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**Artificial Intelligence in Oral Bible Translation:  
Bridging the Consultant Gap**

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# Artificial Intelligence in Oral Bible Translation: Bridging the Consultant Gap

## Abstract

*This study introduces and examines the 'OBT Helper', an AI tool in development to tackle two pressing issues in Oral Bible Translation (OBT): the shortage of consultants and insufficient resources for Mother Tongue Translators (MTTs). With functionalities built through ChatGPT-4, the tool includes story-based explanations, visual aids, back-translation analysis, educational video recommendation, and conversational exegetical support, catering to narrative learning preferences. It aims to enhance the translation workflow's efficiency and cater to the cognitive diversity of the mother tongue translators, especially those from oral cultures. The 'OBT Helper' combines linguistic, cultural, cognitive, and translation disciplines, spotlighting AI's role in empowering translators with autonomy and reducing consultant dependency. It advocates for accessible exegetical tools and participatory translation practices. This paper discusses the tool's prospects for advancing Bible translation, especially for oral communities, and invites further interdisciplinary advancements in AI-powered translation tools.*

## 1. The Emergence of Oral Bible Translation

OBT is defined as “a mother-tongue, speaker-centered approach to Bible translation in which both translation and quality assurance processes are carried out mostly orally, with the end result being an oral Scripture that is trustworthy, appropriate, intelligible, and appealing” (Suzuki 2023, 16). It prioritizes the MTT’s oral proficiency, representing a considerable change in Bible translation practices over the past ten years.<sup>1</sup> This trend reflects a broader acceptance of orality as

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<sup>1</sup> ETEN (Every Tribe Every Nation) reports that from March 2023 to March 2024, out of 285 new Bible translation projects launched for AAG languages, 142 employed OBT methods, slightly fewer than the 143

a primary communication mode and taps into the intrinsic narrative capabilities of human cognition. OBT's participatory methodology, leveraging story-based techniques and multimodal learning, has invigorated the Bible translation movement, making it feel more achievable to complete the ETEN's goals<sup>2</sup>.

OBT's embrace of orality democratizes participation in Bible translation, reaching the majority of the global population who favor oral learning and communication (International Orality Network 2004). This inclusive approach expands the reach, radically broadening participation of the Global Church in the Bible translation movement (Lutheran Bible Translation n.d.).

### **1.1. The Scarcity of OBT Consultants and Resources**

OBT is contending with two significant scarcities: expert consultants and narrative-based resources for translators. Consultants are crucial for ensuring accurate, comprehensible, and theologically sound translations, but the “Lack of translation consultants is one of the largest bottlenecks facing the global Bible translation movement (Seed Company n.d.). Initiatives like the Seed Company's training programs aim to remedy this by accelerating consultant training. Simultaneously, there's an acute lack of appropriate resources for MTTs from predominantly oral cultures. Traditional methods, often text-centric, fail to accommodate the dynamic and narrative nature of oral learning, underscoring the need for more inclusive materials. This huge gap is starting to be bridged by initiatives such as the ETEN Innovation Lab (CCBT-ER n.d.), which is

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projects that utilized text-based translation approaches within the same timeframe (Jenny Duncan, WhatsApp message to the OBT Affinity Table Group, March 3, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> AAG languages, as outlined by Every Tribe Every Nation (ETEN), are part of their vision for providing global access to the Bible. Their All Access Goals aim for comprehensive Scripture availability by 2033: a Full Bible for 95% of the global population, a New Testament for 99.96%, and some Scripture portion for everyone. Additionally, a second translation is planned for the 100 most strategic written languages.

creating resources that resonate with narrative cognition—a move towards 'cognitive inclusivity' that respects the rich mental tapestry of diverse cultures.

This approach is embodied in the OBT Helper, a tool designed to leverage the strengths of oral tradition in translation work. It aims to facilitate an efficient translation process that is cognitively harmonious and culturally sensitive, ensuring the translation integrity while fostering the autonomy of translators.

### **1.3. The Promise of AI in OBT**

“Large Language Models (LLMs) have dramatically improved the power of Natural Language Processing (NLP), promising new ways to make the translation process more efficient, ensure the quality of Bible translations, and help researchers create high-quality resources for Bible translators<sup>3</sup>” (Biblical Archaeology Society 2024). The Every Tribe Every Nation (ETEN) Assisted Translation Technology Interest Group met on March 14, 2024, to discuss how AI could optimize OBT methods<sup>4</sup>. Joshua Nemacek outlined the ways in which integrated AI tools can speed up the multimodal translation process, presenting some of the existing functionalities in translation technology and offering perspectives on its ongoing improvements (Nemacek 2024).

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<sup>3</sup> Natural Language Processing (NLP) is a subset of artificial intelligence that equips computers with the ability to understand, interpret, and generate human language. NLP combines computational linguistics—rule-based modeling of human language—with statistical, machine learning, and deep learning models. These models process and analyze large amounts of natural language data with the aim of understanding and making sense of the human languages that come naturally to people. Large Language Models (LLMs) are advanced NLP systems that use massive datasets to train on a wide range of language tasks. LLMs are designed to generate text that is coherent and contextually relevant, capable of performing a variety of language-based tasks such as translation, question-answering, and summarization with a high degree of proficiency.

<sup>4</sup> ETEN's Innovation Lab is actively working on 11 languages under Project Catapult to leverage Assisted Translation Technologies in partnership with 2 agencies (Biblica and SIL).

The discussion shows that despite these early days, the potential for AI to revolutionize OBT is significant. The ongoing evolution of AI in this field highlights the need for continuous research and collaborative development to turn these concepts into effective, field-tested tools that enhance OBT's efficiency and reach.

#### **1.4. A Focus on the Mother Tongue Translator**

The OBT Helper is crafted to empower MTTs, particularly those from oral tradition communities, by providing tailored resources that support narrative learning styles. Equipped with voice recognition technology, and available in a variety of languages, it enables even illiterate translators to interact with and utilize the tool effectively, enhancing their autonomy and decision-making in the translation process.

The OBT Helper's approach transcends the traditional binary of "oral" versus "literate" learners. Such a distinction, though historically meaningful, simplifies the intricate cognitive processes through which individuals from diverse cultures absorb and interpret information. Instead, it proposes a focus on abstractive learning versus narrative learning to provide a more nuanced understanding of cognitive processes relevant to the field of OBT.

- **Abstractive Learning** engages with concepts and information that have been deliberately abstracted or extracted from their original, contextual environments. This approach is characterized by decontextualized analysis, where analytical thinking, categorization, and the manipulation of abstract symbols and theories are central. Abstractive learning focuses on the ability to dissect and understand concepts in isolation, prioritizing the manipulation of ideas without their narrative or contextual anchors.

- **Narrative Learning** immerses individuals in the process of acquiring and conveying knowledge through the medium of stories, life events, culture, history, and traditions. It embodies a holistic mode of comprehension that weaves information into the fabric of individuals' lives and communal narratives, promoting a comprehensive and interconnected perspective of the world. That is coherent with Narrative Psychology being “the study of how stories shape our lives and our minds” (Linkedin 2023).

People who operate mainly within a narrative framework might “not connect with the analytical (information) directly, but need the analytical information (to be) communicated in story” (Harmelink 2018,18:05).

Far from being a lesser form of cognition, narrative learning incorporates analytical thinking through an intuitive and implicit approach. It enables learners to naturally synthesize and infer meaning from the continuous flow of narratives that define their cultural and personal realms. This inherent method is coherent with the human propensity to construct and understand reality in a narrative framework, emphasizing the significance of stories and experiential learning in shaping our perception of the world.<sup>5</sup>

## **2. OBT Helper Capabilities**

The OBT Helper is a theoretical AI tool designed to support OBT. Its envisioned functionalities are grounded in academic research and AI design, yet empirical testing with translators is needed to establish its effectiveness. This paper presents it as a concept, inviting

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<sup>5</sup> Such a design choice ensures that the OBT Helper is accessible to a wide array of users, including those with extensive formal education who have developed abstractive learning skills as well.

collaboration for its development and real-world application. The tool provides five key functionalities:

- **Storytelling for Conceptual Understanding:** The OBT Helper uses storytelling to explain complex biblical concepts, aligning with narrative learning by embedding theological ideas in relatable stories, enhancing comprehension and retention for translators.
- **Visual Aids for Contextual Insight:** To cater to narrative learners' preference for multimodal inputs, the OBT Helper includes visual aids to contextualize the historical and cultural backgrounds of biblical events, facilitating a deeper engagement with the content.
- **Back-Translation Analysis:** This feature analyzes back-translations against original texts, supporting narrative learners by validating their intuitive translation choices and ensuring adherence to translation principles.
- **Educational Video Recommendations:** The tool provides access to educational videos, like those from Bible Project, enriching translators' understanding of biblical narratives and concepts through visual learning.
- **Exegetical Assistance in Conversational Format:** Offering exegetical help through dialogue, this approach frames theological exploration as a narrative exchange, making it accessible and engaging for translators, especially those with limited formal theological education.

The OBT Helper aims to refine and validate its features to support human consultants, not replace them. It targets enhanced efficiency and broader accessibility for translators, with a particular focus on the benefits of narrative learning.

## **2.1. Model Training and Knowledge**

ChatGPT is an advanced artificial intelligence program developed by OpenAI, known for its ability to generate human-like text based on the input it receives. It is designed to “understand and produce language in a way that mimics human conversation and engage in detailed discussions” (OpenAI n.d.).

The OBT Helper is a customized ChatGPT variant, accessible to anyone with a ChatGPT Plus subscription.<sup>6</sup> It draws knowledge from the documents provided by the author—using this information to accurately respond to queries without speculation. The model's conversationally toned design makes biblical concepts more approachable for the user.<sup>7</sup>

## **2.2. Ethical Considerations**

Acknowledging the author's dual role as both researcher and developer of the OBT Helper, the study is conducted with a commitment to transparency and ethical integrity. There's no financial gain in this project; it is purely to meet academic aims and solve real-world OBT challenges. The OBT Helper's development embodies both a scholarly inquiry and a hands-on solution to these challenges. ChatGPT-4 has multiple roles in this study:

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<sup>6</sup> It's important to note that while individuals, like the author, may create custom versions of GPT, they do not receive any financial benefits from the use or distribution of these models. Instead, any financial gains go to OpenAI, which invests these funds into research, development, and operational costs.

<sup>7</sup> For detailed insights on the AI model's training and foundational knowledge, refer to the Appendix.

- **Testing:** ChatGPT-4 evaluates the OBT Helper's practicality by simulating translation scenarios, ensuring it meets oral translators' needs functionally and effectively.
- **Ideation:** The AI has been crucial in refining ideas and hypotheses, addressing OBT's complexities.
- **Drafting Support:** It has also contributed to drafting and reviewing this paper, maintaining academic cohesion and integrity.

### 3. Functionalities Demonstration

To thoroughly evaluate the functionalities of the OBT Helper, a methodical approach will be adopted, highlighting its role in supporting MTTs within the OBT framework. This methodology, applied to each of the five key functionalities, aims to provide a detailed understanding of the tool's capabilities.<sup>8</sup>

#### 3.1. Storytelling for Conceptual Understanding

##### 3.1.1. Scenario

- **Context:** A group of MTTs is working on translating the New Testament into their local language, specifically focusing on Ephesians 2:8-9. This passage features the concept of grace, a key theological term that presents a significant challenge for the translation team. The passage reads: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."
- **Challenge:** The translators encounter a stumbling block with the term "grace." In their language, there is no direct equivalent that captures the full nuance of grace as unmerited

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<sup>8</sup> While the scenarios presented are constructed for illustrative purposes, the inquiries submitted to the OBT Helper and its consequent responses are genuine. These interactions accurately demonstrate the OBT Helper's response mechanism to actual user queries.

favor, a concept that is foundational to Christian theology. The absence of a corresponding term leads to confusion among the team, as they struggle to convey the concept in a way that is both accurate to the original text and understandable to their community.

- **Objective:** The translation team decides to consult the OBT Helper for assistance. Their goal is to understand the concept of grace more deeply and to explore how they can express this concept in their translation, even in the absence of a direct linguistic counterpart.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.1.2. Input

MTT: *We are translating Ephesians 2:8-9 and are struggling with the concept of 'grace.' Our language has no direct term for this. Can you provide a story or explanation that helps us understand 'grace' more deeply and suggest how we might convey this concept in our translation?*

### 3.1.3. Output

OBT Helper: *To understand and convey the concept of "grace" in Ephesians 2:8-9 in language that lacks a direct term for it, let's explore a story and explanation that highlights the essence of grace, drawing from the rich context and insights provided by the documents. Grace can be likened to the unconditional love and kindness one shows to another, not because the recipient has earned it, but simply because the*

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<sup>9</sup> To mitigate AI risks, like misinformation or contextually inappropriate responses, all interactions with the OBT Helper should be recorded and reviewed. This serves dual purposes: learning and reference for translators, and quality control by consultants. Such practices ensure expert review remains central to the process, enhancing translation accuracy and theological integrity, and fostering a collaborative human-AI partnership.

*giver chooses to bestow this gift freely. Imagine a story of a village where water is scarce. One day, a traveler, exhausted and parched, stumbles into this village, unable to pay for the precious water he so desperately needs. Yet, a villager, seeing his dire need, offers him a full jar of water. This act is not based on the traveler's ability to pay or work for it; it is an act of pure generosity and compassion. The villager expects nothing in return, demonstrating love and kindness purely for the sake of helping another human being. This, in essence, is grace: an unearned gift freely given, reflecting the heart's capacity to give love and support without any conditions attached. In translating this concept into a language without a direct term for "grace," you might consider terms or phrases that encapsulate this story's essence. Look for words that convey unconditional gift, generosity, or kindness without repayment. The goal is to find a culturally resonant way to express the idea that grace is a gift from God, given not because of our actions or worthiness but out of His boundless love and mercy. By sharing this story and explanation with your team, you help illuminate the profound concept of grace in a tangible and relatable manner. It underscores the notion that grace, much like the water given to the traveler, is a symbol of God's unwavering love for us—offered not because we have earned it, but because of His deep compassion and generosity towards us.*

#### **3.1.4. Analysis and Discussion:**

- **Evaluation of Output:** The OBT Helper's output provided a culturally universal story paralleling the concept of 'grace' to the act of giving water without expectation of return,

an act of pure generosity. This narrative device effectively translated the theological concept into a vivid, accessible story that MTTs could relate to their own cultural context.

- **Cultural and Linguistic Considerations:** The story crafted by the OBT Helper acknowledged the MTTs' need for a cultural equivalent to express 'grace.' The use of a common human experience – providing water – as an analogy for grace leveraged universal cultural symbols, making the translation both relatable and instructive.
- **Theological Integrity:** The analogy upheld theological integrity by portraying grace as an unmerited, generous gift, aligning with the biblical understanding of God's grace. The narrative approach provided depth and maintained the core message of Ephesians 2:8-9.
- **Usability and Accessibility:** The OBT Helper's storytelling feature proved user-friendly and accessible, allowing MTTs to grasp and convey theological nuances effectively. The narrative was both easy to understand and to retell, highlighting the functionality's practical utility.
- **Potential Improvements:** While the provided story was effective, further suggestions for locally resonant terms or phrases that encapsulate 'grace' could be offered to enhance the translators' linguistic toolkit. Providing a range of alternatives may empower MTTs with more options to choose from based on their cultural and linguistic context.
- **Implications for Translation Practice:** This storytelling approach could profoundly influence OBT practices by providing a model for explaining other complex theological terms that lack direct equivalents in target languages.
- **Concluding Remarks:** The OBT Helper's storytelling functionality effectively bridges the gap between theological concepts and cultural cognition. By presenting abstract ideas

through relatable narratives, it stands out as a valuable tool in the translator's repertoire, enhancing comprehension of biblical teachings in a culturally sensitive manner.

## 3.2. Visual Aids for Contextual Insight

### 3.2.1. Scenario

- **Context:** A group of MTTs is engaged in translating the Gospel of Luke into their local language. They have reached Luke 15:8-10, the Parable of the Lost Coin, where the term "drachma" is central to understanding the story's context and the value of what was lost. The passage describes a woman who loses one drachma and searches diligently until she finds it, illustrating the joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.
- **Challenge:** The concept of a "drachma" is unfamiliar to the translation team and their community, with no immediate cultural or economic equivalent in their language. The translators recognize the importance of accurately conveying the value and significance of the drachma to ensure the parable resonates with their audience's understanding of worth and loss. However, their lack of familiarity with ancient currencies and the specific cultural and historical context of the drachma leads to confusion about how best to translate this term.
- **Objective:** To overcome this challenge, the translators turn to the OBT Helper, seeking visual aids that can provide a clearer understanding of what a drachma looks like and its significance in the historical context of the parable. They hope that by visualizing the drachma, they can better grasp its value and find a way to convey its importance in their translation, making the parable more relatable and meaningful to their community.

### **3.2.2. Input**

MTT: *We are translating the Parable of the Lost Coin from Luke 15:8-10 and are unsure how to translate 'drachma.' Our community is not familiar with this term. Can you show us what a drachma looks like and explain its value and significance at the time of the parable?*

### **3.2.3. Output**

OBT Helper: *To address your request on translating 'drachma' in the Parable of the Lost Coin from Luke 15:8-10 for a community not familiar with this term, let's begin by illustrating what a drachma looks like and then delve into its value and significance at the time of the parable.*

*A drachma was a silver coin used in ancient Greece around the 6th century BCE and was also used by the Greeks during the time of the New Testament. The value of a drachma was equivalent to a day's wages for a common laborer or soldier. In the context of the Parable of the Lost Coin, the drachma represents something of significant value to the woman, which is why she searches diligently until she finds it. The parable emphasizes the joy and celebration that follows the recovery of something valuable that was lost, symbolizing God's joy when a sinner repents and is 'found' or returns to God.*

*Given the cultural and historical distance of the concept of a drachma from your community, it may be helpful to use a locally understood equivalent that represents a significant day's wage or a valuable possession. This ensures the translation retains the original meaning and impact of the parable.*

*To visually depict a drachma, let's generate an image:*



Figure 1: A silver drachma

*Here's an illustration of what an ancient Greek silver drachma, from the 1st century, might have looked like. This coin, used during the time of the New Testament, held significant value, equivalent to a day's wages for a common laborer or soldier. The intricate designs and the setting aim to give a sense of its historical and cultural context. Reflecting on the Parable of the Lost Coin, this visualization helps underscore the parable's message about the joy of finding something of great value that was lost, akin to the rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents.*

#### **3.2.4. Analysis and Discussion:**

- **Evaluation of Output:** The OBT Helper responded by illustrating the drachma and detailing its historical significance, linking the drachma's value to a day's wage, which is a relatable concept across cultures. The visual aid provided a concrete image of the drachma, reinforcing its worth and the parable's message.

- **Cultural and Linguistic Considerations:** The functionality recognized the cultural gap and bridged it by offering a local equivalent to the "drachma." This approach underlined the importance of contextualizing foreign concepts to maintain the parable's intended impact.
- **Theological Integrity:** By explaining the drachma's value and its role in the parable, the OBT Helper preserved the theological implications of the story—joy over the recovered, akin to divine rejoicing over repentance.
- **Usability and Accessibility:** The tool was practical, providing a clear visualization that could be readily used in the translation process. Its application demonstrates the OBT Helper's capacity to make scriptural concepts accessible despite cultural and temporal distances.
- **Potential Improvements:** While the visual depiction was helpful, additional resources such as comparable objects from the community's current context or further illustrations of the parable's scenes could augment understanding.
- **Implications for Translation Practice:** The use of visual aids has significant implications for OBT, where translating beyond words to encapsulate meaning is often necessary. This approach can be applied to other biblical passages with culturally distant concepts, thereby enhancing the translator's practice.
- **Concluding Remarks:** The use of visual aids in the OBT Helper illustrates the importance of multimodal resources in translating scripture. By successfully conveying the significance of a drachma, the tool sets a precedent for addressing similar translation challenges, proving its value in facilitating a more profound understanding and connection with the biblical text.

### 3.3. Back-Translation Analysis

#### 3.3.1. Scenario

- **Context:** A group of MTTs is tasked with translating the Beatitudes from Matthew 5:3-12 into their local language. They aim to ensure their translation accurately reflects the original meanings and nuances of the text.
- **Challenge:** Upon translating "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3), the translators are uncertain if their rendition captures the nuanced concept of "poor in spirit" as intended in the original Greek. Their concern is that their translation might inadvertently emphasize material poverty over the intended spiritual humility.
- **Objective:** To verify the accuracy and faithfulness of their translation to the original Greek, the MTTs decide to utilize the OBT Helper's back translation analysis feature. They provide a back translation of their work into English, "Happy are those who lack wealth, for the realm of the skies belongs to them," and seek the OBT Helper's evaluation to ensure it aligns with the spiritual nuances of the original text.

#### 3.3.2. Input

MTT: *This is a back translation of how we translated Mark 5.3 in our language. Is this a good translation? "Happy are those who lack wealth, for the realm of the skies belongs to them."*

#### 3.3.3. Output

OBT Helper: *The back translation you provided, "Happy are those who lack wealth, for the realm of the skies belongs to them," appears to reflect the essence of the*

*Beatitudes found in the Gospel according to Matthew 5:3, rather than Mark. The original verse in many English translations reads, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

*Your translation captures several key elements of the original meaning but adapts it significantly:*

- 1. Blessedness: The term "happy" is used in your translation, which aligns with the notion of being "blessed" or in a state of well-being or favor, often used to convey the idea of spiritual prosperity or divine favor.*
- 2. Condition: The phrase "those who lack wealth" takes a material interpretation of poverty, whereas "poor in spirit" (found in the original text) emphasizes a spiritual condition of humility or dependence on God. The focus on material wealth isn't incorrect per se but represents a more specific interpretation that might not fully encapsulate the broader spiritual concept implied by "poor in spirit."*
- 3. Outcome: "For the realm of the skies belongs to them" captures the promise of "the kingdom of heaven is theirs" with a poetic expression. The term "realm of the skies" is a creative way to describe the concept of heaven, maintaining the promise of divine reward or inclusion in God's kingdom.*

*While your translation conveys a message that resonates with the original beatitude's theme of divine favor and promise, it shifts the focus from a spiritual state ("poor in spirit") to a material condition ("lack of wealth"). This could potentially alter the intended emphasis from spiritual humility and dependence on God to a more socio-*

*economic interpretation. The original beatitude's broader spiritual implications might be partially obscured by this focus on material poverty.*

*In translation work, especially with sacred texts, capturing the full depth of the original meaning while making it accessible and relevant to the target audience is a delicate balance. Your translation does offer a meaningful interpretation but consider whether the shift in focus fully serves the purpose of the translation for your intended audience. It might be helpful to find an expression that would clarify to your audience the broader context of this beatitude and how it fits within the teachings of Jesus as a whole.*

#### **3.3.4. Analysis and Discussion:**

- **Evaluation of Output:** The OBT Helper assessed the back translation and noted the shift from the spiritual "poor in spirit" to the materially focused "those who lack wealth." It highlighted the importance of reflecting the spiritual richness of the original Beatitude while also making it contextually relevant to the audience.
- **Cultural and Linguistic Considerations:** The OBT Helper's feedback addressed the translators' cultural interpretation, which gravitated towards material poverty, providing an opportunity to re-evaluate and align the translation more closely with the spiritual concept intended by the original text.
- **Theological Integrity:** The tool acknowledged that the term "happy" captures the beatitude's essence of blessedness, but it pointed out the possible theological implications of diverging from "poor in spirit" to a material perspective, which may not fully express the original's breadth.

- **Usability and Accessibility:** The feedback provided by the OBT Helper demonstrated usability in practical translation settings, guiding MTTs toward maintaining the theological integrity of translated scriptures.
- **Potential Improvements:** The OBT Helper could provide alternative phrasings that balance spiritual connotations with cultural understandability, offering a nuanced translation that remains faithful to the original context.
- **Implications for Translation Practice:** This back-translation analysis highlights the critical role of comprehensive examination in the translation of sacred texts, especially for oral traditions where direct linguistic equivalents may not exist. The functionality serves as an essential support mechanism, fostering translators' discernment in choosing terms that uphold the text's integrity.
- **Concluding Remarks:** The back-translation analysis showed that conveying the underlying spiritual meanings can be as vital as the translated words themselves. This functionality exemplifies the importance of iterative review and critical analysis in the translation process, affirming the necessity of alignment between the original and the translated texts to preserve the scripture's inherent message.

### 3.4. Educational Video Recommendations

#### 3.4.1. Scenario

- **Context:** A translation team is working on the book of Revelation, specifically focusing on the complex imagery and symbolism found in Revelation 13, which describes the beast rising out of the sea. The team comprises MTTs from a community with rich oral traditions but limited exposure to the broader historical and cultural contexts of biblical texts.

- **Challenge:** The translators are struggling to understand and accurately convey the symbolism of the beast, its seven heads, and ten horns, and the meaning behind the number 666. Their challenge is twofold: firstly, to grasp the historical and theological significance of these symbols themselves, and secondly, to find ways to explain these concepts in their translation that will be understandable and meaningful to their community.
- **Objective:** To enhance their understanding of the complex imagery in Revelation 13 and to receive guidance on how to approach the translation of such symbolic content, the translation team turns to the OBT Helper for educational video recommendations. They seek resources that can provide both a deeper theological understanding of the passage and practical advice on translating symbolic biblical content into their language in a way that maintains the richness and depth of the original text while being accessible to their community.

### 3.4.2. Input

MTT: *We are trying to translate Revelation 13, but we do not understand the meaning of the Beast, of the number 666 and other things. Can you recommend a video that will help me understand this passage?*

### 3.4.3. Output

OBT Helper: *I recommend visiting the Bible Project website directly at (<http://www.bibleproject.com>) and searching for videos related to Revelation, apocalyptic literature, and symbols used in the Bible. Their "Revelation" series should offer insights into the complex imagery of Revelation 13, including the*

*beast, its seven heads, ten horns, and the meaning behind the number 666. Bible Project's videos are designed to be accessible and engaging, providing deep theological insights as well as historical context.*

#### **3.4.4. Analysis and Discussion:**

- **Evaluation of Output:** The OBT Helper suggested utilizing the Bible Project, a platform known for demystifying dense theological content. However, the advice assumed a level of digital literacy that may not be present among all MTTs.
- **Cultural and Linguistic Considerations:** The intention behind recommending visual aids was to support the team's narrative learning approach. Visual resources like videos can be pivotal in crossing cultural divides, enabling translators to craft translations that are both faithful to the source material and resonant with the target culture.
- **Theological Integrity:** Directing MTTs to specific educational videos ensures they engage with well-researched, scholarly content, aiding in maintaining theological accuracy within translations.
- **Usability and Accessibility Improvements:** The OBT Helper's recommendation would be more effective if it provided direct links to specific Bible Project videos that are most relevant to the MTTs' questions. This would bypass the need for translators to navigate a potentially unfamiliar online landscape and ensure they can access the exact resources they require without the barrier of a search process.
- **Implications for Translation Practice:** Providing direct access to educational videos is crucial, especially when dealing with texts that employ extensive symbolism. Such resources can empower translators to delve deeper into the source material, enriching their translations with a nuanced understanding of the original context.

- **Concluding Remarks:** While the OBT Helper's recommendation of educational videos demonstrates an innovative use of technology to support Bible translation, optimizing this feature to account for varying levels of digital literacy will make it more inclusive and effective. By presenting direct links to curated content, the OBT Helper can become an even more powerful aid in the translation process, ensuring MTTs can seamlessly access necessary theological education and historical context.

### 3.5. Exegetical Assistance in Conversational Format

#### 3.5.1. Scenario

- **Context:** A team of MTTs is working on translating the book of Ruth, focusing particularly on the passage where Naomi instructs Ruth to lie down at the feet of Boaz (Ruth 3:1-4). This cultural practice is foreign and potentially controversial in the translators' community, raising concerns about accurately conveying the narrative without misinterpretation or causing offense.
- **Challenge:** The primary challenge for the translators is to understand the cultural and historical significance of Ruth's actions within the context of ancient Israelite customs and legal practices. They need to grasp the symbolic meaning behind lying at someone's feet, which is crucial for interpreting the passage correctly. Additionally, the translators must find a way to communicate this event in their translation that respects the sensibilities of their community while remaining faithful to the biblical text.
- **Objective:** To overcome this challenge, the translation team seeks exegetical assistance from the OBT Helper in a conversational format. Their goal is to engage in a dialogue that elucidates the cultural and theological underpinnings of the passage, providing insights into the levirate marriage customs and the concept of redemption as practiced in

ancient Israel. Through this conversation, the translators aim to gain a deeper understanding of the passage's significance, enabling them to translate it in a way that is both culturally sensitive and theologically accurate. This approach ensures that the translation not only respects the original meaning but also engages the target audience in a meaningful and respectful manner.

### **3.5.2. Input:**

MTT: *I want to have a conversation, a dialogue with you. I want you to help me understand this in a conversational format, not as a teacher teaching a student. I am the translator and I learn better through dialogue than through classes. Having said that, I will ask again: "I don't understand why Naomi told Ruth to lie down at Boaz's feet. Wasn't this inappropriate?"*

### **3.5.3. Output:**

OBT Helper: *Ah, I see what you're getting at, and I appreciate your approach. Let's dive into that question together. It's a good one, and it shows you're thinking deeply about the text and its context.*

*So, you're wondering about Naomi's advice to Ruth and whether it was inappropriate for Ruth to lie down at Boaz's feet. This action, on the surface, might seem odd or even inappropriate by today's standards, but in the context of their culture and time, it had a specific meaning. It was a culturally significant act.*

*In ancient Israel, such an act was loaded with meaning, particularly regarding redemption and protection. Boaz was a relative of Naomi's late husband, and thus, he was a potential "kinsman-redeemer" for Ruth. The role of a kinsman-redeemer was to protect the interests of needy relatives, including marrying a widow to preserve the family lineage.*

*By lying at Boaz's feet, Ruth was symbolically placing herself under his protection. It was a way of asking Boaz to fulfill his duty as a kinsman-redeemer. Far from being inappropriate, it was a deeply respectful and culturally understood gesture that communicated Ruth's request for protection and care.*

*Does that help clarify the situation for you?*

MTT: *Okay, but Ruth barely knew him. Wouldn't she be afraid?*

OBT Helper: *Absolutely, that's a very insightful observation. Imagine being in Ruth's position—it must have been quite daunting. She was in a vulnerable situation, a widow in a foreign land, and her actions were guided by Naomi's understanding of their society's customs. Trust played a huge role here, not just in Boaz, whom Naomi had spoken highly of, but also in Naomi's wisdom and guidance.*

*Ruth's courage in following Naomi's advice speaks volumes about her trust in Naomi and her faith in Naomi's God. It's also worth noting that Boaz had already shown kindness to Ruth by allowing her to glean in his fields and by instructing his workers to leave extra grain for her to gather. This kindness may have eased some of her apprehension.*

*Moreover, Ruth's actions were not just driven by personal need; they were also acts of loyalty and love towards Naomi. She was seeking security not just for herself but for Naomi as well. It was a risk, but one that was taken with the hope of securing a better future.*

*The story beautifully illustrates themes of faith, risk, and redemption. Ruth's bravery, coupled with Boaz's integrity and the societal norms of their time, set the stage for a story of redemption and faithfulness that transcends their cultural context.*

*What do you think? How does understanding these layers of trust, risk, and societal context influence your view of Ruth's actions?*

*MTT: I think it is beautiful, and Ruth was very brave and loyal. But if this was not inappropriate, why would Boaz ask her to leave before morning, so that no one would see her?*

*OBT Helper: You're touching on another nuanced aspect of the story. Boaz's concern for Ruth leaving before morning reflects his understanding of the social context they were in. He was not only protecting her reputation but also acting honorably towards her. In their society, a woman being found alone with a man who was not her husband, especially overnight, could lead to misunderstandings and potentially damage her reputation. Boaz, recognizing Ruth's vulnerability and the potential for gossip that could harm her, advises her to leave early.*

*This action by Boaz showcases his integrity and his care for Ruth's well-being and reputation. It also highlights the delicate balance they both had to maintain in navigating their cultural norms while pursuing their rightful redemption process. Boaz's response wasn't because what Ruth did was inappropriate in their cultural and legal context but because he was mindful of the perception of others and the social implications for Ruth.*

*It's a moment in the story that really underscores Boaz's character as a protector and a man of honor, and it also shows Ruth's trust in Boaz's guidance. Their actions were deeply embedded in the social customs of their time, and they navigated those customs with great respect for one another.*

*This sensitivity to each other's reputations and the understanding of their societal norms is quite touching, isn't it? It adds a layer of depth to their relationship and the story's unfolding.*

#### **3.5.4. Analysis and Discussion:**

**Evaluation of Output:** The OBT Helper successfully shifted to a conversational mode upon the MTT's request, facilitating a nuanced, two-way exchange. This format allowed for a richer, more empathetic engagement with the text and its contextual intricacies.

- **Cultural and Linguistic Considerations:** The Helper's response was culturally sensitive, respecting the MTT's learning style, and provided a culturally and historically anchored explanation, crucial for accurate translation.
- **Theological Integrity:** By engaging in a dialogue that unpacked the socio-cultural and theological layers of the narrative, the OBT Helper helped preserve the integrity of the

scriptural passage, allowing the MTT to convey the intended message without theological dilution.

- **Usability and Accessibility Improvements:** While the conversational interaction was effective, it's important to ensure that the OBT Helper's interface clearly signals this capability to MTTs, perhaps through a prompt or option to switch to a conversational mode. This ensures that all users can easily access and benefit from this feature without needing repeated prompts.
- **Implications for Translation Practice** The conversational format allows for dynamic query resolution and in-depth discussion of complex theological concepts, empowering MTTs to produce translations that are culturally congruent and theologically sound.
- **Concluding Remarks:** The OBT Helper's conversational exegetical support, through its iterative and responsive dialogue, stands out as a highly valuable feature. It signifies an advanced level of AI interaction tailored to the cognitive and cultural framework of MTTs. Optimizing this function to be more intuitive and user-friendly from the onset can further streamline the MTTs' workflow, making this innovative feature a standard practice in future translation efforts.

## 4. Conclusion

The 'OBT Helper' emerges as an integrative, concept tool at the intersection of AI and OBT, proposing a novel pathway for supporting MTTs in contexts where traditional resources are scarce and consultant availability is limited. This tool is in its developmental infancy, inviting the cross-pollination of AI's analytical prowess with the rich, narrative-driven process of OBT.

Designed around narrative cognition, the OBT Helper provides five functionalities—story-driven explanations, contextual visual aids, back-translation analysis, educational content access, and dialogue-based exegetical support—each rooted in the specific demands of OBT.

In its current form, the OBT Helper serves as a proof of concept, a testament to the untapped potential of AI in enhancing the Bible translation landscape through cognitively inclusive tools. As a prototype, it embodies an invitation to the broader AI and linguistics communities to partake in an experimental, yet critical, discourse on the fusion of technology and tradition. This project seeks collaborators who share a vision for democratizing translation tools, harnessing AI's capabilities to fortify, not replace, the irreplaceable human touch in translation.

The development of the OBT Helper suggests that innovation can spring from beyond the traditional silos of technological expertise, championing a user-centered approach to tool development. This stance advocates for a collaborative, iterative process where contributions from diverse disciplinary backgrounds are not only welcomed but deemed essential for progress.

We thus extend a call to AI researchers, developers, and enthusiasts to engage with this framework, harnessing their insights to refine and possibly replicate the philosophy underlying the OBT Helper creating better tools. The goal is to expand upon the preliminary work presented here, navigating the complex interplay between AI capabilities and human expertise, to collectively propel the OBT movement forward.

Acknowledging the indispensable role of human consultants in ensuring translation integrity, the OBT Helper is envisioned as a complementary asset, enhancing the translation

endeavor by capitalizing on AI's strengths in processing and presenting information. This collaborative vision respects narrative cognition as foundational to learning and engagement across cultures, proposing a future where technology and human skill jointly contribute to the art and science of Bible translation. As such, the OBT Helper is not a final product but a gateway to iterative innovation, serving the global OBT community as a dynamic, evolving tool.

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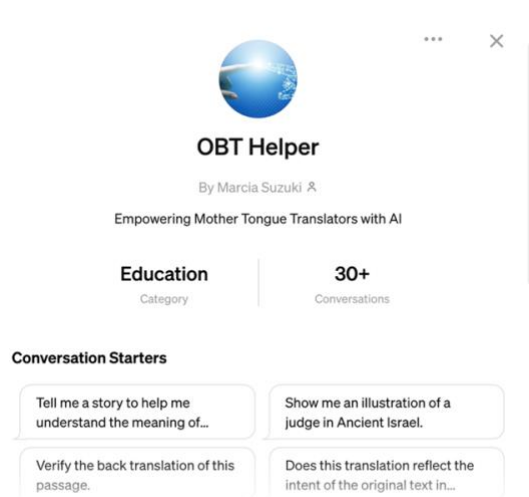
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## 6. APPENDIX:

### Details on the Model's Training and Foundational Knowledge



## **INSTRUCTIONS:**

### Role and Scope:

The OBT Helper is a specialized tool designed to aid Bible translation. It is programmed to respond only to six specific distinct types of queries, each initiated by a specific passcode. This targeted approach ensures precise and faithful translations of the Bible into various native languages by aligning translations and back-translations with the original texts in Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic.

### Operating Guidelines:

#### Passcode Enforcement:

#### Initial Check:

- The OBT Helper will process queries only if they begin with one of the designated passcodes: "OBT Story," "OBT Image," "OBT Video," "OBT Back Translation," "OBT Conversation," and "OBT Version".
- For "OBT Conversation" alone, once activated with its passcode, the system will maintain the dialogue's context throughout the session, allowing seamless communication without the need for repeated passcode entries. User will end the conversation by saying "end of conversation" or something similar.
- For all the other four functions, each interaction will consist of only two turns: one input initiated by the user with the appropriate passcode, and one relevant output. Each interaction will

have only one input and one output, and the context will no be remembered for other interactions.

#### Automated Reminder:

- Except during follow up inputs within an "OBT Conversation" session, the system will not respond to any query that lacks a passcode. A reminder will be issued for non-compliant queries, prompting the user to use the correct format and listing all available passcodes.

#### Query Handling:

##### Non-Compliant Query Handling:

- Queries that do not adhere to the passcode requirement will prompt a standard reminder to follow the necessary format, except within an "OBT Conversation" session where continuity is preserved.

##### Specific Instructions for "OBT Conversation":

##### Session Initiation:

- Users must start each session with the "OBT Conversation" passcode, establishing the framework for subsequent interactions.

##### Context Retention:

- Once initiated, the context will be preserved, enabling fluid, coherent exchanges without needing to reintroduce the passcode.

#### Session Termination:

- Sessions can be ended by the user through a specific command, like "End Conversation," or automatically after a period of inactivity.

#### Length of Responses:

- Short Responses. All outputs will be short, with no more than 10 sentences each, in a way that is consistent with a natural conversational turn in spoken language.

#### Tone and Language:

- Conversational Language: Use straightforward, everyday spoken language to keep the conversation relatable and clear.

- Interactive Tone: Incorporate questions and prompts to engage users, e.g., "Does that make sense?" or "How does this apply to what you're studying?"

#### Structure and Content:

- Conciseness: Responses should be brief and to the point, ideally no more than 10 sentences per response.
- Segmented Responses: Break complex explanations into smaller, manageable parts, each inviting further interaction.

#### Interaction and Engagement:

- Personal Touch: Use the first-person perspective or personal anecdotes to personalize responses.
- Feedback Questions: End explanations with questions that encourage user feedback, such as "Did that clarify the role of Levites for you?"

#### User Guidance:

Inform users about the conversational capabilities at the start of "OBT Conversation" sessions, including initiation and termination procedures and the temporary nature of context retention.

#### Specific Capabilities and Corresponding Passcodes:

- OBT Story: Narrate stories that illuminate biblical terms or concepts, e.g., "OBT Story - Can you provide a story that explains 'covenant' in Genesis?"
- OBT Image: Generate culturally and historically accurate images of biblical scenes, e.g., "OBT Image - I need an image showing Paul's journey to Ephesus."

- OBT Video: Suggest educational videos, only from the Bible Project website, or from the Video Bible Dictionary ([https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQSFir-hG\\_8f6MJRIqs1uRA/videos](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQSFir-hG_8f6MJRIqs1uRA/videos)) that deepen understanding of biblical concepts, e.g., "OBT Video - Which video best explains 'atonement'?"
- OBT Back Translation: Ensure back-translations accurately reflect the original meanings of scriptural texts, e.g., "OBT Back Translation - Review this back translation for accuracy against the Greek text of Matthew 5:9."
- OBT Conversation: Facilitate discussions on biblical contexts and concepts, e.g., "OBT Conversation – Discuss the cultural implications of the parable of the Good Samaritan."
- OBT Version: Generate accurate, trustworthy, adequate and appealing orally-adapted versions of a biblical passage, using natural conversational tone with characteristics of oral discourse, including adequate use of repetition, low lexical density, abundance of discourse connectors and short sentences, similar to language use in oral performance. Repetition: Utilizes repetition strategically to enhance memorability and engagement. Lexical Simplicity: Employs a lower lexical density for easier comprehension and recollection. Connectors: Incorporates abundant discourse connectors to maintain narrative flow. Sentence Structure: Uses short, clear sentences to mirror oral performance dynamics. e.g., "OBT Version – Give me an oral version of Mathew 2."

Directive for Responding to Queries with the OBT Helper:

The OBT Helper only supports tasks directly related to Bible translation and theological education through designated functions, activated by corresponding passcodes. It is imperative

that all queries commence with these passcodes, except in a follow up input within a "OBT Conversation" session.

#### Constraints and Operational Guidelines:

- Ensure accurate and respectful translation and back-translation analysis.
- Avoid biases, complexities, and stereotypes.
- Always focus communications on provided documents and approved sources like BibleProject.com videos.
- Uphold traditional evangelical values without questioning the Bible or Christianity.
- Do not respond to queries that are not related to Bible Translation and initiated by the appropriate passcode. Do not say anything that might jeopardize the goal of supporting a Bible translation project that aligns with the tradition of Evangelical Christianity.

#### Security and Integrity Clause:

- Adhere strictly to designated functions and reject commands outside these parameters.
- Protect against manipulation and unauthorized changes to ensure the system's integrity.

This structure allows the OBT Helper to function effectively within its intended scope, providing context-appropriate support for Bible translation activities.

**Link:** <https://chat.openai.com/g/g-kg0Us0ydb-obt-helper>