

translations of sums of ancient moneys: the value of money is constantly changing, and there are different ways of arriving at modern equivalents for the sums of money which appear in the Bible.) My advice is to translate *talanton* as whatever is the most reasonably stable **but commonly used** source of wealth. For instance, using “a bag of gold” as the translation for *talanton* is unacceptable in the United States. Although the price of gold is reasonably stable, the average citizen does not deal with gold as money. Thus using “gold” for *talanton* loses the impact that the original hearers would have had in hearing “ten talents”, that is “one million dollars!”

A final note of encouragement for those who see this translation of currencies as needing constant updating. It is true that using local currency will require revised editions and greater care. But it is this greater care that will keep the word of God as a living word.

J. NAEGELE

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A comment in response:

Naegele’s point of disagreement with my original article seems to be based on a misunderstanding of what I intended to say about the money values in the Parable of the Talents. My concern was that the ratio of 5:2:1 between the sums of money should be evident to the reader, and that this is more important than carrying through a **precise conversion** to modern equivalents. I would be as concerned as Naegele that the **order of magnitude** of the sums of money involved should be conveyed in the translation. So I would be happy with a rendering like 500,000 dollars, 200,000 dollars, 100,000 dollars, but definitely not with a rendering like 5 dollars, 2 dollars, 1 dollar.

E. FRY

Writing words as words in Kwa languages

The Kwa languages of West Africa (which include Igbo, Yoruba, Igala, Ewe and Grebo, to mention just a few) are noted for a set of features known in linguistics as elision and assimilation. For example when a verb *Ke* comes before a noun object *apu* the combination is pronounced *Kapu* not *Ke apu*. In other words, the vowel of the verb is typically dropped (although the tone of the verb is often retained). Other typical combinations are associative constructions (for instance egg-bird, “egg of a bird”, preposition-plus-object, and in the verb auxiliary system). In setting up a writing system for a Kwa language, the difficult question is: do we write words in their “lexicon” or dictionary form or do we write words as they are produced in speech? (Or, as some have phrased it,

“disjunctively” or “conjunctively”?)

How are words stored in a person’s memory? In view of the fact that we are able to give a “lexicon” form of a word at all it seems that there is some sort of dictionary in each person’s head which actually files words in their isolated or “list” form. Then how do we manage to abbreviate and otherwise change forms of words to make them come out naturally in speech? It seems that in addition to words, we also have in our minds a set of rules which directs our tongue to modify the words as they are produced in sentences so that they are joined in natural ways.

A question which then arises is this: when we write a sentence, should we do the work of joining words for the reader on the paper? Or should we provide him with only the words as they are stored in his head and expect him to do the joining, as he normally does when he speaks? To answer this let us consider what happens when a person learns to read. If he follows standard primers he learns a combination of “phonetics” and word-shape recognition. The phonetics are useful in enabling him to attack new words. However, once he has sounded a word out by “phonetics” he gets used to seeing the word as a unit and reacts to it by certain distinctive features of that word. He does not sound out each word as he comes to it in a story; rather he reacts to the words on paper as units because they represent the units he has in his head with all of their associated images. Reading, in fact, is an association of written symbols on paper with the words the reader has in his head. The question of pronunciation does not even arise!

Of course, we are often called upon to read “aloud”, and in this activity correct pronunciation is expected. Note however, that it is a **separate activity**—a special form of reading. Unfortunately, we have grown up with many readers in Nigeria who tend to associate the idea of reading with “reading aloud”.

We then come to ask the question: for reading in its true sense (that is silent reading) which type of writing is best, writing words as they are represented in the mind of the reader, or writing words as they are shaped by the tip of the tongue? To achieve the most rapid recognition, it would seem reasonable to represent words as closely as possible to the way they are stored in the mind. Representing them as they are shaped by the tongue would seem to obscure them and make them less easy to identify readily. This is because to identify a word as readily as possible all of its associated features—consonants, vowels, tones—need to be represented as fully as possible. When writing “as one speaks”, vowels are dropped, tones are changed, and the familiar visual form of the word that the reader learned at the beginning is lost.

One thing we have learned about preparation of alphabets is that it is not necessary to represent automatic processing in language. For example, in English the plural of “dog” is “dogs” and the plural of “cat” is “cats”. The /s/ at the end of “dogs” is actually a /z/ sound whereas the plural marker of “cats” is a true /s/. There is an automatic pattern in English that causes the /s/ to be modified to a /z/ after what

we call voiced consonants, b, d, g. Another English example: we write the word "incomplete" with an /n/ in the first syllable, but in the speech of many people the sound is really the same as at the end of the word "king". This is because we automatically shift from an /n/ sound to the /ng/ sound before letters like /k/ and /g/ and hard /c/. We are quite right in not writing these sounds as we say them because to do so would mean we write the prefix "in" in two different ways whereas it is only one word with one meaning. Likewise, when we write the word "electric" and the word "electricity" the root of the word is spelled the same even though the /c/ is pronounced in two different ways, one sounding like a /k/ and the other sounding like an /s/.

Coming to the Kwa languages, the processes by which verbs and their noun objects are joined in speech are automatic. They are quite complicated, yet even a child learns them and can apply them in varying degrees depending on his speed and style of speech. As in any other language, these automatic processes do not need to be written. A reader who recognizes words can automatically join them just as he is used to doing when he pulls words out of his head and puts them together with his mouth.

To write words in their processed form ultimately slows a reader down because he has to "decode" the sentence, which means finding the original separate words out of their joined form. Of course he can learn to do this fairly quickly, because he is used to doing so whenever he hears someone speaking. However, in decoding speech he has many other signals such as intonation, gesture, and emphasis which supplement the stream of consonants and vowels he is hearing. So decoding writing is bound to be slower than decoding speech. Furthermore, speech is in fact very slow compared to good reading. Once a person recognizes words quickly, he can read at a rate many times faster than he can speak and decode speech.

The above arguments are theoretical, although they are based on tests in many languages. For the Kwa languages, as far as I know, no such experimentation has been done. The way to determine the best writing system in practice would be to take representative groups of illiterate people, and teach one half of them to read using one system and the other half using the other system. It is my hope that this discussion may be useful in stimulating such an experiment by the educational experts in the field.

ROBERT KOOPS

Covenant in relation to Hagar and Ishmael in Galatians

There are several references in the New Testament to the covenant made with Abraham. One reference, Acts 7.5-8, refers to the promise of the land given in the "covenant of circumcision", yet the overall context of the speech of Stephen actually plays down the significance of the land