

## GRAMMATICAL EQUIVALENCES IN BIBLE TRANSLATING

How should the expression: 'Thou art my beloved Son. . . .' (Mark 1: 11) be translated? For many languages the problem does not involve primarily lexical equivalences, that is, how to translate the separate concepts represented. Rather the problem is: What grammatical form will the phrase take in the receptor or second language? In many languages a simple phrase may be translated by a grammatically more complex construction, or *vice versa*. For example, if a phrase in one language consists of a noun and several adjectives, in the Isthmus Nahuat language of Mexico such an expression must be restructured, for not more than two preposed adjectives may occur; all other noun modifiers must be presented as clause constructions postposed to the noun. Accordingly, the phrase 'with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places' (Eph. 1: 3) would be transformed to 'with every blessing which is spiritual and which is in heavenly places'. The phrase 'my beloved son' contains only two preposed modifiers in English, but the equivalent phrase in Isthmus Nahuat would be 'my son whom I love' because 'beloved' must be transformed into a postposed clause. Other examples of obligatory transforms from English to Isthmus Nahuat are: 'a sharp two-edged sword' (Rev. 1: 16) equals 'a sharp sword which has two edges'; 'the seven golden lampstands' (Rev. 1: 20) equals 'the seven lampstands which someone made of gold' ('golden' must be either 'gold-like' or the verbal construction 'to make of gold' must be used).

In these Nahuat examples no complex lexical problems are encountered; i.e. no acute difficulties of lexical equivalence or correspondence, but in languages such as Nahuat certain grammatical equivalences must be determined. Noun phrases must be recast into different kinds of noun phrases or into some other grammatical construction which is proper for the target language and which at the same time is the one corresponding with the source language.

In some instances both lexical and grammatical equivalences must be sought by the translator. For example, 'I am the bread of life', 'the gospel of glory' among others, require in many languages both lexical and grammatical equivalences in the process of translating from one to another language.

Nida has written extensively demonstrating the need for the Bible translator discovering the lexical equivalences between the source and receptor languages.<sup>1</sup> Among others, Adriani has also written on the need for lexical

<sup>1</sup> Nida, Eugene A., *Bible Translating*, 2nd edn., American Bible Society, New York, 1961, pp. 11-30, 130-48. Nida treats the problem of linguistic equivalence on pp. 249-79, but even in the section on syntax does not go into the kinds of equivalence relations treated here.

equivalences in translating.<sup>1</sup> The use of these equivalences in translations has become a part of minimum acceptability. Though many of these equivalences in the vocabulary of the two languages may be rather obvious to the translator (for example, *tortilla* for *bread* in some instances; *paper* for *book*, etc.), other problems of lexical equivalence must be studied carefully because their solutions are more difficult to determine (for example, words for *snow*, *sheep*, *camel*, *desert*, etc.).

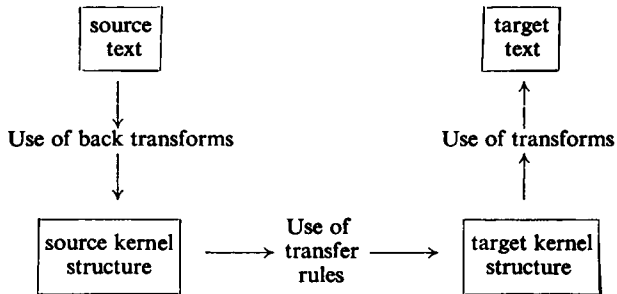
In addition to the vocabulary another area of equivalence in Bible translating is the grammar. Since problems of equivalence in this area of study are often, as a whole, more subtle, they are more frequently ignored. If they are not ignored, they may be solved by the translator's intuitive reaction based on his familiarity with the spoken language.<sup>2</sup>

It is well known that the particular types of grammatical construction in any given language (noun phrases, verb phrases, clauses, etc.) are limited in number. Though the number of types of noun phrases, etc., may be very large, the number is always limited (i.e. finite) and describable for a given language. Furthermore, these construction types do not have a necessary one-to-one translation correspondence to the construction types of any other language. A given noun phrase type in English, for example, one consisting of an article, several adjectives and a noun, is not necessarily matched by

<sup>1</sup> *The Bible Translator*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (January 1963), pp. 9-13.

<sup>2</sup> Recently the type of problem discussed here has been solved by translators using back transformations (i.e. deriving kernel structures), transferring on the conceptual level, and then making appropriate forward transforms. The author has found that the method suggested is economical in that it allows regular conversion of expressions in one language to their equivalents in another language and avoids the working out of back transforms each time.

However, it should be stated that the translation must go beyond this point and beyond what is suggested in this article. Ultimately the total meaning must be analysed. For this the more detailed approach currently recommended at Translators' Institutes is summarised as follows:



The source form and meaning composite is analysed in order to find the equivalent target meaning and then the appropriate target form is found in the target language for this meaning.

The procedure suggested in this article is a simplified version which fits in at the point of the transfer rules in the diagram above. It is, however, only a beginning in the ultimate process required for acceptable translation.

For a more complete description of the total process, see Eugene A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1964, especially pp. 68-9.

that noun phrase type in another language, for example, Isthmus Nahuat. In Isthmus Nahuat the structurally equivalent phrase might consist of a demonstrative pronoun, an adjective, a noun and a relative clause. Here our attention is on the formal difference in the two phrases, i.e. a different construction type in each language in terms of their internal arrangements. However, there is also a constructional equivalence in the grammar between the two languages.

For the Bible translator these differences are a source of difficulty which must be resolved, not by-passed. If the difficulty is not to be solved by the translator's intuition, the solution must be by means of a careful study of the grammatical equivalences analogous to the lexical equivalences he is already employing.

Where features of grammatical equivalence are involved, the following suggestions are intended to help the translator deal with these problems and produce a proper translation.

The application of grammatical equivalences to Bible translating is in two areas. The first involves the concept of grammatical levels within a language.<sup>1</sup> The concept of grammatical levels is essentially treating a sentence as composed of included constructions, i.e. such constructions as clauses, phrases and words. Each construction may be composed of other constructions. Thus the grammar of a language is described in terms of sentences, clauses, phrases and words (or, more properly, classes of sentence types, classes of clause types, etc.). However, a grammatical construction in the source language cannot match in type a grammatical construction in another language; any one construction may be systematically matched with more than one or with one of another type in the second language. Specifically, a phrase in one language may be equivalent to a clause in the second language. In addition to the examples already given from the New Testament note the following:

- (1) *(The old man)<sup>2</sup> on the bench*
- (2) *(The old man) who is on the bench*
- (3) *(The tall) very pretty (girl)*
- (4) *(The tall girl) who is very pretty*

A phrase may be equivalent to a sentence, or two or more sentences in one language may be required to match one phrase in another language, for example:

- (5) *(The old man) on the bench (is my father)*
- (6) *(That old man is my father.) That one who is sitting on the bench he it is.*
- (7) *(The tall) very pretty (girl sings).*
- (8) *(The girl is tall.) She is very pretty. (She sings.)*

<sup>1</sup> Pike, Kenneth L., *Language in relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior*, Part I (1954), Part II (1955), Part III (1960). Glendale, Summer Institute of Linguistics. Elson, Benjamin F., and Pickett, Velma B., *Beginning Morphology-Syntax*, 1962, Mexico, D.F., Mexico.

<sup>2</sup> Parentheses mark the context relevant to the example.

Bible translators have known of these equivalences for a long time. There is no attempt here to make these facts appear new. Rather the purpose is to point out (1) the necessity to recognise and state them in some description which shows up the differences, and (2) to formalise a type of translator's transfer grammar for each set of equivalences. Such a grammar for Isthmus Nahuat and English would look like this:

<i>Source Language (Eng.)</i>	<i>Receptor Language (Is.Nah.)</i>
Locative phrase, e.g. 'to Mexico' or 'to that house'	(1) Locative phrase, e.g. 'este Mexico' (to Mexico) (2) Relative clause, e.g. 'kan ono? inon kahli' (where that house is)
Adjective phrase, e.g. 'a living stone'	(1) Relative clause, e.g. 'se tet yeh bibo' (a stone which is alive)
or 'the Beautiful Gate of the temple'	(2) Verb construction, e.g. 'inón puerta ipan tiopan. moto- kahtoya puerta yeh monsa. (the gate in the temple. It was called the gate which is beautiful.)

This form of a transfer grammar is admittedly an over-simplification, and the examples are at best poor illustrations of the principles involved. The grammar would be more extensive in a real language situation because of even more possibilities of equivalences. Such a grammar states the relationship between the construction types of two languages being compared or used in the translation process. Transfer grammars may be set up according to any degree of detail convenient to the user.

The second area of grammar in which the application of grammatical equivalences is relevant involves matching similar constructions which are different in internal detail. For example, a particular noun phrase in one language (for example, English) may be equivalent to a different type of noun phrase in another language (for example, Isthmus Nahuat). Using the illustrations numbered 1 to 4 above and including their contexts (the words in parentheses) the transfer grammar for these sets of phrases would look like this:

<i>Source Language (Eng.)</i>	<i>Receptor Language (Is. Nah.)</i>
Noun phrase (1)	Noun phrase (2)
Noun phrase (3)	Noun phrase (4)

Noun phrase (1) would consist of an article, an adjective, a noun, and the locative phrase referred to earlier. Noun phrase (1) contrasts with noun phrase (2) which includes a relative clause, *who is on the bench*, as a postposed modifier instead of a prepositional phrase, *on the bench*. Noun phrase (3) contrasts with noun phrase (4) by changing one preposed modifier, *very pretty*, to a postposed modifier which is a relative clause, *who is very pretty*.

The requirements of the structure of the second language produce grammatically identical phrases from two grammatically different phrases in the source language.

In some languages phrases in the Greek genitive case in the source language have to be translated by an adjective and a noun in the target language, for example: *the gospel of glory* becomes *the glorious gospel*.

The following illustrations taken from the King James' Bible and the New English Bible further illustrate the principle of grammatical equivalence, although in this instance between two versions of the same language instead of between two languages.<sup>1</sup> The relevant phrase is given first in the words of the King James' version and then in the words of the New English version:

James 2: 14 . . . and have not works . . . v. . . . when he does nothing to show it.

John 1: 1 In the beginning was the Word . . . v. . . . when all things began, the Word already was.

. . . and the Word was God . . . v. . . . and what God was the Word was.

John 1: 3 was not anything made that was made . . . v. . . . no single thing was created.

John 1: 6 a man . . . whose name was John . . . v. . . . a man named John.

John 1: 12 But as many as received him, to them . . . v. But to all who did receive him, to those. . . .

The following are illustrations of grammatical equivalences made in the author's translation of I Peter in Isthmus Nahuat. In some instances lexical equivalences had to be found also.

1: 1 . . . you who far (is) your country who are scattered . . . v. (King James) . . . to the strangers scattered . . . ('strangers' was changed to 'one whose country is far away'—a nominal phrase including a modifying clause which replaces a single noun.) ('scattered' was changed to 'who are scattered'—a modifying relative clause which replaces a participle.)

1: 2 Our Father God chose you according as He knew beforehand . . . v. (King James) Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. ('Elect' was changed to 'Our Father God chose you'—an independent clause which replaces an adjective.) ('the foreknowledge of God the Father' was changed to 'He knew beforehand'—an independent clause which replaces a noun phrase.)

2: 4 . . . like a stone but which (is) living . . . v. (King James) . . . a living stone . . . ('living' was changed to 'which (is) living'—a modifying relative clause, without an expressed copulative verb which replaces a participle.) ('like' was added to make the meaning clear to the Aztec audience.)

In each of the above examples the grammatical requirements of the receptor languages necessitated the use of the particular grammatical equivalent as well as in some instances various lexical equivalents.

<sup>1</sup> Since the two versions were made at distinct time periods, separated by several centuries, the language used in each instance actually represents two dialects separated by time not geography.

It is certain that for the readers of the Isthmus Nahuatl translation the use of the grammatical equivalents facilitates the reading and understanding of the Scriptures. It is also true that the change in grammar in modern speech translations is a factor in making the translations more readable and capable of being understood by the uninitiated.

If the translator starts early to make a file of these equivalences, he will soon profit by having a set of possible equivalences graded as to probable usefulness. Using the ideas suggested above, a translator can produce a translation with grammatically equivalent (and therefore natural sounding) constructions for the use of the Church. To do otherwise may be to produce what sounds sensible as to its meaning but said in an awkward way grammatically.

The translator must first know the grammar of both the source and receptor languages. As he observes grammatical equivalences, he notes these down and keeps them in some readily acceptable form (for example, a file), and then as he translates, he refers to these entries for use in determining the proper equivalent for each passage being translated. As his familiarity with the work increases many of these equivalences become memorised and thus appear to be 'automatic', i.e. usable without looking them up in the file, much like his use of the vocabulary items (the lexical equivalents).

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