

Sales Success for Translated Books

Amany Latif Ebied, production manager of Dar El Thaqaifa (www.darelthaqafa.com), a division of the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services in Cairo, Egypt, reviews factors that influence the marketing and sales of translated books.

Culture is a complex collection of experiences of history, social structure, religious beliefs, myths, customs and traditions. The process of transmitting cultural elements is a multi-faceted task. Translations play a key role in the development of world culture, given the impact of technology and globalization.

Approximately 65 percent of the Christian books published in the Arab world are translated—mainly from English and sometimes from French. Dar El Thaqaifa (DET) is a Christian publishing house in Egypt distributing books in the Middle East and to Arabs worldwide. Its challenge is to adapt translation to Christian Arab theology in light of Arab civilization as well as choosing books to meet readers needs in a way that coincides with Arab culture.

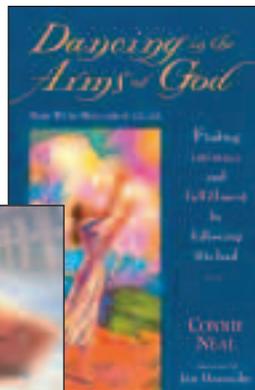
Quality counts

The ideal translation should be accurate, conventional and communicative in a way that is understandable to the readers. Arabic translation can expand a text over 30 percent in size from English.

Some book titles cannot be easily translated from English to Arabic due to the fact that translation is not a matter of seeking other words with similar meaning, but rather finding appropriate ways of saying things in another language. The translation must convey the

appropriate meaning from the author's culture to the reader's culture. If necessary, restructure the form to convey the meaning. Consequently, editing is a must or some sentences, words or titles may undermine the book and make promotion and sales impossible.

As an example, DET wanted to translate *Dancing in the Arms of God*, by Connie Neal. The content of the book was deep, inspiring and new.



It represented an intimate relationship with God in connection with the story of Cinderella. DET decided to publish it, but the problem we faced is that the words “dancing” and “in the arms of God” in a Christian Arabic book are undesirable. Those words refer to a kind of relationship that in the Arab culture

is a human relationship and can never be compared to the holiness of God. In this case, we negotiated a compromise with the author and publisher. We sought to explain the idea of the book

MULTILINGUAL WORLD

No one knows exactly how many languages exist in the world today. Some place the figure around 6,800. Roughly 2,400 are spoken in Africa; 1,000 in the Americas; 2,000 in Asia; 200 in Europe; and 1,200 in the Pacific.

Estimates of how many people speak a language vary considerably. For example, English estimates vary from 392 to 514 million, Hindi from 150 to 357 million, Spanish from 150 to over 372 million, and Russian from 150 to 275 million. Estimates of first-language speakers at www.translationinfo.com are:

1. Chinese (Mandarin): 1,075,000,000
2. English: 514,000,000
3. Spanish: 425,000,000
4. Hindustani: 357,000,000
5. Russian: 275,000,000
6. Arabic: 256,000,000
7. Bengali: 215,000,000
8. Portuguese: 194,000,000
9. Malay-Indonesian: 176,000,000
10. French: 129,000,000

—Amany Latif Ebied

while remaining compatible with the culture, and changed the book's title to *Surrounded by the Hands of God*.

Cover designs are the cornerstone of book promotion. They may need to differ substantially from the concepts used on the original cover. The challenge is to ensure all materials, including the book cover and copy, communicate an idea and look appropriate to the subject in the Arab culture. Press releases, articles, reviews, ads, brochures, and the data on our web site and in our catalog are our main means of promotion.

Timely topics

Study and investigate the market to determine interest, trends, and issues of concern to readers. Conduct a sales analysis. The books most in demand by our clients are books about family, youth and children. Of these, 90 percent are translated because of the lack of Arab and Egyptian specialists and researchers in those fields.

Sometimes we have to take risks, especially when it comes to a vital issue of interest to our readers. In the Arab culture, sex is not considered an acceptable topic for conversation or reading. It is hard to include the word "sex" in a book title. In 2000, however, we found a book titled *No Sex Please, We're Single*, by Ian Gregory. It covered issues faced by

Egyptian youth, so we took a chance



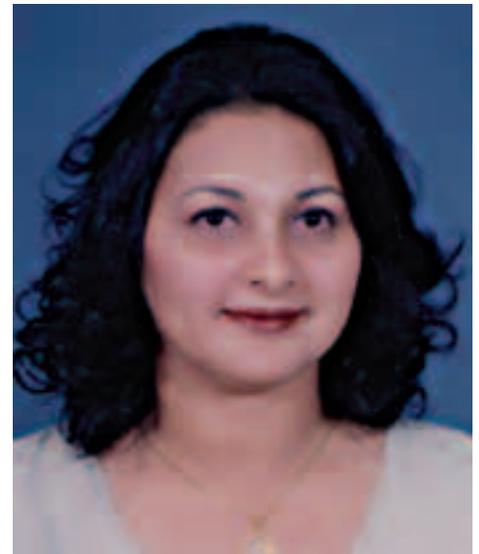
and published the book using the same title and a standard cover design. The first year, sales were slow and disappointing, but afterwards it became one of our bestselling books.

Author appeal

Authors such as Billy Graham, Josh MacDowell, or Michael Green are known worldwide and among Arab Christians. Their books are well distributed and also sell well. Though they are popular authors, they cannot promote their books effectively in another language and culture. The publisher must facilitate this process. One of our most successful methods for increasing sales is inviting the author for a festival, panel or a revival so that a lot of people will attend to meet the beloved author.

Sales success

The main factors affecting sales of translated books are the author, the topic, and the quality of the translation. Sometimes the concepts of the books are very good, but the form and style are still incongruous for promotional and sale purposes. Terminology management, editing and cover design are needed.



"I have a vision for children and youth in Egyptian society," says Amany Latif Ebied. "I want to help them find answers. I want to help them to live their Christianity so they can cope effectively in their communities as real believers."

Promoting a translated book is a competition. Any book must compete to capture buyers' attention, and translated books have extra hurdles to overcome against national works. Do everything in your power to make a translated book a success. ▽

THE ARABIC LANGUAGE

Arabic is the sixth most widely spoken language in the world. It is the dominant language throughout the Middle East, North Africa and into Central Asia, spoken daily by over 246 million people. Arabic is the liturgical language of nearly 1 billion people worldwide.

Though the Arabic language can be viewed as a unifier of the diverse societies of North Africa and the Middle East, disparate dialects can make communication virtually impossible. Differences still abound in the daily language of urban, rural and nomadic people. However, the Arabic used in the mass media and in public and educational life is standardized, enabling communication throughout the region.

Arabic is a Semitic language, sharing its origins with Hebrew and Amharic. Its alphabet consists of 28 consonants and can be written without vowels, since vowels are inherent to the consonants. The Arabic alphabet has also been adopted by non-Semitic languages such as Farsi, Urdu, Malay, and some West African languages.

Arabic, like Hebrew, is written right to left. In actuality, it is also a bi-directional language, since numbers can be written in left to right order and whenever Roman script is used. Another interesting fact is that the numerals used when writing Arabic are typically not written in "Arabic" numerals at all; rather, Arabic uses Hindi numerals. However, Arabic numerals as used in most western languages are sometimes used in Arabic writing.

—Amany Latif Ebied