

Conclusion

Every language has its own characteristic grammar. If the structures of one language are mechanically imposed on another by the translator, they are bound to be a disturbing alien element.

But the translator dare not on that account have a diminished concern for structure. Syntax always conveys significant meaning. It indicates important relationships and meaningful segmentations of experience. It can even provide clues to the psychological outlook of the writer.

In translating a Biblical book, we have to consider that the meaning conveyed to us through syntax is an integral, intended part of the message and impact of the book. It belongs to the translator's task, therefore, to reproduce in the receptor language the meaning conveyed by the syntactic structures of the source language—and to do this in the most natural and effective ways that he can find, with a minimum of distortion.

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TRANSLATING THE HEBREW BIBLE

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Of all the books in the world there is surely none that is so difficult to translate as the Hebrew Bible. It is the purpose of this paper to examine a number of its difficult passages and peculiar constructions in an effort to solve at least some of the problems connected with them and so obtain a more accurate translation than any we have now.

A good passage to begin with is Judges 18: 7b, which is regularly emended to agree with the last clause in v. 10. The translation in RSV is typical: 'lacking nothing that is in the earth, and possessing wealth'. The emendation is purely speculative. If the two clauses were so nearly alike originally, it is inconceivable that they would have become so different in the course of time. The opposite procedure is what regularly happens: clauses that are somewhat alike tend to become identical. The only reason for the emendation is the allegation that the Hebrew as it stands makes no sense, but properly interpreted it makes good sense and fits perfectly into the context. It is to be noted at once that the clause is circumstantial, with its subject first and its verb in the form of a participle, two distinguishing marks of the circumstantial clause. The next word, *dābār*, is manifestly in the adverbial accusative of manner, 'in a thing, in any way'. The last two words of the clause are a participle followed by a noun. The translation of RSV, 'and possessing wealth', is most unfortunate, because there is nothing in the Hebrew to suggest 'and', the participle cannot be translated 'possessing', and the noun

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cannot possibly mean 'wealth'. The participle comes from the root *yrš*, which does not mean 'to possess', with RSV, but 'to take possession of, to seize, to conquer'. Here the participle is used as a noun, 'conqueror', and the noun *'ešer* that follows is in the attributive genitive and comes from the root *'sr*, meaning to 'restrain, to enchain, to repress, to oppress'.¹ Hence the literal translation of the phrase is 'conqueror of repression', in idiomatic English, 'repressive conqueror'. Accordingly the whole clause reads, 'with no one in the land to debase them in any way, no repressive conqueror', or in smoother English, 'with no repressive conqueror in the land to debase them in any way', exactly the kind of phrase that the context demands, describing as it does the feeling of security on the part of the citizens of Laish on the eve of its conquest by the Danites.

A construction that appears only twice in the whole of the Old Testament, Gen. 38: 29 and 40: 10, is the temporal preposition *kaq* with the participle. Because the construction is so rare, scholars emend the participle to the infinitive construct, which is usual here, or they translate the phrase as if it were the temporal *kaq* with the infinitive construct. Neither course is warranted. The very fact that the construction is so rare is the more reason to retain it, and there must be some difference between the temporal *kaq* with the participle and temporal *kaq* with the infinitive construct. Two usages of the participle are (1) to express continuous action, and (2) to express imminent action. One or other of these usages must be involved here, and I suggest that it is the second, although the other is possible. Hence I would translate the first clause in Gen. 38: 29, 'But just as² he was about to draw back his hand, his brother came out', or less likely, 'But just as he was drawing back his hand, his brother came out'. The participle, along with the preposition *kaq*, makes the action more lively, emphasizing the fact that the one brother by a mere hair was able to slip by the other. The same is true of the second occurrence of the construction, Gen. 40: 10, which I would translate, 'Just as it was on the point of budding, its blossoms shot up; its clusters ripened into grapes'. It points up the remarkably short time for the vine to come to fruition, symbolizing the quick return of the chief butler to office. To emend the text in these two passages or to mistranslate them is to spoil the effect that the writer had in mind.

A phenomenon in Hebrew that has never been noted before, in so far as I know, is the fact that when we have *waw* introducing indirect narration following a verb of telling, commanding, or petitioning, it is usually simple *waw* with the jussive or the imperfect with jussive force when there is no special form for the jussive (e.g. Ex. 6: 11; 10: 17; 11: 2; 14: 2; 25: 2; Lev. 22: 2; 24: 2; Num. 5: 2; 17: 2; 19: 2; 21: 7; Joshua 4: 16; 1 Sam. 9: 27; 1 Kings 2: 17; 5: 20). Contrary to expectation, it is rarely *waw* conversive with the perfect (e.g. Num. 15: 38; 20: 8; 35: 2), and more rarely still there is no introductory particle of any kind (e.g., Gen. 12: 13). In the last case the

¹ For this root and its derivatives see Ernst Kutsch, *Vetus Testamentum* 2, pp. 57 ff. Kutsch labels *'ešer* as a doubtful derivative, but this derivation gives a meaning so apt in this context that it must be a derivative, meaning 'repression' or the like.

² As I have noted in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 78, p. 73, n. 3, temporal *kaq* seems to be a bit more immediate and emphatic than temporal *beq*; hence 'just as' here.

clause is an object-clause; in the other two it is grammatically co-ordinate, but logically (that is, in meaning) it is an object-clause and is so translated into English. One would expect some difference in meaning among the three clauses, or at least between the first two, but there seems to be no difference. The simple *waw* with the jussive of the first has its counterpart in the *waw* conversive with the perfect of the second, which *waw* gives the perfect imperfect jussive force. Hence the translation of a verse like Num. 16: 37 (Heb.: 17: 2) with simple *waw* and the jussive, 'Tell Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, that he must pick up the fire-pans out of the conflagration', is quite like that of Num. 15: 38 with *waw* conversive and the perfect, 'Speak to the Israelites and tell them that throughout their generations they must make tassels on the corners of their garments'. However, it is surprising to have the former construction used so much more frequently than the latter, but it does bring out the precativa idea more forcibly, and it is probably the earlier of the two constructions.

The recognition of this usage of simple *waw* with the jussive finally clears up a problem in Gen. 42: 25 that has always baffled scholars: the construction *waymal'ê û*, *waw* consecutive with the imperfect, which gives the verb perfect force, and that of course is quite out of place here. All we have to do to solve the problem is to point the *waw* as simple *waw*: 'Joseph commanded that they were to fill their receptacles with grain', or better, 'Joseph commanded that their receptacles were to be filled with grain', since the verb is third plural impersonal.

The phrase at the beginning of Deut. 14: 28 seems to read, 'at the end of every¹ three years', and this is the usual translation, but that cannot possibly be correct because it would make the fourth year the year of tithing, whereas Deut. 26: 12 states very definitely that the third year was the year of tithing. The difficulty is solved if we recognize that the word *qêš* has two distinct meanings, one expressing point of time, as in Ex. 12: 41, 'At the end of four hundred and thirty years, on that very day, all the hosts of Yahweh left the land of Egypt', and the other expressing a portion of time, the end-portion.² It is the latter meaning that we have here in Deut. 14: 28. The time of tithing was not 'at the end of three years', but 'in the end-portion of three years', that is, the third year. Hence our translation of the phrase should be 'every third year'.

By the same token the same kind of phrase in Deut. 15: 1 and 31: 10 should be translated, not 'at the end of every seven years', with RSV and the other translations, but 'every seventh year', and this is confirmed by Deut. 15: 9, which states very explicitly that the year of remission was the seventh year (cf. also Deut. 15: 12 and Jer. 34: 14).³

¹ There is nothing in the Hebrew corresponding to the distributive 'every'; it is simply understood from the context, and that is quite legitimate here.

² After coming to this conclusion I discovered that Arnold B. Ehrlich in his *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel*, 1, p. 18 f., re Gen. 4: 3, gives to *qêš* the meaning of 'Endpunkt' and to *qâšeh* the meaning of 'Endteil'; and in this he may be right, although it means changing the one for the other in some places.

³ Alex R. Gordon in *The Bible: An American Translation* tried to meet the difficulty by translating the phrase in Jer. 34: 14, 'at the end of six years', but that of course is not what the Hebrew says.

In Hebrew, as in all languages, a word may take on different meanings in different contexts, but this has not always been recognized. A striking example is the use of *hebel* in the book of Ecclesiastes. In 1: 2 the word has manifestly the sense of 'futility':

'How utterly futile!'¹ says Qoheleth;
'How utterly futile! Everything is futile.'

In 6: 12 'empty' is surely its meaning: 'For who knows what good there is for man during the few days of his empty life,² which he spends like a shadow?' In 6: 4 it is best translated 'sorry thing': 'Though it [the prematurely born] comes as a sorry thing and departs in darkness'. In 8: 14 the meaning is 'senseless thing': 'There is a senseless thing that takes place on the earth: there are righteous men upon whom comes a fate befitting deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked men upon whom comes a fate befitting deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is senseless'. Finally, in 11: 10 the meaning is clearly 'transient thing': 'For youth and the prime of life are transient'. In this one short book *hebel* would seem to be used in at least five different senses: 'futile' (much the most frequent), 'empty', 'sorry', 'senseless' and 'transient'.³ And so with other Hebrew words and phrases.

It does not seem to be recognized by our lexicons and grammars that the prepositions '*im* and '*ēt*, although usually expressing accompaniment, are both quite often used like the preposition *lāmed* to express interest (advantage and disadvantage, 'for' and 'against'). It has long been noted that with a verb of fighting or the like the preposition is often '*im*, 'with', but the meaning in both Hebrew and English is 'against'.⁴ The preposition here is simply a variant of the *lāmed* of disadvantage, and it has the same force, as illustrated by Judges 15: 3, 'For I am going to do harm to them', compared with 1 Sam. 6: 9, 'He has done this great harm to us', the former with '*im* and the latter with *lāmed*. There are many examples of the '*im* of advantage, used exactly like the *lāmed* of advantage. I cite only one: 1 Sam. 12: 24, 'For see what a great thing he has done for you'.

Similarly the preposition '*ēt* is often used as a variant of the *lāmed* of advantage, as, for instance, in Deut. 1: 30, where '*ittēkem* is a variant of *lākem* in the same verse, and both are to be translated 'for you'. Another illustration is '*ittî*, 'for me', in 1 Sam. 24: 19. A good example of the '*ēt* of disadvantage is '*ittî* in Judges 11: 27, 'against me', a variant of the *lāmed* of disadvantage, such as we have in *lāk*, 'against you', appearing in the same verse. Another illustration is in 1 Sam. 12: 7, where we have the '*ēt* of both disadvantage and advantage: '*ittēkem*, 'against you', in the first half of the verse, and '*ittēkem*, 'for you', in the second half.

I am finally persuaded that Grimme was right in his contention that *zē Sinai* in Judges 5: 5 is to be translated 'the One of Sinai', meaning 'the God of

¹ A superlative construction in Hebrew; lit. 'Futility of futilities!' The word *hebel* is of course a noun, but its equivalent in English is an adjective.

² Lit. 'his life of emptiness', the second noun being in the attributive genitive and properly reproduced in the English idiom by an adjective.

³ For the last two renderings I am indebted to Professor W. A. Irwin.

⁴ See, e.g., Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, OUP, p. 767, col. 2, c.

Sinai'.¹ The translation of RSV, 'yon Sinai', is quite impossible. The usual translation, 'that is, Sinai', or the like, is possible, but that would much more likely be expressed by *hû' Sînai*, as Ehrlich long ago contended.² What persuaded me that Grimme was right was the parallels to the expression in certain of the cognate languages, but more particularly the fact that *zê Sînai* in Judges 5: 5 stands in apposition to *Yahwê*, and not to *hârîm*, 'mountains', which is some distance from it, with three words intervening. And that would seem to be proved beyond question by the parallel passage in Psa. 68: 9, where *zê Sînai* can be in apposition only to *'elôhîm*, 'God', the usual designation of Yahweh in this Psalm. Neither in Psa. 68 nor in Judges 5 is the phrase to be regarded as a gloss; it belongs to the poetic structure of the poems. In Psa. 68: 9 the meter is 2+2, 2+2, 2+2; in Judges 5: 4 f. it is 3+3, 2+2+2, 2+2+2, 2+2. In fact the whole poem in Judges 5 seems to be composed of a series of strophes beginning with 3+3 or one of its variants, 2+2+2, 3+3+3, or 3+2+2,³ followed by two or more 2+2 lines, usually in distich form, but sometimes in tristich, 2+2+2. Just because v. 5a is a tristich is no reason at all for striking out any part of it as secondary, because the tristich is fairly common in this poem, as it is in many others, as a variant of the distich.⁴ Indeed all the words of the strophe are necessary for the climactic parallelism that is so characteristic of the poem:

O Yahweh, when thou camest forth from Seir, when thou marchedst
from the steppes of Edom,
The earth quaked, the heavens also dripped, the clouds too dripped water,
The mountains rocked at the presence of Yahweh, the One of Sinai,
At the presence of Yahweh, the God of Israel.

A Hebrew word that has been handled very loosely by the translators is *gô'êl*. It is a participial noun derived from the root *g'l*, meaning 'to redeem, to take the part of, to avenge', and in accordance with Hebrew custom in such matters the person who was to do the redeeming or avenging was the nearest relative of the person affected, his next-of-kin. Hence in certain contexts the verb came to mean 'to play the part of the next-of-kin' (e.g. in Ruth 3: 13), and the noun took on the meaning of 'next-of-kin', as demonstrated conclusively by Lev. 25: 25, where 'his *gô'êl*' is defined as 'the person nearest to him', *haqqārôb 'elāw*. The word should not be translated 'relative' despite RSV and the other translations, because it was not *any* relative, but only the *nearest* relative upon whom devolved the responsibility of redeeming and avenging. An orderly society required that the responsibility be that of one particular individual. It could not be a general responsibility, since that would

¹ See *Zeitschrift der Deutsch. Morgenländ. Gesellschaft*, 50, p. 573; note also W. F. Albright, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 54, p. 204; *Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research*, 62, p. 30; *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 23, 1, p. 20; H. S. Nyberg, *Hebreisk Grammatik*, §84; J. M. Allegro, *Vetus Testamentum*, 5, pp. 309 ff.

² *Op. cit.*, 3, p. 81 f. However, Ehrlich is quite wrong in his contention that *zê* can only refer to what follows and never to what precedes; see Nelson Glueck, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 56, pp. 463 ff.; also T. J. Meek, *Hebrew Origins* (Harper Torchbook edition), p. 100, n.41.

³ For these variants of the 3+3 meter see T. J. Meek, *Journal of Religion*, 9, pp. 542 ff.

⁴ See T. J. Meek, *op. cit.*, p. 533 f.

result in chaos. Hence a person could have only one *gô'el*; but failing action on his part, another relative could play the part of the *gô'el* (e.g. Lev. 25: 48 f.; Ruth 3: 13). Accordingly the word *gô'el* can only mean 'nearest relative, next-of-kin', a particular relative, and not 'relative' in general; and this is its usage throughout the whole of the Old Testament with one single exception, and that is in 1 Kings 16: 11, where the text is manifestly corrupt.¹ What good Hebrew demands here is *w'gô'el w'ereā'* 'whether next-of-kin or friend', an inclusive phrase. What we have is very sloppy Hebrew: the plural of *gô'el* with suffix and what would normally be a singular noun with suffix, pointed by the Massorettes as plural to agree with the first plural, so that the phrase can only be translated, 'neither his relatives nor his friends', and it makes the English of the clause just as sloppy as the Hebrew, 'He left not a single male, neither his relatives nor his friends'. If the text is by any chance original, it can only mean that *gô'el* took on the meaning of 'relative' in the later period. It surely did not have that meaning earlier.

Another instance that might be cited by someone as the plural of *gô'el* is in Ruth 2: 20, but here the consonantal text has the singular, and that undoubtedly was the original reading. The Massorettes, however, like the author of 1 Kings 11: 16, manifestly believed that *gô'el* could mean 'relative' as well as 'next-of-kin', and led astray by the preposition *min*, which they interpreted as partitive, they pointed the word as plural. Instead of that it is clearly singular, and the preposition *min* would seem to be separative: 'The man is a relative² of ours; he is next after our next-of-kin' (cf. 4: 4, 'For there is no one but you to redeem it, and I come after you').

Against our interpretation of the clause it might be argued that Ruth couldn't very well have said to Boaz, 'You are next-of-kin', as she does in 3: 9, if Naomi had already told her that Boaz was only next after the next-of-kin. But this takes no account of the wily ways of a woman to get her man. It is one of the delicate touches in the book that Ruth should be represented as slightly exaggerating the status of Boaz in order to further his interest in her.³ As pointed by the Massorettes, the two clauses in Naomi's statement to Ruth in 2: 20 say exactly the same thing and cannot be original: 'The man is a relative of ours; he is one of our relatives'.⁴ The author of the book of Ruth could never have written a sentence like that.

There is another passage in Ruth where the Massorettes changed the text, even going so far as to drop a whole word from the consonantal text. The passage is 3: 12, and the word is the particle *'im*. Once again the Massorettes understood the word *gô'el* as meaning 'relative': 'But now, although it is true that I am a relative, yet there is another relative nearer than I'. On the other hand, the original reading with *'im* says something very different: 'But now, as a matter of fact, I am really not next-of-kin, but there is another who is next-

¹ The whole clause in which *gô'el* appears is lacking in the important Greek versions.

² It is to be noted that the word for 'relative' here is not *gô'el*.

³ Another bit of homely wisdom is found in Naomi's instructions to Ruth in 3: 3.

⁴ RSV gets rid of the difficulty by arbitrarily translating the first *gô'el* as 'relative' and the second as 'nearest kin', but for this sudden change of translation in a single verse there is surely no authority.

of-kin, one nearer than I'.¹ Of these two readings the latter is surely the original, and it shows once again that the *gô'el* was the nearest relative, and not relative in general, at least not in the earlier period of Hebrew history.

In Judges 6: 17 we have the use of what corresponds exactly to the Akkadian relative-possessive particle *ša*. The usual translation of the verse is that of RSV: 'And he said to him, "If now I have found favor with thee, then show me a sign that it is thou who speakest with me".' But it is not until v. 22 that Gideon becomes aware of the identity of his visitor: 'Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of Yahweh'. Also it is quite unnecessary to emend *m^edabbēr* to *ham^edabbēr*, as RSV does. The particle *ša* has here its possessive force, attaching the last clause to what immediately precedes it and meaning, 'belonging to, having to do with'. Hence in v. 17 we should translate, 'If indeed I have found favor with you, produce for me a sign having to do with what you are saying to me', or better, as the context suggests, 'in confirmation of what you are saying to me'.

Hebrew tends to run to two extremes: to be very compact or to be very profuse, using few words to say much or many words to say comparatively little. In Judges 10: 11 the Hebrew is unusually compact, so much so that the translators feel that they have to add considerably to the text to make any sense out of it. For example, RSV reads, 'Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites, from the Ammonites and from the Philistines?' Besides expanding the text this translation runs into the criticism that has always been urged against such a translation: the first half of the sentence is quite correct historically, but the second half is not. There was deliverance from the Egyptians in the Exodus, and victory for the Hebrews over the Amorites in the invasion of Palestine (Num. 21: 21-35; Deut. 2: 24-3: 11), but there is no record of deliverance from the Ammonites until Judges 11 and 12, and no trouble with the Philistines until the time of Samson (Judges 13-16).

This difficulty is overcome, however, if we recognize that what we have here are two similar prepositional phrases set over against each other, one the subject of the sentence and the other the predicate, with the copula understood, as so often in Hebrew. One refers to the past, and the other to the future, and the whole may be translated quite literally, 'Does not deliverance² from the Egyptians and Amorites mean deliverance from the Ammonites and Philistines?' or more explicitly, 'Does not deliverance from the Egyptians and the Amorites mean that there will be deliverance from the Ammonites and the Philistines?'

A very familiar passage is Eccles. 12: 11 f., but familiar in what is manifestly an incorrect translation. A typical rendering is that in RSV: 'The sayings of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fastened are the collected sayings of a single Shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness

¹ The first *ki* is asseverative, and *ki'im* is an emphatic negative, such as we have, e.g. in 1 Sam. 25 : 34. The particle *gam* has the force of 'another' here.

² This is the pregnant use of *min*, similar to its use in Deut. 11: 24; Joshua 1: 4; and in other places, where its meaning is 'the region from'.

of the flesh'. In v. 11 RSV has completely ignored *ba^a lē* 'the masters of', and *rō'eh*, 'shepherd', is taken as meaning God, which is very questionable. In v. 12 *yōtēr* is emphatic (its usual sense), and the infinitive '*śōt* belongs to the imperative immediately preceding it, 'be instructed'. Also, the infinitive with its object does not mean 'to make books'. That is an idiom peculiar to the English language and is not at all a Hebrew idiom, which is of course 'to write a book' (e.g. Mal. 3: 16). The sense of the infinitive here is that found, for example, in Ex. 38: 24; 1 Sam. 8: 16; Jer. 3: 16, 'to use, to make use of'. At the end of the verse *yig'at bāsār* is in the accusative of result, 'to weariness of flesh', or more freely 'until the body is weary'. Our translation of the passage is accordingly as follows: 'The words of the wise are like goads; like well-fastened nails are the masters of the collected sayings from a single teacher. Be well instructed from them, my son, to make much use of books without end and to study diligently until the body is weary'—a very different rendering from the accepted one and more intelligible. Instead of being a warning against too much study it is quite the opposite, and that assuredly fits much better into the whole context of the book, as well as the immediate context. Qoheleth was a diligent searcher after truth.

These are only a few of the many problems facing the translator of the Old Testament. However, enough has been said to indicate what an intricate and difficult task he has undertaken and the numerous items of vocabulary and syntax in both English and Hebrew that he must ever keep in mind to be certain that he is correctly interpreting the original.

BOOK REVIEWS

Leviticus, in the 'Old Testament Library' series, by Martin Noth, Engl. trans. by J. E. Anderson. London: SCM Press, 1965, pp. 208; 35s. 0d.

1 and 2 Samuel, in the 'Old Testament Library' series, by H. W. Hertzberg, Engl. trans. by J. S. Bowden. London: SCM Press, 1964, pp. 416; 50s. 0d.

The appearance of two new volumes in English on **Leviticus** and **Samuel** will be welcomed by readers of this journal. It is a long time since either book has been treated on so full a scale, and **Leviticus**, in fact, is one of those Old Testament books which have never been covered in the *International Critical Commentary*. Both these volumes are translated from German commentaries in the series *Das Alte Testament Deutsch*, and gratitude must be expressed to the SCM Press for the way in which they are making these works available to those who would not be able to use the German original.

The commentary on **Leviticus** is half the size of that on **Samuel** and one feature in particular will make it of less practical use to translators than the other volume. The original German commentaries both contain fresh translations of the whole text into German, but unfortunately the English edition of **Leviticus** reproduced the RSV 'though in a few cases where it has seemed