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Peter Schmidt

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Toward a Best Practice in Representing the Authors' Explanatory Notes in Old Testament Translation

Peter Schmidt

Peter Schmidt works with SIL International and is involved in an Old Testament translation project in the Eurasia Area.[1]

Abstract

This article will help translation teams to develop a best practice for dealing with explanatory notes that are made by the Biblical authors themselves.

To my knowledge there is no standard resource for Bible translators that addresses in some detail the issue of explanatory (or parenthetical) notes. However, every Bible translator will face numerous such notes and has to decide what to do with them. Some standard versions appear unsystematic in this and are of limited help.

This article discusses what options a translator has in dealing with such notes. Special attention is given to explanatory notes that need explanation themselves for the modern reader.

In order to explore translation problems and solutions regarding explanatory notes, I collected examples – partly when I encountered them incidentally, partly by reading through several Biblical books and looking for them. I discuss the options for translation on the basis of three types of examples. An annotated translation of Deuteronomy 3:8–17 shows how explanatory notes can be represented.

I argue that each translation project should make two conscious choices: (1) whether or not to mark explanatory notes, and (2) if yes, in what way; this is largely a question of how punctuation and footnotes are used. The principles should be applied consistently. This is to achieve three goals: (1) doing justice to the Biblical text with its own history and different levels, (2) being systematic and transparent in the method of translation, and (3) having efficient ways of working within the translation team.

A model guideline and a list of explanatory notes complete the article.

1. Introduction

1.1. Questions and problems

Occasionally the Biblical authors themselves give explanatory notes on what they write. This is because they are aware that their readers might not have enough knowledge to understand fully the text that they are passing on to them. Such notes occur mainly in the Law and in the historical books. Two examples will illustrate this:

Gen 14:3 says:[2]

> NASB: All these came as allies to the valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea).

The expression *valley of Siddim* is explained by the writer with the alternative name *Salt Sea*. A comparison with KJV shows that not all translations put the last clause within brackets. It reads: "..., which is the salt sea." This brings up questions for the translator: **Should such an explanatory note be marked, and if yes, in what way?**

[1] I gratefully acknowledge help received from colleagues, and especially from Linda Humnick, who gave feedback and input on various aspects of the article as it developed. All errors are my own.

[2] Any highlighting by underlining within quotes is added. Bible quotes are from NRSV unless indicated otherwise. The verse count follows the Hebrew, with English deviation indicated within square brackets where needed.

But there is another problem that arises: The explanation "that is, the Salt Sea" is of little help to the modern reader when the *Salt Sea* is not known either! Today this body of water is known as the *Dead Sea*. Therefore, NRSV translates:

> All these joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Dead Sea).

Which model should a translator follow – NASB or NRSV?

In a few cases, the matter becomes even more complex. Ex 16:36 says:

> NASB: (Now an omer is a tenth of an ephah.)
>
> *footnote on ephah:* "i.e. approx one bu."

NASB put its text into parentheses, because it is an explanatory note by the author. But since the *ephah* is not in use today, NASB provides its own footnote. *bu* is the abbreviation for *bushel*, which is a measure of capacity that some English-speaking readers would be familiar with.

NLT deals with the same verse quite differently. It translates like this:

> The container used to measure the manna was an omer, which was one tenth of an ephah; it held about two quarts.

Thus, it adds a modern equivalent measurement *(quart)* to the text. Besides, it also gives a footnote saying "Hebrew *An omer is one tenth of an ephah*."

These examples will be enough to highlight the problem: **explanatory notes by the Biblical authors reflect the fact that the original text comes with some comments, and that these comments require a methodical way of translating**. If a translation project has a strategy for such cases, this makes the decision easier when a translator encounters such verses. It will also safeguard against an inconsistent manner of translating, which would not be transparent to the user.

1.2. The literature

At present, translators are not given much help regarding the Biblical authors' own explanatory notes. Some general advice is found in the *Handbook on Genesis* (Reyburn and Fry 1997). In its introductory chapter "Translating Genesis," under the heading "Important elements of narrative discourse," we find the following paragraph (p. 7):

> ***Parentheses.*** A story line often contains bits of extra information, comments about characters, descriptions of objects, reports of events that happened at other times, and other apparently irrelevant matter. Sometimes the inclusion of such things is related to the situation of the author or editor of the narrative and his readers, rather than to the story line itself. In printed text these items can be marked by placing them in parentheses; but many languages also have formulas or other devices to mark them off from the main flow of the story line.

This captures well the matter we are dealing with, but does not show how it fleshes out in different places.

Joshua is a Biblical book which contains a comparatively high number of explanatory notes. The *Handbook on Joshua* (Bratcher and Newman 1983), in its comment on verses such as 3:16 or 10:13, does not give any special advice about how to treat them. In 11:10, the issue is addressed, but the proposed solution results in the explanatory note blending with the rest of the text. This is one possibility, but an alternative suggestion would also be good to have.

Omanson (1990:417f) discusses an explanatory note from the New Testament, to be precise Acts 1:18f. In agreement with the *Handbook* he argues that these verses are not part of Peter's speech, but are *Luke's* comment. I will refer to his suggestions below.

Omanson (1989:109–119) has also written a thorough treatise on dealing with meaningful proper names in the Old Testament. Some explanatory notes contain explanations about these names, thus the topic is intertwined with our wider issue. Omanson showed (1989:114f) that English, French, Spanish and German

versions were not consistent in their approach to translating meaningful names. Over twenty years later the same is true with regard to explanatory notes in general, as I will show shortly.

Frank (2008:36–39) discusses some cases where Biblical authors translate foreign words or give other types of explanations. She draws conclusions regarding the intended readership of the gospels and applies these findings to modern translation: one needs to find a balance between retaining some degree of foreignness and providing the necessary help for understanding (2008:53f). A study on the distribution of explanatory notes in the Old Testament is noted as a desideratum (2008:50fn122).

Stenschke (2013) discusses different types of explanatory notes, focussing on the New Testament. He points out how intentional the Biblical authors were in their communication. From this observation he draws conclusions for how translators today might go about adding explanatory notes. Apart from a footnote on the German translation of Semitic terms in the gospels (Frank 2008:53), and some thoughts about the layout of the *translator's* explanatory notes (Stenschke 2013:230), neither of these two works is concerned with the practical question of how to represent the inner-biblical explanatory notes.

We should think of the Biblical authors' explanatory notes as a kind of "footnotes." We are used to thinking of footnotes as way of adding necessary background information. For example, Blight (2005:27ff.), in his comprehensive guide on footnotes for the New Testament, recommends the ones listed in table 1:

Table 1: Examples of recommended footnotes

reference	problematic text	suggested footnote	problem addressed
Luke 5:1	Lake of Gennesaret	"This is another name for the Lake of Galilee."	unknown name
Rom 1:7	Rome	"Rome was the capital city of the Roman empire. ..."	unknown significance of a place
Luke 22:47	He approached Jesus to kiss him.	"In Bible times it was the custom for a man to greet another man by kissing him on the cheek."	unfamiliar custom

In much the same way, the Biblical authors were concerned about removing obstacles for understanding, or enhancing understanding, by providing additional information. Note how similar the examples in table 2 are to the ones quoted above.

Table 2: Examples of Old Testament explanatory notes

reference	problematic text	author's explanatory note	problem addressed
Gen 14:3 (NASB)	the valley of Siddim	that is, the Salt Sea	unknown name
Josh 11:10	Hazor	Before that time Hazor was the head of all those kingdoms.	unknown significance of a place
Judg 14:10	and Samson made a feast there	for the young men customarily did this.	unfamiliar custom

The difference between modern footnotes and intra-biblical explanatory notes is that in ancient writing, footnotes as an easily recognizable paratextual element had not yet been developed. **The question then is how we should represent them in translations today.** We should not be less concerned about the Biblical authors' paratext than we are about the paratext of our own translations.

Many translators might turn to one or several well-known English versions as a model. Unfortunately, they do not always yield good examples. For instance, 2 Samuel 5:7 and 1 Chronicles 11:5 are parallel and contain this identical sentence: "David took the stronghold of Zion, it [is] the city of David." Nevertheless, several English versions show slight differences in how they treat this sentence. For example, NASB uses parentheses in Chronicles, but not in Samuel; in the GNB, it is the other way round. For the naming formula, NIV uses parentheses in Genesis 19:22, but not for the identical Hebrew wording in Judges 15:19. ESV places the explanation about the Jewish tradition in Mark 7:3–4 in parentheses, but does not do the same in the

analogous case of Ruth 4:7. In Mark 12:42, none of the English versions retains the original monetary units *lepton* and *quadrans* in the main text, but several versions keep both *shekel* and *gerah* in the main text of Exodus 30:13. The rhetorical question that is used when quoting sources ("Is this not written / recorded in ...?") is not always dealt with in the same way: NLT keeps the form of a question in Joshua 10:13, but not in Esther 10:2. NET does it the other way round. None of these are grave mistakes, and there will always be exceptions for various reasons, but a translator cannot derive a system from these findings. More consistency would be desirable.

The advantage of having a system in place for dealing with explanatory notes is twofold: (1) **Transparency:** whether a reader agrees with the chosen approach or not, at least the translation team cannot be blamed for arbitrary decisions in different places, because the same logic is followed everywhere; (2) **Practicality:** everybody on the team knows what to do when he or she encounters an explanatory note in his or her book. The issue does not need to be discussed anew every time.

In this article, I want to explore in some detail the issues involved in representing explanatory notes in translation. **The aim is to assist translators (or translation teams) in developing best practices for their work.** Different approaches can be taken toward explanatory notes. The goal of this article is not to fight for one way at the exclusion of all others, but to encourage translators to choose between them, and then apply one approach consistently throughout the Bible. Granted, a rigid principle may not be applicable in each and every case. Still, it is better to have a system in place than to decide arbitrarily on a case-by-case basis.

At first I will address some more fundamental questions about marking explanatory notes. Then I will present different solutions for certain cases. One important difference is whether or not an explanatory note can still be understood by itself today. Afterwards I will discuss a few more complicated issues that arise.

1.3. Terminology and definitions

The pieces of text that we are dealing with could be called by various terms. Technically speaking, some of them are *glosses*. A *gloss* is defined by the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Baldick 2015) as "an explanation or translation of a difficult word or phrase, usually added to a text by a later copyist or editor." Dictionary.com offers this definition: "an explanation or translation, by means of a marginal or interlinear note, of a technical or unusual expression in a manuscript text."

These definitions stress the mediating role of the editor, and the time lapse or cultural distance between the text and the audience. However, the term *gloss* is too narrow and technical to cover all cases.

Naming them *parenthetical remarks* would underline their character role as interruptions. The *Dictionary of Literary Devices* (Dupriez 1991) defines *parentheses* as "the insertion of a segment, complete in meaning, and relevant or irrelevant to the subject under discussion, into another segment whose flow it interrupts."

In our texts, this is often an appropriate characterization, but not always. Emphasizing again the grammatical side of things, the definition for *parenthesis* on dictionary.com is as "a qualifying, explanatory, or appositive word, phrase, clause, or sentence that interrupts a syntactic construction without otherwise affecting it, having often a characteristic intonation and indicated in writing by commas, parentheses, or dashes."

Helfpul in this definition is the hint at the use of punctuation as an indicator. The UBS *Handbooks* usually speak of *parenthetical statements* (or *parenthetical remarks*). The definition in the glossary is "a statement that interrupts a discourse by departing from its main theme. It is frequently set off by marks of parenthesis, ( ), or by a dash, –."

In this article, I prefer the term *explanatory note*. It stresses the function of the insertions. It also has the advantage of avoiding technical language. Stenschke uses this term in his article (2013). The *Handbook on Deuteronomy* (Bratcher and Hatton 2000) uses it a few times with reference to what is found in the text itself. Other *Handbook* volumes use *explanatory note* with regard to what today's translators provide for their readers.

An alternative name would be *editorial notes*, because they are "relating to the commissioning or compiling of content for publication" (dictionary.com). Or one could speak of *inner-biblical footnotes*, but this is only possible in a figurative sense.

As to the writers, in this paper, *Biblical author* refers to the person who gave us the text as it is accessible to us in the Masoretic Text. *Original writer* refers to the writer of the source text that the *Biblical author* made use of, or passed on as a whole, and comments on.

2. Marking explanatory notes

I will first discuss the question whether explanatory notes need to be marked at all. Then I will address the question how they can be marked. Following that, we will look at how this marking should be explained in the introduction to the Bible.

2.1. Do explanatory notes need to be marked?

Is it not acceptable to leave explanatory notes unmarked? For example, several English versions do not highlight the explanatory note in Joshua 6:25 (underlining mine):

> NET: Yet Joshua spared a Rahab the prostitute, her father's family, and all who belonged to her. She lives in Israel to this very day because she hid the messengers Joshua sent to spy on Jericho.

A translator who chooses not to indicate explanatory notes may apply this principle here as well. However, he should be aware of the issues at hand.

The question is whether not marking such notes is really an appropriate way of translating. Compare this with how we deal with direct speech: There are clear conventions about representing direct speech, including the use of a colon and quotation marks. Likewise, some versions mark messages and letters by indenting them (e.g. NIV in Ezra 7:12ff). Why should explanatory notes not also be marked for what they are? They have a special function.[3]

If explanatory notes are not recognized, then different levels of the text become indistinguishable. Treating explanatory notes like normal text comes at the cost of leaving the reader to figure out alone the literary and historical relationships. They would have been obvious to the first recipients of the Biblical books.

Consider Exodus chapter 16. The reader first reads the story of the manna. Arriving at vv. 31–36, he will sense that "something is going on in the text." I quote these verses from NRSV (without NRSV's footnotes):

> [31] The house of Israel called it manna; it was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. [32] Moses said, "This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, in order that they may see the food with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.' " [33] And Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the Lord, to be kept throughout your generations." [34] As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the covenant, for safekeeping. [35] The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a habitable land; they ate manna, until they came to the border of the land of Canaan. [36] An omer is a tenth of an ephah.

These verses are an appendix. In his commentary on *Exodus*, Stuart (2006) explains on vv. 35f, "these verses are the Bible's equivalent of a footnote or endnote – an explanatory note placed at the end of the text."

And in his commentary, Oswalt (2008) notes on vv. 31-36:

> The importance of the previous segment concerning God's faithful provision of food is attested by this appendix (so Sarna 1991:91), containing reflections (some from later times) upon the segment.... The last three items obviously come from a time later than the events described in 16:1–30: (1) The Ark of the Covenant had not been constructed yet, (2) the manna had only begun, not ceased, and (3) the omer was the normal unit of measure.

Those Israelites who wandered through the wilderness had been eye-witnesses to the miracle of the manna. As that generation had died out, the writer notes for the sake of the coming generation what can be known

[3] Another example of how a special type of text should be marked somehow is the greeting written by Paul, e.g. 2Th 3:17 ("I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the mark in every letter of mine; it is the way I write."). The English versions all start a new line here (except NET). A new paragraph with a blank line before it would be altogether appropriate. NLT marks the greetings by setting them completely in capital letters.

about it: He makes sure the story is understood correctly (v. 36), and he points to what is tangible of the manna (33f). This way, **he mediates between the original story and the reader**. This is part of the metadiscourse. The translator who does not distinguish this appendix from the story loses some of the internal structure of the text. On the other hand, if these verses are marked in some way, the reader will get some confirmation for his impression that this is a kind of note in its own right. He understands that it is *meant* to be an explanatory note. In this particular case, the note could be indicated through a suitable section heading, as in Menge (1949): "Nähere Angaben über das Manna; ..." (*English:* Further details about the manna; ...).

Let us go back to Joshua 6:25. The conquest of Jericho is a most significant story in itself. Looking back many years later, the author reminds his readers that Rahab's descendants are still living among them. That is not needed for completing the story about Jericho, but in doing so he stresses the far-reaching results of faith in action.

Genette (1997:326–327) discusses whether notes should be treated like normal text or not. He points out:

> There would be nothing absurd about incorporating this kind of note into the actual text.... But I will nonetheless add...: incorporation into the text would entail some loss or impairment. The obvious impairment ... is that incorporating a digression into the text might well mean creating a lumpish or confusion-generating hernia.... The main loss seems to me that in denying himself the note, the author thereby denies himself the possibility of a second level of discourse, one that sometimes contributes to textual depth.... With this kind of note we are in a very undefined fringe between text and paratext.

Thus, one should examine whether the reasons for not marking explanatory notes are strong enough. One objection against marking notes is that parentheses or the like mess up the page and confuse people. It is true that special marking draws attention to a detail, perhaps more than is desired. But that is so with the translator's own footnotes as well: They highlight problems. This cannot be avoided.

Another argument against highlighting explanatory notes is that they point the reader to some sort of change in the text that occurred early on, and thus bring up the question how reliable some information is when the author is not an eyewitness himself. But one can look at the same question from a different perspective: First, the note says something about the age of the original material; secondly, it shows that the author is concerned about passing it on in a comprehensible manner. As Woudstra puts it (1981) regarding Joshua 6:25, "Many take this expression to be an indication of the etiological nature of the story. Rather, it is used to confirm the historical veracity of the event just reported."

There could be practical considerations, though, for not marking explanatory notes. Some of these notes are very short. A translation team might decide, for example, that it is not worthwhile putting an explanatory note into parentheses, if it is only an apposition (as in the example in § 3.2.1. below).

2.2. How can we mark explanatory notes?

The answer to this question depends on factors such as orthographical conventions, level of education, and the receptor language itself.

2.2.1 Marking by punctuation

In some languages, using parentheses () for setting apart explanatory notes is the obvious choice. The *Handbook on Joshua* (Bratcher and Newman 1983) states on 4:9, where the "to this day" phrase occurs for the first time in this book, "TEV places the last sentence of this verse, (**Those stones are still there**), within parentheses in order to indicate that this is an added comment. The force of the parentheses may be lost on readers who are lacking a certain degree of sophistication, and most translations do not use parentheses here."

One good possibility is using parentheses ( ) for explanatory notes by the Biblical author, and square brackets [ ] for explanatory notes by the modern translator(s). This leaves the curly braces { } for textually questionable passages. The preface to Menge (1949) is an example of how the distinct usage of parentheses and square brackets is explained to the reader, though his practice is not the one suggested here. The orthography needs to be respected. In some projects, the translators might want to consider the conventions in the language of wider communication and the national language as well. For example, in Deuteronomy 2:20–23, almost all English versions mark the passage by using parentheses, whereas the German and French ones mark it with

dashes before and after.[4] But then, for the short explanatory note in 2 Chronicles 20:2, where most English versions use parentheses, the German versions differ among themselves: dash, comma, and parentheses can all be found. The French ones have a comma here. For a few more details regarding punctuation, see section 3.2.2. b) below on *Beer-sheba*.

The German translation by Menge (1949) used a smaller font size for additions by the translator. A disadvantage is that this practice can look odd to the reader. The use of italics could be considered instead.

In language groups where literacy is low and fluency in reading cannot be taken for granted, the use of parentheses (or italic font, for instance) will often be uncommon. This could mean that the signals that are meant as a *help* end up being a *hindrance* to understanding. Whether such an effect exists would need testing. As long as they are not confusing, but only ignored, it might still be better to use them.

One other way to set apart an explanatory note is to simply start a new line and make it a separate paragraph, as the *Handbook* suggests in the case of Joshua 6:25 (Bratcher and Newman 1983).

2.2.2 Linguistic marking

In some languages, special punctuation might be superfluous, because there are *linguistic* markers that can be used – or *must* be used! For example, a certain suffix on the verb might set the sentence apart from the rest of the narrative so that it will be understood immediately as an added comment. This is the case in some Bantu languages.

Another possibility is the use of discourse particles: Certain phrases might typically introduce explanatory notes from the side of the story teller himself. They would function similarly to the English "By the way, ..." Whether such phrases are appropriate for written and formal language is a matter that needs to be checked. JB begins Acts 1:18 with "As you know, …." The German NeÜ uses a near-equivalent of "by the way" in Deut 3:9 ("übrigens"). NET translates הִנֵּה *hinnēh* in Deut 3:11 with "It is noteworthy that ...." Besides these introductory particles, other phrases and particles can also be used. NEB inserts "be it noted" in Acts 1:18. Menge's translation of Deuteronomy 3:11 says "Sein Sarg ... befindet sich bekanntlich (= as is generally known) zu Rabba ...." NeÜ, in the same place, achieves a similar result with the modal particle "ja": Deuteronomy 3:11 NeÜ "Sein eisernes Bett steht ja noch in Rabba, ..."

In translation projects for languages that are influenced by Arabic, the word *ya'ni* might work in some cases. It is used in Persian and in Turkic languages as well. It can be translated as "i.e. / this means / that is to say" and is commonly used for introducing definitions and explanations. It has the advantage of avoiding parantheses, which could be misunderstood as a marker for something that does not belong to the text.

Omanson (1990:418) makes another suggestion in his article on Acts 1:15-22: "To help clarify that this is Luke talking, or rather writing in verses 18–19, I have added the name "Theophilus" at the beginning of verse 18." Thus the explanatory note is introduced with a vocative, addressing the reader. This is worthwhile considering. It might seem quite unusual but, depending on the receptor language, it could be just the right way of marking such an insertion. Admittedly, this might be easier to do in Acts, where the addressee is well-known, than in other books that are written for an anonymous readership.

2.2.3 Remark in the introduction

If the translator wants to be transparent in regard to explanatory notes, there is probably no other way than to address his approach in the Introduction to the Bible. How have the English versions done this? It is perhaps the majority that do not address it at all (so for instance NIV, REB, GNB). The 1996 version of the NLT was advertised as a "dynamic (functional) equivalent translation." Its introduction is a good model in that it spells out in some detail what is meant by "dynamic equivalence." Under the heading Clarity and Readability, the Committee clarifies how weights, measures, currency and calendars were rendered, and under the heading Textual footnotes, the rendering of meaningful proper names is addressed. Thus, the introduction speaks to

[4] In complex sentences, the combination of dash and comma can occur.

several issues that are related to explanatory notes. Still, it does not say whether and how they are marked.[5] The preface to the NET Bible (bible.org/netbible) discusses at length the notes provided by the *translators*. It does not explain, however, what was done with the Biblical author's explanatory notes.

Even if the publisher decides that no special explanation is given in the introduction, the translation team should at least spell out its practice in the project's internal guidelines. A model guideline is given in § 6.

3. Translating explanatory notes that are not clear by themselves

Once an explanatory note has been identified and marked, the translator needs to reflect on the question, will this explanatory note be clear to the readers? Does it make good sense in a modern context? Let us first look at an example that does probably not pose a problem. Judges 19:10 reads:

> But the man would not spend the night; he got up and departed, and arrived opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). He had with him a couple of saddled donkeys, and his concubine was with him.

While the ancient name *Jebus* is unknown to most readers, the name *Jerusalem* is well-known, and so the explanatory note by the Biblical author is as informative to the modern reader as it was to the original reader. Thus, the explanatory note still fulfills its purpose.

Now let us look at a slightly more doubtful case. 2 Samuel 5:7 says:

> Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion, which is now the city of David.[6]

Here, the Biblical text itself explains a term (*Zion*) that might be unfamiliar to both his original reader and today's reader. The author explains it by quoting a term that was familiar to his audience *(City of David)*. The question is whether the term *City of David* is also familiar to today's reader. If not, the explanatory note is of little help, so it requires some explanation itself. However, in this particular case, the story that is told in 2 Samuel 5:6–10 provides enough of a frame for the introduction of these two new terms that they explain each other.[7, 8]

Let us move on to places where the explanatory note itself is not readily understood. That is, the explanatory note itself is not self-explanatory! How can the explanatory note be made meaningful to the reader of the translation? There are a number of possibilities for dealing with it. In the following sections, I present these options by applying them to three different examples. A team will have to agree on the approach that should be taken and apply that as consistently as is appropriate.

3.1. A basic decision on footnotes

How explanatory notes are treated is part of the general philosophy of a given translation project. The *skopos* of the translation will influence which choices are made. In principle, there are two ways of handling unclear explanatory notes: (1) Keeping the translation literal and making footnotes; or (2) including some modern equivalent in the text itself. However, in practice, there are a number of difficulties, which I will address in some detail below.

The translation project's general approach to the use of footnotes (or, in some projects, marginal notes) influences the way how explanatory notes can be dealt with. If it is part of the project's policy to avoid footnotes at far as possible, then the consequence is that explanatory notes can neither be explained in a footnote, nor can they be replaced by "modern" explanatory notes in the text, with the literal wording given in the footnote. The translator is thus left with choosing between the risk that certain explanatory notes pass

[5] In the introduction to the 2007 edition of the NLT, this section was revised and comes under the heading Translation Issues. The introduction to NLT 2015 no longer includes these topics.
[6] The word "now" is added in NRSV's translation.
[7] Both *Zion* and *City of David* are concepts that the reader will have to learn about. *Zion* is so frequent and widespread in the Old Testament, occurring 154 times, that it can hardly be replaced everywhere. Even if the explanatory note in 2Sam 5:7 is comprehensible, a glossary entry is still in place for giving more information, like commenting on *Mount Zion* and *Daughter of Zion*.
[8] Another example is Genesis 36:1 "These are the descendants of Esau (that is, Edom)." The connection between the two names was established in 25:30 and 32:4 already.

as incomprehensible, or replacing them with modern explanatory notes, without the link to the original being transparent to the reader.

In a project that generally accepts footnotes for supplying information that cannot easily be included in the main text, the translators need to choose between translating literally in the main text and interpreting the meaning in the footnote, or putting the plain meaning into the main text and giving the original wording in the footnote.

3.2. Decisions on individual explanatory notes

We will now take a closer look at the translation of unclear explanatory notes and discuss three typical cases. In looking for solutions, I present five different approaches:

a) Translating literally.

b) Translating literally and giving the meaning in a footnote.

c) Replacing the Biblical author's explanatory note with a "modern" explanatory note and giving the literal translation in a footnote.

d) Replacing the Biblical author's explanatory note with a "modern" explanatory note *without* giving the literal translation in a footnote.

e) Replacing the Biblical author's explanatory note with a "modern" explanatory note *in the form* of a footnote.

I begin with a short and simple case.

3.2.1 Alternative names – E.g. *Salt Sea* in Joshua 3:16

Consider Joshua 3:16. The verse says about the Jordan River's waters,

> NASB: ... and those [waters] which were flowing down toward the sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off.

Apparently, *Sea of the Arabah* was a name that some readers would not have been familiar with. Therefore, the Biblical author added *the Salt Sea*, which must have been a better-known name. As for the uninitiated reader today, he will also not have heard about the Sea of the Arabah. The problem is that the name in the explanatory note – *the Salt Sea* – is *also* unknown. Well-informed readers might know that the Dead Sea is a body of salt water, and might correctly associate the name *Salt Sea* with the Dead Sea. But in many contexts, the translator cannot count on this kind of encyclopedic knowledge.[9]

The translator needs to solve two questions: Firstly, how to mark the explanatory note in the text, and secondly, how to make the explanatory note meaningful to the reader. There are various ways of dealing with this.

a) Translating literally

For example, like the NASB above. This method risks that the reader will not be able to identify the *Salt Sea* with the Dead Sea.

b) Translating literally and giving the meaning in a footnote

For example,

> NIV: ... while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Sea) [*footnote:* That is, the Dead Sea] was completely cut off....

The footnote can be called a *second-level note*. It helps the reader to understand the Biblical author's exlanatory note. The *Dictionary of Literary Devices* (Dupriez 1991:326) acknowledges, "'Second-degree'

[9] Another example is Gen 14:17 ("..., the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley."). Both names for the valley are unknown to the reader. (The King's Valley is also mentioned in 2Sam 18:18.)

notes are possible, necessary even, in some critical editions." They are also called "second-level parentheses" (Dupriez 1991:327). However, a well-known problem with footnotes is that people do not include them when they read the text aloud.

A variant of this is to place the meaning within brackets inside the main text, which would look like this:

> ... while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Sea) [that is, the Dead Sea] was completely cut off....

No English version does this in this place, but this method has been used (see § 3.2.2.) and certainly deserves consideration. The advantages are obvious: the Biblical text and the translator's comment are clearly distinguished, and at the same time the necessary information is readily at hand, not hidden in a footnote.

Note how the example illustrates the different usage of parentheses ( ) and brackets [ ], the former for an explanatory note by the Biblical author, and the latter for an explanatory note by the translator.

An inconvenience is also obvious: one name is explained with two other names, and that makes for a long noun phrase, which could be distracting.

c) Replacing the Biblical author's explanatory note with a "modern" explanatory note and giving the literal translation in a footnote

For example,

> NRSV: ... while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, [*footnote:* Heb *Salt Sea*] were wholly cut off.

This is a viable solution that respects both the content of the Biblical text and the needs of the readers and hearers.

d) Replacing the Biblical author's explanatory note with a "modern" explanatory note *without* giving the literal translation in a footnote

For example,

> GNB: ... The flow downstream to the Dead Sea was completely cut off, ...

As I said earlier, in following this approach one loses some of the Biblical historical setting and some indication of the transmission of the text.[10]

e) Replacing the Biblical author's explanatory note with a "modern" explanatory note *in the form of a footnote*

No version was found that does this. Based on NASB's text, it would look as follows:

> ... and those [waters] which were flowing down toward the sea of the Arabah [*footnote:* the Dead Sea], were completely cut off.

This tactic might be defended by pointing out that, essentially, the translator does the same for his audience as the Biblical author did for his. But again, the name *Salt Sea* gets lost. Another serious concern is that the border between original text and translator's comment gets blurred. The reader will not be able to distinguish between them.

One other interesting variation is found in NLT: It uses *only* the modern name in the text, and puts *both* outdated names into the footnote.

> NLT: And the water below that point flowed on to the Dead Sea [*footnote: Hebrew the sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea.*] until the riverbed was dry.

[10] The *Handbook* (Bratcher and Newman 1983) explains what the Arabah and the Salt Sea are, but it is quiet about GNB (TEV)'s "solution." Among the German versions, GCLNR00, GHFA and GNLB all adopt this method.

Once more, various approaches can be taken, as long as they are applied consistently and are transparent to the user.[11]

The variety of approaches displayed in the above translations (a-e) underlines the need for the translator to be decisive about how to deal with such explanatory notes.

In closing this section, I list further cases where proper names are, as it were, "updated" (without any allusion to the *meaning* of either the old or the new name). Apparently, the original name was not well-known anymore. The examples below may give some ideas for fitting wordings in other receptor languages.

> Gen 35:19 NRSV: ... on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem),
>
> Gen 35:19 GNB: ... beside the road to Ephrath, now known as Bethlehem.
>
> Gen 14:2 NRSV: ..., and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar).
>
> Gen 14:2 GNB: ..., and the king of Bela (or Zoar).
>
> Gen 14:2 NLT: ..., and the king of Bela (also called Zoar).

In all these cases, the second name is the newer one. Contrast this with the reverse case, for instance in Joshua 14:15, which says: "Now the name of Hebron formerly was Kiriath-arba."

3.2.2 The derivation of meaningful names – e.g. *Beer-sheba* in Genesis 21:31

I now apply the different possibilities of translating that were listed above to a case where the origin of a name is given, and where this origin is meaningful – to be precise the name *Beer-sheba* in Genesis 21:31.[12] The text, according to NRSV, says (without quoting NRSV's footnote here):

> Therefore that place was called Beer-sheba; because there both of them swore an oath.

It is known that the third person (here: קָרָא *qārā'* "he called") can express an indefinite subject (Waltke and O'Connor 2010 § 4.4.2). The question is where this applies. The English versions are divided here. While some use the passive "was called," others take Abraham (or Abraham and Abimelech) as the agents and translate "he / they called." I keep the passive here.

How can we translate the verse? The *Handbook* (Reyburn and Fry 1997), in its introductory chapter Translating Genesis, under the heading "Names in Genesis" (pp. 9–11), addresses the issue of proper names that are plays on words, or the literal meaning of which is significant. Their general recommendation is just to examine the footnotes in TEV and RSV (p. 9), but they also suggest (p. 11), "It may be helpful to translate a name that clearly expresses the significance of the unique event associated with the name."

The example given is from Genesis 35:18. On Genesis 16:13, Reyburn and Fry (1997:10) explain, "A still different model is the French common language version (FRCL), which keeps both the Hebrew form and the translation in the text: 'You are El Roi, the God, who sees me.'"

FRCL does not always apply this one solution though. For example, in Genesis 35:8 it *only* gives a translation. In the present case of Genesis 21:31, it provides *no* translation in the main text, but places it in a footnote – perhaps due to the fact that Beer-sheba has a double meaning: "Well of the Vow" *and* "Well of Seven," which cannot be easily integrated in the main text.

a) Literal translation

> NASB: Therefore he called that place Beersheba, because there the two of them took an oath.

Likewise the KJV.[13] The problem with this kind of naming formula is that the modern reader, who does not know Hebrew, is not able to make the connection between the story and the proper name. Most readers will

[11] Although NLT's Introduction is more comprehensive than many others, and explains what kind of footnotes it uses, it does not explicitly speak to this particular kind of case.
[12] Similar examples would be found in Judges 15:17/19.
[13] Regarding the spelling of Beer-sheba: The question of how to transliterate Hebrew or Greek proper names is discussed in Bailey 2007, "Proper Names in the Bible."

assume the name must have to do something with the reported events, but what exactly it means he cannot tell. It is almost offensive to a reader when the text gives a reason for something, and at the same time withholds the information that is needed to follow the reasoning. This is not unlike a commentary that quotes a source in Latin and does so without translation. Evidently the citation must be meaningful, otherwise the writer would not go to the trouble of quoting it. For the reader who does not know Latin it is a frustrating experience to encounter such a quote, if it is not translated. Why should the same be acceptable in Bible translation?

Again, it is the translator's responsibility to (1) mark the explanatory note in a suitable way, and (2) make it meaningful, possibly by means of a "second-level note," that is, a note that bridges the linguistic gap between Hebrew and the reader. Now, some exegetes will not call this case an explanatory note, but see it as an integral part of the story. Therefore I leave the question of marking aside. Even then, what remains is the need for conveying the meaning of the name.

b) Literal translation + footnote

> Therefore that place was called Beer-sheba*; because there both of them swore an oath.
>
> * *footnote:* "That is *Well of seven or Well of the oath*" (so NRSV).

Likewise the NIV, NET, REB, GNB, CEV. In principle, NLT07 does the same, but with the significant difference of placing the note into the text instead of at the bottom of the page. Most people will find this more user-friendly.

> Then he named the place Beersheba (which means "well of the oath"), because that was where they had sworn the oath.

Minor details – which have to be decided on nevertheless – concern the exact wording and punctuation. Some will decide to spare the words "which means" inside the brackets, as follows:

> Then he named the place Beersheba ("well of the oath"), because that was where they had sworn the oath.

Some will prefer square brackets instead of parentheses. Others might use angle brackets, also called chevrons (›...‹ or ‹...›), and reserve parentheses for other purposes (so NeÜ). Menge (1949 in Deut 2:20-23) probably over-used the combination of dashes *and* brackets. Our example would then look like this:

> ... named the place Beersheba – ["well of the oath"] –, because ...

A variant of NLT's solution is FRCL's approach, which was mentioned at the beginning of this section, but was not used by FRCL in this particular verse. It does not use parentheses, but simply places the translated name in apposition, that is, between commas, as in Genesis 10:25. In the present case, this is how it would appear:

> Then he named the place Beersheba, "well of the oath", because that was where they had sworn the oath.

NLT 1996 had it like this:

> So ever since, that place has been known as Beersheba – "well of the oath" – because that was where they had sworn an oath.

It is now not totally clear what is part of the Biblical text and what is added by the modern translator. Compare these two cases from FRCL: The translation of the term *Corban* in Mark 7:11 is an addition *within the Biblical text*. The translation of the name *Péleg* in Genesis 10:25 is inserted *by the translator*.

> Mark 7:11 "Ce que je pourrais te donner pour t'aider est Corban" – c'est-à-dire "offrande réservée à Dieu" –
>
> Gen 10:25 Éber eut deux fils: le premier s'appelait Péleg, "Division", parce que, à 'époque où il vécut, la population de la terre se divisa; ...

FRCL seems to maintain a difference by using *c'est-à-dire* ("that is") only in the former case. NLT07 with the phrase "which means" does it the other way round. It certainly seems desirable to be methodically clear and have two distinct ways.

Yet another punctuation, namely with colon, is found in DCL96. Numbers 13:16 reads:

> De naam van ... Hosea: Hulp, veranderde Mozes in Jozua: De Heer helpt.
>
> (*English:* "The name of ... Hoshea: Help, Moses changed to Joshua: The Lord helps.")

c) "Modern" explanatory note + footnote

> (Therefore that place was called "Well of the oath"*; because there both of them swore an oath.)
>
> * *footnote*: "Hebrew: Beer-sheba."

No English version does this. A problem in this particular case is that *Beer-sheba* is a wordplay with *both* "seven" *and* "oath". Both cannot be rendered in the text. This exceptional case does not speak against the method as such. However, another problem with this method is that it cannot be applied to people's names.

d) "Modern" explanatory note without footnote

> (Therefore that place was called "Well of the oath"; because there both of them swore an oath.)

No English version does this. The problem with this method is that the name Beer-sheba occurs elsewhere and has to be recognized as the same place where this event took place. Therefore, this method is not viable. It would only work when a certain name occurs only once.

e) "Modern" explanatory note as a footnote

> Both of them swore an oath.*
>
> * *footnote:* "Therefore that place was called Beer-sheba ('Well of the oath')."

No English version does this. As was said before, this method makes it unclear what is part of the Biblical text and what is the translator's note.[14]

Additional remarks on proper names

As I mentioned above, naming formulas might not qualify as typical explanatory notes. This is especially true of the ones in Genesis. They are so frequent and typical of the whole book that it does not seem fitting to treat them as asides. Therefore, it is justified to *not* mark them in a special way. Dashes might be a good compromise: whereas parentheses might be perceived as downgrading a sentence, dashes simply mark a break-off point. A few naming formulas with meaningful names occur outside of Genesis, where they stand out more (Joshua 5:9; 7:26; Judges 2:5; 15:19; 18:12; 1 Samuel 23:28; 2 Samuel 5:20). Whether to mark them or not is the translator's decision. Note that not all naming reports come in the form of the most standard formulas (e.g. Exodus 18:3/4; Numbers 27:14).

Sometimes a name is not *identical* to a word that can be translated, but only resembles a word closely. Consider, for example, Genesis 5:29:[15]

> He named him Noah, saying, "Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands."

The *Handbook* (Reyburn and Fry 1997) suggests, "Translators should consider giving a footnote for 'Noah.' See TEV." The footnote in the TEV says, "NOAH: This name sounds like the Hebrew for 'relief.'"

The introduction to NLT 2007 (p. A48) is very explicit about how meaningful names are handled. I quote the relevant section as a model:

> When the meaning of a proper name (or a wordplay inherent in a proper name) is relevant to the message of the text, its meaning is often illuminated with a textual footnote. For example, in Exodus

[14] On the whole section, cf. Omanson (1989:114–118).
[15] See 11:9 for a similar example.

> 2:10 the text reads: "The princess named him Moses, for she explained, 'I lifted him out of the water.'" The accompanying footnote reads: "*Moses* sounds like a Hebrew term that means 'to lift out.'"
>
> Sometimes, when the actual meaning of a name is clear, that meaning is included in parentheses within the text itself. For example, the text at Genesis 16:11 reads: "You are to name him Ishmael *(which means 'God hears')*, for the LORD has heard your cry of distress." Since the original hearers and readers would have instantly understood the meaning of the name "Ishmael," we have provided modern readers with the same information so they can experience the text in a similar way.

This explanation accomplishes two things: (1) It presents the problem and its solutions to the reader; and (2) the translators can claim a degree of freedom in how they decide certain cases.

3.2.3 Obsolete explanations – e.g. *omer* in Exodus 16:36

I have discussed cases where the explanatory note is of little worth to the modern reader, because he does not understand it. Now there is one other peculiar problem that can arise: If the original text contains an unknown term that is given an explanatory note, but the translator – due to his philosophy – has already removed that unknown term by translating the original text meaningfully, then the explanatory note becomes pointless! This issue concerns mainly units of measurement (including months). For example, Exodus 16:35–36 reads:

> [35] The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a habitable land; they ate manna, until they came to the border of the land of Canaan. [36] An omer is a tenth of an ephah.

The reason for the explanatory note in v. 36 is that the measure unit *omer* had been used throughout the passage, beginning in v. 16, with regard to the people collecting manna. Apparently there was a need to clarify how much an omer contained.[16] This is explained by using the more common unit *ephah*. However, if in the translation of v. 16 – which literally says "... Gather ... an omer for every man ..." (KJV) – the unknown unit *omer* was already replaced, for instance, by *quarts* (as in NLT), then the explanatory note is not only unnecessary, it is completely out of place. Instead of explaining something, it would introduce an additional difficulty.

Taking up the different approaches that were presented above, the following options exist:[17]

a) Literal translation

As NRSV above.

b) Literal translation + footnote

> NASB: (Now an omer is a tenth of an ephah.) [*footnote:* i.e. approx one bu]

bu is the abbreviation for *bushel*, which is a measure of capacity that some English-speaking readers would be familiar with.

c) "Modern" explanatory note + footnote

No English version does exactly this. NLT has a variant of this option in presenting *both* the literal translation *and* a modern explanatory note in the main text, plus a footnote about the Hebrew.

> NLT: The container used to measure the manna was an omer, which was one tenth of an ephah; it held about two quarts. [*footnote:* Hebrew *An omer is one tenth of an ephah.*]

The advantages are that the main text is understandable, and the footnote makes transparent what the translators has done. But if the overall approach to explanatory notes is clarified in the Introduction to the Bible, such a footnote might not be needed; or the main text could read more simply:

> The container used to measure the manna was an omer; it held about two quarts.

[16] Stuart: "Verse 36 explains for a later generation ... the meaning of the old word "omer."" – Cf. the discussion on Exodus 16 in § 2.1 above.
[17] Some of this data has been laid out before in Schmidt 2014:42-44.

This way, the Biblical author's explanatory note is used by the translator as a "template" as it were, and filled in in a way that is relevant for his target audience. (Depending on the readership, *two liters* would be more meaningful than *two quarts*.)

d) "Modern" explanatory note *without* footnote

> GNB: (The standard dry measure then in use equaled twenty quarts.)

This would be more instructive if the name of at least one of the units *(omer / ephah)* was also given. Compare FRCL's attractive solution:

> – La ration de manne, quatre litres environ, représentait le dixième de l'unité de mesure habituelle. –
>
> (*English*: The ration of manna, about four liters, matched the tenth of the usual measuring unit.)

This way, the *function* of the original explanatory note is maintained: It is a comparison of the measure that is found in the text with another unit. In the preceding story, FRCL had translated *omer* with "environ quatre litres" (about four liters) as well (v. 16).

e) "Modern" explanatory note *as a footnote*

> CEV: The main text does not contain the words of v. 36. They are *only* found in the footnote.
>
> *footnote:* The Hebrew text adds, "An omer is one tenth of an ephah." In the CEV "omer" is usually translated "two quarts."

This solution is transparent. Nevertheless, the explanatory note is part of the MT and some representation of it should be found in the main text. Whichever solution is adopted, the translation of *omer* in the whole passage (vv. 16ff) needs to be coordinated with the translation of v. 36.

Further references with the same kind of problem are the ones listed below:

> Ex 30:13 ... half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs) ... [and Num 3:47; 18:16][18]
>
> Deut 3:11 (... By the common cubit it is nine cubits long and four cubits wide.)[19]
>
> 2Chr 3:3 ... the length, in cubits of the old standard, was sixty cubits, and the width twenty cubits.[20]

Let me cite another example that involves names of months.[21] Esther 2:16 reads:

> When Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus in his royal palace in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

The same construction occurs in Esther 2:16; 3:7 (twice); 3:13; 8:9/12; 9:1; Zechariah 1:7. Again, we are dealing with two levels: One is the relation between two different Biblical units, and the other one is their relation to our modern calendar. The *Handbook* (Omanson and Noss 1997) says,

> He cites the month first by number in the Hebrew fashion, and then by its Babylonian name that the Jews used from the time of the captivity. Almost all versions retain both the ordinal and the name used by the author. GECL, however, omits the name of the month: "in the tenth month of his seventh year of reigning." The Living Bible also omits the Babylonian name but substitutes the modern English name: "in January of the seventh year of his reign." The use of two calendars in identifying months is evidence of the importance the author gives to time and to history in telling the story of Esther. The two calendar systems should be maintained in translation. The Babylonian name may be transliterated like other proper nouns. A footnote may then be used to explain **Tebeth**, or a glossary entry may discuss the Old Testament calendar system.

NLT07 uses seasonal references and footnotes instead.

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[18] Even if one does not classify these words as an explanatory note, but rather as part of God's speech, there is still the issue of two unknown measurements to be dealt with – namely the *shekel* and the *gerah*.
[19] For details on this verse see the remarks on the table in § 5 below.
[20] A case in the New Testament is found in Mark 12:42.
[21] Dealing with the problems relating to the conversion of dates is a topic worthwhile to be treated on its own. Here, I restrict myself to the instances where the Biblical author uses more than one calendar.

> Esther was taken to King Xerxes at the royal palace in early winter* of the seventh year of his reign.
>
> * *footnote:* Hebrew *in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth*. A number of dates in the book of Esther can be cross-checked with dates in surviving Persian records and related accurately to our modern calendar. This month of the ancient Hebrew lunar calendar occurred within the months of December 479~B.C. and January 478~B.C.

There is also the same Hebrew construction in reverse, i.e. with the month's name given first, and then explained with the numbered month. We find it in 1 Kings 6:1/38; 8:2. For example, 1 Kings 8:2 says:

> All the people of Israel assembled to King Solomon at the festival in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month.

The *Handbook* (Omanson and Ellington 2008) recommends:

> Since this Canaanite month name was no longer known and used by the Israelite people when this account was written, the author explains to his readers that this corresponds to **the seventh month** (not the month of July, as a literal rendering might be understood in some languages). This month was later called "Tishri" and corresponds to modern mid-September to mid-October. NLT says "in early autumn," and Peregrino has "in the month of October (the seventh month)." These renderings have the advantage of showing that **the seventh month** does not mean the modern seventh month of July. But it will probably be better to keep the name found in the Hebrew text and then indicate in a footnote that this corresponds to September/October.

I present another example of NLT07's approach, which is explained in their introduction, namely 1 Kings 6:1,

> It was in midspring, in the month of Ziv,* during the fourth year of Solomon's reign, that he began to construct the Temple of the LORD....
>
> * *footnote:* Hebrew *It was in the month of Ziv, which is the second month*. This month of the ancient Hebrew lunar calendar usually occurs within the months of April and May.

Thus, similarly to what NRSV does in Joshua 3:16 regarding the names of the Dead Sea, here the time is rendered in a meaningful way for the reader and one name of the original text *(Ziv)* is kept, while the other phrase *(second month)* is only rendered in the footnote. Note that NLT has changed its system between its first edition (1996) and its second edition (2004). The former had only the modern rendering in the text and both Hebrew wordings in the footnote.[22] (However, the *explanation* about using seasonal references was better in NLT 1996's introduction than in the 2007 one.)

3.2.4 Summary

It was relatively simple to choose and apply a principle to our first example *Salt Sea* in Joshua 3:16. If the translator feels the need, he can *replace* the ancient name with the modern one. The case of *Beer-sheba* in Genesis 21:31 was more complicated, because the name is a *meaningful* one, and the meaning is relevant. The case of *omer* in Ex 16:36 presented a special challenge in that the author *explains a unit, the name of which does not occur in the translation*. It shows both that it is good to have principles laid down as a starting point, and that principles carry only so far and creative solutions might still be necessary at some points.

3.3. The phrase "to this day": Which day is that?

The phrase עַד־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה *'ad-hayyôm hazzeh* "to this day" / "until today" is especially frequent in Joshua, but there are numerous occurrences in other books as well. (There is also the shorter phrase עַד־הַיּוֹם *'ad-hayyôm* "to the day", which sometimes has the same meaning.) The phrase "to this day" often refers to a name that is still in use, or to a place that can still be visited. Both of these cases occur together in Joshua 7:26:

> and raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the Lord turned from his burning anger. Therefore that place to this day is called the Valley of Achor.

[22] There seems to be some inconsistency. Esther 2:16 in NLT07 still follows the older model.

The problem with the phrase "to this day" is that it will often be misunderstood as referring to "today," that is, to the reader's own life time, whereas in reality it refers to the Biblical author's time. In some cases, this misunderstanding is a non-issue. For example, Genesis 26:33 says: "... therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba to this day." Although, strictly speaking, this refers to the Biblical author's time, the statement is applicable even to today, since the place is still known by that name. In other cases that is not so – see, for example, the verse from Joshua quoted above.

What should translators do? As we will see when we look at different verses, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to translating this phrase. All I can do here is to raise some of the issues that the translator will face, and make a few suggestions. For clarification: the phrase "to this day" occurs 84 times in the Old Testament. Not all of these instances are problematic. Here, I discuss only those that occur within explanatory notes.

Marking the whole explanatory note by using parentheses can alert the reader to the fact that this bit of text is added by someone from his own perspective. This simple signal could be enough for some readers to understand that "to this day" is not to be understood as *today*. (Among the English versions, only NET does so.)

A remark in the introduction might be necessary. This could be done in the introduction to the whole Bible, or perhaps only in the book introductions to Genesis, where the phrase occurs for the first time, and in the introduction to Joshua, where it is more frequent than elsewhere. Such a remark could be worded like this: "The phrase 'to this day' does not refer to our present time, but to the time when the book was written."

However, such a wording is potentially confusing, because the phrase "to this day" also occurs in places where it is not the author himself who speaks. For example, it occurs in direct speech in Jacob's blessing, which contains this clause: "the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day" (Gen 48:15). In such places, the phrase would not be placed inside parentheses though.

The book of Kings brings an additional difficulty. Its last verses indicate that it was written during the exile. A statement like the one in 2 Kings 2:22 could still have been true during that time. It says: "So the water has been wholesome to this day, according to the word that Elisha spoke." But several other places cannot apply to the time of writing anymore. Such is the case, for example, with 1 Kings 8:8, which says about the poles of the Ark of the covenant: "They are there to this day." By the time of the exile, the Temple was destroyed.[23] Thus, the phrase "to this day" dates back to an earlier account, and was apparently left untouched by the compiler of Kings when he used passages from that source. Another case where this is certainly so is 1 Kings 9:21.

What could a good solution look like? Consider 2 Kings 13:23,

> But the Lord was gracious to them and had compassion on them; he turned toward them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them; nor has he banished them from his presence until now.

If the reader is told in the book introduction that Kings was written for the community in the exile, then this verse is a confusing statement, because by the time of the exile the Lord *had* banished the people from his presence! But the original readers knew that the compiler of Kings made use of earlier sources.

One option for the translator is to do the same: Since the sources that were used by the compiler of Kings are frequently mentioned in the book itself (and this could be highlighted in the book introduction as well), he could trust that the reader understands the different layers. But many readers will not.

GCLNR00 solves the last sentence this way (and GHFA does so similarly):

> Er wollte sie nicht vernichten, denn bis dahin hatte er noch nicht endgültig mit ihnen gebrochen.
>
> (*English:* He did not want to destroy them, because until then he had not ultimately broken up with them.)

[23] The LXX drops the problematic sentence. In the LXX, 1Ki 8:8 [3Ki 8:8] ends with the clause "but they could not be seen from outside." (NETS). But MT continues with "they are there to this day" (NRSV).

The use of the pluperfect, together with "not yet," implies that the situation has changed since.[24]

Some English versions do the same in Judges 18:1, where the short phrase *'ad-hayyôm* "to the day" occurs, e.g. NIV "because they had not yet come into an inheritance," and NET "because at that time they did not yet have a place to call their own)." Unfortunately, we cannot easily apply this solution to all relevant cases. For example, in 1 Kings 8:8 (quoted above) a phrase like "until then" would wrongly refer to the time of the dedication of the Temple, and would thus become pointless.

In some cases an attractive alternative to be considered is to express the idea by saying "from that time onward / henceforth" or similarly. This would work well, for example, in 1 Kings 9:21:

> NRSV: These Solomon conscripted for slave labor, and so they are to this day.
>
> Alternative: These Solomon conscripted for slave labor, and so they were from that time onward.

This wording leaves it open *how long* those people were put to slave labor, which is fitting, because we do not know exactly. A variation would be "…, and so they have remained." The only English version that comes close to such a rendering is CEV "..., and they remained Israel's slaves."

REB shows a similar solution in Joshua 6:25. Instead of "she has lived in the midst of Israel to this day" it has:

> Thus Joshua spared the lives of Rahab the prostitute, her household, and all who belonged to her, because she had hidden the men whom Joshua had sent to reconnoitre Jericho; she and her family settled permanently among the Israelites.

Some Study Bibles provide a footnote on this issue. For example, the NIV Study Bible says on 1 Kings 8:8, "These words must be those of the original author of this description of the dedication of the temple rather than those of the final compiler of the books of Kings." Such a remark might, however, trigger questions about the origin or development of the book that are not helpful in some settings.

The NIV Study Bible also addresses the issue in its introduction to 1 Kings, in the section on "Author, Sources and Date." It says about sentences including the phrase "to this day," "An alternative view is to understand these statements as those of the original source used by the author rather than statements of the author himself."

The problem becomes even more acute in 1–2 Chronicles. The parallel text of 1 Kings 8:8 – 2 Chronicles 5:9 – is, in its literal translation, even less applicable to the period when Chronicles was written, which is after the return from exile.[25] One could speak of four levels now: (1) The original writer described the delivery of the Ark into the Temple, and – already noticing the time lapse – provides an explanatory note for his contemporaries: he states that the poles can still be seen. (2) The compiler of Kings uses this text during the exile without adjusting it. He counts on his readers' understanding. (3) The Chronicler does the same in the era after the exile. (4) Today's translator of Chronicles delivers the text to his own audience.

As I said in the beginning, there is no ideal solution. The difficulties that I described make me wonder whether it is not best to go with the easiest way: a literal translation. But that would be inconsiderate to the reader who is not aware of the historical and literary background. Even if we admit that some such knowledge has to be taught and learned separately from the text itself, it does seem appropriate to facilitate the reading by applying some of the methods discussed.

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[24] Some versions, apparently attempting to evade the difficulty, have given the verse a rather questionable exegetical twist. REB: "nor has he even yet banished them from his sight." This would mean that, speaking during the exile, the Lord has still not banished the people. It would be theologically true to say that he has not given them up completely, but he had banished them from the country at that time. GNB: "He has never forgotten his people." CEV: "In fact, he has never turned his back on them or let them be completely destroyed." Again, these statements are true, but are not what the Hebrew sentence declares. The commentaries do not support such interpretations.

[25] Interestingly, the Chronicler drops the word "today" from Solomon's dedication prayer (compare 1Ki 8:28 with 2Chr 6:19), but that is within direct speech. It could just be for shortening.

4. Avoiding potential mistakes

This list of possible pitfalls might help to avoid them.

- **Giving the impression that the speaker in the text was explaining his own words**

  2 Chronicles 20:1 reads,

  > Messengers came and told Jehoshaphat, "A great multitude is coming against you from Edom, from beyond the sea; already they are at Hazazon-tamar" (that is, En-gedi).

  NRSV rightly put the whole remark "(that is, En-gedi)" *outside* the quotation marks of the direct speech. The remark about the alternative name is not part of what the messenger says. NASB, for instance, has done it differently:

  > Then some came and reported to Jehoshaphat, saying, "A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea, out of Aram and behold, they are in Hazazon-tamar (that is Engedi)."

  This can also be argued for, because the parentheses might be enough as a signal, and because the remark refers only to the place name, not to the entire speech. On the whole, however the solution in NRSV seems tidier.

  Another example comes from Numbers 27:14. The NIV, for instance, places the note outside of God's speech.

  > … for when the community rebelled at the waters in the Desert of Zin, both of you disobeyed my command to honor me as holy before their eyes." (These were the waters of Meribah Kadesh, in the Desert of Zin.)

  In contrast, NET includes the note within the quotation marks. That model should not be followed, unless it is really based on an exegetical decision.[26]

- **Removing information from the text that is relevant elsewhere**

  I have already touched on this problem in the discussion on *Beer-Sheba* in § 3.2.2. Let us look at Genesis 48:7. Jacob says about Rachel, "and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath" (that is, Bethlehem)." Instead of writing "Ephrath," the name Bethlehem, which is also the name by which that place is known today, could be used in the translation. The explanatory remark could then be taken out. However, this cannot be recommended. Ephrath occurs a few more times, including Ruth 4:11 and Micah 5:1 [Engl. 2]. These places are relevant in the history of David and the Messiah. Theoretically, it might be possible to avoid the double name there as well, but that seems to be too strong an intervention in the Biblical text. In addition, there is the gentilic noun *Ephrathite* (e.g. 1 Samuel 17:12) that also builds on this name. (For a similar case, see the discussion on *City of David* and *Zion* in the introduction to § 3 above.)

- **Confounding the original text and the explanatory note**

  The question here is: Which phrase explains which? In its rendering of 1 Kings 6:1, the NASB represents the Hebrew correctly by saying "in the month of Ziv which is the second month." In contrast, the REB says, "in the second month of that year, the month of Ziv." There is no question that the Hebrew grammar has it the other way round. One would need some justification for changing that.

  2 Samuel 5:7 contains the note "the stronghold of Zion, which is now the city of David." 1 Kings 8:1 has it the other way round: "the city of David, which is Zion." No matter what the reason is, and no matter which term today's reader might be more familiar with, we need to keep the relation that the two names have to each other in the Biblical text.

- **Introducing a change over time where two names were used simultaneously**

[26] Cf. Omanson (1990:418) on the same question concerning Acts 1:18f. He points out that GNB, NIV and NEB "close the quotation marks at the end of verse 17 and open the quotation marks again at the beginning of verse 20. By their use of quotation marks, these three translations indicate that the words of verses 18 and 19 are Luke's comment to Theophilus, which he inserted into Peter's speech to explain what happened to Judas."

GNB translates Genesis 35:19 like this: "... beside the road to Ephrath, now known as Bethlehem." This is most likely justified. But there could be cases where a person or a place were known by two names without any shift over time being involved. A safer wording would then be "also known as ...".

- **Interrupting the text with excessively long explanatory notes**

  The flow of a narrative should not be disrupted by a note that is long and makes reading awkward. Where an explanatory note is longer than just a phrase, it is better to make it a separate sentence. Judges 14:10 is a place where either solution can work:

  > NIV: ... And Samson made a feast there, as was customary for bridegrooms.
  >
  > GNB: ..., and Samson gave a banquet there. This was a custom among the young men.

- **Applying punctuation inconsistently**

  Mismatches in how the punctuation is applied are not reader-friendly. An example would be using dashes in one place and parentheses for the same purpose in another. Also, to state the ovbious, pairs of parentheses need to match. Depending on the syntax and on the conventions in a given language, an exception could be explanatory notes that are opened with a dash, but closed with a comma.

  Finally, if it was decided to use brackets [ ] for the *translator's* explanatory notes, then they must not be used for the *Biblical author's* explanatory notes, because that would communicate that this piece of text is not part of the Biblical text.

5. Illustration on the basis of Deuteronomy 3

The third chapter of Deuteronomy serves as a good example, because there are several explanatory notes within a few verses, and they are of different kind and degree of difficulty. The *Handbook* (Bratcher and Hatton 2000) says about verse 9, "This verse is, so to speak, a footnote, added to the text by someone other than the original writer"[27] and suggests, "A translation should end verse 8 with a full stop, and have verse 9 in parentheses." Then, on verse 11 it says, "Here is another footnote: a note about the iron (or, stone) bedstead (or, coffin) of King Og…. Rabbah, the capital of ancient Ammon, is now Amman, the capital of Jordan."[28]

If a translation passes over these notes indiscriminately (as for example GHFA and the GNLB), it misses a special feature of this section. It is a case analogous to Exodus 16, discussed in § 2.1. above. McConville (2002:92f) puts it well when he writes,

> A noteworthy feature of the passage is the series of interjections into the speech of Moses. The narrator's voice has the effect of putting the possession of Transjordan on a broad canvas, historically and geographically. The perspective is from a time later than Moses (note 'to this day', 14). In a sense the narratorial intrusions increase the significance of Moses' conquest, because they anchor it in a world of other, normal, historical processes. However, they also put his work in historical perspective, suggesting that the life of Israel must continue after him. In this sense the rhetorical feature complements the theme of his death and the succession of Joshua.

Table 3, below, shows Deuteronomy 3:8–17 in various translations. Problematic areas and alternative solutions are discussed in the Remarks column and in the section below the chart. It is not claimed that the "Model translation" has the ideal solution for each case and situation, but the examples in the chart may serve teams in discussing their approach to explanatory notes.

[27] Tigay (1996 on 2:10–12): "Since verse 12 speaks of the Israelites in the third person, these notes do not appear to have been part of Moses' speech to the Israelites, to whom he consistently refers in the second person."

[28] Note that what the writers of the *Handbook* do here for their readers – the equating of Rabbah with Amman – is exactly what the Biblical authors sometimes did for their audience – the "updating of names."

Table 3: Translation of explanatory notes in Deuteronomy 3:8–17
Explanatory notes are shaded gray. Special issues are underlined.

NASB	NRSV	Model translation, based on NRSV	Remarks
*NASB's own footnotes – as far as relevant here – are marked with *, and rendered at the very bottom.*	*NRSV's own footnotes are marked with [a, b, c], and rendered at the very bottom.*	*Suggested footnotes are marked with *.*	
[8] "Thus we took the land at that time from the hand of the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, from the valley of Arnon to Mount Hermon. [9] (Sidonians call Hermon Sirion, and the Amorites call it Senir): [10] all the cities of the plateau and all Gilead and all Bashan, as far as Salecah and Edrei, cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan. [11] (For only Og king of Bashan was left of the remnant of the Rephaim. Behold, his bedstead was an iron bedstead; it is in Rabbah of the sons of Ammon. Its length was nine cubits and its width four cubits by ordinary cubit.*)	[8] So at that time we took from the two kings of the Amorites the land beyond the Jordan, from the Wadi Arnon to Mount Hermon [9] (the Sidonians call Hermon Sirion, while the Amorites call it Senir), [10] all the towns of the tableland, the whole of Gilead, and all of Bashan, as far as Salecah and Edrei, towns of Og's kingdom in Bashan. [11] (Now only King Og of Bashan was left of the remnant of the Rephaim. In fact his bed, an iron bed, can still be seen in Rabbah of the Ammonites. By the common cubit it is nine cubits long and four cubits wide.)	[8] So at that time we took from the two kings of the Amorites the land beyond the Jordan, from the Wadi Arnon to Mount Hermon. [9] (The Sidonians call Hermon Sirion, while the Amorites call it Senir.) [10] We took all the towns of the tableland, the whole of Gilead, and all of Bashan, as far as Salecah and Edrei, towns of Og's kingdom in Bashan. [11] (Now only King Og of Bashan was left of the remnant of the Rephaim. In fact his bed, an iron bed, can still be seen in the Ammonite city of Rabbah [today's Amman]. By the natural cubit now in use it is nine cubits long and four cubits wide [4 x 1.8 meters / 13 x 6 feet]).	v. 9: Like most versions, I include this note in parentheses. Depending on the receptor language, one may introduce it with a phrase like "By the way, ..." v. 11: NASB's "For" renders the Heb. *kî*, which is one marker for explanatory notes. NRSV's "Now" is more natural. v. 11: NASB's "Behold" renders the Heb. *hinnēh* – another way of introducing an explanatory note. NRSV's "In fact" is a fitting solution. v. 11: Rabbah: I include, as the *translator's* explan-atory note, the modern name of the city. v. 11 cubit: See discussion below. I add "now in use" to alert to the different definition of *cubit*.
[12] "So we took possession of this land at that time. From Aroer, which is by the valley of Arnon, and half the hill country of Gilead and its cities I gave to the Reubenites and to the Gadites.	[12] As for the land that we took possession of at that time, I gave to the Reubenites and Gadites the territory north of Aroer,[a] that is on the edge of the Wadi Arnon, as well as half the hill country of Gilead with its towns,	[12] As for the land that we took possession of at that time, I gave to the Reubenites and Gadites the territory north of Aroer by the Wadi Arnon, as well as half the hill country of Gilead with its towns,	v. 12: "Aroer, which is ... ": Some relative clauses like this could also be classi-fied as explanatory notes, but for the sake of simplicity are not given special treatment. Cf. also the apposition in v. 13 "the kingdom of Og" etc.

[13] The rest of Gilead and all Bashan, the kingdom of Og, I gave to the half-tribe of Manasseh, all the region of Argob (concerning all Bashan, it is called the land of Rephaim. [14] Jair the son of Manasseh took all the region of Argob as far as the border of the Geshurites and the Maacathites, and called it, *that is*, Bashan, after his own name, Havvoth-jair,** *as it is* to this day.)	[13] and I gave to the half-tribe of Manasseh the rest of Gilead and all of Bashan, Og's kingdom. (The whole region of Argob: all that portion of Bashan used to be called a land of Rephaim; [14] Jair the Manassite acquired the whole region of Argob as far as the border of the Geshurites and the Maacathites, and he named them—that is, Bashan—after himself, Havvoth-jair,[b] as it is to this day.)	[13] and I gave to the half-tribe of Manasseh the rest of Gilead and all of Bashan, Og's kingdom. (The whole region of Argob in Bashan used to be called the land of the Rephaim; [14] Eventually Jair the Manassite acquired the whole region of Argob as far as the border of the Geshurites and the Maacathites, and he named it – that is, Bashan – after himself, Havvoth-jair [villages of Jair], as it is still known to us.)	v. 13-14: The syntax is difficult, which is why NASB and NRSV differ. *Argob* sometimes seems to be a *part* of Bashan (see v. 4), and sometimes seems to be *equated* with Bashan (cf. Tigay 1996:418; McConville 2002:89). v. 14: *Liter.:* "as it is to this day". – "As it is still known to us" does not necessarily include the modern reader. v. 14: Havvoth-jair: The meaning of the Hebrew name cannot be understood without translation.
[15] To Machir I gave Gilead. [16] To the Reubenites and to the Gadites I gave from Gilead even as far as the valley of Arnon, the middle of the valley as a border and as far as the river Jabbok, the border of the sons of Ammon; [17] the Arabah also, with the Jordan as a border, from Chinnereth*** even as far as the sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, at the foot of the slopes of Pisgah on the east. * lit. *by a man's forearm* ** i.e. the towns of Jair *** i.e. the Sea of Galilee	[15] To Machir I gave Gilead. [16] And to the Reubenites and the Gadites I gave the territory from Gilead as far as the Wadi Arnon, with the middle of the wadi as a boundary, and up to the Jabbok, the wadi being boundary of the Ammonites; [17] the Arabah also, with the Jordan and its banks, from Chinnereth down to the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea,[c] with the lower slopes of Pisgah on the east. [a] Heb territory from Aroer [b] That is Settlement of Jair [c] Heb Salt Sea	[15] To Machir I gave Gilead. [16] And to the Reubenites and the Gadites I gave the territory from Gilead as far as the Wadi Arnon, the middle of the wadi being the boundary, and up to the Jabbok, the wadi being boundary of the Ammonites; [17] the Arabah also, with the Jordan and its banks, from the Sea of Galilee down to the Sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea,* with the lower slopes of Pisgah on the east. * Hebrew: 'Salt Sea'.	v. 16: Some take the clause "the middle of the wadi being the boundary" as another explanatory note (NET, McConville). v. 17: sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea: I follow NRSV. See discussion above.

Remarks on table 3

Use of parentheses: Verses 11 and 14 show the use of parentheses for the Biblical author's explanatory note, and inside them square brackets for the translator's annotation.

Rabbah (v. 11): The fact that the modern name Amman still reflects the name of the ancient Ammonite

people is quite obvious, but many readers would not make the connection between the Ammonites and present-day Jordan's capital by themselves.

In English, alternative wordings for "[today's Amman]" are: "[modern / present-day Amman]".

Pointing out that this city is today's Amman could increase the risk of creating the misunderstanding that Og's bed can still be inspected there today. But this problem is not really due to the note in brackets; it is a bigger problem with the phrase "to this day".

Salecah and Edrei (v. 10): Edrei is present-day Dar'ā (also Deraa). Dar'ā is not a minor place. It has a population of about 100,000. Furthermore, it played a prominent role in the Syrian civil war. Thus it is not an unknown entity. This raises the question whether its modern name should be given in the text.

Salecah is present-day Salkhad (also Tsalkhad). This town is much smaller than Dar'ā, but nevertheless easily found in a modern atlas or on the Internet. Where and when to use present-day names – be it as a translation of the ancient names, or in addition to them – cannot be discussed here, but it is one other issue that translation teams need to think about.

Cubit (the phrase בְּאַמַּת־אִישׁ *bᵊ'ammat-'iš*) (v. 11): What NASB translates "by ordinary cubit" is literally "by the cubit of a man." Tigay (1996) says, "This phrase distinguishes the cubit used in measuring Og's bedstead from some other type of cubit, probably a royal cubit."[29, 30] There are some uncertainties in the interpretation of this phrase, but probably we have to assume that everywhere else in the Pentateuch *cubit* refers to the royal cubit (i.e. the long cubit). It was one handbreadth longer than the natural cubut, which reaches from elbow to fingertip. The purpose of the statement about the cubit here then is to apply to the given measurements a definition of the cubit that has not been used elswehere in the book – probably the natural (or common/ordinary) cubit.[31] Most English versions do not bring this out. Adding the phrase "now in use" brings across to the modern reader that the Biblical author was dealing with two different measures.

This is a two-level explanatory note: The Biblical author adds some information about Og's bedstead, and then qualifies his own data – the measurements – by noting which unit of measure applies. The translator needs to reflect all that *and* provide measurements that are clear to his reader. Whether with or without footnote, there is no simple and tidy way of doing that.

Names for Bashan: Verse 13 states (NASB): "Concerning all Bashan, it is called the land of Rephaim." But v. 14 states (NASB): "... and called it, *that is,* Bashan, after his own name, Havvoth-jair." One should consider translating either with "used to be called the land of the Rephaim" in v. 13 (cf. NRSV), and / or ending v. 14 with "Thus it became known as Havvoth-jair [villages of Jair]." This would also have the advantage of being more vague as to whether that name is still in use today.

Argob (v. 14): Deuteronomy 3 recounts how Israel conquered the land east of the river Jordan under Moses' leadership. Tigay says: "It is likely that 'Jair' refers here to the clan that traced itself back to Jair, not to Jair himself." He also explains,

> It is not clear how the present verse relates to verses 3–7, which imply that the Argob was conquered earlier. Conceivably it means that Jair constituted the unit that captured Argob earlier. Another possibility is that the conquest of the Argob was accomplished in two phases: a national one, in which Og's army was defeated by the entire Israelite army (vv. 3–5), and a local one in which Jair defeated the local defenders of the cities in its territory (v. 14). In that case, verse 3 has telescoped the two phases into a single summary that includes the phase mentioned in verse 14.

If one follows this latter view, it would be justified **to start out v. 14 with "Later** / Eventually…."

Havvoth-jair (v. 14): Not every name has to be meaningful in translation, but *it is the point of this explanatory note* to establish the connection between the name that the readers know and its historical origin. Therefore the meaning of the name should be made transparent to the reader.

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[29] McConville (2002) translates "by the common cubit" without further comment.
[30] On this question, see Schmidt (2014:5).
[31] Another possibility is that this cubit was in use among the Amorites or Ammonites, from where the quote of the measurements came.

Chinnereth (v. 17): This Hebrew name signifies the Sea of Galilee.[32] Since that name is better known, it should be used. (How the cognate names in the Old and New Testaments – here Chinnereth and Gennesareth – are dealt with is another issue for teams to consider, but not our topic here.)[33]

Formatting and display: CEV devotes a separate paragraph to v. 11 alone, with its own heading. There is a certain logic to it, because Og's coffin is not directly related to the story of conquering the Amorites' land and distributing it. Also, CEV adds the line "Moses said to Israel" at the beginning of chapter 3 in order to clarify who is speaking. If one considers v. 11 to be a later note, it makes sense to take it out from that section. Even so, elevating an explanatory note to a paragraph in its own right does not reflect its role in the text; and one would have to do the same in similar other places.

In conclusion, I want to state that, when it comes to individual cases, it will often be a matter of opinion whether it is worthwhile to set them off as explanatory notes or not. However, it is recommended that the translator choose one method as his default approach.

6. Model Guideline

The following list takes up most cases that were discussed and may serve as a starting point for teams who want to determine their own language- and project-specific guidelines.

- Where the **Biblical author** himself gives an explanatory note, we enclose it in **parentheses** ( ).

  e.g. Josh 11:10 Joshua turned back at that time, and took Hazor, and struck its king down with the sword. (Before that time Hazor was the head of all those kingdoms.)

- Where we as **translators** add an explanation, we enclose it in **square brackets** [ ].
- Where appropriate, we introduce the Biblical authors' explanatory notes by means of a fitting **discourse particle**.

  e.g. Gen 36:24 These are the sons of Zibeon: Aiah and Anah; (By the way, he is the Anah who found the springs in the wilderness, as he pastured the donkeys of his father Zibeon.)

- Where we expect that our readers might not understand the Biblical author's explanatory note, we translate it freely according to its meaning, and give the literal wording in a footnote.

  e.g. Josh 3:16 ... while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea,* were wholly cut off. *[*footnote:* Literally: the Salt Sea]

  not: ... while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Sea) [that is, the Dead Sea] was completely cut off.

- Where the Biblical author provides **an alternative name**, we set this name between **dashes**: – ... –.

  e.g. Judg 7:1 Then Jerubbaal – that is, Gideon – and all the troops that were with him rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod.

- Where the Biblical author provides **a translation of a name**, we enclose it in **parentheses**.

  e.g. Est 9:24 Haman ... had plotted against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur (that is "the lot") to crush and destroy them;

- If the Biblical author alludes to the meaning of a name, and **the translation is added *by the translator***, this is done in between **chevrons**:

  e.g. Gen 21:31 Then he named the place Beersheba «well of the oath», because that was where they had sworn the oath.

  Alternative: Then he named the place Beersheba [meaning «well of the oath»], because that was where they had sworn the oath.

[32] Tigay (1996), McConville (2002). Elsewhere, this proper name can also signify the settlement (see Josh 19:35).
[33] One other example are the names Miriam in the Old Testament and Mary in the New Testament. One can argue for or against such a type of inconsistency. See Bailey (2007) "Proper Names in the Bible."

- When a name is only ***similar* to a meaningful word**, we add the words "sounding like ..." to explain that.

  e.g. Ex 2:10 ... She named him Moses [sounding like the Hebrew for "pull out"], "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

- Where appropriate, **modern place names** are added in square brackets, preceded by "today's".

  e.g. Deut 3:11 the Ammonite city of Rabbah [today's Amman].

- Where the Biblical author explains a **unit of measurement or time** that does not show up in our own translation, we make his explanation meaningful in the main text and provide the literal rendering in a footnote.

  e.g. Ex 16:36 The container used to measure the manna was an omer; it held about two quarts. [*footnote: Literally:* An omer is one tenth of an ephah.]

- Regarding the phrase **"to this day"**, we try to eliminate misunderstandings about what "this day" is. Because the usage of the phrase varies, we deal with this on a case-by-case basis.

  e.g. Josh 6:25 Rahab and her family settled permanently among the Israelites.

- We make exceptions to these rules as individual cases require them.
- We explain the essential points of our approach to explanatory notes in the introduction to the publication.

7. A list of explanatory notes

To help translators in tracking explanatory notes, table 4 below lists some of them. The list is not exhaustive, but might include the majority of the less debatable ones.

Table 4: Occurrences of explanatory notes

book	**references**
Genesis	13:10; 14:2/3/7/8/17; 15:18; 23:2/19; 32:4[3]; 35:6/19/27; 36:1/19; 43:32; 48:7; 50:3
Exodus	4:26; 16:31–36; 18:3/4; 30:13
Numbers	3:47; 13:22; 18:16; 20:13; 27:14; 32:38
Deuteronomy	2:10–12; 2:20–23; 3:8–14; 4:48; 34:1
Joshua	3:16; 7:2; 10:13; 11:10; 12:9; 13:3; 14:15; 15:8/9/10/25/49/54/60; 18:13/14/28; 19:8; 20:7; 21:11
Judges	7:1; 11:39–40; 14:10; 15:17; 19:10
Ruth	4:7
Kings	1 Kings 6:1/38; 8:2
Chronicles	1 Chronicles 4:22; 5:36 [6:10]; 11:4; 2 Chronicles 3:3; 5:2; 20:2; 22:11
Ezra	10:23
Esther	2:16; 3:7 (2x); 3:13; 8:9/12; 9:1; 9:24; 10:2
Daniel	10:4
Zechariah	1:7

Remarks: Most occurrences in Genesis are "updates" of names. The same is true of those in Joshua 15–24. The naming formulas in Genesis (where the *origin* of a name is explained, see § 3.2.2) have not been included. The places listed for 1 Kings and Esther (except Esther 9:24; 10:2) are all double names for months.

In addition to the above, table 5 lists the places where the standard phrase "to this day" occurs, as far as they are relevant here. (All occurrences within direct speech have been removed.)[34] Some places are debatable: For instance, 2 Kings 17 gives a theological evaluation of the historical events. In that context, the phrase "to this day" (vv. 23/34/41) is not an explanatory note anymore. Therefore they were omitted.

Table 5: Occurrences of the phrase "to this day" in explanatory notes

book	**references**
Genesis	*19:37; 19:38*; 26:33; 32:33; *35:20*; 47:26
Deuteronomy	2:22; 3:14; 10:8; 34:6
Joshua	4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26 (2x); 8:28; 8:29; 9:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10
Judges	1:21; 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12
Samuel	1 Samuel 5:5; 6:18; 27:6; 30:25; 2 Samuel 4:2–3; 6:8; 18:18
Kings	1 Kings 8:8; 9:13; 9:21; 10:12; 12:19; 2 Kings 2:22; 8:22; *10:27*; 14:7; 16:6
Chronicles	1 Chronicles 4:41/43; 5:26; 13:11; 2 Chronicles 5:9; 8:8; 10:19; *20:26*; 21:10; *35:25*
Ezekiel	20:29

Remarks: References in *italics* indicate occurrences of the short phrase "to the day." One further special case is 2 King 13:23 with *'ad-'attâ* "until now."

8. Conclusion

Passing oral or written texts down generations is fraught with the risk of misunderstanding. Therefore, glosses are not an oddity that we as modern translators would need to cover up, but rather a textual element that is to be expected. They testify to the Biblical author's desire to communicate well. This includes both respect for his ancient source and concern for his readers. His explanatory notes are an element of paratext *in* the Biblical text, and a form of metadiscourse: The author mediates between his text and his readers.

Instead of ignoring them, translators need to recognize that explanatory notes exist, and need to reflect on the method for dealing with them. This is part of a professional approach to translation, and will give the translator confidence in dealing with these notes. Marking explanatory notes as what they are may help readers to realize more fully the historical dimension in the development and tradition of the texts. It could also contribute to them seeing themselves as part of the community of recipients across the ages, and that they are not the first ones who lack some "cultural literacy" when it comes to Biblical texts. Finally, while the passage of time can cause difficulties in understanding, it can also make the lasting witness of texts (or of people and locations mentioned in them) more significant.

In the present treatise, I could not address all aspects of translating explanatory notes. Some more precision is desirable in how they can be identified and defined. Further investigation of readers' perceptions would help to represent them in an audience-sensitive way. Language-specific ways of expressing parenthetic notes could be explored further. (Parenthetically, explanatory notes in the New Testament should also be compiled and analyzed in view of translation.)

9. Abbreviations

CEV Contemporary English Version

DCL96 Dutch common language version 1996 (Groot Nieuws Bijbel)

FRCL French common language version

[34] The only similar cases in the New Testament seem to be Matt 27:8 ("For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.") and 28:15 ("... And this story is still told among the Jews to this day").

GECL	German common language version (Gute Nachricht Bibel)
GCLNR00	German common language 2000 (Gute Nachricht Bibel)
GHFA	German Hoffnung Für Alle version (Hope for all)
GNB	Good News Bible (TEV)
GNLB	Neues Leben: Die Bibel (German equivalent of NLT)
JB	Jerusalem Bible
KJV	King James Version
LXX	Septuagint
Menge	German version by Hermann Menge
MT	Masoretic Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NBS	French version La Nouvelle Bible Segond
NEB	New English Bible
NET	New English Translation
NeÜ	German version NeÜ (originally Neue evangelistische Übertragung)
NIV	New International Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
PDV	French version Parole de Vie
REB	Revised English Bible

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