

certain militants, who even wanted the pronoun "it" to be used in place of "he" when referring to God. Others have recommended "they" in referring to God, as a constant reference to the Trinity. Some have objected to the term "mankind" since it contains the component "man-"; and a few even reject the term "human", since they see the masculine "-man" hidden in this form.

The changes which the translators have introduced are not, however, attempts to placate an extreme minority; rather they reflect an effort to make the text as universally applicable as possible. When the linguistic forms are singular and particular, but the meaning is actually plural and general, then some modification is not only justified but even desirable.

BARCLAY M. NEWMAN JR

SOME HINTS ON SOLVING TEXTUAL PROBLEMS

Dr. Barclay Newman is a UBS Translations Research Associate resident in the USA.

Bible translation is difficult in all of its stages. There is the difficulty of determining the meaning of a passage of Scripture, and there is the difficulty of selecting a proper form for the expression of this meaning in the receptor language. Then there is the difficulty of stating the meaning in a way that is both accurate and clear. But there is yet another difficulty which must be dealt with before any of these others. It is that of deciding upon what words are best considered to be a genuine part of the original text.

Biblical scholars have developed a scientific method of study and research that deals with this difficulty of deciding on what words belong in the text. It is known as "textual criticism". As used by scholars the word "criticism" does not have the negative meaning of saying what is wrong with the text. Rather it is used positively in the sense of weighing up all available evidence to determine as nearly as possible the original words of the biblical text. Over the years "textual criticism" has developed into a highly technical science which requires specialized skills. Yet there are ways by which the translator who does not have these skills may benefit from the work of textual experts. This may be done in the same way that a person who knows nothing about the science of flying may board a plane and fly to distant places.

In what follows we shall look at examples of textual problems from both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The article will then conclude with some practical guidelines to help translators who are unskilled in the science of textual criticism. But consideration must first be given to two important facts.

Two Important Facts

As we examine various textual problems, there are two important facts that must be kept in mind: (1) For the most part textual differences do not affect basic biblical teachings. What the Bible teaches about sin and salvation, for

example, is not in any way affected by the different readings that are found in various manuscripts. (2) The emphasis in textual studies is positive rather than negative. For the Old Testament this means that we can rely upon the general faithfulness of those scribes who copied the biblical texts from one manuscript to another. Old Testament scholars have been much impressed by the consistency that they have found in the Old Testament manuscripts. These scholars inform us of the remarkable agreement in detail between the earliest and the latest Hebrew manuscripts. This shows that the scribes who copied the Old Testament manuscripts were extremely cautious and careful in their work. The same thing may be said of those persons who copied and preserved the New Testament manuscripts.

Moreover, the Old Testament was in constant use in the Jewish synagogues, while the New Testament was used as much in the life of the early Christians. This means that even if a scribe had made a mistake in the copying of a manuscript, it would possibly be discovered as the manuscript was read aloud to the congregation of a synagogue or church. This would specially be true in the case of major mistakes.

Examples of Old Testament Textual Problems

Originally Hebrew manuscripts were written without benefit of vowels. The earlier scribes used only consonants and assumed that the reader would know what vowels were to be supplied when the text was read aloud. It was only at a much later date that vowel markers were placed in the text. But by this time the scribes were not always certain what vowel should be supplied. So at more than a thousand places these later scribes supplied one set of vowels in the text and another set in the margin. As a result, scholars today are left to decide upon the best choice. Often the reading in the margin seems better than that found in the text itself, as is believed to be the case with Amos 8.8. The reading in the text has "and be watered", whereas the majority of modern translations have the equivalent of "and sink", which is the reading of the margin.

Several ancient translations (for example, Greek and Latin) were made from Hebrew manuscripts before the time that vowels were placed in them. This means that in some instances these ancient translations may represent an earlier interpretation of the text than that represented by the vowel markers of Hebrew manuscripts. An illustration of this may be found in Jeremiah 49.1, where the Hebrew text has "their king" (pronounced *malcam*). However, several ancient versions have "Milcom" (an Ammonite god). As can be seen, the only difference is in the vowels, whether *a . . . a* or *i . . . o*, which were not a part of the original Hebrew manuscript. The majority of modern translations prefer "Milcom", since in Jeremiah 49.1-6 the prophet is announcing God's judgment against the Ammonites.

Another peculiarity of ancient Hebrew manuscripts was that they were written without separation between words. Thus different meanings could be derived from the text on the basis of the way in which word divisions were made. An illustration often used in English is GODISNOWHERE. If these letters are divided in one way the meaning is "God is nowhere", whereas if they are divided in another way the meaning is "God is now here". Accordingly the

Hebrew text in Hosea 6.5 may be divided so that two totally different meanings result. One interpretation is reflected in KJV ("thy judgments *are as* a light that goeth forth"), while RSV ("my judgment goes forth as the light") represents the other possibility.

Sometimes differences of translation result from what may be called "scribal errors". One common type of error which resulted from the similarity of Hebrew letters was the writing of one letter in place of another. For example, the Hebrew equivalent of the letter "d" (ד) is very similar in form to the Hebrew equivalent of the letter "r" (ר). The similarity in form between these two letters is the difference between "made ready provisions" (RSV) and "made as if they had been ambassadors" (KJV) in Joshua 9.4. It also accounts for the difference between "Dodanim" (RSV) and "Rodanim" (NEB) in Genesis 10.4.

The RSV rendering of 1 Samuel 14.41 is considerably longer than the same verse in KJV. Here the RSV translators have restored from an ancient translation what they believe to be the original text. Apparently two lines of the original Hebrew manuscript ended with the noun "Israel". But when the scribe copied the manuscript he accidentally overlooked everything in between the two occurrences of "Israel", thus producing a much shorter reading. Fortunately, at least one ancient translation was made from an earlier Hebrew manuscript which still had the complete text, and so scholars are able to reconstruct what seems to be the original reading.

Sometimes one scribe would read a manuscript aloud to several other scribes, and they would write down what he said. By this dictation method more manuscripts could be produced in a shorter amount of time than was possible when one scribe copied the manuscript by himself. But occasionally a scribe would misunderstand what was read to him. This perhaps accounts for the difference between "not we ourselves" (KJV) and "we belong to him" (RSV) of Psalm 100.3. In Hebrew the two phrases would sound very similar, and one scribe heard incorrectly.

There are also places in the Old Testament where scribes have apparently made intentional alterations. Occasionally a scribe would "improve" on a text which in his thinking dishonored the Lord. For example, in Genesis 18.22 the text reads "the Lord stood before Abraham". But to have the Lord "standing before" Abraham could suggest that the Lord is Abraham's servant. To avoid this meaning one ancient scribe altered it to read "Abraham stood before the Lord".

Examples of New Testament Textual Problems

Some errors found in New Testament manuscripts are of a similar kind to some of those which appear in Old Testament manuscripts. For example, the confusion between Greek letters is the apparent cause for the difference between the two readings of "dissipation" and "love feasts" in 2 Peter 2.13. A scribe copied what he thought he saw, but his eyes played tricks on him.

In John 17.14-16 the phrase "from the world" occurs six times, twice in the combination "... them from the world". This observation may well account for the strange reading found in verse 15 of one ancient manuscript. That parti-

cular manuscript omits the words placed in parentheses, which may have resulted from two lines which ended similarly in the Greek text:

I do not pray that you should take *them from the*
(world, but that you should keep *them from the*)
evil one . . .

Apparently a scribe looked back at the source manuscript and went from "them from the" of the first line down to "evil one" in the third line, thus entirely omitting the second line.

An error in hearing may well account for the alternative between "we have" and "let us have" in Romans 5.1. In the Greek of the first century A.D. the pronunciation of these two verb forms would have been similar (and possibly the same), thus accounting for the two readings. The scribe who was dictating read one of these forms, while the scribe who was taking down the dictation heard the other. The similarity of sound between certain Greek words also accounts for the difference between "our" and "your" of 1 John 1.4: "And we are writing this that our/your joy may be complete."

Some errors in New Testament manuscripts resulted from parallel accounts in the Gospels, especially when a scribe was more familiar with one Gospel than with the others. Thus in passages where parallel accounts are found in two or more of the Gospels, a scribe might accidentally write down what he remembered from the Gospel with which he was more familiar. An example of this type of error may be seen in Matthew 19.17. The best Greek manuscripts read: "Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good". But some Greek manuscripts contain a reading which derives from the parallels in Mark 10.18 and Luke 18.19: "Why do you call me good? No one is good by God alone". It is quite possible, of course, that this particular change represents a scribal attempt to harmonize the three accounts. But many scholars believe that a conscientious scribe merely made an honest mistake. In all good faith he recorded in Matthew what he remembered from either Mark or Luke.

Examples may also be given of intentional changes made in New Testament manuscripts. The accounts of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew (6.9-13) and Luke (11.2-4) are noticeably different. But some ancient manuscripts reveal obvious attempts to harmonize Luke 11.2 with Matthew 6.10. The most reliable manuscripts of Mark 1.2 identify "Isaiah the prophet" as the source of the quotation which follows in verses 2-3. Yet the quotation is a combination of several sources, only one of which is the book of Isaiah. Thus in some ancient manuscripts "Isaiah the prophet" is replaced by "the prophets", which represents an attempt to "improve" on the original reading. Some scribes must have rebelled at the thought of referring to Joseph as the "father" of Jesus. Therefore "his father and his mother" in Luke 2.33 is altered in some manuscripts to read "Joseph and his mother".

Some Practical Guidelines for Solving Textual Problems

Through patient research biblical scholars have developed techniques which help them to solve textual problems. They have come to discover that as a general rule *a shorter reading* is to be preferred over a longer one. This is because scribes had the tendency either to combine several readings into one or

else to expand the original reading in an attempt to make it clearer. Scholars have also learned that *a more difficult reading* is to be preferred over an easier reading. This is because scribes frequently attempted to “smooth out” texts which were thought to contain geographical, historical, or theological contradictions. Many other techniques have also been developed by scholars to assist them in the resolution of textual difficulties. But most of these are highly technical and beyond the scope of this article. Our primary concern here is to suggest some practical steps that may be taken by the translator who is not a specialist in textual criticism. These steps may be outlined as follows:

1. Before the project is began select one or more of the standard translations as the textual base for the new translation. If the translators happen to be working from English, they may choose from among a number of reliable translations, such as Revised Standard Version, Jerusalem Bible, New English Bible, New American Bible, New International Version, and Good News Bible. These translations will not always agree in their solutions to textual problems, but we may rely upon each of them to deal in an honest way with the available evidence.
2. When confronted with a textual problem, note the various options represented by the translation or translations chosen for the textual base of the new translation. Read through them carefully, and then make a choice on the basis of what seems best in the immediate and overall context of the book.
3. Do not get bogged down by spending too much time on any one textual problem. If two or more of the standard translations are being used for the textual base of the new project, then the committee should adopt the principle of following a certain one of them whenever the committee members cannot agree. Since the textual decisions of the standard translations are based upon scholarly opinion, this will both guarantee a valid decision and save precious committee time.

If the translation project is of the New Testament, and the translators know some Greek, there is another better option open to them. That is, they should use as fully as possible the UBS Greek Text and the supplementary volume (*A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*). There is also textual help available for Old Testament projects where the translators know some Hebrew. The UBS has recently published a new edition of the Hebrew Old Testament, and preliminary reports have been published of the Committee's decisions on textual matters. For those translators who have some ability in Hebrew, it would be advisable for them to make as much use of these sources as they possibly can.

Marginal Notes

The standard translations do not always agree on which textual problems are to be indicated in the marginal notes, and a decision must be made concerning what to do when this happens. A good rule would be to note only those textual problems which are listed in certain of the standard translations. It would seem advisable to select no more than three for this purpose, and it may even be best to follow the textual notes of a single translation exclusively. Or, it is also possible to follow the principle of noting a textual problem only in instances where two of the three standard source translations provide one.

For some translations it may be best not to include any textual notes. Readers unaccustomed to notes may be confused by them to the extent that they would reject the translation because of them. But even if a translation committee decides not to include textual notes in the translation itself, an honest translation will require that textual decisions be made at one level or another. By following the procedures marked out in this article, those translators who are not textual experts may feel confident that they have done the best they can with the resources available to them.

EUGENE A. NIDA

POETRY AND THE BIBLE TRANSLATOR

Dr. Eugene Nida is a Special Consultant for Translations with the American Bible Society. He was until recently UBS Translations Research Coordinator.

Some of the long, involved sentences of Ephesians, Hebrews, and First Peter are a source of despair for many Bible translators. Almost equally difficult are the many abstract terms in the Gospel of John and the Epistles of John. Nothing, however, tests a Bible translator's skill, patience, and endurance like the poetic portions of the Old Testament. It would not be so bad if there were only one type of poetry in the Bible, but in reality the Bible contains a number of different types of poetry: didactic, prophetic, liturgical, lyrical, and dramatic.

Some translators have thought that in translating from Hebrew the best solution is simply to follow traditional Hebrew texts and to reproduce corresponding poetic lines in their own languages. But for many passages scholars are not at all agreed as to whether the text should be printed as prose or as poetry. Furthermore, unless the translation in a particular language has a poetic structure, simply printing the text in poetic lines will not make poetry out of what in the translation is essentially prose. This practice, in fact, often results in turning good prose into poor poetry.

Before we can make valid decisions with regard to how to translate and to print poetry, it is essential to know more about some of the fundamental features of poetry, and to determine what the different functions of poetry are in different languages.

The formal features of poetry involve primarily (1) sounds (and in some instances letters) and (2) the rhythmic length of units. Sounds are also used in two different ways: (a) to imitate or to suggest sounds in the non-linguistic world and (b) to construct patterns of similar or related sounds. The imitative use of sounds is called *onomatopoeia*. In English such imitative words as *choo-choo*, and *putt-putt* are clearly onomatopoeic, but a great many other words may also be recognized to be so, for example *murmur*, *whisper*, *buzz*, *clang*. Moreover, we may also use the combination *fl* to suggest the movement of a *flickering flame*, and the *s*'s in *sleek*, *slithering serpent* can suggest the movement and hissing of a snake. The imitation of sounds in the practical world by the verbal sounds of a language is by no means exact, but all languages develop certain conventional ways of representing such sounds. In many African languages the use of extensive ideophones is a remarkable tribute to this imitative process.