

predominant language, and by clinging to the language of the former administration, English. There are purely educational reasons which are amply sufficient to justify a certain place for the vernacular, and another but assured place for English, in schools. In the nature of things, it must be expected that the use of vernaculars will in the course of time decrease; a united country will more and more incline to the use of a single language; we may privately regret that English has not succeeded in being that single language, but we ought not to disregard the consequences of what is after all a perfectly legitimate political decision. If Scriptures in Classical Arabic alone are made available, they can never become the means by which the common people will receive the Word of God; they will reach only the most highly cultured. Colloquial Arabic Scriptures may have only a small part to play at first in this particular area, but their part can hardly fail to grow more important as time goes on. There is a strong case for familiarising the present generation of schoolchildren with the Scriptures in Arabic, even though for them the primary source of their knowledge of the Bible will continue to be their own vernacular versions. Ordination candidates should become familiar with the Arabic versions during their training, so that they may not be restricted to their own tribes during their ministry. The townships and industrial centres which are only now beginning to grow, have groups of mixed tribes and the children of these people are already to some extent detribalized; such populations already need Arabic Scriptures, and their numbers are increasing. It should not be claimed that the need is already a great one, measured in the numbers of those who would now use such books, but the opportunity to be abreast of a quite certain development is at hand now, and ought not to be missed.

Problems of Bible Translation

R. F. Henderson

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When the Holy Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost the disciples began to speak with tongues and Jews who had been born abroad, whose language was no longer Aramaic but that of the country of their birth, were amazed to hear, every man in his own tongue, the mighty works of God.

The gift of tongues might well be compared with the rocket which is used to assist a modern aeroplane in its take-off. When the plane becomes airborne the rocket is spent and the further propulsion of the plane is left to its own engines. In the same way we believe that the gift of tongues was for a time and for a purpose. That time and purpose are past and the work of making the Word of God known to every man in his own tongue has become the continuing task of generation

after generation of scholars. Their work is never finished because language is a living changing thing. Sometimes it changes quickly as English did after the Norman invasion, sometimes it changes slowly as English has been doing since the King James Version was made in 1611. Whether the change be fast or slow it is always there and, sooner or later, every translation will fail to convey to every man, in the tongue in which he commonly speaks and thinks, the mighty works of God.

When this occurs a new translation is required and some person, or body of persons, possessing the necessary ability, will feel the urge to make it. They will require not only ability but courage and perseverance, for they must look forward to several years of close research and study, to criticism of their work and misunderstanding of their motives. They will, however, have set before themselves a high ambition — to give to their fellow countrymen a version of the Scriptures that will be clearer and more accurate than any earlier one and that will, at the same time, retain to a greater degree the force and spirit of the original.

That this has always been the translator's aim can be clearly seen by considering some of the great translations which have served as stepping-stones to our English Bible.

Long before the time of our Lord many Jews had settled in other countries and their descendants had lost facility in Hebrew, but used instead the Greek speech which served as the common language of trade around the eastern end of the Mediterranean. For the benefit of these foreign-born Jews the Old Testament had been translated into Greek. This work became the Scriptures of the early Church and quotations from it are common in the New Testament. It is for this reason that New Testament quotations are sometimes different from the original Old Testament passages. It is also interesting to note that the difficulty of making a good translation was appreciated even at this early date. In the prologue to the book of Ecclesiasticus in the Apocrypha the translator says, "For things originally spoken in Hebrew have not the same force in them when they are translated into another tongue, and not only these but the law itself and the prophecies and the rest of the books have no small difference when they are spoken in their original language".

Later the Church divided into Eastern and Western sections. The Western section had its headquarters at Rome, so that Latin became its common language. As Latin replaced Greek several translations were made until these several versions, together with the variations introduced by careless copying, became so perplexing that Jerome was commissioned about 380 A.D. to make a new translation into Latin. Since Latin was the common language of all those in Western Europe who could read and write, this was equivalent to translating the Bible into the common or vulgar tongue. The translation was known as the Vulgate.

In England the language of the country was changed from Saxon to Anglo-Saxon by the Danish invasion. Later the Norman conquest fused the Anglo-Saxon with Norman-French to give English. It was not until 1350 A.D. that the language became reasonably stable and the time opportune for Wycliffe to give his Church and nation the Bible in the language of the people. "Christ", he said "and His disciples

converted the world by making known the Scriptures to men in a form familiar to them".

It should perhaps be mentioned here that Wycliffe was perturbed at the corruption which had crept into the church, and believed that the best antidote for this corruption was to give the people the Scriptures in a form which they could understand. Most of the dignitaries of the Church, however, held the view that the Scriptures could not be understood by the common people without explanation as Philip explained the book of Isaiah to the Ethiopian eunuch, and that the ignorant and unlearned would wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction as Peter had said in 2 Peter 3 : 16. A decree was therefore passed in 1408 which forbade the translation of the Bible by any person without the authority of the Church.

A century later printing had come into common use. The study of Hebrew and Greek had been revived in England. The great scholar Erasmus had produced his Greek Testament. Erasmus also wished to give the people the Bible in their own language, "that the husbandman might sing it at his plough and the weaver at his shuttle". The Lutheran Reformation was, however, just commencing on the Continent, and the minds of the English Church authorities were dismayed by the disturbed outlook. They refused to consent to a translation on the grounds that the time was not opportune and they feared to give an occasion to some rebellious hothead. They persisted in this attitude until Tyndale, losing patience, entered the field and proceeded with his translation in the face of opposition and persecution.

The next few years saw great changes. Henry VIII had broken with the Pope. The Church in England had become the Church of England. The Bible in the tongue of the people was being put through one revision after another. Tyndale's, Coverdale's, Matthew's, the Great Bible, the Geneva Bible, the Bishops' Bible and the Douai Bible all appeared between 1525 and 1582. Religion and politics were interlocked; the Puritans who had fled to the Continent came back with the Geneva Bible, Churchmen used the Bishops' Bible and Roman Catholics had the Douai version. All these were well supplied with marginal notes calculated to set their opponents by the ears and to maintain ill-feeling and strife.

It was to end this state of affairs and to produce a Bible which would be acceptable to Puritans and Churchmen alike, that James I, who was himself a competent scholar, set up a committee of able men of both shades of opinion who produced the King James or Authorised Version in 1611.

Two hundred and fifty years passed by. More ancient manuscripts were found bringing greater certainty of the original text. The English language had slowly changed so that words had altered or even reversed in meaning. The necessity for a revision was felt, and so we got the Revised Version of 1885.

Now we have reached another stage. In the last sixty years much has been learned about what is called New Testament Greek, but which was really the common language along the shores of the Mediterranean. Much has also been learned about languages cognate with Hebrew.

During the last twenty years the rate of change in our own language has increased. All this has resulted in a number of new translations of the Scriptures, so that we are experiencing the same state of affairs which preceded the production of the King James Version.

Every one of these new translations has had the common aim of giving the reader the Word of God in the language in which he speaks and thinks.

It is instructive now to look at the way in which these various versions were received. The reluctance with which the Jews received the Septuagint when it first appeared gradually disappeared as its value and usefulness were proved, so that it was accepted by the writers of the New Testament as being fully authoritative. Passages which varied quite considerably from the Hebrew were quoted and are now accepted by us as Scripture. Some such passages with the Old Testament reference are:

Luke 4 : 18	from Isaiah 61 : 1
James 4 : 6	from Proverbs 3 : 34
1 Peter 4 : 18	from Proverbs 11 : 31
Hebrews 1 : 6	from Deuteronomy 32 : 43

The latter is particularly interesting for the words quoted in Hebrews do not appear at all in the Hebrew of Deuteronomy but do appear in the Septuagint.

In translating the Vulgate Jerome worked from Hebrew and Greek sources. The Vulgate was therefore a new translation and not a revision. It was given a very poor reception; it was called heretical and revolutionary; it was pronounced to be subversive of all faith in Holy Scripture; it was an impious altering of the inspired Word of God. This opposition lasted for centuries, but, one thousand years later, the Council of Trent decreed that the Vulgate was to be regarded as the standard version of the Scriptures and the Roman Catholic Church still holds to that decision. Even Knox's recent translation is a translation of the Vulgate. Indeed, all English Bibles before the King James Version were the same and made no attempt to go back to the Hebrew and Greek.

Wycliffe's Bible was received by the Church with bitter persecution, Wycliffe himself was called the forerunner of Antichrist, inventing a new translation of the Scriptures.

Tyndale's version was attacked by the leaders of the Church and subjected to much biased and unfair criticism. "To study to find errors in Tyndale's book were like studying to find water in the sea".

The King James Version was a masterpiece made by able men who were given every facility for their work. They went back to Hebrew and Greek sources and used freely all that was best in earlier translations, particularly Tyndale's. They were, however, well aware that their work would be unacceptable to many, and so their preface foresaw criticism from Popish persons on the one hand and from self-conceited brethren on the other. They were not far wrong in their forecast, for the Puritans clung to their Geneva Bible, and one eminent Hebrew scholar wrote to King James: "I would rather be torn to pieces by wild horses than allow such a version to be imposed on the Church". In the long run

the King James Version won its way into a position which no other version in any language has ever attained.

It is difficult to assess the reception given to the Douai version, for Roman Catholics were not Bible readers like the early Protestants. The original Douai was admittedly a clumsy version compared with the King James Version, and was later revised to the present Douai.

The Revised Version of 1885 had a disappointing reception. Its merits were not appreciated and it became more a book for reference than for reading.

As for the newer versions, time alone will tell which will stand and which will fall. One thing is certain, history will repeat itself, and each will meet with opposition and criticism. Some of this will be legitimate, but a great deal will be prejudiced. It may well be that when the King James Version has ceased to hold its place, as it must do sooner or later, it will not be replaced by any single version, for this state of affairs has been peculiar to our own language.

Having seen what is the aim of a translator and what reception he may expect his work to be given when completed, we may now look at the obstacles which confront him in the actual task of translating. It must be accepted as a fact that no translation can equal the original in all respects. This was clearly seen 2,000 years ago by the translator of Ecclesiasticus, who wrote, "Things spoken in Hebrew have not the same force in them when they are translated into another tongue". It is the business of the translator to preserve the force as well as he can. The chief obstacles in his way are three in number, namely: (1) The very nature of the words; (2) The different patterns in which sentences are built in different languages; and (3) The fact that each language has its own idioms peculiar to itself which cannot be translated word for word but must be translated by corresponding idioms.

If a citizen of the Irish Republic wishes to visit Britain he will proceed to change his Irish money into British money. This can be done coin for coin, for Irish currency has exactly the same coins as British currency and corresponding coins have exactly the same value. If, however, a Britisher wishes to visit France, he cannot exchange his money coin for coin, but only sum for sum, and that perhaps not exactly, but only to the nearest penny. It is much the same with words: it is frequently impossible to find in one language a word which is the exact equivalent of a particular word in another language. For example, we are told that in many languages there is no equivalent for the English word *home* in the sense in which it was used by the little American girl who had lived most of her life in one hotel after another. "I guess," she said, "we do have a home, only we don't have a house to put it in". Missionaries working in pagan countries have told of similar difficulties because the people have no word for the concept of *love*.

In addition, the same word may change its meaning with its context just as a colour may appear to change according to the background against which it is seen. In the sentence, 'The girl wore a pretty frock but her shoes were pretty shabby', the word *pretty* has two quite different meanings. If this sentence were being translated into another language

it is unlikely that the translator would be able to find a word which would change its meaning in the same way.

Another example is the word *word* itself. If the three English sentences:

- (1) How do you spell this word?
- (2) I give you my word I did not do it.
- (3) My word, how the child has grown!

were to be translated into French, they would have to be translated by three different French words. It is therefore impossible to translate every single word in one language by a single word in another language. It is also impossible to translate a given word in one language always by the same word in another language.

Often too there are several words which differ just a shade in meaning, and the translator must decide which one most nearly conveys the sense of the original. Our language, for example, is particularly rich in bad names to describe people we dislike. If I fall out with someone and call him a rogue, a rascal, a knave, a villain, a scamp and a scoundrel, have I, in fact, called him six different names or merely repeated myself six times over? The Oxford Dictionary gives each of these terms as equivalent to one or other of the rest. This suggests that they are at present synonymous. If however, we inquire into their origin, we find that knave and villain both mean a landless labourer and convey the low opinion held of such persons by the farmer-landowner. This attitude has not yet disappeared in our own country. A rogue, on the other hand, meant an idle vagrant, one outside society. It is used in this sense of an elephant which has left the herd and is living as a solitary ill-tempered outcast. A scamp was one who had run away from the battlefield and left his friends in the lurch. This sort of thing must be studied by a translator, and, when he is dealing with a language where the literature is scant, his task may not be easy. The choice of the correct word involves a high degree of scholarship and a natural aptitude for language.

Another difficulty is presented by the use of words in a specialised or technical sense. As any art or craft develops, some new words will be coined to describe the tools and operations connected with it, while some existing words will be given a special or restricted meaning quite different from their ordinary everyday meaning. This has become true of theology and in consequence the translator of the New Testament must ask himself whether a word like *righteousness* is being used in such a way in the original, or whether it has acquired a special sense in the course of time while not possessing it when written by the Apostle. A good example of a word with a special meaning is *baptism*. Its special sense has been recognised by carrying it, Anglicised but not translated, into English when it means the religious rite.

The more we study words the more elusive they seem to become. They are like the air which, itself intangible, can carry with it the fragrance of the hedgerows or the tang of the sea. So words can carry with them something more elusive than themselves, the very spirit of the original.

The second obstacle to be overcome by the translator is the structure of the sentence. In English the order of the words in a sentence decides

the meaning. 'The man killed the lion' is not the same as 'The lion killed the man'. In a more highly inflected language the ending of the word would indicate whether it was the subject or the object, just as the ending *ed* in *killed* shows that it is in the past tense, while the ending *s* in *kills* indicates the present tense. With such a language the words could be arranged in any order without changing the meaning, and so the writer would be given another degree of freedom which he would probably use for the purpose of emphasis. When such a language is translated into English the translator is working under a handicap. He is like a cyclist accustomed to a three-speed machine who has borrowed a simpler machine and, although he can manage fairly well, is hampered at times by the absence of the other gears.

If a translator sticks too closely to the order of words in the original sentence he may produce a version in which the emphasis is put on the wrong thought. He may also lose the emphasis contained in the original and find it impossible to reproduce it in written English without a paraphrase in which the conciseness and neatness of the original has been lost.

When our Lord was disputing with the Pharisees about casting out demons, the point at issue was not *what* was being cast out but how it was accomplished. In the King James Version the sentence reads, "If I by the finger of God cast out devils . . ." Here the word *devils* occupies the position of emphasis which should be held by *the finger of God*. The point at issue is more clearly conveyed by the rearrangement, 'If I cast out devils by the finger of God, by whom do your sons cast them out?' A second example is the sealing of the 144,000 in Revelation 7. The emphasis should not be on the number sealed for, after all, that was the same in every case. It should rather be on the names of the tribes and passage rendered. "Twelve thousand were sealed from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand from the tribe of Reuben, etc.", as in the Revised Standard Version.

The English language is suited to short sentences while other languages, like Latin, suit long complex sentences. Such sentences on being translated into English require to be broken up, while, in translating the other way round, several short English sentences may profitably be linked together. If the translator sticks too closely to the sentence structure of the original his version may be awkward to the point of obscurity. Compare, for example, the passage, "The Pharisees and all the Jews, except they wash their hands, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders", with Knox's rendering, "For the Pharisees; and, indeed, all the Jews, holding to the tradition of their ancestors, never eat without washing their hands again and again".

Or compare again Hebrews 7:15, "And it is yet far more evident for that after the similitude of Melchizedek there ariseth another priest, who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life", with the same passage in the Revised Standard Version, "This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest, not

according to a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life”.

We cannot conceive that letters written by the apostles to newly-formed churches were not clear and understandable to the readers. The translation into English must be equally clear to the English reader; if not, then the translator has failed in his duty.

The third obstacle in the way of the translator is idiom. Each language has its own particular way of expressing certain things. An Englishman meeting another says, ‘How do you do?’ A Frenchman in the same circumstances says, ‘How do you carry yourself?’ While a German says, ‘How goes it with you?’ One of the first things a student is taught when he commences to study a language is that idiom must be translated by idiom. An excellent example of this occurred at the Coronation. While the people in the Abbey shouted “God save the Queen” the choir boys sang or shouted “Vivat Regina”. These Latin words do not literally mean ‘God save the Queen’, they mean rather ‘May the Queen live’. They are, however, what a Roman would have shouted in the same circumstances. This same example is found in the Bible at the coronation of Solomon. The King James Version says that the people shouted “God save the King”, but the margin tells us that the Hebrew words they used meant ‘May the King live’. The King James translators have very properly given an idiomatic translation of the passage.

Proverbs must generally be treated in the same way. The same wise thought is illustrated in a different way in different lands and should be translated by the corresponding proverb. Where an Englishman would say ‘Every little helps’, a Frenchman would say ‘Little streams make big rivers’.

Similar problems arise because the emotions have been identified with certain organs of the body, but not with the same organs in every language. In English the heart is spoken of as the seat of sincerity or of motive, either good or bad. In the time of David the kidneys appear to have been regarded as the seat of these things, while the heart was more the seat of thoughts and desires. If the translator puts the words of David into the corresponding English words, then Psalm 5 : 2 will read, “Lord, test my kidneys and my heart”. The King James translators got over the difficulty by using an obsolete word, *reins*, for kidneys. The modern versions translate the verse in some such words as “Prove me in heart and mind” (Moffatt). This conveys exactly what David meant and is therefore a good translation; but the Hebrew word for kidneys has been translated heart and the Hebrew for heart has been translated mind. The translator’s problem is not so much ‘How could David the Hebrew have said this in English?’ but rather, ‘How would David have said this if he had been an Englishman in the same circumstances?’

Still another difficulty arises if the original is capable of bearing more than one meaning, or where it is, perhaps, intentionally vague. A good translation will retain the ambiguity or the vagueness if it is at all possible to do so. Failing this, the translator becomes a dogmatic expositor.

The original Douai had a footnote to a certain passage which read:

“Because this speech is subject to divers senses we keep the words of our text, lest by turning it into any English phrase we might straiten the Holy Ghost’s intention to some certain sense, either not intended, or not only intended, and so take away the choice and indifferency from the reader, whereof (in Holy Scripture specially) all translators must beware”.

During the process of translation such things as poetic or dramatic form, literary style, prose, rhythm and plays upon words are all liable to be lost. Their loss must not be regarded as of no great consequence, for, if God has given us the ability to appreciate them and has seen fit to put them in the original for the benefit of mankind, then some effort should be made to retain them in the translation. If this can be done without loss in any other direction then we shall have a better translation. Psalm 23 in metre is an outstanding example and must almost reach the highwater mark of translation. Assuming that the King James version is itself an excellent translation (and modern translators have left it practically unchanged) then the words have fallen without forcing and almost as they stand into the metrical version. Attempts to put the other Psalms into metre seem most inadequate beside it. Word plays are generally lost because they depend on similarities in words in one language that probably do not exist between corresponding words in any other language. Sometimes it is possible to preserve them as in Genesis 2, where Adam called his partner *isha* because she was taken out of *ish*. The word play has come through in English as *woman* taken out of *man*.

While there is great danger of loss in the process of translation, there is also the danger of introducing something which was not present in the original. C. S. Lewis, in his introduction to Phillips’ *Letters to Young Churches*, says: “The New Testament in the original Greek is not a work of literary art: it is not written in a solemn ecclesiastical language, it is written in the sort of Greek which was spoken over the eastern Mediterranean after Greek had become an international language and therefore lost its real beauty and subtlety”.

Now our King James Version is written in a dignified, solemn and beautiful language which was not, even in 1611, the ordinary language of the people, and is much less so today. It would, therefore, appear that, if C. S. Lewis is correct in his estimate of New Testament Greek, the Authorised Version of the New Testament has had something of stateliness and dignity added to it in the process of translation. Whatever we may think of this we may be sure of one thing: the little churches who came together to hear the letters sent them by their friend Paul needed neither a dictionary nor a commentary to understand them. And neither should we; a good translation should come to us with the same force and clarity as the originals came to them, though, as we are not in the same circumstances, it might not produce in us exactly the same reactions.

No one has yet produced a perfect translation of the Bible, for what one translator retains another loses, and every good translation has

something to offer us. What then should be our attitude towards the many newer translations that are now available?

Most of us are inclined to open them at a passage on which we have decided views and judge the book by the way in which the translator has rendered that particular passage. This is not a very reasonable test, for the Scriptures are not to conform to our theology but our theology to the Scriptures, and this may well be one of those passages which are "subject to divers senses". Nor should we be too hasty in saying that the translator has deliberately obscured or falsified the passage, for to accuse any reputable scholar of such practice is equivalent to accusing a scientist of faking an experiment or an accountant of drawing up a misleading balance sheet. Again it is not wise to retreat behind the saying "The old is better" and refuse to consider any version later than the Authorised. An examination of the passage from which the quotation comes will show that it expressed the feelings of the Jews who considered the old wine of Judaism to be better than the new wine of Christianity. If you are attached to some edition because of the helpful marginal notes, it is well to remember that the success of the King James Version was due to the fact that it was the first version from which all notes (except those required to clarify the meaning of a word) were rigorously excluded. Even if a version has some undoubted errors in it we should not condemn it wholesale. The Septuagint was by no means perfect, yet it was accepted by the early church, and quotations from it which vary from the Hebrew are now regarded by us as Scripture. The King James Version has acknowledged errors, yet no version has been more used of God than it has been. Surely the advice of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5 : 20, meets the case exactly. As translated by Phillips it reads:

"Never despise what is spoken in the name of the Lord. By all means use your judgment and hold on to whatever is good".

Social Anthropology in Missionary Service

C. P. Groves

(Being a review of Dr. E. A. Nida's latest book, *Customs and Cultures*, published by Harper at \$ 4.00.)

The appreciation of a point of view different from the one we take for granted is less easy than we often think. Having grown up inside a particular social structure and historical tradition, we normally accept its outlook and apply its standards unless by an effort of imagination we place ourselves outside it. The foreign visitor's failure to adopt a standpoint appropriate to a new situation is well illustrated in the case of the Parisian who visited London and on his return was asked for his impressions. Well, he said, one thing struck him as very strange: whereas in Paris public places were named after great victories — place