We include in this issue a number of articles which deal with topics and problems in the translation of the Book of Joel. One of the contributions in our NOTES section is also on this same subject. Translators and translation consultants from the Africa Region prepared this material in the first instance for a Translations Workshop held during May 1984.

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METAPHOR IN COMMON LANGUAGE TRANSLATIONS OF JOEL

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It is obvious that most of the Hebrew text of Joel consists of poetry. And Bible translators are aware of the fact that often formal features of Hebrew poetry cannot be consistently carried over to other languages.

This also applies to types of figurative language like metaphor and simile. Translators normally deal with metaphor in various ways. If the original figure can be retained in the translation without losing or distorting the meaning of the expression translators tend to preserve it, even though the translated figure may not always produce the impact of the original as it may not constitute a natural equivalent. Alternatively when translators feel the comparison would only make sense if the underlying ground of comparison is clearly stated, they may want to add information which is clearly implied in the original.

Whenever a figure does not seem to communicate the right information, translators may feel forced to drop the figure altogether and express the meaning directly. This, however, has been done too easily in dynamic-equivalence translation, particularly in poetic texts, resulting sometimes in translations that do not quite express the vividness and impact to which the use of figurative language in any language largely contributes. In order to avoid this there now seems to be a tendency among translators to make more effort in searching for more natural figures in their own languages whenever Hebrew figures cannot be transferred meaningfully or without distorting the meaning. Some recent common language translations like *Die Gute Nachricht* in German have achieved something worthwhile in preserving the figurative characteristics of Hebrew poetry.

In this paper I have compared about twenty cases of metaphor in the book of Joel in five common language translations, English, French, German, Dutch and Swahili (draft only), with a view to studying the various options favoured by the translators. It is interesting to note that translators, even in culturally quite related settings, come up with different results.

It is interesting to note that certain sections of Joel are full of examples of metaphor, for instance the description of the locust attack in 2.7–9. It seems that these figures can be carried over to most languages since the comparison with an army of soldiers is clearly marked at the beginning of verse 7 by means of a simile.

Unlike most English translations, but in line with the majority of the translations referred to in this paper, I have followed the Hebrew chapter division. I

am quoting the translations other than English by way of my own back-translation marked by parentheses.

The RSV has been used to represent the form of the Hebrew and deviations from that pattern have been noted wherever necessary. The abbreviations stand for:

E = Good News Bible
F = La Bible en français courant
G = Die Gute Nachricht—Die Bibel in heutigem Deutsch
D = Groot Nieuws Bijbel
S = Habari Njema kwa watu wote (Swahili drafts)

Reproducing the original figure as such

Most of the examples of metaphor in Joel have been carried over as such in the translations I am considering. In the context in which they occur translators apprently felt that these metaphoric expressions were quite meaningful. In a good number of cases when it was not clear that a comparison was involved, the metaphors were turned into similes.

Of the examples selected for this paper only one represents a case where all five translations chose to retain the figure as such:

Fear not, O land (2.21)

The land which was devastated because of the locust plague and the drought, is told not to fear, but to be glad instead. We are dealing here with a case of personification which apparently many languages can handle. The translations all retain the figure, but G, F and S use the second person pronoun to indicate, as in the RSV, that the land is addressed.

E Fields, don't be afraid
G (You fields, don't be afraid any longer)

Obviously many more examples could be quoted of metaphoric expressions that have been handled without any adjustments. However, I think it would make more sense to contrast them in the next sections with cases where they have been treated differently in some of the translations.

Reproducing the original figure with the comparison stated more fully

In a good number of cases translators felt the need to state more clearly certain elements of metaphoric expressions, for the sake of understanding.

Often this applied to the object of comparison which in some languages may need to be identified more clearly.

Nation has come up against my land (1.6)

"Nation" here clearly refers to the huge army of locusts which is invading the country and destroying it. This figure can be interpreted as a personification, which could easily be mistaken for a literal nation or army of soldiers. For this reason E, D and S make specific mention of the locusts, while basically retaining the image of the "nation":

E An army of locusts has attacked our land

D (an army of locusts . . .)

In other cases the metaphoric expression is focused on an event rather than an object. This is the case in the following example:

And the LORD roars from Zion. (4.16)

As the verb indicates, the speaking of the LORD is compared with the roaring of a lion who is ready to attack his prey. It refers to the coming day of the Lord. All languages except S retain the figure, but only G and D actually put the reference to the lion in their text:

G (Like the roaring of a lion sounds the voice of the Lord)

D (The Lord roars like a lion)

A more complicated example is found in 2.13 where one verb with an object is used in both a figurative and a literal sense:

Rend your hearts and not your clothes (2.13)

The tearing of the clothes of course represents a symbolic action expression someone's grief or indignation. The translation of this phrase can cause problems to translators, since the symbolic action is related to Jewish culture, and may not be understood, unless its underlying meaning is clarified by way of a descriptive phrase or a footnote. The "tearing of the heart" is a figurative extension of meaning, and the expression points to the real, inward repentance which the Lord calls for. Although the reference to the tearing of clothes enhances the right understanding of the figurative phrase, a meaningful translation may require some further clarification. However, the translators of G and D probably felt that the context would enable the receptor to understand the meaning of the phrase correctly, because they translate the form of the figure literally. Quite interestingly, E brings out the implied meaning of sorrow underlying the symbolic action, while introducing a common idiomatic expression which also makes reference to the heart:

E Let your broken heart show your sorrow;
tearing your clothes is not enough.

The second line emphasizes quite correctly that the tearing of the clothes as such is not wrong. It will not do. The solution chosen by the translators of E actually combines two approaches: a new figure is introduced, and the meaning of the symbolic action is made to come out more clearly.

A next example reads as follows:

Fire devours before them,
and behind them a flame burns. (2.3)

Apparently the host of locusts with their devastating power is compared with the destructive qualities of fire. Theoretically it is possible that we are dealing with two separate things: the appearance of the locusts, and the occurrence of bush fires. Most interpreters, including the translators of some common language translations, take it that the fire refers to the destruction caused by the locusts:

E Like fire they eat up the plants

F retains part of the figure which depicts fire both in front of and behind the army of locusts:

F (Like a destructive fire they devastate everything before them and leave bare everything behind them)

Both G and D leave the form of the metaphor intact.

In 4.13 we come across an interesting case of metaphor, the figure of which is quite meaningful provided some explanation is added. The figure illustrates the harvest of the sins of the nations, which the LORD is about to judge. In Hebrew and the RSV it is worded as follows:

Put in the sickle,
for the harvest is ripe.
Go in, tread,
for the wine press is full.
The vats overflow,
for their wickedness is great. (4.13)

G is the only translation that has not restructured the verse. The translators probably assumed that the final line would quite adequately explain the meaning of the metaphor. D basically retains the metaphor but clarifies the setting in relation to the preceding verse which speaks about the judgement of the evil nations:

D (Criminal they are,
put in the sickle,
it is time to harvest;
Crush the grapes,
the winepresses are full,
they run over with their evil.)

E follows the same pattern, but changes the metaphors into similes:

E They are wicked;
cut them down like corn at harvest time;
Crush them as grapes are crushed in a full winepress
until the wine runs over.

The final example of this approach is found in 4.16 where the LORD is portrayed as a refuge point to his people:

But the Lord is a refuge to his people,
a stronghold to the people of Israel. (4.16)

These two identical figures in parallel lines occur very commonly in the OT. Because of their identical meanings they have been made one line in E. This seems acceptable as the ground for both comparisons lies in the protective nature of the Lord. However, E drops the figures altogether:

E But he will defend his people.

F and D retain one of the figures, while expressing the meaning of the other in the parallel line:

F (But the Lord protects his people,
he is a refuge to the Israelites.)
D (But to his people he is a refuge,
Israel he protects.)

G has kept both figures intact, but adds a qualifier to clearly mark their meanings:

G (But to his people the Lord is a sure refuge and a protecting fortress.)

Changing the metaphor to plain language

It often happens that figures of speech cannot easily be transferred from one language into another. In the last section we dealt with figures that could be made meaningful by marking some of the implied components of the comparisons on which the figures were made. However, it often happens that a metaphor in one language just does not make sense in another language and the only way to communicate the message is to drop the metaphor and express the meaning in straightforward, non-figurative language. Perhaps in the early period of modern translation theory it was too easily assumed that the figurative language of the OT was inaccessible to modern readers of the Bible in a Western context. It seems that some of the older common language translations of the OT have lost something of the original vigour of the text; and this can be partly explained by the fact that too high a proportion of metaphor and other literary features of the text has been done away with. We cannot entirely avoid having to drop figurative expressions for the sake of clarity of communication. However, I sometimes wonder whether translators have made enough effort to preserve as much as possible of the beauty and impact of the text.

Here again, translators in related cultural settings have followed different approaches in finding solutions to their problems. In Joel we find a good number of examples of metaphor that could be further described as cases of personification. One of them is found in the first chapter of the book:

The fields are laid waste,
the ground mourns. (1.10)

In E and S the personification of the soil, which is compared with a person mourning the loss of a good friend, does not seem to create problems. The context marks the meaning of the figure. G, F and D make the verb "mourn" describe the drought of the land, while F expresses the sadness of the situation in a figurative way:

D (The fields are destroyed,
the soil is dried out.)
F (The fields are destroyed,
the land is plunged into sadness.)

In 2.3 the devastating power of the locusts is depicted as a fire which consumes everything which is in its way. The text explains:

Nothing escapes them. (2.3)

Apparently both E and F can handle the metaphor. D, G and S remove the metaphor and translate:

(Nothing is spared.)

In the Bible the word "son" is often used in an extended sense referring to the descendants of somebody, or the inhabitants of a particular area—when it is used in connection with a geographical name. This applies in the following example:

I will sell . . . into the hand of the sons of Judah (4.8)

Many translations in Western languages find it hard to use "sons" in this extended sense outside the context of the familiar "church language". E, S and G translate "people" or "inhabitants" of Judah, whereas D uses "Judah" in reference to the people.

Finally, there is an interesting example with a common metaphor in the last chapter of Joel:

because they have shed innocent blood in their land. (4.19)

The translators of both D and S considered the figure quite meaningful and therefore retained it in the translation. Those of E, F and G apparently had doubts about the right understanding of the figure and decided to avoid the metaphor, resulting in the following translation:

E because they killed innocent people.

G moreover specifies that the innocent people who were killed were Jews living or staying in Egypt and Edom.

Introducing new figures

So far we have seen that there is a tendency among translators to retain the figures of the Hebrew if they can be transferred meaningfully to the language in which the translation is being made. If there is any doubt about that they either attempt to supply information that helps to identify the comparison expressed by the figure, or simply drop the metaphor and express the meaning of the phrase in non-figurative language. Fortunately translators have also resorted to looking for alternative figures in their own languages that would fit in contexts where the original figure would not make sense. In the common language translations of Joel I have come across a number of examples where translators have succeeded in finding such alternatives.

One example is found in 1.12 where the RSV reads as follows:

. . . gladness fails from the sons of men. (1.12)

We should note here that the RSV has already departed from the literal form of the Hebrew which uses the verb "dry up" as a play on words in relation to the condition of the various fruit trees and crops. In this particular case the translators of D, E and S drop the figure and translate that the joy is gone or has disappeared. S uses the verb "lack". However, both G and F introduce a substitute for the Hebrew figure which fits quite nicely in the pattern of the drying up of the crops as depicted in the poetry. Compare the two different metaphors introduced by the translators of G and F:

G (All the joy of the people has withered.)
F (All joy has been extinguished among the people.)

The very well known verse about the pouring out of the Spirit is worth mentioning here, since it has been treated differently in the translations that have been compared for the purpose of this paper. The metaphor which occurs twice in the passage (3.1 and 3.2) is often translated literally:

I will pour out my spirit on all flesh. (3.1)

The figure was retained in D, E, F and S, but adapted as follows in G:

G (I will fill them with my Spirit.)

In the second occurrence in the next verse the figure has been dropped and the verb is expressed non-figuratively:

G (even to the servants, male and female, will I give my Spirit.)

Two complicated cases involving other problems

Two cases were noted where the problem of figurative language in translation was further complicated by a textual or exegetical problem. Again translators of the common language versions handled the problem in different ways.

The Hebrew Masoretic text of 4.21 reads in a literal translation (see RSV footnote):

I will hold innocent their blood, which I have not held innocent. (4.21)

Of the translations referred to in this paper only F follows this reading:

F (Yes, I declare them innocent!)

It seems that the object of the verb is ambiguous in this translation. Does it refer to the Egyptians and Edomites who had killed innocent Jews in their lands? From the context (the innocent people in the previous line) and the fact that the object "their blood" would normally refer to people who have been killed, we may gather that this sentence is an affirmation on the part of the LORD of the innocence of the Jewish people against whom the violence had been committed by the neighbouring enemies. It is probably on the basis of internal evidence that most translators have adopted the reading of the Septuagint and the Syriac versions, as this seems to make more sense in this context. Already the RSV had decided on this reading and so have the translators of the majority of the common language translations. The RSV therefore reads as follows:

I will avenge their blood, and I will not clear the guilty. (4.21)

The avenging of the blood is a figure of speech expressing the punishment of those who killed the innocent people. "Blood" might be identified as a metonym, referring of course to the violent death of these people. It seems that, whichever text is followed, blood should be taken in a figurative sense, though in the interpretation of F it could refer both to the subject and the object of the bloodshed; probably the latter. Interestingly, the translators of E and G felt they had to drop the figure, while those of D and S had apparently good

reasons to retain the notion of "blood". Compare the following translations:

E I will avenge those who were killed;
I will not spare the guilty.
D (In this way I avenge that blood;
punish the guilty.)

The translators of G felt they had to drop the figure, but decided to introduce a rhetorical question, probably to retain an element of impact which would otherwise have been lost:

G (Shall I leave that [the killing of the innocent Jews] unpunished?
I will punish them for that, as sure as I live on Mount Zion.)

The assurance the LORD gives by referring to his presence among his people has been made to apply both to the punishment of the guilty people of Egypt and Edom as well as the promises of salvation for the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. To mark this G has changed the order of some elements in the text.

In 1.19 reference is made to a fire which destroys trees and crops:

For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and flame has burned all the trees of the field. (1.19)

The exegetical problem we face here concerns the interpretation of the picture of the fire with its devastating effect. From the context we get the impression that the locust plague coincides with a time of severe drought. The question here is whether we are dealing here with a "literal" fire, occurring in a time of drought, or figurative description of the drought which is compared with a destructive bush fire.

D, G and F interpret "fire" in a literal sense:

D (The pastures are scorched,
the trees burnt.)
G (The severe heat has consumed the grass and scorched the trees.)

Interestingly, E is an exception to the general pattern by interpreting the fire figuratively:

E Because the pastures and trees dried up,
as though a fire had burnt them.

Conclusions

For the purpose of this paper I studied about twenty cases of metaphor in the book of Joel and the way they have been handled in a number of common language translations. I picked out particularly those cases where not all the five translations followed the same approach. I realize it is a bit dangerous to make a general statement on the way the translations have handled figurative language on the basis of only twenty examples. I will therefore make just one or two observations with regard to each translation that has been dealt with in this paper.

E is obviously the oldest translation. There is a tendency to drop metaphors that can not be transferred meaningfully. This happens in just under half of the examples, and in the remaining cases the figures have been retained. In just

under half of these cases the underlying comparisons have been made more explicit and meaningful. In none of the cases has E introduced new metaphors.

The picture presented by F is only slightly different. F has retained more metaphors than E, and in one case substituted a French figure for a Hebrew one.

G deviates from E and F in that it has the highest proportion of new metaphors. Interestingly both D and S retained more metaphors than any of the others. S introduced one new figure, D none.

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TRANSLATING THE LOCUST INVASION IN THE BOOK OF JOEL INTO KITUBA

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There are many cultural elements in the book of Joel which present problems of understanding for the Kituba reader. In this article I propose to focus on just one of these, the invasion of locusts (Joel 1.4, and also 2.25).

In the French Common Language translation (FC) the text of Joel 1.4 reads:

Ce que les chenilles laissent de la récolte
est dévoré par les sauterelles;
ce que laissent les sauterelles
est dévoré par les hannetons;
ce que laissent les hannetons
est dévoré par les criquets.

The English RSV text is as follows:

What the cutting locust left,
the swarming locust has eaten.
What the swarming locust left,
the hopping locust has eaten,
and what the hopping locust left,
the destroying locust has eaten.

The insect invasion which was the occasion for the prophecy of Joel, is described using terms for which we do not always have exact equivalents in English, French or Kituba.

According to E. Dhorme, if we look at the way the Hebrew words are derived, we may translate as follows: *gazam* "cutting creature", by cricket, and *ḥāsil* "gnawing creature", by locust. The real term for locust is *arbeh*, which comes in the series of terms in this text between the cricket and the cockchafer, this last corresponding to *yeleq*.

According to J. Laroche, Hebrew has at least nine words to designate the different species or various stages of development of the locust. (*Dictionnaire Encyclopédique de la Bible*, Volume 2, page 641.) In brief the meanings which he gives for each of the terms in Joel 1.4 are: