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Considerations for OT Translation

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Abstract

Old Testament translation brings new challenges. This article touches on some of the areas which may need special attention when translating the Hebrew Bible. These include textual issues, hapax legomena, genre, and poetical language. Textual problems in the OT are more difficult to handle compared to those in the NT. Rare words or words that occur only once are more frequent and difficult to explain. Some of the text types differ from those of the NT and need to be investigated because they can influence our exegesis. Finally, the poetical language is richer and more abundant and may challenge some of our translation theories. The article does not cover these issues in any depth but is intended to raise awareness, give guidance, and suggest some further helps.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this article[1] is not to provide an in-depth treatment of the present topic, but rather to raise awareness for some of the problems related to OT translation, give possible solutions, and suggest further reading. Quite a number of SIL teams are now involved in OT translation and have experienced some of the challenges that go along with it. Even after successfully completing a translation of the NT, translators of the OT face quite a few different challenges, particularly the following:

(1) Textual issues in the OT can be a problem and require greater background knowledge to weigh the evidence for alternative readings of the text.

(2) There are many hapax legomena in the OT, words that occur only once, which makes interpretation more difficult.

(3) A number of different genres or text types are used in the OT. Recognizing them may shed light on exegetical choices and consequently affect our translations.

(4) Poetical language of all kinds is used frequently. To translate poetry not only meaningfully but with its poetic impact retained is challenging.

2. Textual issues

The question of what source or base text we are going to use must be addressed first. For many translators this will be some English translation. But when we compare one version with another, we quite frequently find that they differ because their translators chose different readings.

Modern translations are normally based on the Leningrad Codex of 1008 A.D. as printed in the BHS *(Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia)*. This is an excellent manuscript, but it must be recognized that it is a relatively late one. In view of the fact that the first books of the Hebrew Bible were written over two thousand years before 1008, it is not at all surprising if copying errors crept into it. We are therefore forced to deal with the textual base and consider alternative readings prior to doing actual translation work. The translators of the

[1] The substance of this article was originally presented as a lecture for the translation consultant update at Ukarumpa, Papua New Guinea, in November 2001.

NIV, for instance, consulted the following two categories of sources in addition to the Masoretic Text (MT), which was their base text:

> (1) Dead Sea Scrolls, Samaritan Pentateuch, and ancient scribal traditions. Sometimes the NIV translators followed a variant Hebrew reading in the margin of the MT instead of the text itself. In rare cases, they divided words in the consonantal text differently from the way they appear in the MT.
>
> (2) The more important early versions: Septuagint (LXX), Symmachus, Theodotion, Vulgate, Syriac, Targum, and Jerome.

The textual problem of the NT is minor compared to that of the OT because of the relatively large number of NT manuscripts available. For the OT, however, if the MT is difficult, the translator is left with only a few witnesses (particularly the Dead Sea Scrolls, Samaritan Pentateuch, LXX, and also Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion, Syriac, Targum, Vulgate, Vetus Latina, Coptic, Ethiopic, and Arabic.

2.1 Examples of textual problems in the OT

Four examples of textual problems in the OT are presented here to illustrate the need for textual decisions. The first example is Gen. 4:8, which NASB translates as follows: "Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him." KJV translates it, "And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field.…" Both the NASB and KJV emend the MT at this point, for the MT has neither 'told' nor 'talked with'. Rather, it reads *wayyōʾmer* (וַיֹּאמֶר) 'and he said', an introduction to a direct speech quotation which apparently was dropped out accidentally by a scribe.[2] And since the Samaritan Pentateuch, LXX, Vulgate, and Syriac add the direct speech, 'Let's go out to the field', it is possible that this represents the original reading. Although most modern English translations and almost all commentators accept the addition, some try to make sense of the MT text as it stands.[3]

Barnwell ([1985]:116) suggests including the words 'let us go out to the field', since "without them the sentence seems incomplete, and they are included in all the early translations and in all the major English versions." The UBS *Handbook on Genesis* by Reyburn and Fry, however, follows the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project (HOTTP):

> HOTTP is of the opinion that the ancient versions attempt to change or modify the words of the Hebrew text. Accordingly HOTTP suggests that this clause be translated "Cain talked to Abel his brother, and it happened that…," or "When Cain had talked to Abel his brother, it happened…," and that the words "Let us go out to the field" be placed in a footnote. (Reyburn and Fry 1997:111)

My own suggestion at this point is to follow the reading reflected in the ancient versions, as there is obviously a problem with the MT.

The second example is Gen. 47:16. KJV, following the MT, renders it "And Joseph said, Give your cattle; and I will give you for your cattle, if money fail." NASB among others adds *food*: "Then Joseph said, 'Give up your livestock, and I will give you *food* for your livestock, since *your* money is gone.' "

Here the Hebrew word *leḥem* (לֶחֶם) 'bread' or 'food' was accidentally omitted by a scribe[4] and does not occur in the MT, which the KJV reflects. It does, however, occur in the important witnesses of the Samaritan Pentateuch and LXX. Moreover, the context of v. 15 clearly suggests that *leḥem* is needed to make the meaning clear.

The third example is 1 Sam. 1:24, which KJV renders "And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks.…" NASB translates it "Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with a three-year-old bull.…" The MT reading here, *bəpārîm šəlōšâ* (בְּפָרִים שְׁלֹשָׁה) 'three

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[2] G. J. Wenham (1987) regards this as a possible case of homoeoteleuton (verbal similarities at the end of lines or words that sometimes cause scribal error).

[3] For a discussion of the different positions see Hamilton 1990.

[4] The omission was a result of haplography ("writing once") due to a similar-looking word that precedes.

bullocks', is corrupt. The original reading *bpr mšlš* (בפר משלש) 'a three year old calf' is reflected in the LXX (cf. also Gen. 15:9) as well as in the Dead Sea Scroll 4Q (see Tov 1980:54), and also the Syriac. This reading is also supported by HOTTP, and is followed by all modern translations.

The fourth example is 2 Sam. 24:2, which NIV, following a LXX reading[5] (cf. 1 Chron. 21:2), renders as follows: "So the king said to Joab and the army commanders[6] with him, 'Go throughout the tribes of Israel from Dan to Beersheba and enroll the fighting men, so that I may know how many there are.' " NASB, following the MT, renders it "And the king said to Joab the commander of the army who was with him.…" English versions are divided between these two readings for 2 Sam. 24:2. NIV, (N)RSV, NEB, REB, (N)JB, and CEV follow the former reading; NASB, NCV, TEV, and NLT, the latter. This case is perhaps more difficult to decide on, but it is likely that the Greek reading (of the Lucian recension) reflects a secondary reading apparently influenced by 1 Chron. 21:2. The MT is supported by Rahlfs' Septuagint version and appears to better reflect the original reading.

2.2 Choosing between alternative readings

The four examples of section 1.1 illustrate the need for textual decisions. But how can we know which reading should be chosen?

It may be said that many of the textual problems that exist in the OT are insignificant for translators whose goal is a dynamic translation. Even so, there are still a lot of cases where we need to make a decision. Translations that are not helpful with regard to textual questions are those that have relied (almost) exclusively on one manuscript (e.g., Codex Leningradensis), among which is the KJV. It should be added, however, that the KJV was produced before the field of textual criticism had developed much. NASB is not very helpful either, because it often does not seem to grapple with the textual problems. On the other end of the spectrum are translations such as NEB (and to a certain degree also REB), NAB (*New American Bible* 1970), and similarly (N)JB, that do not sufficiently consider the fact that the ancient versions are translations whose differences are not always to be explained by a different Hebrew reading. That is, they sometimes deviate from the MT due to the application of translation principles.[7] The most helpful English translations for textual matters are probably the NRSV, NLT, and perhaps the NIV, although they should not be followed blindly. In order to get some more background information and understand some of the reasons why one reading may be preferred over another, the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project[8] prepared under the auspices of the UBS (Barthélemy et al. 1973–1980) can provide valuable assistance.

Unfortunately, there is no translation or commentary that provides the translator with the perfect solution in every text-critical case. Although one may choose to lean towards one particular version in cases where the

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[5] According to the Lucian recension. Note, however, that the text in Rahlfs' LXX supports the MT: καὶ εἶπεν ὁ βασιλεὺς πρὸς Ιωαβ ἄρχοντα τῆς ἰσχύος τὸν μετ' αὐτοῦ 'and the king said to Joab the captain of the forces who was with him'.

[6] Following the LXX (see also 2 Sam. 24:4 and 1 Chron. 21:2). The Hebrew text has 'Joab the army commander'.

[7] "Different books of the Hebrew Bible were translated by different [LXX] translators. The translators of the *LXX* varied in the degree to which they followed [modern] translation principles. On the limited basis of certain tests, the books can be approximately categorized into three groups ranging from the very literal to the comparatively free. Among the books that are translated more literally, there are Judges(B), 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Psalms, Ecclesiastes Lamentations, and Hosea. Those that are somewhere in the middle with regard to literalness are Judges(A), Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and 1 and 2 Kings. The books that are translated most freely are the Pentateuch, especially Exodus, Joshua(B), Esther, Daniel(G), Job, Proverbs, Isaiah, and perhaps Amos. The books of this last group are more difficult to reconstruct because of the greater amount of translational elements they contain. The books with little or no evidence from our tests have not been listed." (Tauberschmidt 1997:53–64).

[8] This five-volume work covering the whole OT compares readings in the RSV, NEB, *Bible de Jérusalem,* and the Revised Luther Bible wherever they depart from the MT. Supporting data are given for each reading, and a graded choice is made in each case (A, B, C, D). The rules by which the text was chosen are also given in codified form. The full arguments that underlie the decisions made are not included, but Barthelémy's final and full scientific report is available in French (see Barthelémy 1982–1992).

MT is problematic, there will be instances where the reading of the favorite translation may not be acceptable to the translator or translation committee.

The basic principle in choosing between alternative readings can be expressed as a question: Which would have changed into the other? In other words, Which is more likely to have given rise to the other? (see McCarter 1986:72). But while this appears to be the basic principle, more specific guidelines may be helpful. These guidelines follow. Note, however, that they cannot be applied mechanically in every case since at times they point in opposite directions.

(1) The more difficult reading is to be preferred.

This rule may work where there are no scribal errors in the MT, as is the case in the MT Gen. 2:2, 'on the seventh day'. This reading is more difficult than the LXX 'on the sixth day'. In the case of Jer. 23:33, however, there is a scribal error in the MT; it reads אֶת־מַה־מַּשָּׂא 'What burden?'. But most scholars regard the LXX as reflecting the original reading: ὑμεῖς ἐστε τὸ λῆμμα 'You are the burden!' which reads אתם המשא when reconstructed into Hebrew (Tov 1992:302–303).

(2) The shorter reading is to be preferred.

Copyists tended to add information to the text. For example, they may make implicit information explicit, add comments to explain difficult words or concepts, or include alternative readings if manuscripts which they were copying varied. This can be seen by comparing MT 1 Sam. 2:22, 'And Eli was very old', with Dead Sea Scroll 4QSam[a]: 'And Eli was very old, *ninety years*' (ibid.:305–306).

(3) The reading that is more appropriate to its context is to be preferred.

For example, a reading that conforms more to the style of the author is to be preferred to one that does not. This applies also to the viewpoint of the passage and characteristics of language and thought (see McCarter 1986:74).

(4) Assimilation to parallel passages needs to be considered.

Perhaps in order to attain greater consistency, copyists assimilated (harmonized) the text of one passage to that of a similar one, as in the case of 2 Sam. 24:2 (see sec. 1.1, fourth example). Among the more common types is assimilation to explicit details given in a nearby passage, as in Isa. 2:10, where the LXX adds ὅταν ἀναστῇ θραῦσαι τὴν γῆν, which is assimilated from the passage in Isa. 2:19: בְּקוּמוֹ לַעֲרֹץ הָאָרֶץ 'when he rises to terrify the earth' (see Barthélemy et al. 1973–1980, vol. 1, p. xi; see also Tov 1992:307).

(5) Emendation may be used with discretion.

Emendation may be described as "the process of substituting what appears to be a better form of the text for one which is judged to be incorrect" (Bratcher and Reyburn 1991:1204). Jellicoe (1968:320) writes as follows about this topic:

> Conjectural emendation, so common half a century or more ago, and carried to extremes, for example, by Duhm, and to the point of eccentricity in the later work of Cheyne, is today in some circles virtually rejected, a reaction which is altogether too radical. The main objection, which certainly has validity, is on grounds of subjectivism. Used with discretion, however, it will always have a place.

Tov (1992:296), on the other hand, believes more in common sense than in abstract rules when it comes to making textual decisions:

> It is our understanding that common sense should be the main guide of the textual critic when attempting to locate the most contextual appropriate reading. At the same time, abstract rules are often also helpful.

Clearly, textual concerns are a challenge for us. *The Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project* (Barthélemy et al. 1973–1980:iv–xvii) is not reluctant to list fifteen factors involved in textual decisions. One good way to equip ourselves for making textual decisions is to do some further reading. This will help us gain more background knowledge and so be able to weigh the evidence for alternative readings and make better decisions.

A very helpful and practical introduction to OT textual matters is Brotzman's *Old Testament Textual Criticism* (1994), which is written with beginning students in mind. In addition, there is Tov's *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (1992), which includes many aspects of OT textual criticism. Tov regards as equal the external evidence of all traditions, Masoretic Text, Samaritan Pentateuch, Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Hebrew text underlying the ancient versions, whereas Brotzman in general regards the Masoretic Text more highly, although he clearly states that its absolute superiority cannot be maintained in every verse.

Then there is Ernst Würthwein's *The Text of the Old Testament,* which is a translation of Würthwein's 1988 German work. Würthwein regards the Masoretic Text more highly and resorts to other manuscripts and versions only as a last resort. As the most important textual witnesses besides the MT he regards the Samaritan Pentateuch, Qumran, and LXX, followed in order of importance by Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion, Syriac, Targum, Vulgate, Vetus Latina, Sahidic, Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian and Arabic.

Bertil Albrektson's 1975 article entitled "Textual Criticism and the Textual Basis of a Translation of the Old Testament" is also useful.

3. Interpreting rare words (hapax legomena)

It is not always easy to establish the correct meaning of words in the Hebrew Bible because there are so many hapax legomena, words that occur only once. The Masoretes, aware of this, marked such words and spellings (see the outer margin of BHS) with the letter λ (*lamed*) and a small dot over it as an abbreviation for the Aramaic word meaning 'there is no other'. This was "presumably to warn scribes that, although unusual, these forms were not mistakes" (Greenspahn 1992:54–55).

Out of a total vocabulary of approximately eight thousand words in the Hebrew Bible about thirteen hundred words occur only once. Although many present no serious problem, there are still several hundred hapax legomena—especially in poetic passages—the meaning of which is uncertain (Silva 1983:42).

How can we determine the meaning of rare words that are obscure? While meaning cannot always be determined by etymology (e.g., we cannot explain the meaning of *butterfly* by splitting it up into its roots butter and *fly*), it is necessary in cases of OT hapax legomena to appeal to etymology, even though this is not ideal. It may be helpful to keep in mind de Moor's rule: "An explanation which rests on the sole basis of etymology can never be anything more than a plausible hypothesis" (cited by Silva 1983:85).

Another problem complicates the situation further: because the Hebrew Bible developed over a period of more than a thousand years, it does not contain homogenous language throughout. The following three stages of Biblical Hebrew are often distinguished: Archaic Biblical Hebrew (until the tenth century b.c., examples of which are Genesis 49, Exodus 15, Deuteronomy 32, and Judges 5), Standard Biblical Hebrew (from the tenth to the sixth centuries b.c.), and Late Biblical Hebrew (post-exilic, examples being the Books of Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Daniel, and some Psalms). Over time words may have undergone semantic shift or change. The gap of more than a thousand years between Archaic Biblical Hebrew and Late Biblical Hebrew is a long time compared to only several hundred years between Classical Greek and NT Greek; yet, as we know, the meaning difference between Classical and NT Greek words can be great (see Salisbury et al. 2000:114–118 and Jenni 1978:15).

A further obstacle is that only a limited corpus of Hebrew texts is available. To compensate for the limited information available within the Bible itself, scholars have tried to seek evidence from other Semitic languages, such as Aramaic and Arabic. More recently Akkadian and Ugaritic texts have been regarded as particularly valuable.

Ugaritic has close linguistic affinities to Biblical Hebrew and culturally is closely related to the biblical world. Ugaritic texts may indeed, then, shed some light on Hebrew words, as in Prov. 13:9, "The light of the righteous rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked goes out" (NASB). The BHS suggests reading this verse with LXX, 'The righteous always have light', instead of with MT, 'The light…rejoices…'. Driver (1951:180) has found evidence in Ugaritic texts of a semantic relationship between 'brightness' and 'joy'. Thus we can conclude that Ugaritic texts support the MT at this point. The NLT combines the two elements of light and joy and translates this appropriately as "The life of the godly is full of light and joy."

Dahood (1966–1970) has the richest application of Ugaritic material in his three-volume commentary on Psalms, and there are those who regard Dahood's contribution highly (e.g., Craigie 1983, *passim*); but there are others who, like VanGemeren, are "skeptical of understanding the Psalms in the light of Ugaritic studies" (1991:n.p., under "Types of Psalms"). Although the Ugaritic language is a valuable resource in the study of archaic and poetic aspects of the Hebrew Bible, caution does need to be taken in the use of even closely related languages.

Greenspahn (1992:55, citing Cohen 1978), says, "[C]ognates must appear in at least one context that is identical with that of their biblical counterparts before information about one should be used to illuminate the meaning of the other." This seems like a good rule because the demonstration of etymological equivalence between languages does not necessarily mean semantic equivalence too. But Greenspahn (ibid.) says that this method has proven possible in only a handful of cases.

As for the use of poetic parallelism in establishing the meaning of rare words, this should be used with care and only as an approximate guide. Strict synonyms or antonyms should not be assumed (see sec. 4.2).

Ancient versions can be of limited help in establishing the meaning of Hebrew words. The difficulty is that the translators applied translation principles to varying degrees and did not always produce literal translations. Thus we cannot simply assume that in the LXX, for example, every Greek word reflects a Hebrew word in the MT or, more precisely, in the Hebrew source that was in front of the translators. In addition, we need to consider that the Hebrew source the translators used did not always agree with the MT we use today.

Among the books on lexical issues that may be helpful for the interpretation of Hebrew words are the standard Hebrew lexicons Brown-Driver-Briggs (1952) and Koehler-Baumgartner (1994–2000). In particular I would recommend the *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis,* which is now available on CD-ROM.

4. Genres (text types)

There are five major text types in the Hebrew Bible: law/legal (e.g., Leviticus), narrative (e.g., 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings), wisdom (e.g., Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job), prophecy/prophetic (e.g., the Prophets), and hymnody/poetic (e.g., Psalms). Further subdivisions may be mentioned, but these are often fairly subjective and may vary among scholars. Another aspect is whether a passage is prose or poetry, although in many texts both styles occur (Stuart 1997:n.p., under "Exegesis").

It is important for the translator to know the genre of the source text, because the text type may shed light on exegetical choices and may consequently affect the translation. A historical narrative like the Book of Jonah, for instance, should not give the impression that the story never took place.

In translating poetic texts there must be a concern not only for correct meaning, but also for conveying the poetic impact of the text. This applies also to poetry or elevated speech embedded within narrative.

Before parallel lines are dropped and rendered in narrative style, a careful investigation of the function of the parallelism should be made. For often the second line of a so-called synonymous parallelism may be slightly different in meaning and impact from the first line and may go beyond it.

In the Book of Proverbs there are many vivid sayings which have memorable forms. It is quite a challenge to render these proverbs in an appropriate way.

In wisdom literature words may have taken on a different meaning than elsewhere. For instance, in the case of the word *torah* it is the wise sayings of the teacher that may be in focus rather than the law of Moses.

In the Book of Psalms different subgenres have been recognized, such as laments, hymns, enthronement psalms, royal psalms, pilgrim psalms, wisdom psalms, and liturgies. Moreover, some individual psalms are mixed types. Although scholars do not always agree on a particular system of classifying the psalms, it is important, according to Ernst Wendland (1998:31), to recognize that the psalms are not all the same and that "there are certain variations in the style in which they are written (form), in what they say (content), and also in the purpose … for which they were written (function)." Wendland goes on to say that a

classification according to their literary genre "is important, because the way we interpret a given literary text is guided … by our identification of its genre" (ibid.). For example, we approach a hymn quite differently from the way we approach a sermon. Wendland's method of classification is based to some extent on a given psalm's style and structure (form), but even more upon its textual content and purpose(s).

Five major functions are identified by Wendland (ibid.:33): (1) petition, (2) thanksgiving, (3) praise, (4) instruction, and (5) profession of faith. He also identifies five minor functions (ibid.:45): (1) repentance, (2) remembrance, (3) retribution, (4) royalty, and (5) liturgy. The minor functions usually occur within units of major functions.

Wendland emphasizes the importance to translators of recognizing these different functions:

> The reason Bible translators, in particular, must learn to see these basic distinctions is in order to find *functionally equivalent discourse forms* in the receptor language (RL). Petitions, for example, need to be expressed in the way that is most natural for requests and appeals in the RL. The same is true for words of thanksgiving or praise or any other genre. (ibid.:32)

5. Poetry

Analyzing and translating poetry is particularly challenging, as we will see in this section. Much of the OT is written as poetry. However, Hebrew poetry is not easily defined. That is, there is no particular characteristic that defines poetry as over against prose, which is why it is sometimes difficult to categorize a text as poetry or prose. But there *are* certain characteristics which, although they also exist in prose, are used in poetry more frequently and with a higher concentration. The most notable of these are compactness (sec. 4.1) and parallelism (sec. 4.2).

5.1 Compactness

The most obvious characteristic of Hebrew poetry is its terseness; that is, the lines are short and compact. This is due, for one thing, to the use of fewer function words such as definite articles, prepositions, conjunctions, and discourse markers. The frequent parallelisms also foster conciseness, since parallelism involves ellipsis (the dropping out of a major element such as the verb in the second colon). The use of imagery and figurative language likewise tends toward compact expression at the same time that it increases the emotional impact of a passage.

Hebrew poets often play on the sounds of language and use rhythm patterns to achieve poetic effect. Unusual or archaic expressions and grammatical forms, as well as word pairs, are other common characteristics of Hebrew poetry. (For more on these topics, see Ryken and Longman 1993:80–91; Longman 1997:118–124; and Salisbury et al. 2000:36–38.)

As for structure, parallelism is the most common feature of Hebrew poetry. That is, lines are most commonly clustered into line pairs (called bicolons), but there are also clusters of three lines (tricolons) and four lines (tetracolons), and even single lines (colon). According to Watson (1995:11), "The larger units such as poems or stanzas are composed of strophes, and the strophes in their turn are made up of one or more cola. The cola consist of even smaller units." (For more on this topic see Watson 1995:11–15.)

5.2 Parallelism

Parallelism occurs in many languages, not just Hebrew. According to Newman (1918:3), parallelism "is discoverable in some degree in almost every literature." Thus it can be expected that parallelism may occur in many of the languages that contemporary translators work in.

Certainly, parallelism is an outstanding characteristic of Hebrew poetry (see Watson 1995:114–159). Adele Berlin says, "Parallelism is the most prominent rhetorical figure in ancient Near Eastern poetry, and is also present, although less prominent, in biblical prose" (1992:155). She defines parallelism as "the repetition of the same or related semantic content and/or grammatical structure in consecutive lines or verses" (ibid.), and concludes, "Because there are infinite possibilities for activating linguistic equivalences, there are infinite possibilities for constructing parallelisms" (ibid.:160).

According to Petersen and Richards (1992:35), parallelism occurs in the interaction of semantic and grammatical equivalence and opposition:

> [Hebrew] parallelism is not something that is predictable, and no mechanical system or set of categories can confine it. Rather, we must carefully observe the individual words as well as their relationships at the level of the colon, multi-colon, and entire poem in order to comprehend the range of parallelisms utilized in the Hebrew Bible.

Hebrew parallelism cannot be fitted neatly into a mechanical system. Kugel (1981:12, 15) argued that the influence of Robert Lowth, who is often credited with the discovery of biblical parallelism,[9] unfortunately forced everything into one of three boxes by identifying three types of parallelism: synonymous, antithetical, and synthetic parallelism. This has had a disastrous effect on subsequent criticism, because synonymy was often imposed where it did not exist.

Berlin (1985:64), although commending Lowth for his insights, agrees with Kugel that "there is no reason that [Lowth's] views of parallelism should remain canonized." In her opinion, biblical parallelism is dynamic (ibid.:4). She adds, "Most of the credit goes to Kugel, who offered the longest, most anti-Lowthian description of parallelism" (ibid.:64).[10]

In a similar vein, Alter (1985) spoke of the "consequentiality" of parallel lines. He too viewed parallelism as dynamic, not static. Berlin, however, faulted both Alter and Kugel for being too extreme:

> Both Kugel and Alter came to the study of the Bible from literary criticism, and both brought their finely honed skills as readers to parallelistic texts. But literary criticism often eschews precise analysis in favor of more diffuse observations. So, while achieving a reorientation of the view of parallelism, Kugel and Alter achieve it only at a level of extreme generality. They offer only the vaguest definitions of parallelism and do not provide the criteria for deeper analysis of its workings. (Berlin 1992:156)

According to Bratcher and Reyburn (1991:5), "An objective look at parallel lines in Hebrew poetry leads one to the conclusion that the possible relations between lines are nearly limitless." Even Franz Delitzsch (1873:7) remarked that "The relation of the two lines to each other is very manifold."

It is important to keep this in mind when we exegete and translate parallel forms of the Hebrew Bible. We should avoid the tendency to treat word pairs as meaning the same thing (a tendency fostered by Lowth's categories and also by thinking of synonyms as identical, with a complete semantic overlap). Hebrew parallelism is often dynamic, and rarely static, as the examples of Bratcher and Reyburn 1991:4–9 demonstrate.

We also need to be aware that quite a few commentators tend to "correct" the more dynamic parallelism of the Hebrew towards a form that is more static, especially when the Hebrew is unclear or the lines do not corespond well. Translators and commentators often use the LXX to achieve "better" parallelism, especially in the case of Proverbs, without suficiently considering that the LXX is a translation. Not that every deviation of the LXX from the MT should be blamed on the translator, but the translation technique of the individual books does need to be taken seriously before a different Hebrew *Vorlage*, or source, can

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[9] Although Bishop Lowth was not the first to discover parallelism, he gave the most extensive treatment of it in his *De sacra poesi Hebraeorum (Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews)* in 1753 and his Isaiah in 1778. Consequently his definition, expressed in the introduction to Isaiah, became the classic definition of parallelism: "The correspondence of one Verse, or Line, with another I call Parallelism. When a proposition is delivered, and a second is subjoined to it, or drawn under it, equivalent, or contrasted with it, in Sense; or similar to it in the form of Grammatical Construction; these I call Parallel Lines; and the words or phrases answering one to another in the corresponding Lines Parallel Terms."

[10] In Kugel's view the second line always goes beyond the first one. He says, "Biblical parallelism is of one sort, 'A, and what's more, B', or a hundred sorts; but it is not three" (Kugel 1981:58). However, Berlin (1985:4) faults Kugel for equating parallelism with poetry and making no distinction between poetry and prose: "Kugel] tacitly accepts the equation of parallelism with poetry (even as he rejects it [referring to Kugel 1981:70]) and then, wherever he finds parallelism he is forced to call it poetry—but, since he knows it isn't poetry, he calls it 'elevated style.' " Berlin (ibid.) goes on to say that "parallelism is not in and of itself a mark of poetry as opposed to prose, or even of elevated style as opposed to ordinary discourse; it is a common feature of all language. And yet,…in a certain sense parallelism is the essence of poetry."

be assumed. In fact, the LXX translator of Proverbs, as I have argued in my doctoral dissertation (Tauberschmidt 2001), adapted the dynamic parallelisms of the Hebrew towards producing lines that correspond better grammatically and/or semantically.

One such example is Prov. 10:10. The NIV, following the MT, translates it as "He who winks maliciously causes grief, and a chattering fool comes to ruin." CEV and NCV are similar. But RSV, REB, TEV, NRSV, and NLT follow the LXX; thus NLT renders Prov.10:10 as "People who wink at wrong cause trouble, but a bold reproof promotes peace." The problem is that the second half of the Hebrew text, 'but/and foolish lips (a chattering fool) comes to ruin', does not seem to fit the first half, 'He that winks with the eye causes pain/trouble', being neither a parallel nor a contrast (Goldsworthy 1993:91). Therefore many commentators (e.g., Toy 1899, McKane 1970, Scott 1965, Gemser 1963, and Clifford 1999) follow the LXX. Some of the more recent commentaries, however, follow the reading of the MT (e.g., Meinhold 1991, Plöger 1984, Ross 1991, Scherer 1999, and Dietrich 1985). Ross, for instance, writes, "Verse 10 departs from the normal antithetical pattern to form a comparison: shifty signs, although grievous, are not as ruinous as foolish talk" (1985:954). According to my thesis it seems that the translator has made some adjustments especially to the second colon to make it correspond to the first.[11]

The BHS apparatus suggests in Prov. 10:10 to read with the LXX ὁ δὲ ἐλέγχων μετὰ παρρησίας εἰρηνοποιεῖ, but in view of the foregoing considerations this may not be needed. Nor may Clifford's assertion that "G preserves a superior reading, for it has antithetic parallelism and gives a syllable count closer to colon A" (1999:111) be appropriate. (Clifford 1997:51 lists Prov. 10:10b under "obviously corrupt verses" with regard to the MT.)

Parallelism may be found not only in poetry but also in narrative. In fact, the first parallelism in the Bible occurs in Gen. 1:27. This particular parallel form in the midst of narrative was not without purpose: "[With] a jubilant song…the creation of man [is] celebrated in three parallel clauses" (Keil and Delitzsch n.d.:64). Interestingly, the use of songs within or at the end of stories is a common feature of Sinaugoro (see Tauberschmidt 1999), an Austronesian language of Papua New Guinea. In such songs parallel lines are used frequently. This is of course not the case in every language, but it is important to find appropriate ways in any receptor language to mark a climax.

Another case in point is in Judg. 14:14, where a riddle is expressed in a concise Hebrew parallelism. The NRSV translates this well in English verse due to the accidental rhyme:

> Out of the eater came something to eat.
>
> Out of the strong came something sweet.

The CEV, which has created new forms of parallelism in English that are not just a literal reproduction of the original poetic form, renders Judg. 14:14 as follows:

> Once so strong and mighty—now so sweet and tasty!

For other examples see Barclay M. Newman's 1997 article on features of poetry in the CEV.

See Watson 1995 for more types of parallelism (e.g., chiastic, staircase, terrace, emblematic, and also phonological, morphological, and syntactical); see also Berlin 1985, Alter 1985, and Kugel 1981.

6. Conclusion

Some of the challenging areas that will confront the translator of the OT are: textual issues, hapax legomena, different text types/genres, and features of poetry, particularly parallelism. My intention here has been to raise some awareness of these issues and to encourage further reading and study in order to obtain greater skill and background knowledge for the important task of translating the Hebrew Bible.

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[11] Since ὁ…ἐλέγχων 'he that reproves' appears to parallel ὁ ἐννεύων 'he that winks' in a contrasting manner and συνάγει ἀνδράσι λύπας 'he procures griefs for men' (first half) appears to parallel εἰρηνοποιεῖ 'he is a peacemaker' (second half), it seems that the translator produced a striking contrast by applying his translation technique. This is supported by G. Gerleman (1950:16), who regards the LXX rendering as (trans)formed according to Greek style.

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