

### **Distributing the translation**

After each of the training programs held so far we have gone ahead to produce what has been translated as a small book, which will be distributed in the community as soon as possible after the program has taken place. It may seem a bit strange to do this in a situation where many people cannot read, where almost all communication is oral, and where the translation itself has been produced by the oral method. However there is value in producing a book for two reasons. Firstly, the book represents the achievement of the translation team in a form that can be seen and handled, and so it is important for keeping up interest in translation. Then those people who have learned to read will be able to make use of it: in communities where reading is a new experience those who can read are usually eager to get whatever they can in their own language.

Of course the new translation is made available to people who cannot read, too. Even though it is printed in a book, it will be in fact be heard by most of the people as it is read aloud in family groups by those who can read. And cassettes can be provided too, copied from the master cassette prepared by the translation team. I know of some situations where people are in fact making use of books and cassettes together, to help them in the process of learning to read.

There is already a warm acceptance of the material that has been produced by our translation teams. Its quality has been recognised by the people themselves, and they are also glad to have it because it is the product of the creative effort of members of their own community. In some situations there has been a great increase in the desire to have and to use the Scriptures in the aboriginal languages, as parts have come alive for translators and readers through the training programs.

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## **LEARNING TO DEAL WITH TRANSLATION PROBLEMS**

A REPORT ON THE EXPERIENCE OF LEARNING IN A WORKSHOP SITUATION

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At a recent translators' workshop held in Kinshasa, Zaire, it was decided that the afternoon practical work should be devoted to a single complete passage, with the participants working on only a few verses each day. Each of the participating translation teams was asked to spend an hour and a half translating six to eight verses. Then a final period of 45 minutes was set aside for discussion of the problems in the passage and the various solutions to these problems in the different translations.

Since most of the committee involved in this workshop had completed translating the New Testament, the passage selected was taken from the Old Testament. And in order to avoid lengthy discussions on matters where the translators might already have ideas about the text, it was decided to focus on a passage that was not too well-known. Yet the passage chosen had to be one that contained a large number and a wide variety of translation problems. The passage chosen was 1 Kings 11.14–43.

Experience has shown that all too often translators bring to the Translation Consultant problems they could easily solve by themselves if they used available resources properly. The purpose of this article is to show how this passage was used to teach translators not only how to translate, but also how to use the resources available to them in solving translation problems.

### The resources recommended

Each participant in the workshop was provided with a mimeographed copy of the passage in two quite different French translations. The *Bible de la Pléiade* (BP) and the unpublished draft translation of the *Français courant* (FC) were placed in parallel columns to allow easy comparison between a literal and a more meaningful (“dynamic”) rendering of the same text. In addition, those present were strongly urged to consult the following translations: the *Bible de Jérusalem – 1973* (BJ) and the *Traduction Oecuménique de la Bible* (TOB) in French, and the *New English Bible* (NEB) and the *Good News Bible* (GNB) in English. Also available to the translators were various commentaries, Bible dictionaries and Bible atlases. There was also a mimeographed two-page list of these and other books considered necessary to make up a basic working library for a Bible translator. It was felt that the vast majority of the problems in this passage could be easily solved if these resources were properly used. In the teaching sessions held in the mornings we emphasized the proper use of available resources: one session was devoted to a presentation of the book list, and another to a full discussion of how the resources could be used in answering the questions raised in 1 Kings 11.33.

## THE PASSAGE AND ITS PROBLEMS

1 Kings 11.14–43 deals basically with only one theme—Solomon’s enemies; but it contains numerous translation problems of various kinds. They may be grouped under three major headings: (1) text, (2) interpretation and meaning, and (3) equivalence.

### Problems of text

#### 1 Kings 11.15

BP says that David *defeated* Edom, whereas FC says that he *fought against* the kingdom of Edom. That this is a matter of different texts followed rather than one of translation is indicated both in a note in BP as well as in the notes in the *International Critical Commentary* (ICC) and TOB, and a note is proposed for FC as well. The translation consultant advised the translators that in such a case they might consult BP, BJ, TOB, FC and GNB and follow

the rendering “defeated”/“conquered”, as in BP, BJ, and GNB, against TOB and FC draft which have “fought against”.

### 1 Kings 11.20

Here the line between textual and translational problems is less clear. ICC tells us that the Hebrew reads “weaned”, and the Greek, “reared”. Similar notes are to be found in BP and BJ. But a note in TOB and another for the translators of GNB treat it as a translation problem. The translators were encouraged to follow BP, BJ, TOB, FC, and GNB, which all have “reared”/“raised”.

### 1 Kings 11.22, 25b

Some translations (BP, BJ, and NEB) follow the Greek Septuagint (LXX) in moving verse 25b (the second part of verse 25) up to follow verse 22, and all of these translations indicate this in a footnote. In fact, NEB moves all of verse 25 to follow 22.) See also the *Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project* (PIR), published by the United Bible Societies.

BP and GNB follow the LXX against the Hebrew text, as indicated in their footnotes, in adding between verses 22 and 25b the sentence “And he [Hadad] went back to his country.”

BP, BJ and NEB follow the LXX in translating the beginning of 25b: “This is the harm that Hadad caused . . .” Only BP and NEB indicate this in footnotes. See also PIR.

BP, BJ, NEB and GNB read “Edom” for “Aram”, at the beginning of 25b, but only BP and NEB indicate this in footnotes. See also PIR.

### 1 Kings 11.24

This textual problem is also discussed in PIR. But notes are also found in ICC and NEB explaining the omission in NEB of the phrase “when David killed them”.

The Hebrew has the last three verbs of this verse in the plural, referring to Rezon and his group, but the Greek, as indicated by a note in ICC, has the three verbs in the singular, with Rezon alone as the subject. BP and NEB have the third verb in the singular, with notes; BJ has all three in the singular, without notes. On this see also Hulst: *Old Testament Translation Problems* (UBS).

(On 1 Kings 11.33, see below, under the fuller treatment of that verse.)

## Problems of interpretation and meaning

The first problem to deal with is the relationship between this passage and what comes before it. NEB indicates a simple relationship of events which happen one after the other by supplying “Then . . .” at the beginning of verse 14. The *Jerome Biblical Commentary* (JBC), however, sees this passage as the “fulfillment of the prediction made in the preceding interpretative discourse”, which would indicate the translation found in the GNB: “So . . .”.

BJ and GNB agree as to the internal division of 1 Kings 11.14-43 into three sections: verses 14-25, verses 26-40, and verses 41-43. TOB combines the second and third sections (verses 26-43).

Since there are problems of interpretation and meaning in literally every verse, we shall look at only a few that are most critical for the translator, and show how certain tools can help in dealing with these problems. In the workshop, primary reference was made to BP and FC, but in this article English translations are the main ones cited for the examples.

### **1 Kings 11.19, 20**

Is Tahpenes a proper name? A note in BJ says it is not the name of a person, but rather an Egyptian title which is explained by a Hebrew title, “the Great Lady”, which refers to the queen mother. The *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (IDB), in the article on TAHPENES says that “we may have here the Egyptian title ‘the wife of the king’ . . . , treated as if a name.” If it is a title, then we should treat it the way we do “Pharaoh”, namely a word to translate, rather than copy into the new language.

### **1 Kings 11.20**

What is the “house” that we read about in RSV, NEB and TOB? A note in BP makes it clear that this is the king’s palace, and this explains why GNB and BJ translate “palace”. It was shown time and again in our workshop that although BP was a very literal, formal equivalence translation, many clues to the meaning could be found in its notes.

### **1 Kings 11.21**

The usefulness of BP’s notes can be seen in the one on the expression “sleeping with his fathers”, which indicates that this is the Hebrew expression for “dying” when we are talking about kings. The fact that “fathers” means “ancestors” could be found in Brown, Driver and Briggs’ *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (BDB), under ‘ab 4.a but most translators seem to find it handier to have that information in a note in their Bible, especially when it is combined with the information that the expression as a whole means “dying”. To be sure, that information is given directly in GNB, but they might be suspicious of GNB’s translation unless they saw the explanation given in the BP note.

### **1 Kings 11.26**

NEB’s “an Ephrathite from Zeredah” is a double mystery, in that (1) it doesn’t show clearly the connection between “Ephrathite” and “Ephraim” and (2) it doesn’t indicate that Zeredah was in the land assigned to Ephraim on the eastern side of the Jordan River. This information may be found in Bible dictionaries and atlases, but it is more liable to be noticed immediately in the note in BP. Note the translation in GNB: “man . . . from Zeredah in Ephraim”.

### **1 Kings 11.26, 27**

Formal equivalence translations give here the translation “lifted up his hand against the king” (RSV). The formal equivalent in French, as is pointed out in a note in TOB, means an attempt at assassination, whereas the Hebrew expression refers rather to a revolt or a rebellion. Hence NEB’s “rebelled against the king” and GNB’s “turned against King Solomon”.

### **1 Kings 11.28**

“The house of Joseph” (RSV) is explained by a note in BP as referring to the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim, which once again happens to correspond to GNB’s translation: “the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim”.

**1 Kings 11.30–32**

The notes in BP and TOB explain that by this time the tribe of Judah had absorbed the smaller tribe of Simeon. The translator might well think he had missed one tribe out of twelve when only one tribe is left after taking care of ten, unless he were to read this explanation.

**1 Kings 11.36**

“Always have a lamp before me” (RSV) is explained by notes in BP, BJ and TOB as a symbol, an image, a sign of the kingship remaining in his family for ever, which explains the translation we find in GNB: “always have a descendant”. The same information is to be found in commentaries such as *The Interpreter’s Bible* (IB) and *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible* (PCB), but translators in Zaïre are less likely to have these books and less likely to consult them than they are to consult the notes at the bottom of the page in annotated Bibles.

**1 Kings 11.38**

“I will build you a sure house” (RSV) has been misunderstood by some Zaïrian translators as referring to a literal building. This expression is, however, explained in notes in BP and TOB, hence the translation in GNB: “I will make sure that your descendants rule after you”.

### Problems of equivalence

One of the major shifts involved in translation is in expressing plainly in words what was only understood in the original. The reason or justification for this is that the modern reader often does not have certain background information available to the original reader. But this is not the only problem to be dealt with in producing a readable translation. Various sorts of other adjustments in words and structures are necessary to put the modern reader in as favorable a position for understanding as the original reader.

**1 Kings 11.14–15**

In the transition from verse 14 to verse 15 there is the idea of a “flashback”, or reference back to what had happened much earlier. To make this clear GNB supplies “Long before this” at the beginning of verse 15.

**1 Kings 11.20**

“Bore him Genubath his son” (RSV, and similarly BP) and “bore him his son Genubath” (NEB) are unsatisfactory, because they give the impression that when she bore a child he already had the name of Genubath. The problem is the possessive “his”. GNB solves the problem by translating “bore him a son, Genubath” and FC is even more explicit by translating “bore a son to Hadad, who named him Genubath” (“*donna un fils à Hadad, qui l’appela Guenoubat*”).

**1 Kings 11.22**

In English and French, we normally use the verb “ask”, rather than the verb “say”, to introduce a question. So it is that the king’s question is “asked” in GNB and FC, rather than “said”, as in the more literal translations (RSV, NEB, BP and TOB). This problem occurs very frequently in Bible translation. The verb “ask” is often preferred because it points more clearly to a question, even in languages where “say” is also possible in such a context.

**1 Kings 11.25**

When we compare RSV and BP's "He was an adversary of Israel all the days of Solomon" with FC's "So Rezon was an enemy of the people of Israel all through Solomon's reign" ("Rezon fut donc un adversaire du peuple d'Israël pendant tout le règne de Salomon"), we note that for purposes of clarity the pronoun "he" is replaced by "Rezon", "Israel" by "the people of Israel", "days of Solomon" by "Solomon's reign". In addition, a "so" provides a transitional link with the preceding verses.

**1 Kings 11.42**

It is as unnatural in French as in English to say, with RSV (similarly BP) "The time that Solomon reigned was forty years". Hence the shift, in FC, to: "Solomon reigned for forty years" (and GNB: "He was king . . . for forty years").

**A FULLER TREATMENT OF A SINGLE VERSE**

We can get a better idea of how the different types of problem—textual, interpretation, and translational—come together by taking one verse, 1 Kings 11.33, and examining these various types of problems in a fuller way. In our workshop we compared BP, BJ, TOB and FC, but here we will take RSV, NEB and GNB, as examples of three different types of translation.

**RSV**

because he has<sup>h</sup> forsaken me, and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites, and has<sup>h</sup> not walked in my ways, doing what is right in my sight and keeping my statutes and my ordinances, as David his father did.

<sup>h</sup> Gk Syr Vg: Heb *they have*

**NEB**

I have done this because Solomon has<sup>a</sup> forsaken me; he has<sup>a</sup> prostrated himself before Ashtoreth goddess of the Sidonians, Kemosh God of Moab, and Milcom god of the Ammonites, and has<sup>a</sup> not conformed to my ways. He has not done what is right in my eyes or observed my statutes and judgements as David his father did.

[<sup>a</sup>] has: *so Sept.*; *Heb. has plural.*

**GNB**

I am going to do this because Solomon has<sup>m</sup> rejected me and has worshiped foreign gods: Astarte, the goddess of Sidon; Chemosh, the god of Moab; and Milcom, the God of Ammon. Solomon has<sup>m</sup> disobeyed me; he has done wrong and has not kept my laws and commands as his father David did!

<sup>m</sup> *Some ancient translations* Solomon has . . . and has; *Hebrew* they have . . . and have.

The first thing we notice is the transitions in NEB, "I have done this" and GNB, "I am going to do this", which express clearly the relationship with the previous verse.

We also have a textual problem. TOB and FC follow the Hebrew in having the verbs in the plural. BP, BJ, RSV, NEB and GNB, however, follow the versions in translating the verbs in the singular, with Solomon as subject, in view of the context. The participants in the workshop were referred to the notes in ICC; BP, BJ, TOB, FC; NEB, and GNB on this textual problem, and advised by the translation consultant to follow BP, BJ, and GNB (the majority

of the five versions they have been urged to consult on textual problems) against TOB and FC. Note that the difference between the two readings in Hebrew is a simple difference of vowels, and not of consonants.

The textual problem also raises a problem of identification of participants. If we read the plural, the "they" of TOB should be spelled out as "the Israelites", as in FC. But if we read the singular, with the majority of versions cited, we will have "Solomon" (NEB, GNB) for "he" (RSV).

Level of language is another question to be dealt with, especially in common-language translations. Compare "has forsaken" (RSV, NEB) with the common-language solution of GNB: "has rejected". Compare also the literal "has prostrated himself before" (NEB) with the more meaningful ". . . has worshiped" (RSV, GNB).

By putting in a classifier, "foreign gods", GNB brings out the link joining the three names which follow and highlights the nature of the idol worship.

At this point in our workshop we took time to explore the indexes of BP and BJ to see what information we could gather on these foreign gods. We found a note in BP that told us that sitting on the throne next to Baal was the goddess Ashtoreth, who was the same as the famous Astarte of the Phoenicians, and that explains the expression "the Baals and the Astartes". A note in BJ told us that "the phrase 'Baal and Astarte' or, in the plural, the Baals and Astartes' is the common expression for the Canaanite divinities." By checking in some Bible dictionaries (*Encyclopédie de la Bible*, *Dictionnaire encyclopédique de la Bible* and IDB) under the words Sidon, Phoenicia and Canaan, we learned that Astarte is the same as Ashtoreth and that she was a goddess of Sidon, a city in Phoenicia, which was a part of Canaan.

Two translations in French (BP, TOB) have "sons of Ammon" instead of "Ammonites", so we next looked up Ammon in the Bible dictionaries and on the maps in BP, BJ, TOB and GNB, and found out that it is a country. In the language of the translators participating in the workshop it is probably better to include this information in the translation, by using a classifier.

RSV's literal "he . . . has not walked in my ways" was compared with the less literal "he . . . has not conformed to my ways (NEB) and the more meaningful equivalent "Solomon has disobeyed me" (GNB).

The need to replace the particle "doing" (RSV) by a finite verb "he has done" (NEB, GNB) was also pointed out. Older translations, such as the RSV, needlessly imitate the Biblical languages in the way they use participles, even when the construction is not only awkward but also confusing, as in this verse. Did Solomon do what was right or not? The word "not" in RSV could be taken as relating only to "has . . . walked". NEB and GNB clear up this ambiguity.

In a common-language translation, it is important to avoid technical vocabulary. We have three levels demonstrated in RSV, NEB and GNB in the translation of one phrase: "my statutes and my ordinances" (RSV), "my statutes and judgements" (NEB) and "my laws and commands" (GNB). RSV is the most technical; GNB is the most common; NEB is intermediate in level.

Finally, it was emphasized in our workshop that the translator must be sensitive to the natural word order of his language. Compare "David his father" (RSV, NEB, following the order in Hebrew) with "his father David"

(GNB, using the natural order in English).

By way of conclusion it was pointed out that we can use the more literal translations, such as BP, BJ, TOB and RSV in an attempt to discover the *form* of the original, but we need to compare these with translations such as GNB and FC, which give more of the *meaning*. We often find the meaning in the footnotes of BP as well. It was pointed out that textual, interpretation, and translational problems are often dealt with in the notes of BP, BJ and TOB. NEB has only textual notes, and can be classified as less literal than RSV but less dynamic than GNB.

### CONCLUSIONS

In summary we may say that although translators *should* work from the original languages, and consult the commentaries and other reference works, (as well as being trained in the theory of translation,) most of them are working at a different level in a country like Zaïre. Therefore they need to be encouraged to make greater use of the resources they have at hand, such as the footnotes in annotated versions of the Bible (like BP, BJ and TOB), along with the solutions of the more dynamic or meaningful translations, such as NEB, and especially GNB and FC. The best way to help them is through the approach of letting them learn through experience. We did not take the wrong course in keeping to one passage in our workshop; but we probably would have done better, working with translators at this level, in doing more detailed study, such as we did for 1 Kings 11.33, than taking such a long passage as 1 Kings 11.14–43.

A larger question, however, still remains: to what extent should we entrust translation work to translators with limited equipment, given the variety and number of problems that can arise in this work?

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## TRAINING TRANSLATORS TO WRITE IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGES

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### THE NEED

Often one of the most serious handicaps that limits mother-tongue speakers as translators is their lack of experience in writing, especially in their own language. Even the few who have had some experience in writing essays have usually had this in a colonial language—English, French, Portuguese, or some other European language. Likewise all the *good* written literature they have been exposed to has been in the language of their education, not in their