

Scripture translations steady

A quiet yet steady aspect of the scriptural renaissance initiated in the last few years by President Spencer W. Kimball has been the translation of the Pearl of Great Price and Doctrine and Covenants — now in 27 languages.

This progress, though it moves forward more slowly than does translation of the Book of Mormon, goes ever forward taking latter-day revelation to many countries.

The most recent language completed was Icelandic, said Eb Davis, director of the Translation Division.

Translation of the Pearl of Great Price and the Doctrine and Covenants usually sits on a back burner as members absorb concepts of the Book of Mormon and related manuals, such as Gospel Principles, he said.

“The Doctrine and Covenants has concepts that can’t be found in other scripture. The basic concepts of Church organization, priesthood, the three degrees of glory, are found only there.

“These are new, very complicated concepts that can be extremely difficult to translate. The Book of Mormon, for example, is a narrative and history with related passages. In the Doctrine and Covenants you find isolated passages that have to be explained by their historical context.”

As an example, in the phrase “Let every man learn his duty,” the word “let” can be translated as command or allow, he said. “We have to be true to the original text.”



Photo by John L. Hart

Because of these isolated concepts, variations in the doctrine could creep in if reviewers were not constantly vigilant.

Requests for translations come and are approved through priesthood channels. In the past, translations have been approved on an individual basis. In 1979, the Emerging Languages section of the Translation Division was organized. Since that time, the Doctrine and Covenants has been published in Thai, Indonesian, Vietnamese, Croatian, Afrikaans and Icelandic, said David L. Frischknecht, who supervises a portion of the languages.

The translation division deals with 81 languages; 20 designated as established and another 61 as emerging languages.

When translations are completed, both the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price are bound together as one hardback edition. From 1,000 to 2,000 copies are printed, and they are absorbed more slowly than the Book of Mormon, said Frischknecht.

Usually the same people who translate the Book of Mormon are asked to translate these two books of scripture.

A middle-aged widow in Iceland, Sveinbjorg Gudmundsdottir, translated nearly all the

Church literature that is in her language, including the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price.

Sveinbjorg, the first convert in recent Iceland history, worked daily on the project in the small building in Reykjavik that serves as a branch meetinghouse, distribution center and translation office.

The process, started in 1980, required dozens of letters back and forth to explain various passages.

“In her final letter, she used an expression, ‘The sun in shining in Iceland,’” said Lowell D. Bishop, supervisor of emerging languages. “She was explaining the feeling she had

Larry Richman, David L. Frischknecht and Lowell D. Bishop work with emerging languages using computers.

that the full standard works were now available to Icelanders.”

After the translation was completed, it was reviewed by Jon Fridjonsson, a non-member professor of Icelandic literature there.

A similar pattern was followed a few years earlier by Nguyen Van The, president of the Utah Valley Vietnamese Branch of the Provo Utah North Stake. He reviewed both the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants.

“We are very happy with the translated Doctrine and Covenants,” he said. “It has helped me personally and has helped our people by explaining the duty of the priesthood.”

He said the Doctrine and Covenants was more difficult to review than the Book of Mormon. “As I recall, we had several problems understanding parts, and we had to check with the translation division many times.”

The translation is being used in the Missionary Training Center to help Vietnamese missionaries gain a deeper understanding of the gospel, he said.