The Terms of Translation

When "Literal" is Inaccurate: A Multi-Dimensional Approach to Translating Scripture Meaningfully

by Donna Toulmin

I s a literal translation always the most accurate? What is "meaning" and how can translators communicate it accurately? How can translators capture the full meaning of the text?

Throughout this past year a team of Angika language speakers translated the first ever book of the Bible into their mother tongue. As part of the process, they considered *how to translate "key" Biblical terms* which are rich in theological meaning, such as "Messiah", "Kingdom of God" or "Son of Man". One day as they met with their translation consultant, the discussion turned to one of these key terms. They suggested a word from their language which might be appropriate, explained the basic dictionary meaning and asked the consultant, "Is it correct?" The consultant's mind raced through various considerations, and she responded, "There are so many more things we need to think about before we can say whether this is the best term to use here. The dictionary meaning is not all we need to know!"

But what else do we need to know? What are the different dimensions of meaning we should look for when interpreting the Bible's meaning and translating it into another language? This paper is an attempt to clarify *what we need to consider before we can answer the question "Is the translation correct?"*

What are Key Terms?

Key terms are the words in the Bible which are crucial for understanding the meaning of the whole Bible, such as "sacrifice", "temple", "God" and so on. They are very important to translate well. In fact, they're the type of words that if the meaning is slightly wrong, the whole Bible can be misunderstood. Some people refer to them as the "theological backbone" of a translation.

The meaning of key terms can be very complicated either for theological reasons (e.g. English words like "righteousness", "God", "faith" or "atonement") or for cultural reasons (words like "synagogue", "mercy", or "tabernacle"). Terms like

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these are very difficult to translate while still communicating the meaning accurately and completely.

What is Accuracy? ESV vs NLT

I'm sure you've noticed that lots of translations claim to be "accurate" translations. Let's compare two translations, each which claims in their preface to be an accurate translation into English.

From the preface to the *English Standard Version*	From the preface to the *New Living Translation* (2nd Ed.)
[In the ESV] faithfulness to the text and vigorous pursuit of accuracy were combined with simplicity, beauty, and dignity of expression.	[NLT is]...a general-purpose translation that is accurate, easy to read, and excellent for study.

But these two translations are very different. Compare their translations of Matthew 3:8.

Matthew 3:8 ESV	Matthew 3:8 NLT
Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.	Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God.

Clearly, there are differences in the translations of these two verses. "Can they both be accurate?" Some people would say: "No! The NLT is not accurate here. The ESV has translated the text better." Others would say "No! The ESV is not accurate here, the NLT has better captured the meaning of the text".

My answer to this question is "Yes! They might both be accurate, but in different ways. They're pursuing different types of accuracy, different types of equivalency, and different types of meaning."

You might be familiar with the continuum of English translation styles in Figure 1.[1] On the left are very literal types of translation, towards the middle more meaning-based styles, and towards the right the translations are freer and are often called "adaptations" or "paraphrases".

This way of thinking about translation has its place; it's useful for thinking about how literal or otherwise a translation is. However, when thinking about meaning, it's not so helpful. This is a one-dimensional diagram, and it's represented just as a line. But meaning is multidimensional and can't be fully described with just a line. The fact that meaning is multidimensional is what makes languages rich and beautiful, but it's also what makes translation difficult.

I have formulated eight dimensions of meaning which I think are helpful for translators to keep in mind. I came up with these dimensions via two avenues. Firstly, I observed talented translators do actual translation work. These dimensions are what they tend to consider when thinking about how to translate something. The other avenue was by reading literature about translation styles and analyzing the reasons why people thought one translation style was superior to another. I observed certain tendencies there.[2] I have assimilated all that information, and these are the eight dimensions of meaning I came up with.

If you are a translator, or an exegete, or you just have an interest in how God's word is translated today, I hope these dimensions of meaning can be a helpful tool for you. As I explain each dimension, I'll show you how each can be applied to a particular example in a particular language. The language is the Angika language,

spoken in Bihar, India. The translators, who are all Angika themselves, want this translation to communicate to the Hindu Angika speakers who know basically nothing about first century Jewish culture or theology.

The example I'd like to use is their attempt to translate the phrase "the Son of Man" in Luke 5:24, the story of the paralyzed man:

> "But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home" (Luke 5:24 NIV).

Of course, we're not translating the English phrase "the Son of Man", but *rather* the Greek phrase "ho huios tou anthrwpou" *Yet,* I'll more often write "the Son of Man", because that is more familiar to most English speakers. But do keep in mind that we're not translating the English phrase as we understand it, but the Greek phrase as we believe it was understood by the people who were listening to Jesus, as well as the people for whom Luke was writing his gospel.

Please keep in mind, as well, that my intention in this paper is not to render a full exegesis of the phrase "Son of Man". I am certainly not an expert in all these dimensions, but I simply want to illustrate the method by which this exegesis can be done. In fact, one of the benefits of this method of exegesis and translation is that it is useful in illuminating the areas in which one's understanding of the text is lacking.

Dimensions of Meaning

Lexical Meaning

The first dimension is one that people will be most familiar with: lexical meaning. This is the meaning of each

Figure 1: English Translation Styles

Essentially Literal			Dynamic Equivalent				Paraphrase
NASB	KJV	NRSV	NIV	NLT	CEV	TLB	MSG
	NKJV	NAB	HCSB	NJB			
	ESV		TNIV				

word within the phrase. I like to call this "dictionary meaning", because it's the meaning you would find in a dictionary. Linguists know this type of meaning as semantic meaning, or denotation. "Literal" translation strives to translate primarily the lexical meaning of phrases (Figure 2).

So we might say that the lexical meaning of this phrase is "the" and "son" and "of" and "man", or more precisely *an identified biological male descendent of a human being*. That is the meaning which we end up with if we consider only the dictionary meaning of each word.[3] That works well with sentences like "I walked to the shop." Add up the meanings of "I" + "walked" + ""the" + "shop", rearrange according to the grammar, and voila–you have your translation!

Is this what the phrase "son of man" is talking about? Is it really a comment on Jesus' parents? Perhaps. But it's certainly not the full meaning. Language is often more complicated than just the lexical meaning. Our example, "the Son of Man", can also be understood as an idiom whose meaning is not the sum of its lexical parts.
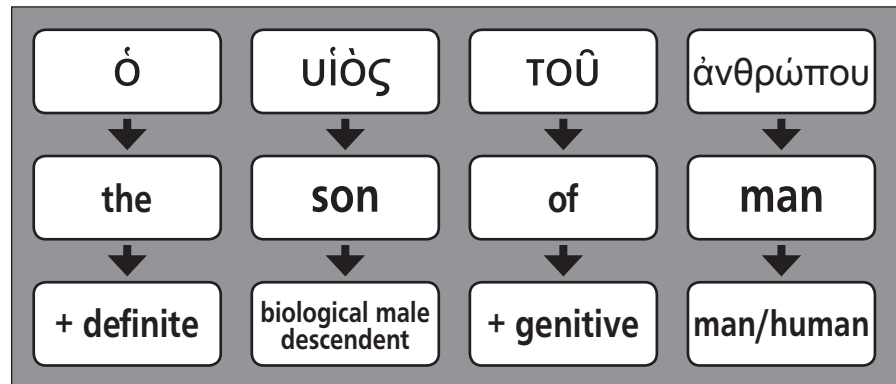
Phrasal Meaning—Idiom

It is also possible to view this not as a set of words, but as a whole phrase which has its own meaning. An idiom is when the meaning of the phrase does not equal the sum of its parts, like in English "to kick the bucket," (which, in my dialect means "to die.") A native English speaker would know that it's an idiom, and know that most of the time that phrase doesn't have anything to do with buckets. Let's think about the phrase "the son of man," is it an idiom? If so, what does it mean?

There are two types of idiom: a frozen, or a productive idiom.

As a frozen idiom

If you translate this phrase literally into Aramaic and Hebrew, it is an idiom which just means something like "human" or "person." It's a bit like C. S. Lewis' "son of Adam" and

Figure 2: A Literal Translation of "Son of Man"

ὁ	υἱὸς	τοῦ	ἀνθρώπου
the	son	of	man
+ definite	biological male descendent	+ genitive	man/human

"daughter of Eve" in the Narnia Chronicles. It is less clear whether "the Son of Man" has this meaning in Greek, but it is also possible.[4] If this is the meaning we decide is primarily being communicated, a good English translation for "the Son of Man" might be *the Human*.

As a productive idiom

Productive idioms are slightly different from frozen idioms because they are designed to combine with other things. For example, in the phrase "let alone", it's hard to say what the meaning is by itself. But put it in a sentence (like "I'm so weak I couldn't even pick up this feather *let alone* that book.")[5] and a native English speaker knows what it means. In the same way, in Greek "son of"[6] is a construction meaning something like "one with the characteristics of". Look at the descriptions of people in Mark 3:17 and Acts 4:36 as "sons of thunder" and "son of encouragement".[7] If this is the meaning of "the Son of Man" here, then a good translation might be "*the one like a man/human*" or "*the one with the characteristics of a man/human*".

Often, the translator will have to choose between either communicating the meaning of the words (lexical meaning) or communicating the meaning of the idiom (phrasal meaning). You'll note that lexical and phrasal meanings are two dimensions of meaning which deal with the phrase out of context. The rest of the dimen-

sions of meaning which we will examine are pragmatic dimensions, that is, we need to keep in mind the context of Luke 5:24 as we think about these other dimensions.

Information Structure—Discourse Meaning

This refers to the role of the term within the broader context of the sentence and the discourse. We can understand the information structure by asking questions like these: What is the most important part of the sentence? What is emphasized? What is the topic? How are things introduced here? Is it known information or unknown? These questions (and many more) are about how information fits together in the sentence and the discourse context.

Let me note a couple of points about the information structure of Luke 5:24. Firstly, in Greek the phrase "the son of man" and the word "authority" come before the verb. This is not the usual place for them to be in Greek and has meaning attached to it. Steven Runge (following Simon Dik[8]) says that the two elements before the verb here have two different functions. The first element is setting up the "Topical Frame." That means it is introducing what is being talked about: this person or title which Jesus is calling "The Son of Man". Secondly, it is introducing what is being said *about* this person, in this case, that he has *authority on earth to forgive sins*. Runge says that the

emphasis is not on the first ("son of man") but on the second ("authority to forgive sins.")"[9] So if we were to translate equivalent information structure into English we might say "The Son of man *does* have authority on earth to forgive sins." Note the emphasis which is created by adding "does".

Finally, this sentence is not complete in Greek. The sentence ends when Jesus acts to heal the man. The healing is the way in which those present can know that the son of man does have authority on earth to forgive sins. Any translation would want to make sure that this link with the action is understood.

Meaning Communicated Through Genre

Genre also communicates meaning. The same word in a poem, and in a legal document will mean slightly different things. The way we interpret each word is shaped by the genre in which we find it.

If we translate legal documents as prose, or prose as poetry then we will have changed the meaning a little, we will have changed the way people interpret the words. This dimension is less relevant to "the Son of Man" as mentioned in Luke because the origi-

nal genre is narrative, and the translation is also narrative. But, if it had been a poetic text we were translating, we would have to closely consider the genre when understanding and translating the meaning of the word.[10] For this reason I won't be discussing the genre dimension further in this paper.

Those first four dimensions relate to the term itself and the text surrounding it. First, the *word*, then the *phrase*, then the *information structure* of the sentence, then the *genre* of the passage. These next four dimensions extend outside the text in different ways (see Figure 3). They extend into what I call the "Real world", the "Text world", the "Thought world" and the "Social world".

The "Real World"—The Referent

The question to ask here is who or what is the term referring to? For example, the term "monarch" *means* a person who rules over a kingdom. But in any particular context it might *refer* to Queen Elizabeth II or King George III. The particular King or Queen is the referent.[11]

In Luke 5:24, most scholars agree that the referent to the phrase "the Son of Man" is Jesus,[12] though scholars debate how clear it was to Jesus' audience. In this case, Jesus uses the third person,

and it's not often that people refer to themselves in the third person. When was the last time you referred to yourself as "the teacher" or "the parent"? Some languages have more trouble doing this than others. If all you wanted to do in translation is communicate the referent, then an accurate translation of "the Son of Man" here would simply be: "I".

## The Text World— Intertextual and Intratextual Meaning

Intertextual meaning

This is one type of meaning which is very important to Bible scholars, theologians, and students of literature. *Inter*textual meaning is the meaning which is implied by a text, because of its similarity or relationship with another text. For example, in Mark 6:50, Jesus is walking on water, in a stormy environment, passing by the disciples and then says "egw eimi" ("I am"). In many ways, this causes an astute Biblical reader to think back to Moses and his encounters with God in the Old Testament (for example, Exodus 3:14 and 33:19). The meaning, which Jesus communicates in an intertextual way here, is that *he* is the one who can miraculously feed thousands of people, he's the one who passes by, and he is the one who is called "I am." Who is that one? Yahweh himself. Without that Old Testament knowledge, this meaning is lost on many readers of the New Testament.

A question for translators is how do we communicate this type of meaning? One strategy is to try to use the same terms in the same places (this is called "lexical concordance"). I notice that the NLT has used the phrase "I am" in Mark 6:50 so the link to the Old Testament might be seen by readers. The problem can sometimes be that the wording becomes unnatural, or in some cases unintelligible. Other translations just indicate the intertextual link in a footnote.

Another strategy is to be explicit about the intertextual meaning. Sally Lloyd-Jones' *Jesus Storybook Bible* is a good example of this.[13] (Obviously, as a children's Bible this is not a straight

Figure 3: Dimensions of Meaning
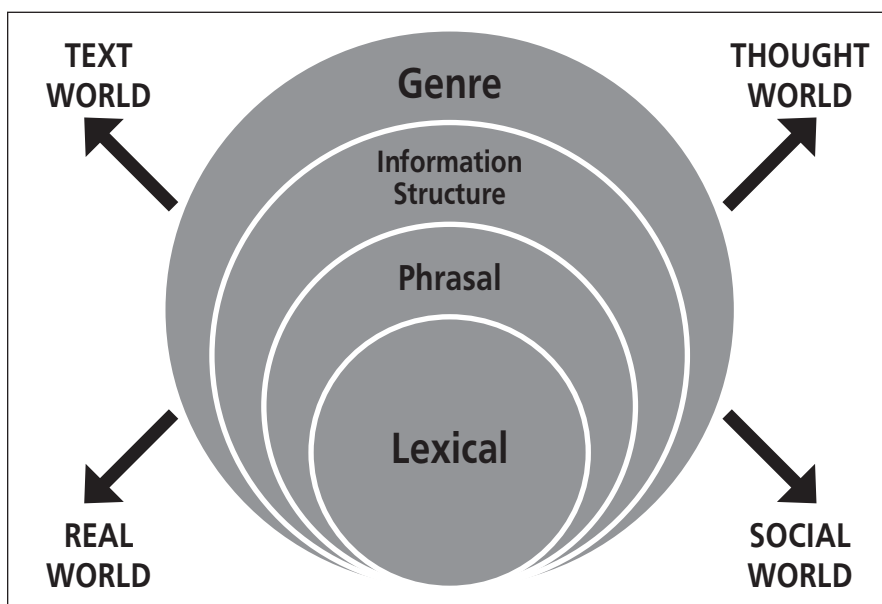
translation, but an adaptation, but it does illustrate my point nicely.) In her Daniel story, she adds another paragraph at the end of the story saying:

> God would keep on rescuing his people. And the time was coming when God would send another brave Hero, like Daniel, who would love God and do what God said—whatever it cost him, even if it meant he would die. And together they would pull off the greatest rescue the world has ever known.

Is this accurate? No, it's not lexically accurate. But it does convey accurate information about the Bible, it is all "true", so in a sense it is accurate. It is explicit about one aspect of the intertextual meaning. Bible scholars would agree that the Daniel story *does* point to Jesus. Lloyd-Jones has made an element of meaning explicit which would not otherwise be apparent to her intended audience.

For the phrase "son of man" there are many articles and books written on the intertextual meaning.[14] The most obvious link is to Daniel 7:13, where Daniel prophesies about "one like a son of man" presented before God, and God gives him an eternal Kingdom over all people. Is Jesus implying here that he is this one? Translators should remember that this link is very subtle, and it's doubtful that people in Jesus' time would have thought to themselves, "Yes! He's calling himself "the Son of Man" like in the book of Daniel. Is he claiming to be our King?" Actually, it's more likely they would have thought, "He's saying that there is a human who has authority over sins." (Remember, of course, that they thought that only God had authority to totally forgive a person's sins, i.e., Luke 5:23.)

A further step to understand the implied meaning in "son of man" would be a look for those places that Luke chose to use it. This is what I'm calling the "*intra*textual meaning".

Intratextual meaning
If we look at all the passages in Luke where Jesus used this term, a pattern does emerge. It is often used in contexts of suffering, and in contexts of glory.

Most have to do with questions of authority. This helps us to realize that when Jesus talks about himself as "the son of man" he's talking about the role he has on earth, to suffer and to be glorified, and his role as the one with authority, as God's representative on earth. In short, we can see, through inter- and intra-textual meaning, that Jesus is saying he is God's chosen King, the Messiah. But, when we're translating this term, it's also important to remember that Jesus could have plainly stated that he was the Messiah . . . but he did not. If we translate "son of man" here as "Messiah", it violates the next two dimensions of meaning.

The Thought World—Ideas and Emotions
The thought world refers to the connotations, ideas and emotions which come into people's minds when they hear this term. What meanings did they actually think and feel when they heard this term? Some words have very strong connotations. We know, for example, that terms like "tax collector" and "Samaritan" both had very strong negative connotations for first century Jews. However, "The Son of Man" is unusual in that it doesn't appear to have strong connotations at all. Even the Hebrew and Aramaic literal translations (which certainly did mean "human") don't have strong connotations either way. It's not even clear that this phrase was used much in Greek at all. This is pretty unusual for a key term. Usually people use words so that people do understand them, not because people don't really understand them. I think this explains why the majority of English translations, even very free ones like *The Message* , have used the literal term "Son of Man"– it's not supposed to mean very much the first time you read it; it gains its meaning as you keep reading and see how Jesus (and the Biblical authors) used the term.

So this term "Son of Man", for the original readers, is rather devoid of associated ideas and emotions. This fact paves the way for Jesus to fill the term with the meaning which he intended it to have.[15]

The Social World—Interpersonal Meaning
This dimension pulls together much of the exegesis we've already done, and adds an extra interpersonal level of analysis. The Social world dimension asks: what was the speaker (or writer) doing with this term here? Why was this term used here? Interpersonally, how does this term function?

I note a few things which "Son of Man" is communicating in Luke 5. First, it can be understood as a title. There is one person who is "the" Son of Man, and part of his role is that he has authority to forgive sins. Second, we can note that this is new information to Jesus' audience. This is the first time in Luke's gospel that the term "Son of Man" has been used. Third, this is a challenge to Jesus' hearers. Jesus' contemporaries believed that only God can forgive sins, and here Jesus challenged this assumption: he said that there is a human who also has that authority (or at least the authority to declare that God has forgiven someone's sins).

I've listed out eight different types of meaning here (Figure 4), and it might appear that they are all distinct and nicely separated, but they're not. There's always overlap and indistinct boundaries between the different types of meaning. While you may disagree with my exegesis, I do hope that my separating the meaning of this phrase out into these dimensions helps you clarify in exactly which dimension you might disagree. I have also formulated eight questions which the translator or exegete might like to ask of a text as they examine it (Figure 5). These are an aid to help think in terms of the eight dimensions, and I hope they will help you discover more of the meaning of the text.

Translation into Angika
So you can see that the meaning of the Son of Man is very complicated. *How on earth can we possibly translate this?* To complicate things even more, we must add two more reasons why this phrase is even more difficult to translate into

Figure 4: Summary of Dimensions of Meaning of 'Son of Man'

Lexical Meaning
"The son of man/human"

Phrasal Meaning
- Frozen idiom
  "the human" or "the man"
- Productive idiom
  "the one like a man/human" or "the one with the characteristics of a man/human"

Information Structure
"The son of man" is not emphasised, the "authority to forgive sins" is emphasised.

Referent
Jesus (though perhaps this is not very obvious)

Intertextual Links
Daniel 7:13 and others; the reader should be able to discover the links, though it should not be obvious.

Thought World
Connotations are minimal and certainly not negative.

Social World
The sentence the phrase is in challenges the presuppositions of the people Jesus is speaking to.

Angika. Firstly, their language doesn't have a definite article . . . they don't have the word "the". Neither do they have capital letters, which is an easy way to indicate something is a title. Keep those two points in mind as we look at possible ways to translate "the Son of Man" into the Angika language.

As I noted above, the priority of this translation team was to communicate in a manner that is clear for Angika Hindu people. Because people and people groups have different assumptions and worldviews, what seems accurate to an outsider like me or another consultant, may not
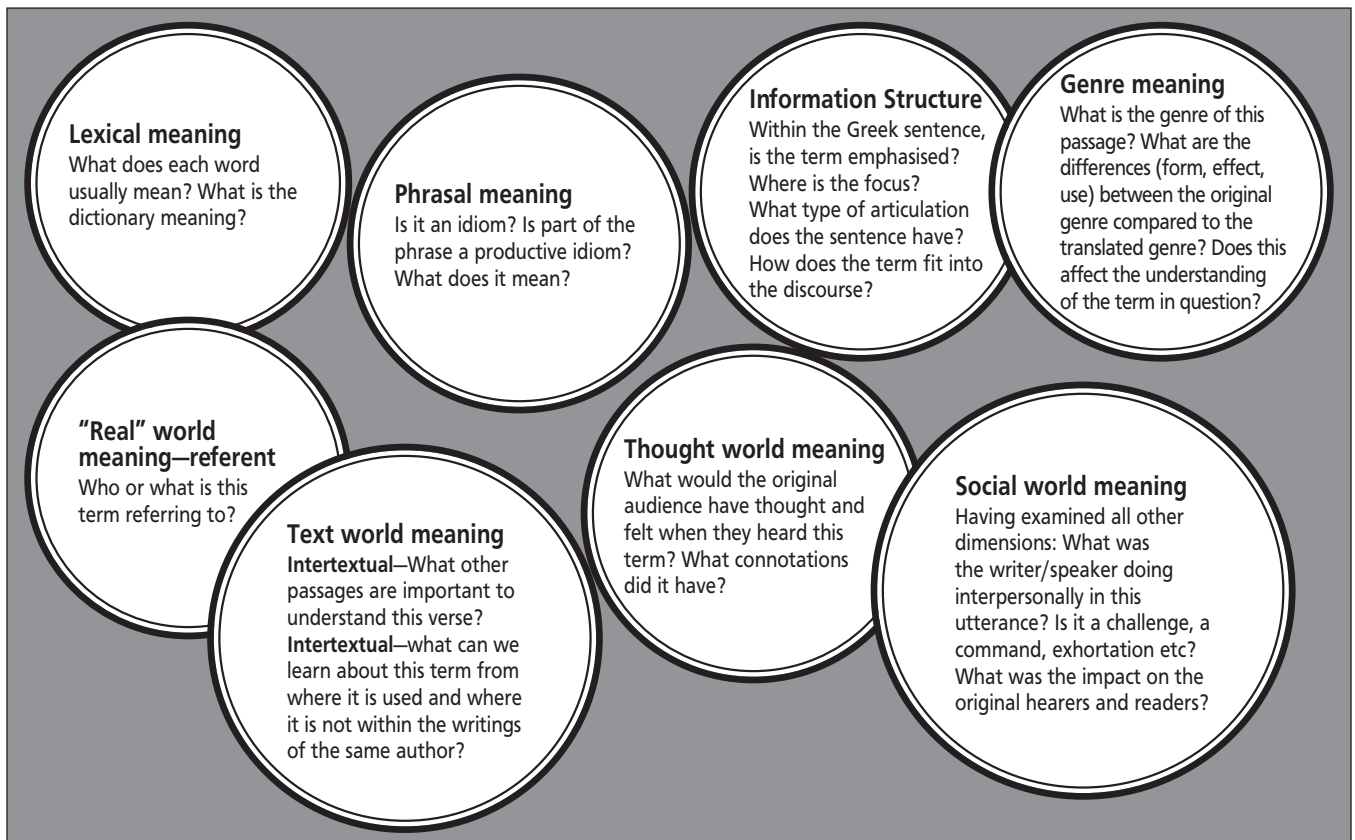
communicate the correct meaning to Angika people. Before a Bible translation is approved for publication it needs to go through a check with a consultant to make sure the translation is accurate. To find out what the translation is communicating, the team and consultant tested the translation with speakers of Angika who are not familiar with the Bible. (I'll call that native speaker the "Representative Native Speaker" or RNS, because they are representative of the intended audience.) After listening to the translation, the RNS was asked to explain what she or he had understood from the text.

What the consultant is checking for at this point is not whether *the consultant* thinks the meaning of the translation is correct, but whether she thinks that *Angika speakers* understand correct meaning from reading the translation. This is a crucial distinction, as you will see.

Figure 5: Exegetical Questions for Dimensions of Meaning

Lexical meaning
What does each word usually mean? What is the dictionary meaning?

Phrasal meaning
Is it an idiom? Is part of the phrase a productive idiom? What does it mean?

Information Structure
Within the Greek sentence, is the term emphasised? Where is the focus? What type of articulation does the sentence have? How does the term fit into the discourse?

Genre meaning
What is the genre of this passage? What are the differences (form, effect, use) between the original genre compared to the translated genre? Does this affect the understanding of the term in question?

"Real" world meaning—referent
Who or what is this term referring to?

Text world meaning
Intertextual—What other passages are important to understand this verse?
Intertextual—what can we learn about this term from where it is used and where it is not within the writings of the same author?

Thought world meaning
What would the original audience have thought and felt when they heard this term? What connotations did it have?

Social world meaning
Having examined all other dimensions: What was the writer/speaker doing interpersonally in this utterance? Is it a challenge, a command, exhortation etc? What was the impact on the original hearers and readers?

Evaluating the Options for "Son of Man"

These are the three options for translation which the team and consultant analysed:

1. 'son of man'
2. 'I who am son of man'
3. 'I'

I'll be evaluating these translations with respect to multiple dimensions of meaning, with a three level evaluation for each dimension. A tick (✓) indicates that this dimension of meaning is communicated correctly and fully. A circle (⊙) means that this dimension of meaning is communicated correctly, but some of the meaning is missing. A cross (✗) indicates that some of the meaning is communicating wrongly and will be misunderstood.

Option 1—"Son of Man"
1. **Angika:** ... मनुष्य-पुत्र कऽ धरती पर पाप क्षमा करय केऽ अधिकार छै।
2. **English word-by-word:** son of man's on earth sin forgiveness doing's authority is
3. **Free English translation of the Angika:** ... human has authority on earth to forgive sins

Lexical meaning
✓ Although option 1 does not include a word meaning "the," this is still lexically equivalent because the Angika language does not need a definite article to show that something is definite.

Phrasal meaning
✓ In Angika the meaning of "manushya putra" ("son of man") is simply "human". This idiomatic meaning is equivalent to the Aramaic, Hebrew and potentially Greek idiomatic meaning of "son of man".

✗ In Angika the phrase "son of . . ." is not a productive idiom and does not mean "one with the characteristics of", and therefore it is not equivalent to the use of "son of . . ." in the New Testament.

Figure 6: Summary of Option 1—"Son of Man"
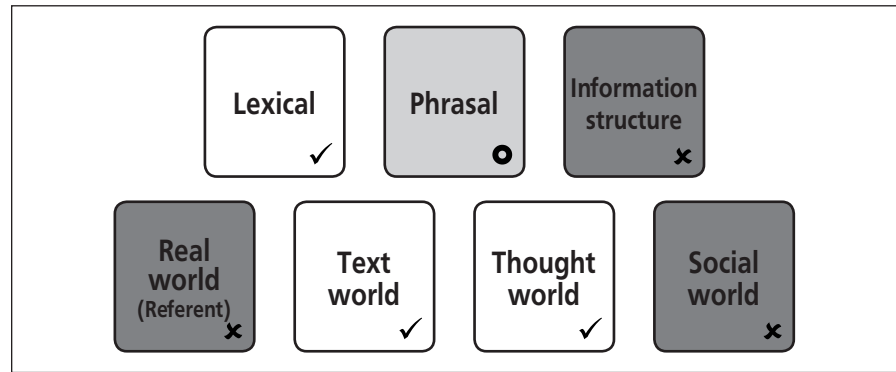
Information structure
⊙ Perhaps surprisingly, the most literal rendering does not reflect equivalent information structure. The emphasis on the authority here is missing, but since the most important part of the sentence tends to come at the end of the sentence in Angika I will say it is partially equivalent.

Referent
✗ This is the dimension in which this rendering is the most problematic. "Son of Man" (the same term as is in the Hindi Bible), is also a common Angika term which means "human" and by extension "humanity". So when a native speaker of Angika reads this rendering of Luke 5:24, they understand it to mean "humans have authority on earth to forgive sins". The referential meaning is not understood when Angika people hear Option 1.

Text world meaning
✓ The average Angika reader is not familiar with the Old Testament, so the intertextual allusions will not be apparent from Option 1. However, if the same term is used in both places, a footnote can help the reader see these connections, so by assuming a cross-reference footnote I'll give this rendering a tick. Similarly, if the same term is used in all places in Luke's Gospel, the intratextual meaning can also be built up.

Thought world meaning
✓ Option 1 has no strong connotations for an Angika person. Contrast this with another language, which also translated this term literally, and it was also a familiar term to speakers of that language, however they understood it to mean "a person of unknown parentage, probably illegitimate",[16] a strongly negative term. If that were the case in Angika language, this rendering would not be equivalent in thought world dimension, because that's not at all how the original hearers would have understood it.

Social world meaning
✗ It is not clear in Angika that Option 1 is a title for Jesus . . . since the term is understood to refer to humans in general.

✗ Option 1 is not a challenge to the worldview of Angika people. They believe that sins can be forgiven in many ways: by performing a ritual, by bathing in the Ganges, or by a Hindu priest. If Jesus says that "humanity" can forgive sins, this does not challenge their understanding in fact it confirms it. The interpersonal meaning of Option 1 in Angika is unlike the intended interpersonal meaning in the original context.

Option 2—"I Who am Son of Man"
1. **Angika:** ... हम्मे, जे मनुष्य-पुत्र छियै, हमरा धरती पर पाप क्षमा करय कऽ भी अधिकार छै।
2. **English word-by-word:** . . . I, who son of man is, my earth on sin forgiveness doing's authority (emphatic) is.
3. **Free English translation of the Angika:** . . . I, who is human, I do have authority on earth to forgive sins.

This rendering was suggested by a translator in order to make clear that Jesus was talking about himself. Again we'll examine it according to multiple dimensions of meaning.

Lexical meaning
◉ The phrase "son of man" is here, but other words have also been added which are not in the original.

Phrasal meaning
✓ Idiom: the idiom "son of man" meaning "human" is present here.

✗ The construction meaning "one with the characteristics of" is not known.

Information structure
✗✗ This is the dimension where this rendering had major problems. This wording was suggested by a consultant, and the mother tongue translators agreed that it was possible to say in their language. But when the team and consultant later tested this phrase with some native speakers of Angika, it was consistently misunderstood. The Angika people consistently answered that the passage meant "so that you may know that I am the son of man." But they weren't able to say what came afterwards. Emphasis should have been on the "authority" clause, but not only was this not emphasised, it wasn't communicated at all.

The team encountered this problem a number of times in sentences with relative clauses, especially where new information was being introduced. I won't go into the details of the grammar

which caused this misunderstanding, but it's clear that this rendering, though it seems accurate, and the translators thought that it was possible to say in their language, it actually communicated wrong meaning.

Usually in languages like Angika, you can communicate the correct information structure with two sentences "I am the son of man. And I have authority on earth to forgive sins". But in this situation that becomes more complicated because this is not a sentence in itself; it's the second part of a bigger sentence "But I want you to know that . . ." comes before "the Son of Man has authority . . .". Whatever way they render the second part of the sentence, it must also make sense in relation to the first half of the sentence "But I want you to know that . . .".

Referent
✓ The referent was equivalent, and people do understand that it is referring to Jesus.

Intertextual meaning
✓ Intertextually, the links to other passages remain open since the phrase is concordant.

Thought world meaning
✓ There are no obvious strong connotations or overtones which overshadow the meaning here.

Social world meaning
✗ Option 2 was not equivalent in the interpersonal dimension because of

the problems with the information structure. Since the readers did not pay attention to the second clause "has authority . . ." they didn't understand the challenge which Jesus was making in his social context.

In practice, all of these dimensions are not always equal; here the information structure was communicated so inaccurately that this misunderstanding dominated the meaning of the translation.

Option 3—"I"
Undeterred, the team pressed on to find a suitable way of rendering this term in Angika language. Some people have said that "the Son of Man" is simply a circumlocution for "I" (or in other words, that it means "I" and nothing more). I don't believe that is the case, but given that other renderings miscommunicated the meaning so badly, the team decided to try putting "I" in place of the phrase "son of man", to make sure, at least, that people understood *Jesus was talking about himself*.

1. **Angika:** हमरा धरती पर पाप क्षमा करय कऽ भी अधिकार छै।
2. **English word-by-word:** my earth on sin forgiveness doing's authority (emphatic) is
3. **Free English translation of the Angika:** I do have authority on earth to forgive sins

Lexical meaning
✗ The lexical meaning is not equivalent.

Phrasal meaning
✗ Not equivalent for either the frozen or productive idiom. There is no idiom here meaning "human" nor is there a construction meaning "one with the characteristics of".

Information structure
✗ The topical frame "son of man" is absent here. People don't know that Jesus is talking about one person who has a title and a role, and part of his role is to forgive sins.

✓ Here the authority part of the sentence is emphasised with a special

Figure 7: Summary of Option 2—"I who am Son of Man"
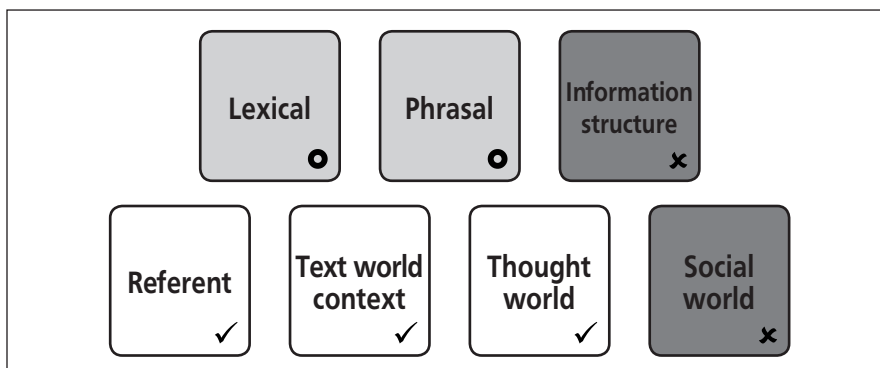
emphatic marker, so this element is given a tick.

Referent

✓ or ⊙ The referent here is equivalent, assuming that the exegete decides both that Jesus was referring to himself, and that it should be obvious to his hearers. However, many commentators have decided that, while Jesus was indeed referring to himself, this fact wasn't obvious to his hearers. If we adopt this exegesis, then Option 3 is only partially equivalent in the referential dimension.

Intertextual meaning

⊙ The inter- and intratextual connections here are not apparent, though they can be made more apparent through the use of footnotes, so Option 3 could be partially equivalent.

Thought world meaning

✓ In this language (unlike in some languages) using the first person pronoun doesn't have any positive or negative connotations and therefore Option 3 would be equivalent to the thought world meaning exegeted earlier.

Social world meaning

⊙ The role of "the Son of Man" as a title, which refers to the one with authority to forgive sins, is omitted from Option 3.

✓ The fact that Jesus claims to have authority over sins is, however, clear.

⊙ For Jesus to tell them that "I have authority to forgive sins" does not challenge the Angika Hindu, because they already believe in many methods and means for having one's sins forgiven.

Notice that this option is pretty good, apart from the lexical and phrasal meanings. If necessary the lexical and phrasal meanings could be corrected by a footnote. But still, it's not an ideal translation.

Actually, none of these three options are ideal. All have at least one major flaw. After a number of weeks thinking about this problem, this next rendering was suggested by one of the translators:

Option 4—"Only-one Son of Man"

1. **Angika:** . . . एकमात्र मनुष्य-पुत्र केऽ ही धरती पर पाप क्षमा करै केऽ अधिकार छै, आरो ऊ मनुष्य-पुत्र हम्मे छिकयै।

2. **English word-by-word:** . . . only-one son of man's (emphatic) authority on earth to do sins forgiveness is, and that son of man, I am.

3. **Free English translation of the Angika:** . . . only one human has authority on earth to forgive sins, and I am that human.

Lexical Meaning

⊙ Clearly some words have been added here. Most notably "only-one" and the final sentence "and I am that human". You might think that the word "only-one" adds an element of exclusivity here which is not in the original, and that is somewhat true: the lexical meaning of "only-one" in Angika is not exactly the same as the lexical meaning of /ho/ (definite article) in Greek. However there is some overlap: both identify a specific person, which was not the case in Angika Option 1 "son of man". Because Angika "only-one" is partially equivalent (in the lexical dimension) with Greek /ho/ (definite article), I have decided that this translation is partially equivalent for lexical meaning. The meaning of the extra sentence will be discussed in the "referent" section.

Phrasal Meaning

✓ Option 4 makes natural use of "man's-son" as an Angika idiom meaning "human". This is equivalent to the original languages.

✗ Productive idiom: Again in this translation, like all the other options, Option 4 does not communicate the meaning "one with the character-istics of".

Information Structure

✓ The topical frame is set up in a similar way to the Greek: there is one particular human as the topical frame, and the comment being added about him is that *he has authority*.

⊙ Consider the first part of Option 4: "that only-one human has authority on earth to forgive sins". The emphasis here is equivalent to Greek: it is on the one person who has authority. However Option 4 includes the addition "and I am that human" (which was included to clarify the referent). This further addition may shift the focus subtly from the claim of *authority* itself, toward the *identity of Jesus as the one who has the authority*.
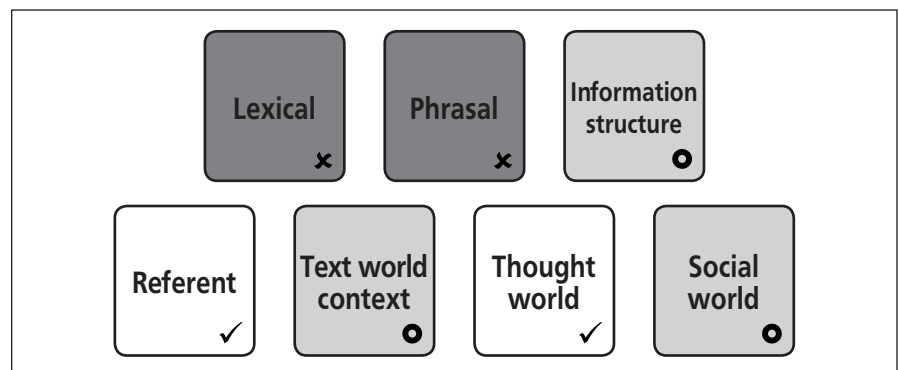
Referent

✓ Here the translators made the exegetical decision that it was clear to Jesus' hearers that he was talking about himself. Therefore, in order to make that point clear, they added in the extra sentence "and I am that human."[19]

Text world context

✓ Intertextual meaning and intratextual meaning can both be

Figure 8: Summary of Option 3—"I"

communicated with this rendering because the words "son-of-man" are used.

Thought world context
✓ Here also there is equivalence, since there are no strong negative or positive connotations with the term "son of man".

Social world context
◉ Here Jesus is challenging the assumptions of his audience. In this sense it is equivalent. In Greek, he is challenging the Jewish assumptions that *no man has authority to forgive sins*. In Angika he is challenging the assumption that sins can be forgiven in a variety of ways; instead he informs them that *one unique human can forgive sins.*

The Angika reader will not think that the phrase "son of man" is a title, but the phrase "only one human" does show that Jesus is a unique human, which is very close to the idea of a title. This rendering is at least partially equivalent for social world meaning.

Notice there are no crosses in this last translation. There is nothing about this rendering which communicates totally wrong meaning; it may not communicate the full meaning, but it is not leading the reader astray. This is in contrast to the first three options (even option 1) which, though more "literal", communicated wrong meaning. Those first three renderings would mislead Angika readers to think the passage

meant something vastly different than what it would have meant for first century readers, and different to what Jesus and Luke intended it to mean.

You can see clearly in the summary diagrams that none of these renderings has all ticks. With the translation of complex terms, it is very unusual to be able to communicate the meaning correctly in all dimensions. That is simply a reality of translation.

Which is the Most Important Dimension?
I have been asked, are these 'dimensions of meaning" of equal importance? I'd say that depends on two factors: the text and the readers.

It Depends on the Text
There will be some passages of scripture where different types of meaning will be deemed more important to communicate correctly in translation. For example, in the book of Hebrews, there are strong intertextual links; without understanding these, the meaning of the book is not easily understood. So a translator should make sure that these links can be seen, sometimes at the expense of other meanings which also might be legitimately communicated by the text.

It Depends on the Readers (and Translators)
More precisely, it depends on what dimensions of meaning the readers expect to have translated and what the translators have therefore

communicated to the readers. It is possible to translate a whole Bible by consistently giving priority to one or two elements of meaning. I believe that this is the reason for some of the differences in the variety of English Bibles available today. For example, a Bible might have a priority on communicating intertextual links (it will probably have a lot of footnotes, and a high level of concordance in terms). Another Bible might prioritise communicating the thought world of the original readership, and accordingly the translators might add clarifying words to show what the original readers thought about something.[20]

How Can These Dimensions Be Used?
I hope that this formulation of dimensions of meaning can be helpful to a number of people involved in biblical study.

First, I hope this can be helpful to people doing exegesis on a text. Often we don't know what questions to ask of a text, and once we have examined one aspect of what a text might mean, we move on to the next section. But if we realize how multidimensional meaning is, we might linger longer on each text, and ask more questions of it, and in doing so, discover the depth and richness of the meaning of God's word. These questions are suggested above in Figure 5, "Exegetical Questions for Dimensions of Meaning".

Secondly, it should be helpful to translators and consultants, those involved in actual translation work. I personally have found these dimensions helpful in systematically checking a translation, and making sure that, as much as possible, all the fullness and richness of meaning which was there in the original languages is also there in the translation.

Thirdly, I hope that this framework can be helpful for people discussing different translations and translation styles. Often I feel disappointed when I hear people talking about translations, when

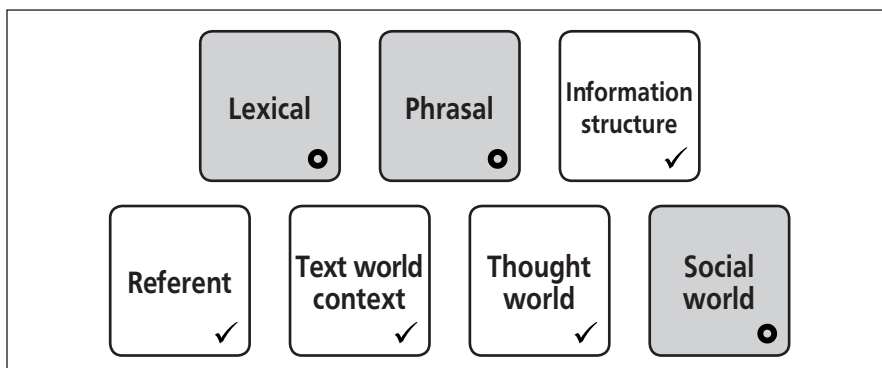*Figure 9: Summary of Option 4—"Only-one Son of Man"*

Figure 10: Comparison of translations of "Son of Man"

	Lexical	Phrasal	Information structure	Referent	Intertextual	Connotation	Interpersonal
"son of man"	✓	◐	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
"I, son of man"	◐	◐	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
"I"	✗	✗	◐	✓	◐	✓	◐
"Only one son of man"	◐	◐	✓	✓	✓	✓	◐

they are vociferously advocating one translation over another. Often, they're only considering one dimension of meaning, and ignoring others which might legitimately be communicated by the text.

Especially when we are discussing translations into languages we ourselves are not familiar with, we must moderate and dilute our opinions of the translation. At the end of the day, it's not important what the translation communicates to me, the consultant, or to anyone who doesn't speak that language. The important thing is what the translation communicates to the people it is translated for. When they understand the meaning of the text, in all of its dimensions, the translation is an accurate one. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] Diagram taken from the Mark D. Taylor and Mark Norton, *NLT Text & Product Preview* (Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2005), p. 14, though similar diagrams can be found in many books on translation. Abbreviations indicate the Contemporary English Version (CEV), English Standard Version (ESV), Holman Christian Standard Version (HCSB), King James Version (KJV), The Message (MSG), New American Bible /Catholic (NAB)) , New American Standard Version (NASB), New International Version (NIV), New Jerusalem Bible/Catholic (NJB), New King James Version (NKJV), New Living Translation (NLT), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), The Living Bible (TLB), Today's New International Version (TNIV)

[2] See for example, Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation* (Crossway Books, 2002) and his stated reasons for his obvious preference for the style of the ESV.

[3] Linguists will tell you that there is much more to be said about the lexical meaning of each of these words. None of the translations given in English here mean exactly what the Greek word mean, but it is precise enough for my purposes here.

[4] It is also possible that Jesus was speaking Aramaic and his words were translated in to Greek by Luke. See for example: Maurice Casey, *Solution to the "Son of Man" Problem* (T&T Clark Int'l, 2007).

[5] For more reading on the construction "let alone" see Charles Fillmore, Paul Kay, and Mary Catherine O'Connor, "Regularity and Idiomaticity in Grammatical Constuctions: the Case of Let Alone," *Language* 64, no. 3 (September 1998): 501-538.

[6] Or more precisely *huios* followed by a noun in the genitive.

[7] See Rick Brown, "Issues in Mission. Part II: Translating the Biblical Term 'Son(s) of God' in Muslim Contexts," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 22, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 136 for a longer list of Biblical examples where the construction "son of" is used productively.

[8] Steven E. Runge, *Lexham Discourse Greek New Testament* (Logos Bible Software, 2008); Simon B. Dik, *Theory of Functional Grammar, Part 1* (Foris Pubns USA, 1989).

[9] Steven E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis*, Bilingual. (Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2010)

[10] See Ernst R. Wendland, *Translating the Literature of Scripture* (SIL International, 2004); and Ernst R. Wendland, *LiFE-Style Translating: A Workbook for Bible Translators, Second Edition* (SIL International, 2011) for more on how to translate the meaning of the genre into the translated text.

[11] See Les Bruce, "Sense and Reference in Translation" (presented at the Bible Translation 2009 Conference, Dallas, TX, USA: GIAL and SIL, 2009) for more on this distinction.

[12] See I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke (New International Greek Testament Commentary)* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978).

[13] Sally Lloyd-Jones, *Jesus Storybook Bible Deluxe Edition* (Zonderkidz, 2009).

[14] F. F. Bruce, "The Background to the Son of Man sayings," in *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology presented to Donald Guthrie* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), p. 50-70; Darrell L. Bock, "The Son of Man in Luke 5:24," in *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 1 (1991): p. 109-121; Maurice Casey, *Solution to the "Son of Man" Problem (T&T Clark International, 2009)*; Delbert Burkett, *The Son of Man Debate: A History and Evaluation* (Cambridge University Press, 2000); R.K. Harrison, "The Son of Man," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (1951): 6-50.

[15] The "thought world" dimension of meaning is related to the intertextual meaning, because much of the worldview of first century Jewish people was formed by their knowledge of the Bible. (Meaning is always inter-connected.) But it is still helpful and productive for the translator and exegete to keep these two dimensions distinct.

[16] Warren Glover, Personal Communication. (October 18th, 2011, Dallas, TX USA)

[17] This is the version published in *The Way to Salvation: The Gospel according to St Luke, Angika Language* (Bible Society of India, Bangalore, 2011).
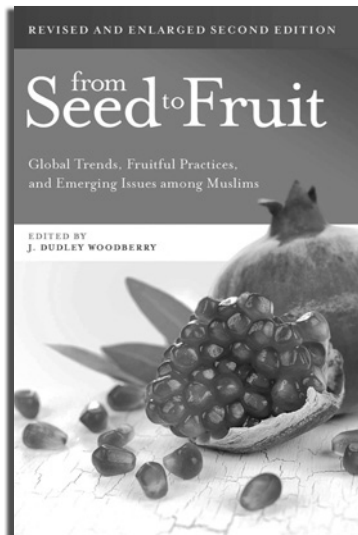
[18] What is translated into English twice in this sentence as "human" is literally "son of man."

[19] If they had decided instead that Jesus' reference to himself was not so clear, then the extra sentence could be omitted. They would then need to test with a speaker of the language to see what reference is understood.

[20] For example, the NLT translation of Luke 10:33 includes the word "despised" to show that Samaritans are not "people who do good" as many people think today, but that they were hated by the Jews.

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