

Dear people who think about translation (at least now and then),

Here's a fun translation solution. In the book of Genesis Jacob wrestles with someone the night before he meets Esau. How should that person be referred to in the title to the passage?

The text says Jacob wrestled with "a man". Jacob himself says he's seen God face to face, and he names the place "God's face". Hosea 12.3&4 says, "In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his manhood he strove with God. He strove with the angel and prevailed, he wept and sought his favor."

Spanish and English translations sometimes label the passage "Jacob wrestles with an angel" and sometimes "Jacob wrestles with God". So Felix and I were puzzeling over the title in Mazatec. How should we refer to this person with whom Jacob wrestled? A man, or an angel, or God?

The solution... Don't refer to him. Use a passive instead. It won't work in English. It sounds funny to say that Jacob was wrestled with. It's equally odd in Spanish. But in Mazatec it sounds perfect. "B'a kama nk'ie nga tsixkjanko Jakob". "Thus it happened when Jacob was wrestled with."

Done.

I hope you had as much fun today as I did.

Terry