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Gerald A. Klingbeil

Andrews University, klingbeil@andrews.edu

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Translation and the GC Session in Atlanta

Odette Ferreira is the calm beacon in the frantic rush of helping people to understand each other during the upcoming General Conference session in Atlanta. Working for the Education Department of the North American Division, she has been tasked (for the second time) with organizing a major behind-the-scenes effort to translate the proceedings into 15 different languages:

Spanish, French, Portuguese, German, Russian, Romanian, Czech, Japanese, Korean, Serbian/Croatian, Italian, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Indonesian, and American Sign Language. An estimated 200 volunteer translators will cover daily nine hours of meetings for 10 days. Because of the strenuous nature of simultaneous translation, each volunteer will translate only small blocks and be

part of a constant rotation.

The wireless technology utilized for the translation will be provided by Adventist World Radio, using radio frequencies and small transistor radios (and headsets). For the first time, there will also be translators on the floor available to delegates wishing to contribute to the discussion, but who may not feel that their English is adequate. Most of the translators will pay their own way to Atlanta and will cover their own accommodation costs. What an army of volunteers, ready to give unselfishly of their time, talents, and means—the world church appreciates you!

would support him in choosing the Romanian term that best describes the specific seventh day of the week.¹³

Where Do We Go From Here?

Around the world translators working outside the church are reaching ever higher levels of professionalism. Within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, however, translators are still more artisans than professionals. Many of them got into the job by a strange set of circumstances, and usually are self-made professionals who are not always supported by a due process of quality editing and proofreading. Svitlana Krushenytska, an Adventist translator living in Ukraine, seems to summarize the general feeling when she states: “I wish our job would be more appreciated.”¹⁴

At times underpaid, Adventist translators must often struggle with the ignorance of both bosses and colleagues about their job and the neglect of some church institutions. Sometimes church events with five-figure budgets do not include translation costs. Thus, more than once organizers are forced to resort to willing volunteers who often lack the knowledge and proficiency for such a task while translators have to work long hours to make ends meet. Ellen G. White understood this problem very well when, advocating for balance in the job of translators, she wrote: “Our work is much more important than is supposed, and requires much more thought. The translators should have less hours to devote to close and absorbing intellectual labor, lest the brain become too weary, and the force of penetration being relaxed, the labor accomplished shall be imperfect.”¹⁵

Things are changing, however. Seventh-day Adventist translators are becoming more aware that even a solitary job such as translation is in need of team efforts. And

church leaders are also grasping that the God-given assignment of the church requires understanding that in fulfilling its mission, perhaps one of the best investments is to increasingly support some of the ones who make the gospel transmission possible.

I do not recall what I finally did with the “Jesus-magnet-imam” translation problem. I may have settled for the Spanish equivalent of something like “Jesus is the greatest attraction in the world,” or something of the sort. What I do know, however, is that such a phrase deserves and has to be read and understood by every human being on earth. Because no matter the language, Jesus is in fact the greatest attraction in this world. And if the mission of the church is to take that message to every tribe and people, maybe there is no better way of accomplishing it than by resorting to committed translators who feel so deeply about sharing the story of Jesus as the ones who will keep voicing it in their native tongues to the last corners of the earth. ●

¹Emmett K. Vandevere, *The Wisdom Seekers* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing Association, 1972), pp. 31, 32; quoted in Floyd Greenleaf, *In Passion for the World: A History of Seventh-day Adventist Education* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2005), pp. 105, 106.

²See, for instance, her remarks to young women in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 204.

³For a complete description of this point, see Pietro Copiz, “The Linguist,” in *J. N. Andrews: The Man and the Mission*, ed. Harry Leonard (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1985), pp. 164-184.

⁴See Ellen G. White, Letter 140 (1907), p. 2, in *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 8, p. 103.

⁵*Australasian Union Conference Record*, July 28, 1899. A similar idea is set forth in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 169.

⁶Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 3, p. 464. This section belongs to appendix C and represents a letter written in 1934 by Willie C. White in response to questions raised by L. E. Froom.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸William C. White letter file, vol. 2, p. 245, quoted in Arthur White, *Ellen G. White*, vol. 3, “The Lonely Years (1876-1891),” p. 436.

⁹For a description of the whole experience, see *ibid.*, pp. 436-438.

¹⁰Personal communication.

¹¹Personal communication.

¹²Personal communication.

¹³Personal communication.

¹⁴Personal communication.

¹⁵Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 8, p. 328.