I SPEAK BIBLE

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Category: Methodology

One of the occupational hazards of life as a Bible translator is having to answer well meaning people when they ask how many languages you speak. In my experience, people are generally disappointed when they realise I don't actually speak that many. My French is very good, I can just about get by in Kouya and that's just about it. Bible translators generally don't have time to learn lots of languages; translation is hard work and takes lots of time.

This excellent article from the commercial translation world illustrates this point beautifully:

> *We translators can spend decades of rigorous effort in the lead-up to our translation careers â€“ and certainlyÂ duringÂ such careers â€“ developing the crucial subject-matter expertise essential to the translation enterprise.*
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> *This process involves learning highly complex concepts in science, technology, philosophy, law, finance, business, music and dozens of other fields through immersion in the lab, lecture hall, classroom, production line, fabrication plant, trading floor or boardroom.*
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> *This prolonged effort is crucial to our ability to precisely convey all these concepts across language barriers.*
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> *But no matter how many fields we master as translators, awaiting us at that same cocktail party will be the eternal question that has been asked of translators since the Tower of Babel:*
>
> *â€œHow many languages do you speak?â€*
>
> *Itâ€™s a question that suggests an innocent, almost whimsical notion of translation as a low-stress career of light reflection, picked up effortlessly while flipping through phrase books and sipping sweet tea in the afternoon shade.*
>
> *The reality is rather more sobering. In my case, for example, Iâ€™d arrive at such parties after having worked out certain issues in my translation work such as the principles underlying optical excitation of Rayleigh waves by interband light absorption or coherent acoustic resistance to an electron-hole plasma or approaches to calculating the electronic structure of alloys.*
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> *So my response to this friendly question of â€œhow many languages do you speak?â€ would be a bit playful and would always be delivered with a smile:*
>
> *â€œI speak science.â€*

The challenge for the Bible translator is not so much to learn lots of exciting, exotic languages, but to get to grips with the text of the Bible so well that they are able to render it accurately and fluently into a new language. First and foremost, Bible translators must speak BIble.

Thanks to Ed LauberÂ for drawing my attention to this article on Twitter