

But ignorant people  
 Don't want to be corrected  
 Nor do they want to become wise.

The above English rendering will certainly appear to be wordy. Actually, the original Hebrew text is essentially wordy. Just imagine, eight verbs and seventeen nouns to say only one and the same thing: **These proverbs were written for you to become wise.** Such, in fact, is the basic meaning of the entire passage.

### How did the translators arrive at such rendering?

First, they noticed that all the nouns had much the same meaning: wisdom, insight, intelligence, cunning, knowledge, shrewdness, and so on. Likewise, all the verbs also had much the same meaning: to know, to understand, to pay attention (to hear), to gain, to gather. So rather than trying to find a particular equivalent for each term, they focused their attention on their shared meaning. So – they reasoned – as long as the basic meaning was retained, they felt free to restructure the word order.

Secondly, they noticed the five-times repeated Hebrew preposition *l-*, which here indicates either the infinitive mood or a participial form, but which also can be translated as “to” and “for”. They decided to take this preposition as a statement of purpose.

Thirdly, they noticed that the Hebrew text had some poetic rhythm and cadence, so they decided to try and see if they could give these verses some poetical flavor. One thing in their favor was that classical Spanish poetry allows for lines with one, two, three, or more syllables, as long as the longest line does not exceed sixteen syllables. Even those who try free verse usually don't write lines longer than this generally accepted limit.

The poetry of the above verses is far from being classical. But it does have rhythm and cadence, plus a regular meter. Since it is basically team poetry, it lacks the flavor a good single poet could give to it. And yet it is easy to read and easy to listen to, which is the main concern of this new version. Improvements can still be made, but from a translational standpoint it can be said that the basic components of meaning of this discourse have been retained and that it is a fairly good rendering of the Hebrew text.

How far can translators go, especially Bible translators? That is the question. The answer may be: as far as they are able to, provided they still do justice to the text. And this is what the BLS translators appear to have done.

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### “LO” and “BEHOLD” – translating the Hebrew word *hinneh*

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The Hebrew word *hinneh* is traditionally translated as either “behold” or “lo” in RSV and many other English Bibles. This simple approach in English may be deceptive for translators in other languages, since

the meaning of the word can vary from one context to another. And the variation really requires using a wider range of terms in translation, especially in many non-European languages.

To study the meaning of the Hebrew term, we will start from the outline of the discussion in the Brown-Driver-Briggs *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (B-D-B), pages 243-244. (Quoted descriptions and definitions below are taken from these two pages of B-D-B.)

I want to approach the range of meanings of *hinneh* as they are set out in B-D-B by analyzing the components of meaning in each particular case: this is the process called "componential analysis of meaning" as proposed by Nida and Taber in *Theory and Practice of Translating* (see pages 56-90, "Referential Meaning"). In line with Nida and Taber I will use terms to refer to components of meaning according to the following definitions:

**Central component:** a component of meaning present in all contexts in which a single term or expression occurs.

**Universal component:** a component of meaning present in all contexts in which a group of differing terms or expressions occur.

**Diagnostic component:** a component of meaning whose absence or presence is crucial for distinguishing between different uses of a single term or expression.

**Supplementary component:** a component of meaning whose presence or absence does not alter the essential sense of the term or expression.

What I hope to do in this short article is to provide a componential analysis of the B-D-B definitions, followed by a suggested adjustment for translation purposes. I then want to rearrange and adjust the components of meaning in a way that is more suitable for working with the concepts of componential analysis. To conclude this study, I will discuss a limited number of passages in order to demonstrate the usefulness of the method for translators. And, finally, I will offer some suggestions for discovering possible applications in non-European languages.

### **Applying componential analysis to *hinneh* as described in B-D-B**

As translators well know, what we identify as central, universal, diagnostic, and supplementary components for a term in one language will mostly not be the same as for an "equivalent" term in another language.

The term *hinneh* is used in a wide variety of differing contexts within Hebrew. Therefore in Hebrew the differing components marking such contexts are not diagnostic but supplementary, since they do not force the Hebrew speaker to use a different term – *hinneh* fits them all.

However, in other languages many of the same components will be diagnostic, since the Hebrew term occurs in contexts that demand a variety of terms in other languages to fit a range of meanings/contexts. We must therefore be prepared to recognize certain components as

being potentially diagnostic in translation rather than supplementary as we analyze the variety of contexts in which *hinneh* occurs.

*Hinneh* is described by B-D-B as a demonstrative particle. It is important to remember that it is not an imperative verb, since the common translation in English, "behold," is imperative and may leave the impression that the term in Hebrew is likewise imperative. Since "lo" is not a verb, there may be less danger of such a misunderstanding where that term is used. We should think of *hinneh* as performing a function similar to the demonstrative terms "this" and "that" in English, where our attention is directed to the fact that the item so marked is either near or far from the speaker. There is nothing imperative about the words "this" or "that."

The first function of the particle *hinneh*, according to B-D-B, is that of "pointing to persons or things." However, for our study it will be useful to separate the component of "pointing" from what the term points to. Pointing, as we will see, seems to be present in all occurrences of the term, and therefore we can regard it as a central component of meaning of the Hebrew term. Some of my colleagues have described this function as that of "an attention-getter." We propose that this term should be described as "a marker to indicate that what follows is worthy of attention." We can label this component as "calling attention to X," or for the purposes of making a concise diagram simply <+attention>.

This leaves us with the need to indicate what the expression points to, namely "persons or things," as in the first definition of B-D-B. Although some may suggest a better term, we will label this diagnostic component as <±object>.

The term sometimes occurs with a first person singular suffix, especially "in response to a call, indicating the readiness of the person addressed to listen or obey" (B-D-B), as in Isaiah 6.8, "Here I am" (*hineni*, "Behold-me"). This yields the diagnostic component we will label <±readiness> (understanding this to apply to the "object," namely, the speaker). The fact that we do not find the term translated as "behold me" in this context in English, but usually "here I am," indicates that this component is diagnostic for English, not supplementary as in Hebrew. In fact, on the basis of English alone, we would not think of the terms "behold" and "here" being close in meaning to each other.

The second function of *hinneh*, according to B-D-B, is that of "introducing clauses involving predication." This in turn is further broken down, first in the context of past or present statements, with reference to "some truth either newly asserted or newly recognized." This diagnostic component will be <±new info>. The new truth may often be "one upon which some proposal or suggestion is to be founded" (B-D-B); but for our purposes such new or additional information may represent a complementary component not directly relevant to the task of translating the term in question. Second, the "predication" may occur in the context of the future: "Here it serves to introduce a solemn or important declaration ... and is used especially with the participle ... in predictions or threats" (B-D-B). This diagnostic component will be

<±fut info>, if we follow B-D-B. In some languages it may be important to add another component to this: <±evil result>. This use of the term frequently occurs with the first person singular attached, as in "Behold, I will bring a flood ..." (literally "Behold-me bringing ...", Gen 6.17, so that <±readiness> may also be appropriate here). While the nature of the statement is usually negative, speaking of evil to come, this feature again appears to be a complementary component which translators will be able to deal with apart from any help we may provide.

The third function of *hinneh* occurs "very frequently in historical style, especially (but not exclusively) after verbs of seeing or discovering, making the narrative graphic and vivid, and enabling the reader to enter into the surprise or satisfaction of the speaker or actor concerned" (B-D-B). This suggests a component that is not always recognized by readers and by translators. The discovery or surprise is first and foremost that of the speaker, writer, or the character in the narrative. Only secondarily, through the art of narration, does the reader share in the surprise or discovery. The diagnostic component in terms of B-D-B is <±narrated discovery>. Below we will divide this into two components, <±new info> and <±event>.

An example in which the reader knows the information before the character in the story discovers it is in the story of how Laban deceived Jacob. In Genesis 29 Jacob expects to marry Rachel, but in verse 23 we are told that Laban substitutes Leah for the intended bride. Then we get the reaction on Jacob's part in verse 25: "And in the morning, behold (*hinneh*), it was Leah ..." Here *hinneh* clearly marks the discovery by the character of something the reader already knows. In the case of "casuistry," which we are about to discuss, the emphasis is also totally upon the narrated character learning the information.

A fourth function occurs chiefly in legal casuistry, that is, the application of general legal principles to particular cases or examples. For such contexts most English Bibles do not use either "behold" or "lo" to represent the Hebrew expression. Therefore we can predict that there will be few instances of confusion over the meaning of the term for translators. It is sometimes represented in English by using the word "if," as in Leviticus 13.5:

And the priest shall examine him on the seventh day, and if [*wehinneh*] in his eyes the disease is checked and the disease has not spread in the skin, then the priest shall shut him up seven days more ...

For this kind of occurrence we can identify the components as follows:

< +attention>  
 < +new info>  
 < +event>  
 < +casuistry>

The final component < +casuistry> marks this off as belonging to a class of its own. Some languages may require the use of a term that indicates

“pointing” in a way similar to the English “behold.” However, in this type of usage it will probably be a milder term, yet one that indicates the importance of what follows as the deciding factor in the matter of case law.

### Rearranging components

It should now be possible to look again at the occurrences of examples cited in B-D-B and adjust the assignment of components more strictly on the basis of componential analysis. We come up with the following diagram:

Basic components	Components of objects and events
+ attention	± object
+ { ± of character in narrative	± readiness
+ { ± of reader	± action to perform
+ { ± directed	
+ { ∓ narrated	
± new information	∓ event
± surprise	± tense, aspect, etc.
± reaction to follow	± casuistry

In the above diagram the basic components, whether universal or diagnostic, are indicated on the left. In the left column, note that either or both **character in narrative** or **reader** must be present. The components labeled **directed** and **narrated** are mutually exclusive, although one of the two must occur, and so the second is marked with a “minus-plus” rather than “plus-minus.” The **information** which *hinneh* draws attention to may or may not be **new**, and if new it may or may not convey a sense of **surprise**. In most cases we may expect or anticipate a need to react to the situation, but not every time.

In the right column of the diagram are the distinctions between components assigned to objects or to events as the point of attention. If attention is drawn to an **object** (whether a person or a thing), we may assume **readiness** on the part of that person or thing, as well as the **action** that person or thing is to perform. If attention is drawn to an **event** (and it may involve objects, persons or things, as participants in the event), local language constraints will indicate whether the event is to be marked by aspect, mode, tense, or other features. As to **casuistry**, the peculiarity of the English language in avoiding “lo” and “behold” in such cases indicates that this usage deserves marking as a distinct component.

It should be emphasized that the above set of components is an attempt to represent the situation within the Hebrew language. When a variety of terms within another language replaces the single Hebrew term, the structure of the components will look markedly different, with separate structures for each term. And it will most likely be the case that

there will be no universal component uniting all the above into a distinct whole, since few languages function in a way similar to that of Hebrew.

### Some examples

In the case of **Leviticus 13.5**, cited above, the person addressed (in this case, the reader) is in no way involved in having attention drawn to the state of the disease; it is only the priest whose attention is drawn to the fact that the disease has not spread. In this case the priest has not been suddenly drawn to attention, nor is the particle *hinneh* used as an order to him to pay attention. However, there is new information, and the result of the information is seven days more of quarantine, followed by possible release. In this context the priest's attention is drawn to an event (the halting of the disease), not to an object, and casuistry is involved.

Another case in which the character in the narrative is the main person whose attention is called is in **Exodus 2.6**: "When she opened it she saw the child; and lo, the babe was crying. She took pity on him ..." (RSV). NRSV does not use any English equivalent to translate the particle: "When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him." In the context the reader knows in advance the contents of the basket. The character in the narrative discovers the child upon opening the basket. However, the word *hinneh* does not occur until she sees the child crying, and this is a discovery revealed to the reader at the same time; literally "and behold-[a]-young-fellow crying." RSV uses "lo" rather than "behold" at this point, which is a less emphatic word, suggesting attention rather than demanding it. It seems to fit better in a situation where the instinct of compassion is being aroused on the part of the princess. Note also that the element of surprise would fit the opening of the basket, but the word *hinneh* is not used until an emotion of compassion rather than of surprise enters the narrative.

In this case we could therefore lengthen the list of possible supplementary components beyond simply that of <±surprise>, especially after examining other narratives. Although the fact of the boy crying is new also to the reader, the context places the emphasis on how the attention of the princess is called into focus. This is one of the texts cited by B-D-B under its definition c: "very frequently in historical style, especially (but not exclusively) after verbs of *seeing* or *discovering*, making the narrative graphic and vivid, and enabling the reader to enter into the surprise or satisfaction of the speaker or actor concerned." In translation, rather than ignoring the term as in NRSV, it may be possible to use an expression of concerned compassion. In colloquial English, for example, we might say, "When she saw the child—aw!—the kid was crying!" This would capture the flow of information and emotion as seen in the Hebrew text.

A similar passage to challenge the interpreter and the translator is **1 Samuel 4.13**: "And when he came, lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching" (KJV). RSV does not represent the word *hinneh* but simply has "When he arrived, Eli was sitting upon his seat by the road watching ..." This is new information for the reader, but it is also new information for the runner bearing the information about losing both the battle and

the ark of God. It follows immediately after the verb telling that the runner arrived. Since the runner is in focus up to that point, and since the particle *hinneh* does at times clearly indicate the attention of the character in the narrative, it seems in keeping with the flow of the text to think of the runner as the basic person whose attention is focused on Eli sitting there. It does not, however, exclude the reader, for this is new information strengthening the impression of Eli's pious concern for the welfare of the ark. Rather than ignoring the term in translation, it may be possible in many languages to use an interjection or some other expression to indicate discovery. Again, colloquial English could perhaps say, "When he arrived, hey, there was Eli sitting ..." While that may be inappropriate in formal English, in other languages something similar may be quite effective and acceptable.

### Options for translators

We could work through many more examples in detail, if we had the time and the space. However, the situation for English translators may provide encouragement for translators in non-European languages.

For example, in RSV a good number of occurrences of *hinneh* in the Hebrew text are represented by either "behold" or the less emphatic "lo." In NRSV many of these expressions simply disappear, and other features in the context are expected to provide the appropriate component of meaning. This is a legitimate procedure, but it may not always be the best. A very small sampling of how RSV used either "lo" or "behold" for *hinneh*, while NRSV used something else is as follows (these are the NRSV equivalents):

Gen 1.26	see	Gen 1.31	see	Gen 3.22	indeed
Gen 18.2	and saw	Gen 19.8	look	Gen 22.7	are here
Gen 50.18	are here	Psa 48.4	then	Psa 59.3	Even now
Prov 7.10	then	Song 2.11	now	Isa 38.17	surely
Jer 8.9	since				

This list can be greatly expanded. In addition to the above equivalents, it may be appropriate in certain contexts to suggest some of the following in English:

note well	mark well
now hear this!	pay attention to this
please note	look, ...
Look!	Attention!
Just look at this, ...	

I list these possibilities so that translators may be encouraged to experiment with a variety of expressions in their own languages – expressions that may accomplish what *hinneh* accomplishes single-handed, with few or no other similar expressions available in Hebrew.

[A final note: Many translation consultants are now finding that the older models of communication theory are less useful than some

newer models. The idea of “frames” in particular is gaining wide acceptance among translation consultants, since it demonstrates quite clearly how both the speaker and the hearer carry with them their own frameworks of concepts. Since the idea of “components of meaning” deals with arrangements of features of meaning on the part of both the source language and the language of translation, it should be possible to incorporate the fundamentals of componential analysis into the “frame” model in some manner. Thus a highly useful way of dealing with meaning need not be lost in moving from one basic model of communication to another.]

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## THE PASSOVER LAMB

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### *Being sensitive to the cultural contexts of source and translated texts – a basis for interpretation and translation of Scriptures*

Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed (1 Corinthians 5.7, NIV): commentaries and interpretations of Paul’s writings have rarely appreciated the full force of this statement. Its background is the presence of sin among the Corinthian church community. The point Paul is making is that this sin is something that has to be discarded altogether: it is “leaven” (verse 5). Leaven was not allowed during the Jewish Passover when the Passover lamb was sacrificed. The Christian Passover is the sacrificial death of Jesus.

There is a clear contrast in this passage between Jewish religious practice, which at that time had become a cultural event celebrated every year, and in which no leaven was allowed, and the once-only event of the death of Jesus, on account of which no sin is allowed throughout the Christian life. Paul here makes a cultural shift and contrast, or a replacement if you wish, for the Corinthian Christian community. He spells out the Christian new understanding of the event of Christ’s death.

For us today the new understanding is also valid in all our cultures. A careful choice of expressions from the languages into which we translate may be able to convey this important message of Paul. Language is part of culture and reflects the feelings of the people of that culture; and we need to keep this in mind if we are to translate religious ideas and communicate effectively what the new event of Christ means in our languages and cultures. In other words, we are talking of bringing the word of God into our cultures, as we express it in the languages of our people.

This article is a case study with the aim of revisiting Swahili translations of the New Testament and considering the possibilities for choices from words and expressions of the Swahili language for speaking about the event stated above.

Without going into interpretations of 1 Corinthians 5.7, it will be my task to put side by side some selected Swahili translations of the passage