

In terms of *balance*, there are four types of material: words of God (Deuteronomy), narration (2 Samuel), response (Nehemiah and Psalms), and teaching (Ephesians). Literary forms include description, prayer, and exhortation.

There are references to women in 2 Samuel and Psalm 86.16.

God is portrayed as creator, preserver, and deliverer in Nehemiah; as judge, father, and king in Psalm 103; and the one who raises from the dead in Ephesians. Jesus is referred to in Ephesians as the one through whom God works. The Spirit of God is mentioned in Nehemiah.

In terms of the *situation* of the target audience, there is a special appeal to the community's experience with oppression (Dt, 2 Sam, Neh, Ps 103), to the human emotions of guilt and bereavement (2 Sam), to those at an independent stage of personal development of the need for repentance and individual decision (2 Sam, Eph), and to those with a religion of law and works of the possibility to grace (Eph).

Conclusion

A selection of texts for a specific audience needs to be chosen according to themes which are distinctive of the Gospel, according to the situation of the audience, and in a way which maintains a balance among different types of material. Each text chosen needs to be tested in terms of the specific situation of the target audience to determine its appropriateness. Help should be requested for this process from a translation consultant and from those who have a special understanding of the target audience. It is important to test in advance the response to the selected texts by a small group of persons from the target audience. Only when all three principles converge and each text is appropriate to the situation of the audience should a particular selection of texts be considered for publication.

JACOB A. LOEWEN

AN ANNOTATED WEST AFRICAN PSALM

Dr. Jacob Loewen is a UBS Translations Consultant resident in Canada

The translation of Psalms into West African languages usually requires a three-step procedure:

1. Studying the exegesis carefully and translating the meaning accurately.
2. Studying the form of the text and finding a West African equivalent and making the necessary adaptations.
3. Adjusting the West African form to its appropriate drumming rhythm.

Translating for meaning. At this stage the translators try to understand each phrase of the text and to translate it as accurately as possible. This will make it apparent if the parallelisms of the text mean more or less the same thing or if the repetition contains additional information. At this stage all the doublets, triplets, and so on are translated without any consideration for their final West African form.

Finding an equivalent West African form. Hebrew has many kinds of parallelisms. There are doublets, triplets, and quadruplets. Some parallelisms are more or less identical in meaning, others are only partially so. There are doublets with one positive and one negative statement, one literal and one figurative statement, one general and one more particular statement, and so on. West African praise songs or medicine chants often contain various types of parallelisms, but they may not have all the types found in Hebrew. Sufficient praise-song material should be carefully studied to discover the range of types and their functions. Nonacceptable Hebrew forms should then be adapted to acceptable ones: for instance, if repetition of the meaning in different words is not acceptable, often the repetition of an identical statement is. At other times the parallelism must be reduced to one statement plus some marker of emphasis.

Adjusting the rhythm. A recent experiment in several languages showed that when several individuals independent of each other were asked to study a psalm and to suggest a melody or a drumming rhythm for it, they invariably came up with the same melody or rhythm. They seemed to feel the content of the psalm “fitted” with certain known melodies or drumming rhythms. In languages where content determines drumming rhythm it will definitely be necessary to adjust the already adapted form to the appropriate rhythm. This may involve changes in word order, the addition or reduction of the number of syllables, or the balancing of tones. All such adjustments, however, should not alter the basic meaning. If the society has praise-song specialists, their suggestions are often invaluable.

The following is a sample psalm in a West African language which has gone through the first two stages. It is given together with the RSV base and the GNB as a model. The West African text contains numbers which refer to notes that follow. Following these notes we add some verse-by-verse comments on the adjustment in form that had to be made in the West African language.

Notes on the West African text

¹ The language had the choice of “the man who . . .” or “if you . . .” It chose the latter because good advice like the psalmist’s should be personal.

² Truly happy. The truly suggests that we are dealing with more than just ordinary happiness. In this language a white belly is a figurative equivalent of “intense happiness”, but it requires that the agent or cause of it be clearly stated. Since the cause is a longer series, it would be best to say “if you want God to give you a white belly. . .”

³ Hear is to “listen to” with a strong component of obedience.

⁴ Walk in the feet is a figure equivalent to “follow the footsteps of someone”.

⁵ Refuse God . . . don’t do what God wants would be possible, but it is clumsy. Refuse is used of a child who habitually disobeys parental instructions.

⁶ Live would probably be better translated “establish residence”. The West African version with “hear . . . walk in feet of . . . establish residence in” suggests a gradation similar to “walk . . . stand . . . sit” which some commentators see in the verse.

Psalm 1

RSV

1. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scoffers; 2. but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night 3. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

GNB

Happy are those who reject the advice of evil men, who do not follow the example of sinners or join those who have no use for God. Instead, they find joy in obeying the Law of the LORD, and they study it day and night. They are like trees that grow beside a stream that bear fruit at the right time, and whose leaves do not dry up. They succeed in every thing they do.

WAL

If you¹ want to be truly happy² do not hear³ the advice of bad people, do not walk in the feet⁴ of those who refuse God,⁵ do not live⁶ in the compound⁷ of those who spoil God's name. If⁸ you want to be truly happy, let your belly be sweet⁹ on God's command-words.¹⁰ let your mind¹¹ eat them day and night. Then¹² you will be like a river-by tree whose leaves¹³ the sun cannot kill,¹⁴ whose children¹⁵ are always ripe at the right time.¹⁶ Then everything you do will finish on a good road.¹⁷ Bad people are not like the river-by tree,¹⁸ they are like dry (corn) chaff¹⁹ which the wind blows away, puff!²⁰ puff!²⁰ That is why God²¹ will hit²² them when he judges all people, he will not let them share²³ with those who are at his back.²⁴ God²¹ will show his good ways²⁵ to the ones at his back, but he²⁶ will let sinners follow the way to perdition.²⁷

RSV

1. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scoffers; 2. but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night 3. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. 4. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff which the wind drives away. 5. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; 6. for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

GNB

Happy are those who reject the advice of evil men, who do not follow the example of sinners or join those who have no use for God. Instead, they find joy in obeying the Law of the LORD, and they study it day and night. They are like trees that grow beside a stream that bear fruit at the right time, and whose leaves do not dry up. They succeed in every thing they do. But evil men are not like this at all; they are like straw that the wind blows away. Sinners will be condemned by God and kept apart from God's own people. The righteous are guided and protected by the LORD, but the evil are on the way to their doom.

WAL

If you¹ want to be truly happy² do not hear³ the advice of bad people, do not walk in the feet⁴ of those who refuse God,⁵ do not live⁶ in the compound⁷ of those who spoil God's name. If⁸ you want to be truly happy, let your belly be sweet⁹ on God's command-words.¹⁰ let your mind¹¹ eat them day and night. Then¹² you will be like a river-by tree whose leaves¹³ the sun cannot kill,¹⁴ whose children¹⁵ are always ripe at the right time.¹⁶ Then everything you do will finish on a good road.¹⁷ Bad people are not like the river-by tree,¹⁸ they are like dry (corn) chaff¹⁹ which the wind blows away, puff!²⁰ puff!²⁰ That is why God²¹ will hit²² them when he judges all people, he will not let them share²³ with those who are at his back.²⁴ God²¹ will show his good ways²⁵ to the ones at his back, but he²⁶ will let sinners follow the way to perdition.²⁷

⁷ Compound. Every “loose” individual immediately seeks to attach himself to a compound which is a walled complex containing a series of individual huts. Once that happens a person belongs to the community.

⁸ Hebrew but GNB instead suggests that the contrasting condition to the if of verse 1 is to be stated. The West African language prefers to repeat the if-clause, thus creating a negative-positive parallelism.

⁹ Belly be sweet is a figure related to white belly meaning “to find something very pleasing”. The two uses of belly in themselves are a parallelism.

¹⁰ God’s command words. The word translated law usually equates more with “tradition”.

¹¹ Mind eat/chew on, both figures are acceptable, but chew on would be emphasizing “the reflection on it” most. Mind or thinking is a common replacement for “man’s innermost, his heart”. Belly is the seat of the feelings, mind that of the will.

¹² Then. The language prefers to link verses 2 and 3 in a means-result relationship.

¹³ Hebrew fruit, leaf are best reordered in this language, with leaves in first position.

¹⁴ Sun cannot kill. It is possible to say “leaves do not dry up”, but it seems to suggest something not natural, while the figure the sun cannot kill shows their hardness as a result of their access to water.

¹⁵ Children. All human, animal and plant offspring are called children.

¹⁶ Hebrew its season is a little difficult; at the right time would put too much emphasis on time. At its childing time, while suggesting season, also seems like needless repetition. Fruit obviously has its maturation time that differs from tree to tree.

¹⁷ Hebrew prosper. The translator’s first choice was produce benefits, but the emphasis was on benefit rather than on success; “will have a good road” means succeed, but it also suggests the absence of difficulties.

¹⁸ RSV are not so. This can be said in the language but it sounds awkward. “Are not like that one”, where the reference is specifically to the tree of the preceding verse, is acceptable, but the language prefers “are not like the river-by tree”.

¹⁹ RSV chaff. The language does not have a general term chaff, but a series of particular words: corn chaff is common in comparisons and proverbs.

²⁰ Puff! puff! is an attempt to render the African ideophone which describes the action of wind carrying away chaff. Ideophones carry much of the emotion in African discourse and usually also suggest a visual image.

²¹ God will. GNB passive must be rendered as active in this language.

²² RSV will not stand is a figure of speech rendered as a plain statement by GNB condemn. The language has no good word for condemn and usually uses hit as a figure of speech to express punishment following judgment. A similar situation is found in verse 6 (see GNB are guided).

²³ Share seems to be the best way to handle the figure “stand in the congregation”. GNB kept apart does not have a strong enough negative connotation in the language; not share seems to be the best way to express the exclusion.

²⁴ RSV righteous, GNB God’s own people. The West African language can say

“people whose possessor is God” or “people who are at God’s back”. The former could imply conquest, while the latter is definitely “follower by choice” (see also verse 6).

²⁵ Show the good way in this context suggests “lack of obstacles”. (See verse 3.)

²⁶ He will let. The West African language prefers to keep God as the agent in this clause also.

²⁷ The language has the choice of annihilation or perdition here. While the latter takes off from being lost, it nevertheless implies “coming to a bad end”.

Notes on Form

Verse 1. The Hebrew triplet has been retained but the nor . . . nor of RSV have become fully parallel verb forms.

Verse 2. The West African version has repeated the if-clause thus repeating the identical phrase of verse 1. This is typical. The law . . . law parallel has been replaced by the belly/mind, the two dimensions of man’s inner being.

Verse 3. Whose leaves . . . whose fruit. The West African parallel is fuller than that of the RSV.

Verse 4. The language prefers to repeat the negative of the comparison “evil men are not like a river-by tree”, but it can shorten it to “like that one”. The ideophone is a characteristic of the language that adds a beautiful sound effect here.

Verse 5. RSV wicked . . . sinners has been replaced by “God will . . . sinners, he will . . . them”, a noun-pronoun parallel. The two negatives of RSV are replaced by a positive-negative pattern as in GNB.

Verse 6. The RSV way (as object) . . . way (as subject) type of parallelism is unknown and unacceptable in this language. “God will . . . he will” replaces it, though the word way occurs in both expressions.

DAVID SOESILO

THE STORY LINE IN TRANSLATING PHILEMON

Dr. David Soesilo is a Translations Advisor with the Indonesian Bible Society

During a recent translation seminar in Irian Jaya, we found out that for most of the tribal languages of the interior of the Birdshhead area, letter writing is unknown. When the people need to send messages, they send them orally through a messenger; or now with readily-available tape recorders, some send messages on tape. On the very rare occasions when they have to write a letter, they write it in the national language, Bahasa Indonesia.

Since this was not the first seminar which the translators had attended, we did not choose a narrative passage for translation practice. We chose a letter—and Paul’s Letter to Philemon was chosen because it is so short. But how could these participants translate this letter clearly in their respective mother tongues, in which written letter form is unknown? Here we were faced with an unusual gap in the mother tongue situation, coupled with the complexities of first century personal letter form.