

and dramatic liturgy which my church uses on Palm Sunday. Far from detracting from the dignity of the worship, the splendid simplicity and directness of the new version improved it immeasurably.

But we ought to expect it to do so. The power of the Scriptures is not in their literary style, but in their message. The new translation is one that concerns itself with making the message clear to the reader above all else.

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## SECOND THOUGHTS ON MEASURING 'NATURALNESS'

In the April 1963 issue of *The Bible Translator*, Joseph Grimes discussed the question of naturalness in a translation. He presented a system for determining 'whether a translation is reasonably similar in certain respects to an original composition in the receptor language'. The system is based on '(1) counting the number of times selected features occur in a sample of the translation, (2) counting the number of times the same features occur in a matching sample of text material in the receptor language, and (3) evaluating whatever discrepancies there are between the two, using a simplified statistical table supplied for the purpose'.

If applied conscientiously by Bible translators, this will do much to help remove the foreign flavor that creeps in so easily. However, as I have attempted to apply Grimes's system and others,<sup>1</sup> serious questions have come up in two areas.<sup>2</sup>

First, it became evident that in some situations it is neither possible nor desirable to use certain grammatical features in a way which is 'natural' in the sense that it agrees statistically with the usage in available receptor language texts. Secondly, among various texts in the receptor language itself the variation in grammatical features may go far beyond the statistical limits set by Grimes's procedure.

### Necessary Exceptions to 'Naturalness'

Certain grammatical features are tied closely to certain semantic features, and when this is the case the frequency of these features in translation should be guided by the meaning content of Scripture, regardless of the frequency of these grammatical features in receptor language texts.

<sup>1</sup> J. Beekman, 'Questionnaire for Translators in New Languages', *The Bible Translator*, Vol. 12, p. 119; and B. Moore, 'A Statistical Morphosyntactic Typology Study of Colorado (Chibcha)', *International Journal of American Linguistics*, Vol. 27, No. 4, p. 298. Note section 3.4.

<sup>2</sup> This paper was originally presented as a seminar at the Spring 1963 session of the translation workshop held periodically by the Wycliffe Bible Translators at Ixmiquilpan, Hidalgo, Mexico, and was discussed with Grimes at that time.

In Colorado of Ecuador, for example, the paragraph introducer *junni* occurs at logical paragraph breaks. That is, each time there is a significant change of actor, action or emphasis, *junni* (or, less frequently, one of several similar words) signals this change of direction of the plot. *Junni*, then, while being a syntactic marker like those mentioned by Grimes on page 54, occurs with a frequency very closely tied to the frequency of significant changes of topic in the text. The use of *junni* in translation cannot, therefore, be simply counted up, tabulated, compared with its frequency in receptor language texts, and then mechanically adjusted. Although a syntactic feature, it is also a carrier of considerable meaning. The actual frequency of *junni* in Bible translation is several times what it is in available receptor language texts, simply because the plots move so much more slowly in folk tales than in narrative sections of Scripture.

Another instance in which meaning content is inseparable from grammatical form occurs in Trique of Mexico. The most common type of comparison is the simile, which is indicated by a distinct sentence type, as in *ro<sup>2</sup> wa<sup>34</sup> ʔwe<sup>3</sup>ʔe wa<sup>3</sup>h*, 'it looks like snow' (literally 'like goes snow goes it'). Without this simile sentence type it is impossible to express comparison only by metaphor, a kind of comparison often too cryptic to be intelligible. Using this simile sentence type, then, is the only lucid way in Trique to render many Biblical figures of speech. But this sentence type, although the most common kind of comparison, is nevertheless used infrequently in native texts. We cannot, then, expect that the use of this sentence type in Trique Biblical translation will keep within statistical limits based on native texts.

These are points at which the dilemma of 'fidelity' v. 'naturalness' forces a compromise solution. To use *junni* with the frequency with which it is used in native Colorado texts would necessitate expanding the translation to the point that no one would recognize it as being a translation of the Bible. Similarly, reducing the use of the Trique comparison sentence type to the frequency found in native texts (translating 'white as snow', for example, as 'very white') would require a wholesale elimination of Biblical comparisons that few would endorse. While striving for naturalness we must also aim as much as possible at reproducing such aspects of over-all style as length and the use of comparisons.

### Considerations of Reading Ease

In other cases mechanical problems of reading make it advisable to deviate intentionally from the statistically normal usage of certain features.

Subordinate clauses in Chol of Mexico may precede or follow the main clause of a sentence; they occur in either position with about equal frequency in native texts. In the Chol New Testament, however, almost every subordinate clause precedes the main clause. The decision to prepose subordinate clauses was based on observed reader difficulties in earlier printed portions. If the subordinate clause followed the main clause, the reader, on arriving at the end of the main clause, found himself at a grammatical stopping point, with a complete sentence behind him and a logical sentence-beginning ahead. Frequently, then, he ignored the lack of a period and stopped, either leaving

the subordinate clause dangling or reading it as part of the following sentence. But when the subordinate clause preceded a main clause, the reader, arriving at the end of the subordinate clause, recognized that he was not at the end of a sentence, and so went on to read the main clause correctly as part of the same sentence.<sup>1</sup> This factor of reading ease, then, outweighed the factor of stylistic naturalness and led the translators to put subordinate clauses before main clauses in almost every case.

A similar situation exists in Colorado, in which two nouns in apposition are distinguished from two nouns in other relationships (such as subject-object) by a pronounced pause before and after the noun standing in apposition. The same disregard for punctuation which affected the Chol subordinate clauses tends to obscure these appositional relationships in Colorado. Without the correct pause, 'He saw James, the son of Zebedee' is indistinguishable from 'James saw the son of Zebedee'. For this reason apposition is avoided in the Colorado translation whenever ambiguity is likely, even though it is quite common in speech.

### Casual and Non-casual Speech

The difference between casual and non-casual speech may also cause deviation from the statistical norm for certain grammatical forms. In Colorado the particle *titi* is the most common indicator of historical past tense in folk tales. When tape recorded folk tales have been transcribed for analysis, however, every informant has unconditionally rejected *titi* as 'bad' and has substituted for it the suffix *-manti*, even though the tape may be of his own speech. We cannot, therefore, use *titi* in Bible translation; the *-manti* form must be used exclusively. This gives it a high frequency of occurrence which, though statistically 'unnatural', is completely unavoidable.

It can be seen, then, that in view of such factors as grammatical forms closely bound to meaning, considerations of reader ease, and extensive use of forms unacceptable to native speakers, it may sometimes be necessary and desirable to use certain forms more frequently than the naturalness tests would permit. The implication remains, of course, that the statistical norms should not be violated unless there is clear evidence that the violation is indeed necessary and justified.

### The Question of Style

The second question brought up by the use of naturalness tests concerns style. Grimes says (*op. cit.*, p. 50) that for measuring naturalness we should choose a text 'to match the translation as closely as possible'. But style can be elusive.

It was a rather jolting experience when I first used Grimes's approach to compare the sentence lengths of two magnetically recorded Colorado texts, both of them folk tales by native speakers. Whichever I used as the

<sup>1</sup> The subordinate clause markers were, in these cases, functioning as what some machine translation investigators call a 'predictor', a signal indicating what type of construction will most likely follow. The predictor requires the machine to retain the subordinate element as incomplete until the main element is completed. It is probable that this is an important factor in meaningfulness for the human reader as well.

norm, the other text had sentences well outside the 'permitted' range. In one text, for example, eleven out of one hundred sentences were two words in length. According to the table provided by Grimes, this meant that we could reasonably expect the other text to have from seven to twenty-one two-word sentences. But actually it had only two two-word sentences. If the sentence-length check for a translation were this far askew, the translator, according to Grimes's table, would have cause for concern. And yet this was no translation; it was an original composition by another native speaker.

Spurred on by this shock, I counted the sentence lengths of various English texts to try to see just how certain factors which might be called style affected it. Written and spoken texts by the same author were compared, and it was found that much shorter sentences were used in speaking than in writing. Adult material was found to have longer sentences than material designed for children, text books had longer sentences than pleasure stories, and descriptive prose had longer sentences than dialogue. Sometimes one stylistic feature would work counter to another and outweigh it. A written text, for example, had shorter sentences than a spoken one when the written text was a children's book and the spoken one was a technical lecture to adults. But none of these factors had any bearing on the two divergent Colorado texts in question.

When, however, these two texts were reconsidered, comparing them with other Colorado texts, a factor of style did come to light which affected the sentence length: the narrator of the text with more short sentences had been very excited when he made the recording. An excitedly spoken text by the other speaker contained more short sentences also. Emotional excitement, then, was a significant stylistic factor which I had not anticipated.<sup>1</sup>

This points up emphatically the need for truly representative text material in the receptor language on which to base checks for naturalness, especially the first checks in any language. For this initial checking it would be best to use two or three different texts to establish norms rather than just one, in order to avoid inadvertently using a text in which the style is skewed by some unrecognized factors. All the texts used should be as close as possible to the type of discourse (narrative, dialogue, etc.) of the Scripture portion being checked, rather than texts known to be of a different nature. If these all agree more or less consistently on the use of the grammatical features to be checked, then one may conclude that they probably do not contain any stylistic factors which would make them atypical. If they disagree among themselves as to frequency of such features, then a still larger corpus of text material should be used in order to have a more representative sample.

### **Easy Grammar for Easy Understanding**

The effect of all these stylistic factors such as education of the reader and excitement of the speaker, has a definite bearing on Bible translation, for it indicates a correlation between the complexity of grammar and the ease with which the audience (hearer or reader) should be able to understand the

<sup>1</sup> Although I should have anticipated it. It had already been connected stylistically with other grammatical features in the *I.J.A.L.* article cited above.

material. That is, the amount of effort which the audience can be expected to expend, and also the difficulties which inhibit their understanding, will determine how complex or simple the material may be and still be 'natural' for them.

Thus, the author who writes to entertain will lose his audience if he writes in a ponderous style, while the reader of a technical article can be somewhat more complex in that his readers, if they approach his work at all, are presumably not averse to a certain amount of study. And if one is writing for people with a limited education (e.g. children or new-literates), the grammar must be simpler because their limited education will inhibit their ability to grasp more complex structures in print. On the other hand, spoken speech sets up certain other barriers which are greater than in written speech; the reader can re-read sections if something is missed due to interruptions or because of the complexity of the material.

When we consider the goals involved in Bible translation for indigenous groups in the light of these observations, all indications are overwhelmingly in favor of keeping the grammar simple. The majority of these readers have only a limited education,<sup>1</sup> and for many more of our audience the Bible will be an oral message, read to them by others. And all too often we have an audience which, like that of the novelist, must be entertained in order to be held. If we err at all in the naturalness of the grammar in our translations, it would be safer to err on the side of simplicity rather than complexity, but without simplifying to the point of boredom. And we should be especially careful to clothe the new and difficult concepts in very normal, easy-to-follow grammatical forms, saving the complexities for passages with semantically simple content.

<sup>1</sup> Adults with limited education are not, of course, completely comparable to children, for whom not only lack of training but also general immaturity inhibits understanding.

## PRECISION IN TRANSLATION

Some languages find it impossible to distinguish between abstract terms, such as mercy, pity and compassion. In many spheres, however, other languages use entirely different words for rice growing in the field, husked rice, rice boiled once and rice boiled twice. In English one word has to do for the lot.

Perhaps the most remarkable example of precision has come recently from the Akha translators in North Burma. The exact direction of all movement must always be specified, so much so that in translating Heb. 11: 37, 'They were sawn asunder', the question inevitably arose: 'Which way? Lengthwise or across?'