

More information about this translation

Purpose and translation philosophy

The Plain English Version (PEV) is an English translation of the Bible designed for Indigenous Australians whose first language is an Indigenous language. Its purpose is to convey the meaning of the original Scripture in English that is easy to understand and natural for them. We have, as much as possible, limited its grammar, semantic and rhetorical features to those common in Aboriginal languages, and its vocabulary to the English that is most widely used.

We have applied the principles of *meaning-based* translation, wherein we have sought to convey the same meaning that the original authors conveyed to the original readers. That means not just considering individual words, but also the message of the whole passage.

To comprehend our philosophy, imagine the author of a passage to be an Indigenous man in Arnhem Land writing to Indigenous people in Central Australia. How would he word the same message to them? We have aimed to word the PEV the same way.

The wording of the PEV was decided in consultation with many Indigenous people whose first language is an Aboriginal language, and our exegesis was checked by accredited consultants who gave approval for publication only after it was adjusted to their satisfaction.

Main differences between the PEV and Standard English versions

Linguistic features: below is a list of modifications made to conform as much as possible to the linguistic features of most Aboriginal languages.

- Minimised *passive voice*, substituting active voice with the actor indicated, even when this was not done in the original text. E.g. Acts 16:30 NIV ‘what must I do to be saved?’; PEV ‘what can I do so that God will save me?’
- Minimised *abstract nouns* by using verbs and adjectives instead. E.g. 1 Pet 1:3 NIV ‘a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead’; PEV ‘Jesus died, but God brought him back to life. From that we know that God will save us too.’ There are however a few abstract nouns that are found in many Aboriginal languages, including words for *life* and *trouble*, so we don’t avoid using them in the PEV.
- Minimised *past perfect tense* (also called *pluperfect*) which English uses to switch back in time. Aboriginal languages have no equivalent for this. We have indicated the time switch-back in words. E.g. 1 Sam 1:5 NIV ‘the LORD had closed her womb’; PEV ‘You see, before this time, God stopped her from having kids.’
- Avoided the use of *gerunds*. E.g. 1 Tim 4:13 NIV ‘devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture’; PEV ‘Make sure you read God’s book in your meetings.’

On the sentence level:

- Minimised use of *subordinate clauses*. E.g. Phil 2:5-7 NIV ‘In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness’; PEV ‘You have to think the same way that Jesus Christ thought. He was the same as God. He was just as important as God. But he didn’t reckon that he had to keep on being important, like God is. Instead, he left all that, and he made himself like a nobody. He was born into this world, and looked like other human beings. He was a man living here. And he worked hard to help people.’

On the discourse level:

- Events usually re-arranged into *chronological order*, for example, the original of Mark 6:14-29 begins with people discussing the supernatural power behind Jesus’ miracles, then it back-tracks several times to explain why Herod had killed John the Baptist. The PEV re-arranges the whole passage, starting with ‘This is the story about what happened to John, the man that baptised people. The big boss over that country was Herod, and his brother was Philip. Philip’s wife’s name was Herodias...’ From there it states the events in chronological order, ending with ‘...some people reckoned, “Jesus is really

John the Baptist. God made John alive again, and God gave him power to do great things.” Herod heard those stories, and he said, “I got my soldiers to cut John’s head off, but this man, Jesus, he has to be John the Baptist. I reckon God made him alive again.”’

- *Logical sequence* sometimes re-arranged. Since many Australian languages favour the word order of *reason-result* rather than *result-reason* we have followed that order in our translation wherever feasible. E.g. Rom 1:19 NIV ‘what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them’; PEV ‘God clearly shows everybody enough for us to understand the true story about him. Everybody knows about him.’
- *Transitional wording* supplied where the original suddenly shifts topic or focus. E.g. 2 Tim 4 at the junction of v.15 and v.16, NIV ‘15 You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message. 16 At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me’; PEV (transitional wording italicised) ‘15 You look out for him too. He doesn’t like the message we tell people about God, and he will try to do anything to stop us. 16 *And here, in this city, when they took me to court that first time*, and I tried to tell the judge my story, nobody else said anything to back me up. They all left me.’
- The words *now* and *then* only used as time

orienting adverbs. They are commonly used in standard English as discourse level conjunctions, but some of our audience find them confusing when used as conjunctions. E.g. Rom 3:19 NIV ‘Now we know that ...’; PEV ‘You know, it’s like this.’

Semantic and rhetorical features: below are some semantic and rhetorical features modified to be understandable and natural for speakers of Aboriginal languages.

- *Implicit and background information* made explicit in cases where it would have been known by the original audience, but not by some of our target audience, and is necessary for correct understanding of the passage. E.g. Mark 14:27-28 NIV ‘ “You will all fall away,” Jesus told them, “for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.” ’; PEV ‘Jesus...said, “All you mob will run away and leave me. A long time ago, God got one of his men to write about this in his book. He wrote, ‘God will knock down the man that looks after the sheep and all his sheep will run away.’ He wrote those words about me. I will die, like he wrote about that man, and you will all run away. But after that, God will make me alive again. Then I will go ahead of you to Galilee country, and I will wait for you there.” ’
- *Figurative speech* can add ‘punch’ to an expression, but when translated literally it

is often obscure, and sometimes seriously misunderstood by people whose first language does not have the same figures. So in this translation, the actual meaning of a figure is conveyed, and the picture words are included only if they are helpful. Below are three of the more common types of figurative speech.

- *Metaphors.* E.g. 2 Tim 4:7 NIV ‘I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith’; PEV ‘I did my job properly, and I finished all the work God gave me to do. I always told the true message about Jesus. I’m like a man that runs a long race and keeps going hard right up to the finish line.’ Note that the literal ‘fight’ is not included. A misunderstanding of such a figure could lead to serious consequences. The apostle Paul often uses the Greek *sarx*, (literally ‘meat/flesh/body’), as a metaphor meaning ‘sinful human nature’. We usually render this as ‘that old part of us that makes us do wrong’, or something similar. E.g. Rom 7:5 NIV ‘For when we were in the realm of the flesh...’; PEV ‘You know, we all have a bad part in us that wants us to do bad things. And at first, when we didn’t believe in Jesus...’
- *Personification.* E.g. Rom 5:21 NIV ‘sin reigned in death’; PEV ‘It was like this. We couldn’t stop ourselves doing bad things, so we all had to die.’
- *Rhetorical questions* have either been turned

into statements that convey the same underlying meaning, or answered explicitly. E.g. Rom 10:15 NIV ‘And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?’; PEV ‘somebody has to send those messengers to go and tell the people about Jesus.’ Or Matt 7:9 NIV ‘Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone?’; PEV ‘If your son asks you for some bread, will you give him a stone? No way.’

- *General instruction* given in third person changed to second person, this being more common in Aboriginal languages. E.g. Mark 4:9 NIV ‘Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.’ PEV ‘You’ve got ears, so you have to listen to me properly, and take notice of my words.’
- *Indirect speech* often replaced by direct quotation. E.g. Mark 8:7 NIV ‘he gave thanks for them’; PEV ‘he said, “Thank you God for these fish.” ’

Vocabulary: modified to conform to what is commonly understood by the target audience.

- Avoided words that are not widely known by the audience. Often a more widely known synonym is used. E.g. instead of ‘speak’, it has ‘say’, ‘talk’ or ‘tell’. Sometimes a descriptive phrase is used. E.g. instead of ‘obey’, it has ‘do what *someone* says’.
- Adjusted the spelling of unfamiliar names to make them easier for the audience to sound out. E.g. instead of ‘Enoch’, it has ‘Enok’.
- In cases where the original has mascu-

line gender but is addressing both genders, gender-neutral language is used. E.g. Rom 15:30 ESV ‘I appeal to you, brothers...’; PEV ‘My Christian friends, I really want you...’

- Where the original has weights, measures, and currency used at the time and place of its writing, the equivalent in denominations known to our audience is used. E.g. Mark 6:37 ESV ‘Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth’; PEV ‘That will cost thousands of dollars.’
- Standard English uses the words *who*, *when*, *where*, *what*, *why* and *how* both to ask questions and to introduce descriptions. However poorer readers are confused when they are used in the latter way, so we have minimised that use. E.g. Gen 14:13 NIV ‘A man who had escaped came and reported this to Abram’; PEV ‘A man got away...and he went and told Abram.’
- Below is a list of biblical terms, and how they have been rendered.

Plain English rendering of biblical terms

Below is a table of frequently occurring biblical terms in Standard English showing how we have usually translated them in plain English. There is some variation to these renderings throughout the text, each case being adapted to fit its context, so a range of plain English renderings is sometimes given below, and sometimes a combination of them is used in the text.

angel: God’s angel messenger

anoint: put olive oil on

- apostle:** Jesus's special worker
- baptise:** take through a special washing ceremony
- blaspheme:** say bad things about, talk against, rubbish
- bless** (God as agent): be good to, give to, make happy, help
- bless** (person as agent): ask God to help/be good to, say that God is good
- chief priest:** boss of the Jewish ceremonies
- Christ/Messiah:** the man that God promised to send, called the Christ
- circumcision:** young man operation
- covenant:** agree to, agreement, promise
- crucify:** nail to a cross
- demon/devil/unclean spirit:** bad spirit
- disciples:** Jesus's followers
- forgive:** not do payback, not punish, say not guilty, let it go
- Gentile:** not a Jew, not Jewish
- glorify:** make really great, show to be really great, say that *someone* is really great, say good things about *someone*, thank God for *something*
- glorious:** beautiful, bright, great and good, wise and good
- glory:** very great thing, something that is really good, something to feel happy about
- gospel:** God's good news, God's good story, God's good message
- grace:** God is good to *someone* (sometimes include, 'even when *that person* didn't do anything good')
- heaven** (of God's home): heaven

heaven (of physical realm): sky
heaven (euphemism for God): God
hell: bad place called hell
high priest: big boss of the Jewish ceremonies
holy: belonging to God, special, really good
Holy Spirit: Holy Spirit, God's spirit
idol: statue that people think is a god
in Christ: joined to Jesus, belonging to Jesus
king: big boss
Kingdom of God/Heaven: God's family, people that belong to God
lawyer: Jewish law man
Levite: man that helped in the Jewish ceremonies
LORD: God
Lord (of deity): God
lord (not of deity): boss
lord (as vocative): sir
oath: promise
parable: picture story
Pharisees: the Pharisee mob that were strong for the Jewish law
priest: leader of the Jewish ceremonies
prophet: person that tells God's messages
reconcile: get *someone* to be friends with *someone* again, stop *people* being enemies
redeem: take the payback for, set free, pay for and set free, save
repent: stop doing bad things, turn to God, turn to follow Jesus, turn around and live God's way, be sorry
resurrect: come alive again, come back to life, God makes *someone* alive again

righteous: do what is right, live the right way, live straight, do good things, do what God wants, not do wrong, good, really good, fair

Sabbath: Jewish rest day

sacrifice: give *animal* to God to show him respect, kill the *animal* and burn it to give it God

Sadducees: the mob called the Sadducees (sometimes include, ‘that believed that after people die, they will never come alive again’)

saints: God’s people, God’s own people, God’s special people, Christians

sanctify: make God’s own special people, make properly good, make clean, give *oneself* to God to do his work

Satan: Satan, the boss of the bad spirits

scribe: Jewish law teacher

scriptures: God’s book

sin: do bad things, go wrong, go against God

sign (miracle): do great things, do powerful things (sometimes include, ‘to show *something*’)

Son of Man: God’s special man from heaven

synagogue: Jewish meeting house

temple: God’s ceremony house

tempt: test, trick, try to get to do bad things, push to do wrong, get to go wrong

worship: show respect to

Note:

Some Greek words, and the English words commonly used as their equivalents, have a primary meaning but are also used in a way that has nothing in common with that primary meaning. We have translated such words to convey the overall meaning of the text where

they are used. There are too many to include here, but a few of the more prominent ones are mentioned below:

in is primarily a locative but is also used to indicate relationship or connection. We have handled some of the common cases thus:

in Christ: joined to Jesus, belonging to Jesus
in the name of: with *someone's* power, (believe) *in someone*, (sent) *by someone*, (teach) about *someone*, (speak) *someone's* message, (baptise) to show they follow *someone*, to show they belong to *someone*

do something *in love*: love (as a verb)

now has the primary meaning of 'at this time' but it is also used as a discourse level conjunction, and is treated as such in our translation of those cases.

then has the primary meaning of 'next in sequence', but it is also used as a discourse level conjunction, and is treated as such in our translation of those cases.

Plain English Version
Portions of the Holy Bible in the Plain English
Version translation for Australian Aboriginal people
who speak English as a second language

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Language: Aboriginal English (English)

Dialect: Australian Aboriginal

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