bible and the Authorised Version. The need for a name for the Bible arose because of new efforts to revise the translation that would take some "modern" scholarship into consideration and make the language a little less archaic.

In 1885, the fruit of those labors resulted in the Revised Version of the Bible (though the Americans were unhappy with this version and published the American Standard Version in 1901). The name of the 1885 version of the Bible still seemed to make sense since it simply described the function of the translation in relation to the original Authorised Version.

But since Protestant Christendom was by no means unified in accepting the fact that the Authorised Version was to be supplanted by its revisions, the need for distinctive names became ever more important. The next large revision effort resulted in the Revised Standard Version of 1952, which was considered too "liberal" by conservative Christians, who in response produced the New International Version of 1978. That might have marked an end to the naming acrobatics, but not so fast: Bible translators and their marketing handlers can be very creative.

In 1989, the more liberal New Revised Standard Version was released, and the New International Version's revised and inaptly named Today's New International Version was published in 2005. Now, since Today's New International Version was again deemed "too liberal" by some, it has been discontinued to make a place for the New International Version that will make its debut in 2011.

Since there was no truly conservative translation in the Bible translation mainstream in the late 1990s and early 2000s—except for the American Standard Version's revised New American Standard Bible of 1971, which is not only conservative but also archaic—the English Standard Version was released in 2001.

Confused by all the "News," "Reviseds," and "Standards?" Believe me, I could have quoted many more exotic extremes from the dozens of English Bible translations during the past 200 years.

The point I am trying to make is that the story of Bible translation names has been somewhat of a farce. New? When and in comparison to what? Today's? As opposed to what? Yesterday's? Fortunately, rather than continuing that silly tradition, the newer translations, at least in this particular line of translations, are now being named in a more basic and forthright manner: English Standard Version and (to some degree) New International Version of a certain publication year.

I believe this is something from which we can learn.

During the Internet boom of the 1990s, at a time when new technologies and new language for these technologies were being developed and invented at a hitherto unknown pace, the movers and shakers of the translation industry did not want to be left behind.

Language itself was being revamped and "translation" no longer seemed adequate, so new terms were coined—localization, globalization, and internationalization. And because that was not complicated enough, the "acronyms" l10n, g13n, and i18n—or the latest guilt-ridden term, GILT (Globalization, Internationalization, Localization, Translation)—made this into a real "lingo." Ironically, language services providers themselves did not, and still do not, truly understand what these terms mean. This is partly because there are competing meanings from other subject areas and partly because these terms—espe-

For more information on the English Bible see:

Thuesen, Peter J. *In Discordance with the Scriptures: American Protestant Battles Over Translating the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Nicolson, Adam. *God's Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

cially localization—seem to suggest a meaning that simply implies making something locally acceptable.

Times have changed again. Now we do not just want to look technical; we want to look "aware" (whatever that means). In response, a new term has been coined: transcreation. Transcreation is supposed to be the "process by which new content is developed or adapted for a given target audience instead of merely translating existing material" (according to a definition from Common Sense Advisory).

I understand that a translator of marketing copy will spend more effort tailoring text to a target audience than a technical or medical translator, but does that warrant a new term? Is it not just a matter of degree rather than of principle?

I completely embrace the term "translation" and am proud to say that I am a "translator." Do I also translate software and even help to adjust the software so that it runs in a different operating system? Sure, just as I sometimes translate marketing copy and massage the text so that it has a similar effect on readers in a new culture even if it uses very different words and concepts. "Translation" is a powerful term with a proud history and tradition, and, in my opinion, we are not well served by splitting it up into many sub-components that often have very shady differentiators.

I do think that we would be wise to invest our energies into clearing up the differences between translation and interpreting, something that is unfortunately perceived as one and the same by the general media and the public. We do know that these are widely different activities, though—one requires a visual memory and a love for perfection and the other requires an oral memory and spontaneity. Neither is superior to the other, but it is up to us to teach others that they are different.

Otherwise, let's embrace who we are. Translation is and was "the same yesterday and today and forever"—beautiful, complex, and manifold—and there is no reason to make it artificially more so.