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The New Sami Bible Translation*

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Introduction

My aim with this article is to shed light on Bible translations in various forms of Sami—what they are, how they are made, and what challenges one faces when translating the biblical text into Sami. I will begin with an introduction to the modern theory and practice of Bible translation from the perspective of the Bible societies in Nordic countries. The reason for this is that these societies have been (and still are) taking the responsibility of publishing translations for Sami speakers. Then, I shall introduce past and present translations and use one of them—Biibbal 2019—to illustrate some of the challenges one faces when aiming to compose a modern translation into Sami. Finally, I shall concentrate on a few issues that turned out to be especially problematic in the translation work and relate them to theoretical frames that might shed light on why these issues constitute a challenge to Bible translation.

Why and How the Bible is Translated: A Perspective From the Bible Societies

To put the discussion of Bible translation efforts into a larger perspective, we ought to start by asking the general question "Why translate the

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Bible?". As the modern Sami translations are commissioned by Bible societies, it is useful to first offer their answer to this question. The Bible Societies together form an international fellowship called the United Bible Societies (UBS). The shared understanding of the goals and ethos of the Bible Societies is expressed in the fellowship's principal document—*The Fellowship Agreement*—uniting the societies around a common vision: "The Bible for Everyone."[1] This vision is further specified as to "achieve the widest possible, effective and meaningful distribution of the Holy Scriptures, and to help people interact with the Word of God,"[2] which, in turn, is related to the Great Commission (Matt 28) and *Missio Dei*. Consequently, the UBS sees its role as being a deliverer of the Bible to everyone who might want it, as well as a fascilitator of interaction with the Bible. The aim is, thus, both practical and spiritual.

The basic principles themselves do not tell how the common aim is to be achieved. One of the central ways has been Bible translation, and the fellowship has agreed on translation principles, described in another key document, the *UBS Guidelines for Scripture Translation*. These principles reflect a long experience in conducting Bible translation globally and acknowledge the different requirements needed when translating the Bible for different purposes. There are, for example, quite different requirements for a translation intended for one church only and for a translation intended for more than one, since different church traditions approach questions of canon and interpretation in a wide varity of ways. In all cases, however, *UBS Guidelines* delineates the importance of using the "best and most reliable base text."[3] It also describes other aspects of the translation work, albeit briefly and, most often, by referring to documents containing more detailed instructions.[4]

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[1] *UBS Fellowship Agreement* § 1.

[2] *UBS Fellowship Agreement* § 3.

[3] *UBS Guidelines for Scripture Translation* § A, B1, and C.

[4] See especially the guidelines jointly agreed with the Catholic Church; *Guidelines for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible* (1987).

The basic thinking behind the principles is described in publications on translation theory and practice. One of the more influential textbooks of that kind is *From One Language to Another* by Jan de Waard and Eugene A. Nida.[5] Among others, it includes an appendix on procedures for conducting a Bible translation project. Here, de Waard and Nida explain various stages of the process and what is needed to complete the project.[6] The summary includes a bold statement "This [engaging in the process of translating] becomes the best guarantee of intellectual humility and inspired creativity in making the message of life come to life."[7]

More specifically, the process can be summarised into five stages: 1) preliminary procedures; 2) drafting; 3) reviewing the draft; 4) testing; and 5) preparations for publishing.[8] Starting with preliminary procedures, they include decision-making regarding the nature of the translation project: What is translated? To whom? By whom is it done? What are the principles to be used in the project in question?[9]

Secondly, de Waard and Nida argue that the ideal way to create the basic translation—the draft—is to form a team, and to distribute the translation work among the team members. The reason for this is because translating the Bible requires a great deal of specialized knowledge—not only on the Bible itself, but also on the receptor language and culture.[10]

Thirdly, reviewing the draft means forming a group of people with competence in biblical studies and receptor language and culture.[11] The

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[5] Jan de Waard and Eugene A. Nida, *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986), 188–209.

[6] de Waard and Nida, *Language*, 188–209.

[7] de Waard and Nida, *Language*, 209.

[8] Eugene A. Nida and Charles Taber, *The Theory and Practise of Translating* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 183–186, describe the process as containing four stages, but the overall process is the same.

[9] de Waard and Nida, *Language*, 190.

[10] de Waard and Nida, *Language*, 191.

task of the group is to provide feedback on drafts. In addition to such a review group, de Waard and Nida also recommend forming a larger consultative group to guarantee the acceptance of the translation. To this end, the larger group could include church leaders or other people of authority.

Simply drafting and reviewing the drafts is not, however, enough to secure the quality of the new translation. The text needs, fourthly, to be tested. By testing, information can be gathered on three different aspects of the translated text: its readability, understandability, and acceptability. De Waard and Nida underline the fact that these three are by nature different aspects of the text and should not be confused.[12] Testing the translation can be done in several different ways, but the importance is to gain information about the three different aspects of the text and improve the text where necessary.

Finally, the fifth stage consists of various actions in preparing the translation for publication. Among these, the authors mention proofreading,[13] but there are also other technical steps depending on how the new translation will be published. I shall later give examples of how all of this can be put into practice.

So far, I have discussed principles on a general, theoretical level in order to highlight the complexity of any Bible translation. Next, I will survey existing Sami Bible translations and ongoing projects.

Sami Bible Translations Past and Present

Overview

According to linguists, Sami speakers use nine different variants of Sami.[14] These are mostly called language, since these variants are not

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[11] de Waard and Nida, *Language*, 193, speaks about competence as stylists.

[12] de Waard and Nida, *Language*, 204.

[13] de Waard and Nida, *Language*, 206.

mutually understandable.[15] Today, there is a translated part of the Bible for nearly all forms of Sami.

The earliest efforts to translate the Bible into Sami can be traced back to the seventeenth century. The first publication which included the translated text of biblical books was a church manual for the Church of Sweden entitled *Manuale Lapponicum*. The manual came out in 1648 and included the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Gospels, and liturgical selections from the Acts and the New Testament letters.[16] The translation was made by Johannes Tornæus. He was the vicar of the Torneå parish and according to his own words, he was not very familiar with the Sami language. Nevertheless, the royal administration had ordered the translation to be composed in such a way that the manual could be used in all Sami-speaking areas.[17] Studies have shown that this was also the case—at least in the sense that the Sami used in the manual does not purely follow any known spoken variant of Sami.[18]

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[14] Pekka Sammallahti, *The Saami Languages: An Introduction* (Kárašjohka: Davvi Girji, 1998), 6.

[15] Ole Henrik Magga, "Bibelöversättningar till nordsamiska", *Teologinen Aikakauskirja* 126 (2021): 152–168 (152–153), uses the terms *språk* (Eng. "language") and *dialekter* (Eng. "dialects") interchangeably when speaking about various forms of Sami.

[16] Magga, "Bibelöverstättningar," 153: "*Manuale* ... började översättingsarbetet på allvar." On the *Manuale* in general, see Hanna Lidberg, *Johannes Tornæus & Manuale Lapponicum* (Opuscula Uralica, 6; Uppsala, 2002).

[17] Johannes Tornæus, *Manuale Lapponicum: Tat lie Praude-Kiete Kirieg, Joite mij adnestop, nabmatom* (Stockholm: Keyser, 1648), *a vi*. The introduction to *Manuale* has numbered folds, but the number for *a vi* is missing. According to the introduction the work is dedicated to Queen Christina.

[18] According to Eino Koponen, "Johannes Tornaeuksen Manuale Lapponicumin murrepohjasta ja vaikutuksesta ruotsinlapin kirjakielen myöhempään kehitykseen," *Sanoista kirjakieliin: Juhlakirja Kaisa Häkkiselle 17. marraskuuta 2010* (Suomalais-Ugrilaisen Seuran Toimituksia, 259; Helsinki, 2010), 50–51, the language used in *Manuale* does not match with any spoken dialect of Sami, but as such formed a basis for the later, in the eighteenth century, developed literary Sami.

The first known publication including only the biblical text is a New Testament, *Ådde Testament*, from 1755. The translation was the responsibility of another vicar, Pehr Fjellström. The language used in this first printed New Testament is also not any existing form of Sami, but an artificial literary Sami, *det sydlapska skriftspråk*, which is not used anymore.[19] The published New Testament was not, however, the first effort in making one, but the earlier attempt to translate and publish the New Testament (1701–1713) failed. The translator of the earlier attempt was Lars Rangius, a vicar of Silbojokk parish. Unlike Tornæus and Fjellström, Rangius was a Sami speaker by birth. The work, however, was never published.[20]

The first complete Bible in Sami (*Tat Ajles Tjalog*) was published in 1811. The New Testament was a revision of the 1755 New Testament, but the Old Testament and the deuterocanonical books were newer.[21] The work was done by yet another vicar, Samuel Öhrling, with assistance from some others.

The second complete Bible, this time in North Sami, was published in 1895. This translation was partly based on an earlier New Testament published in 1840.[22] The main part of the work was done by a Sami reindeer herdsman named Lars Jacobsen Hætta. I will come back to this translation later. The first New Testament in Lule Sami was published in 1903 (*Åtå testamenta: Jårkålum tan taro-kielak Åtå testamenta milte, mi läh Kånåkasast nanostum jaken 1883*), and a completely new Lule Sami New Testament (*Ådå testamennta*) was published in 2003.

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[19] For the early history of the literary Sami, including the 1755 New Testament, see Tuuli Forsgren, *Samisk kyrko- och undervisningsliteratur i Sverige 1619–1850* (Scriptum, 6; Umeå: Forskningsarkivet, 1988), 33–50.

[20] Forsgren, *Kyrko- och undervisningsliteratur*, 21–22. According to Forsgren, the reason not to print the New Testament was a disagreement on how to use Sami.

[21] Forsgren, *Kyrko- och undervisningsliteratur*, 51–52; Magga, "Bibelöverstättningar," 153.

[22] Magga, "Bibelöverstättningar," 154.

At the end of the nineteenth century several smaller publications appeared in variants of Sami spoken in the Kola Peninsula, currently in the Russian Federation. In 1878 a translation of the Gospel of Matthew using partly Akkala Sami and partly Kildin Sami was published.[23] A few years later, in 1894, another translation of Matthew appeared, this time using a dialect of Skolt Sami.[24]

During the twentieth century several translation projects emerged. Between 1976 and 1995 several books of the New Testament were translated and published in Inari Sami. Then, in 2021, the trial edition of the four gospels was published. The current aim is to publish the New Testament in Inari Sami. In 1988 the Gospel of John appeared in Skolt Sami, and a revision of that came out in 2022.

In Sweden, on the other hand, the second New Testament in Lule Sami was, as I said, published in 2003, and the Psalms were published 2023. The plan is to translate the whole Bible. Quite recently, in 2022, the Gospel of John, and some of the New Testament letters were published in South Sami. The current aim is to translate and publish the whole Bible.

General Remarks

Based on the overview above, some general remarks can be made. The first published parts of the Bible in any form of Sami are actually quite old, dating into the seventeenth century. This is remarkable since the first published texts in other Nordic languages are not much older, dating into the sixteenth century. One can see a development in several as-

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[23] The first part of the gospel (chapters 1–22) is in Kildin Sami and the second part (chapters 23–28) in Akkala Sami. The booklet was printed in Cyrillic script.

[24] On the history of this translation, see Markus Juutinen, "Ščekoldinin vuoden 1894 koltansaamenkielisen Matteuksen evankeliumin kielestä," *Suomalais-Ugrilaisen Seuran Aikakauskirja* 96 (2017), 152–151. According to Juutinen's judgment, the language used in the gospel is not particularly good and shows that the translator did not know Skolt Sami very well (164–165).

pects of the work over the years. The first efforts in translation work tried to use a common language understandable for all Sami speakers, but later, starting during the nineteenth century, different variants of Sami were used instead, and this has been the approach since then. It can also be observed that at first, translations were made primarily by theologians, most of them not mother-tongue speakers of Sami. Today, however, the translation work is increasingly carried out by mother-tongue speakers. The last point reflects a broader change in the field of Bible translation. The actual translation task has been handed over from foreign specialists, mainly missionaries, to local mother-tongue speakers, a development seen only in the last century.[25]

Biibbal 2019 as an Example of a Complex Process

The overview of translation principles and the history of Sami Bible translation gives an idea of the complexities that one might face when starting a translation of the Bible into a modern language. I shall next use the recent North Sami translation process as an example of such complexities and show how they may affect the process.

As mentioned above, the first complete Bible in North Sami was published in Norway in 1895. The translation work followed the normal way of translating the Bible at the time it was composed. As the main translator, Lars Jacobsen Hætta, could not understand any Aramaic, Greek, or Hebrew, his translation was based on the existing Norwegian Bible, which was, in turn, based on an earlier Danish Bible.

It should not be a surprise that Bible translations of that era show a tendency to follow closely the language structure of the original texts.[26]

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[25] Dieudonné Prosper Aroga Bessong and Michel Kenmogne, "Bible Translation in Africa" in *A History of Bible Translation*, ed. Philip Noss (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2007), 355–356, make this observation when speaking about Bible translation in Africa, but I believe that we can generalize that (cf. de Waard and Nida, *Language*, 192).

As the Sami translator, Hætta was instructed to operate in the same way when translating.[27] That is to say, he was supposed to follow the structure of the Norwegian and not the natural way of using North Sami of his own time. He managed to do so well according to the recent estimations.[28]

Since languages tend to change over time, sooner or later, a translation becomes challenging to readers. This is especially true if the text, already when published, does not follow the natural way of using the target language. When the new orthography of the North Sami was introduced in 1978, the use of the older biblical texts became a burning problem. As one member of the translation team stated, only elderly people were able to read the Bible "with some fluency." The immediate answer to the problem was to update the orthography, and as a first attempt, a "transcribed" text of the Gospel of Mark was published in 1981. This publication made it clear, however, that rewriting the old texts using new orthographic conventions and rules would not solve the problem—the 1895 text was still too difficult to understand by an ordinary Sami reader.[29]

The obvious consequence was, then, to start a project to translate the Bible into contemporary North Sami. The project was initiated in 1987 and the New Testament came out in 1998. The aim was to compose a

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[26] See, for example, Nida and Taber, *Theory and Practise*, 1. On the theoretical discussion about translation during the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, see Paul Ellingworth, "Translation Techniques in Modern Bible Translations," in *A History of Bible Translation*, ed. Philip Noss (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2007), 312–322.

[27] Per Oskar Kjølaas, *Bibelen på samisk: En bok om samisk bibeloversettelse* (Oslo: Det Norske Bibelselsap, 1995), 75.

[28] Magga, "Bibelöverstättningar," 154, 166.

[29] Magga, "Bibelöverstättningar," 157–165, lists several examples where the 1895 Bible deviates from modern Sami when it comes to syntax. His examples deal with word order, grammatical subject, various details of verbal syntax, pronouns, cases, attributes, and adverbs.

text that was based on modern Sami and could be used in the three Nordic countries, and to achieve this aim a North Sami mother-tongue speaker served as translator and a team was set up to support the translator. The task was not easy, however, since there are not only dialectical differences within North Sami, but the way it is used and written also differs from one country to another.[30]

When the work was continued to the Old Testament, a new organization and new guidelines for the work were accepted. Because the textual bulk of the Old Testament is substantially larger than in the case of the New Testament, the translation task was divided between two translation teams, one operating in Norway and the other in Finland. There was a plan to set up a third team operating in Sweden, but never materialised. Dividing the workload between two groups in two different countries led to administrative challenges, but also called for coordination between the two teams in matters relating to interpretation and language use. To tackle these challenges a coordinating committee was established. The coordinating committee had the responsibility for the final text and, especially, its consistency. The administration and practical matters was handled by the Norwegian Bible Society.[31]

According to the new guidelines, the aim was to compose "a Bible text that is acceptable and linguistically appropriate in all three countries."[32] The wording of the guidelines reflected the challenge of producing a text that would take into account the complex linguistic situation.

The guidelines also dealt with another challenge in translating the Old Testament. The modern translations of the Old Testament are based on the Aramaic and Hebrew texts. Anyone familiar with the exegesis of these texts knows that using the Hebrew and Aramaic texts of the Old

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[30] Magga, "Bibelöverstättningar," 155. The theoretical model used at the time in Bible translation suggested forming a translation team of this kind (Nida and Taber, *Theory and Practise*, 174).

[31] *Revision of the Old Testament* 1999.

[32] *Revised guidelines* 2011, 1.

Testament is not a straightforward enterprise. The guidance was to follow the solutions found from the Norwegian 1978/1985 Bible "without spending too much time on ... own analysis."[33] A few years later this was modified so that the translation team could also use some other modern Nordic translations. But even in this case, the guidance was to base exegetical choices on existing translations. As far as I can understand it, the idea was primarily economical. By basing the new translation on existing modern Bibles, one could speed up the process.

Scheduling Bible translation projects is a challenge. It is difficult to predict the future and estimate how long a project will take to complete. The original idea was to complete the translation work by 2008 (less than 10 years), but this proved to be unrealistic. By 2006, the team instead estimated that the translation of the Old Testament could not be finished prior to 2015.[34] An additional seven years was granted with the condition that the team focused on "essentials." In 2016, however, the new estimation was to complete the work by 2019,[35] and this turned out to be the actual publishing year. Reasons for the delays were, in particlular, the complex organization with several teams in different countries, and challenges in finding workable solutions to exegetical and linguistic problems.

The process that led to the new complete North Sami Bible published in 2019 thus ended up taking about 40 years. The Bible is, however, often translated in a much shorter time.[36] By looking at the history of the process one can notice several reasons why it took longer than expected to complete the translation. The original aim to modernize the

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[33] *Revised guidelines* 2011, 1.

[34] This was the schedule set in the *Revised Guidelines* (2011).

[35] Markku Kotila, *Pohjoissaamen raamatunkäännöksen valmistuminen ja käsittely Kirkolliskokouksessa* [A letter to the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Chruch of Finland] (2018).

[36] A current rule of thumb is that the New Testament will take seven years to complete, while the Old Testament takes twelve years. Thus, the estimation for completing the whole Bible is nearly twenty years.

orthography of the older translation was a mistake based on an unclear view of the challenges that the old version posed to the readers. It was not only the outdated way North Sami was written that made the Bible difficult to read and understand. There was also a genuine problem with the language used. As the old version was translated in a formal way from the Norwegian Bible, the naturalness and clarity of the language suffered. The way people used the language had changed at the same time, causing a language gap between the old text and new readers. This meant that the original goal had to be changed. The new goal was to use modern Sami in a way that the text could be used in different countries, but it was not an easy one to reach, since North Sami is a minority language in all of the countries in which it is spoken.

The Translation Process

The translation process ends when the text is ready to be published. The text might be changed several times during the process, and one might be able to evaluate how well the final text matches the goals set for the translation only at the end of the process. As noted above, the process can be divided into several stages. To illustrate what the stages mean, I will now focus on an example from the beginning of 1 Sam 18.

The beginning of 1 Sam 18 describes how David and Jonathan become dear friends. The translator of the North Sami text drafted the beginning of this chapter in 2012. As she did not know Hebrew, the draft was based on the Norwegian Bible, following the practical interpretation of the project's Guidelines. Her draft translation had a clearly recognizable link with her Norwegian base text:

North Sami Translation	**Norwegian Base Text**
Go Jonatan lei gullan	Da Jonatan hadde hørt
hálešteami Saula ja Davida gaskkas,	samtalen mellom David og Saul,
de son dovddai dakkaviđe čatnasa Davidii,	kjente han seg straks knyttet til David,
ja David šattai sutnje nu ráhkisin	og han fikk ham så kjær
dego iežas heagga.	som sitt eget liv.

(English	**English**
When Jonathan had heard	When Jonathan had heard
the discussion between Saul and David,	the discussion between Saul and David,
so he felt immediately bond to David	he felt immediately bond to David
and David became him as dear	and he became him as dear
as his own life.	as his own life.)

She followed her base text closely and deviated from the Norwegian wording and structure only in a few cases. She added a particle *de* (Eng. "so") at the beginning of the first main clause. In the last clause, she clarified that the pronoun *ham* refers to David.

A few years later, the draft was checked against the Hebrew text, and changes were made to align it closer to the Hebrew text.

North Sami Translation	**Hebrew Text**
Go David lei	ויהי ככלתו לדבר
sártnodan Sauliin,	אל-שאול
de Jonatan gessui sakka	ונפש יהונתן נקשרה
Davidii;	בנפש דוד
son ráhkistii Davida	ויאהבו יהונתן
dego iežas heakka.	כנפשו

(English	**English**
When David had spoken,	And it happened when he stopped talking
with Saul	with Saul
so Jonathan was much delighted	and the soul of Jonathan was committed
with David;	with the soul of David
he loved David	and Jonathan loved him
as his own life.	as his soul.)

As seen, the information structure of the Sami text follows the Hebrew, but the wording deviates from it because the goal was to use appropriate Sami. Thus, David "had spoken" (*lei sártnodan*), not that he "stopped talking" (ככלתו לדבר) with Saul. In a similar fashion, Jonathan is "much delighted" (*gessui sakka*) with David. The Hebrew expression (נפש יהונתן נקשרה בנפש דוד) is, let us say, clearly Semitic speaking about the "soul" of Jonathan being committed (קשר, *niphal*) with the "soul" of David.

Finally, the editing also meant polishing the orthography. This explains why *heagga* had become *heakka* (Eng. "life").

The linguistic editing following the checking was intended to verify that the Sami used in the translation actually is appropriate in all three countries. During the checking the team had modified the draft well, therefore the need for further changes was minimal. To increase fluency, the linguistic editor had only changed the end of the verse from *son ráhkistii Davida dego iežas heakka* ("he loved David as his own life") into *ja ráhkistii su dego iežas heakka* ("and loved him as his own life").

In sum, the translation process produced the biblical text as commissioned. It is a matter of debate how well the teams and the process could produce a text that is exegetically sound enough, but the Bible was nonetheless translated and published. The evaluation of the suitability of the exegetical choices made still remains to be completed, but the other main purpose, using appropriate North Sami, was achieved according to the external evaluation even though this turned out to be one of the main challenges during the translation process.[37]

Some Challenges and How to Tackle Them

The fact that North Sami is used in different countries causes challenges that Kaarina Vuolab-Lohi, one of the North Sami specialists, has summarised in the following way:

> Even though Sami languages unite Sami people across the national borders, the languages live and develop under the influence of the major language of each four countries [i.e. Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Russian federation]. Special problems concerning minor languages will therefore surface. Assimilation and disappearance together with the conflicting pressures of the major languages threaten the unity of the language.[38]

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[37] Magga, "Bibelöverstättningar," 166.

[38] Kaarina Vuolab-Lohi, *Pohjoissaamen kielen tilanne sekä kehittämistarpeet* (Helsinki: Kotus, 2007).

The use of the proper language was one of the difficult challenges in the North Sami translation process. I shall next use some examples to illustrate this. My examples relate to the use of particles and postpositions. North Sami uses several particles that are placed after the main word. One of them is *ga*.[39] This short particle matches the English "also." In current orthographical rules, the particle *ga* is written as a separate word in Norway, but it is conscribed with the preceding word in Finland. Thus, in John 14:21 the Greek clause κἀγὼ ἀγαπήσω αὐτὸν is translated and written as *ja munge ráhkistan su* (Eng. "and I also love him"). According to Norwegian custom, however, the particle *ge* in *munge* ("I also") should be a separate word, *mun ge*.[40]

Another similar case is the particle *han*. This particle indicates that the hearer is somehow familiar with the content of the clause. Thus, in John 5:18, the Greek οὐ μόνον ἔλυεν τὸ σάββατον (Eng. "he not only he broke the Sabbath") is translated *Sonhan ii dušše rihkkon sabbaha* ("He not only broke the Sabbath"). The particle indicates that the statement "he broke the Sabbath" is either a known or self-evident fact. According to the Norwegian custom, the beginning should be spelled using two separate words *son han*.[41] During the testing, readers in Norway found the praxis of conscribing the particles like this disturbing. Conscribing particles like *ge* or *han* makes North Sami used in Biibbal 2019 similar to Finnish, where particles like this are conscribed, but this will consequently alienate the text from the readers living in Norway.

From my own experience with the North Sami translation process, I can remember quite well the difficulty created by using or not using certain postpositions. There was a long and complex discussion on when to use postpostions *birra*, *bokte*, and *siste*. These do exist in North Sami,

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[39] A similar particle is found in other related languages, too. Thus, in Skolt Sami the particle is *i*. In Karelian it is *gi* and in Estonian it is *ga*. In Finnish the particle is *kin*.

[40] This is also the way the clause was spelled in the 1998 New Testament.

[41] This is also the way the clause was spelled in the 1998 New Testament (*Son han ii rihkkon dušše sábbáha*).

but the linguists working with the text felt that the way they were used reflected more the model translations, especially the Norwegian 1978/1983 Bible, than the actual Sami usage.[42]

In John 8:38, the translation of the Greek ἃ ἐγὼ ἑώρακα παρὰ τῷ πατρὶ λαλῶ was *Mun sártnun dan birra maid lean oaidnán Áhči luhtte* (Eng. "I speak about what I have seen with the Father") in the early draft. The draft reflects the Norwegian *Jeg taler om det jeg har sett hos Faderen*. The Greek construction is different, however, placing the relative clause before the verb λαλῶ. The postposition *birra* seems to match the Norwegian preposition "om." *Birra* was removed from the final text. The linguists working with the project took cases like this as examples of avoided constructions from the point of naturalness and fluency.

The challenge in using or not using the postpositions *birra*, *bokte*, and *siste* does not concern understandability, but rather naturalness and fluency. When saying this, we might think that the challenge is easy to solve. When the translation guidelines speak about the appropriate use of the North Sami, the team ought not to use expressions that disturb the naturalness of the language.

There is, however, a deeper or more serious aspect of the challenge. Language issues like the use of the postpositions relate to the expectancy. In his influential textbook of translation theory, Andrew Chesterman introduced what he calls "expectancy norms." These are norms that, according to him, are linked with the product of a translation process—a translation. He claims that "people do have these expectations about certain kinds of texts."[43] One of the texts that Chesterman is talking about is the Bible. How the Bible is translated is never a matter of indifference, and existing translations typically have an influence on how

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[42] See also Magga, "Bibelöverstättningar," 163.

[43] Andrew Chesterman, *Memes of Translation: The Spread of Ideas in Translation Theory* (rev. ed.; Benjamins Translation Library, 123; Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2016), 62–65.

new translations are made—the readers of the Bible expect similarity and continuity.

In the case of the 2019 Bible, the expectations focused on a specific type of language that people knew from the older translation, but also from the church setting. As far as I understand, there exists a church or religious register in North Sami. By register I mean a variant of a language used by a discrete social group. The register is created when people participate in recurring situations where a certain type of language is consistently used.[44]

A church register in North Sami is connected to the church setting. Because priests do not necessarily know North Sami well enough there is a habit of using church interpreters. A church interpreter interprets whatever the priest is saying either in Norwegian, Swedish, or Finnish on an *ad hoc* basis during the service. The interpreters are trusted members of the community, and they are known to be able to do what is expected from them. Since no formal training in interpretation is expected, *ad hoc* interpreting can be formal.

It is known that the church register is connected to Bible translation.[45] In earlier times Bible translations were made using a formal translation method. The formal way of translating creates a language that is not considered natural or fluent because the influence of the source text is felt in wording, idiomatic usage of the language, and its structure. Since the way the older Bible was translated resembles the way church interpreters operate, the church register is kept alive. Some of the members of the translation team thought that using the church register in the modern Bible would be a good idea. This was exactly be-

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[44] See Ronald Wardhaugh, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (Blackwell Textbooks in Linguistics, 4; Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 48–50, on the register as a linguistic term.

[45] Riikka Nissi and Aila Mielikäinen, "Johdanto," in *Sanaa tutkimassa: Näkökulmia uskonnolliseen kieleen ja sen käyttöön* (Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seuran toimituksia, 1398; Helsinki: SKS, 2014), 10–13.

cause of the expectancy norms if we use the terminology developed by Chesterman.

The expectancy norms relate to the usage of the translation. The way people use the translation is intertwined with their expectations concerning that translation. This time it is the Bible translated into North Sami. Chesterman does not say this, but I think that, in the case of the Bible, the usage has a lot to say about readers' expectations. The translated text must fit to the setting where people are using the translation.

Considering the usage or usability of the translation leads us to another important translation theory. Functional translation theories, especially in their German form, make us ask how the new translation is intended to be used. We can form this question also in other words and ask about the purpose the translation is made and the purpose to use it. This was the main question in the early form of the so-called Skopos-Theory by Vermeer. In his theory, the purpose forms the key factor that regulates how translations are to be made. Therefore, the early theory becomes an *exitus acta probat*-type of operation.[46]

Purpose is a manyfold issue and the reader's purpose is only one of the many possible ones to be considered. Even more, readers of the Bible do not share one clear purpose, but there can be various purposes depending on the time and place why a reader might read the Bible. Because the purpose is a complex issue, one must prioritize which one or which ones are more important than others. The theory does not say much about how to prioritize the various purposes but gives priority to future readers' needs and states that the ultimate decisive part is the one who commissions the translation.[47] The commissioner is expected, in

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[46] Katharina Reiss and Hans Vermeer, *Grundlegung einer allgemeinen Translationstheorie* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1984), 101; Christiane Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained* (Translation Theories Explained, 1; Manchester: St. Jerome, 1997), 27–29.

[47] Nord, *Translating*, 29–31, while thinking about a professional translator underlines the responsibility of the translator to interpret the guidance given by the commissioner.

one way or another, to decide in which way best to take the future readers into account. In the case of the new North Sami translation project, the commissioners were the three Bible Societies. They prioritized composing an acceptable and linguistically appropriate translation.

These purposes are theoretically valid, but the discussion has shown that purposes like acceptability and linguistic appropriateness are open to interpretation and different people will interpret them differently. It is therefore understandable that when linguistic appropriateness is interpreted as naturalness and fluency, tensions are created because for some readers of the Sami Bible the expectancy norms conflict with naturalness and fluency.

Conclusions

Finally, after looking at the theories and history of the Sami Bible translation, I conclude by raising two general points.

First, when looking at the history of the Sami Bible translation, one can see that the number of translations published over the centuries is quite large—perhaps more than one might think. The brief overview shows how complex the translation process can be. Factors include matters of interpretation and language to be used. The Bible is a collection of ancient texts that are open to interpretation and are interpreted in various ways. At the same time, the target language is a complex matter, too. There are different variants of it used differently in time and space. Over time, these factors have influenced translations in several different ways. This is partly because of a development in understanding what translation is and what the most useful ways of translating are. Partly the case is about making choices concerning the goals and procedures.

Secondly, it seems to me that translation choices cannot made without seriously considering future users. The way readers of new Bibles are estimated to use it must have a profound effect on the aims and procedures. We cannot base the choices or even the estimations on experts

only—on exegetes or theologians—but must carefully study what the language community at large expects from the new translation and how they will use it. The user must thus be placed at the centre of the planning and executing translations in a more serious way than has been done so far. This will not clear tensions between different dialects or registers, but it will help the planning and execution of the translation work. As goals become clearer and more realistic, better mechanisms for tackling challenges faced during the process can be developed.