

focus. This usage agrees with the traditional sense attached to the solemn meaning of "today" in the Old Testament.

- It is worth noting that in Luke's writings, references to time may not have to be taken literally. Luke's view of the end has a particular sense in which it is not bound by conventional understanding of time and space. Just like the "today" in Luke 23.43, when Luke puts on Jesus' lips the words "from now on the Son of Man will be seated on the right of Almighty God" (22.69) uttered during the trial before the Sanhedrin, he is well aware that Jesus is still physically on earth and is yet to be condemned and crucified.

If translators and reviewers, after going through the observations outlined above, cannot agree on a translation acceptable to all because some of them reject linking "today" with "you will be" on the ground of their denominational position on the question of death and the soul, there may be one possible solution. That is to leave the question of the relationship of "today" open, put a comma both before and after "today", and omit the inner quotation marks. In English the translation may look like this:

He replied, "Truly I tell you, today, you will be with me in Paradise."

This is not an ideal solution, especially as it maintains ambiguity and goes against the normal usage of punctuation in English, but it may be acceptable in some other languages and help to break the deadlock.

It is undoubtedly important to be aware of what people think "today" in Luke 23.43 means. When working with Christian translators who reject any reference to the immortality of the soul, it may be helpful to remind them of the strong evidence within Luke's writings that favours linking the difficult word to the fulfilment of Jesus' promise and not to the time of telling. However it is also necessary to explain to them that references to time in Luke's writings, especially in connection with the theme of salvation, do not necessarily have to be understood in a literal sense. Just as Schweizer has noted, there is reason to believe that when Luke wrote this passage, no detailed thoughts about a life after death were intended.

B.M. NEWMAN

THE SEVEN "OTHER" READABILITY TESTS

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What makes a book readable? Not even your reading specialist knows for sure. And there is no completely reliable way to measure readability. But misconceptions about readability are so common, especially at the nontechnical level, that it might be useful to examine what readability is – and what it isn't.

– Allen M. Blair

What is "Readability"?

One of the questions frequently asked about a new translation of the Bible is, "What is its **reading level**?" Too often this question is based upon the false assumption that certain standards exist whereby a text can somehow be automatically "measured" or "weighed" to determine a precise answer. But this is not the case. In fact the standards for readability testing are not flawless, and any conclusions can never be more than "probability statements." For example, if a text were evaluated to be "grade 4", this would merely be saying that perhaps fifty to seventy percent of persons with a fourth grade education should have little or no difficulty reading it.

Most readability formulas focus on sentence length and vocabulary, though others include such factors as grammatical relationships and sentence structure. Unfortunately, these measurements tend to be **mechanical** and do not take into consideration the less measurable elements that are equally important. For example, a "short" sentence can be more difficult to understand than a "long" one, if the word order of the shorter one is unnatural and the longer one flows smoothly. Moreover too many short, choppy sentences in sequence can actually have an adverse effect by reducing the reader's interest. In this regard, compare the "interest level" of two translations of Psalm 40.13-15 that were given the same "grade level" when evaluated for readability:

A	B
Please, Lord, save me.	Please show that you care and come to my rescue.
Hurry, Lord, to save me.	Hurry and help me!
People are trying to kill me.	Disappoint and confuse
Shame them and disgrace them.	all who want me dead;
People want to hurt me.	turn away and disgrace
Let them run away in disgrace.	all who want to hurt me.
People are making fun of me.	
Embarrass and shame	
all of those who say,	
"Just look at you now!"	

Other than the series of choppy sentences in column A, notice that five of the seven lines end in "me" and three of the seven begin with "people." In column B, the Lord's name is not mentioned, because the Lord is addressed by name immediately before this extract.

A number of additional matters must be considered when attempting to determine the readability of a biblical text. One of particular importance is called **enallage**, the shift in pronouns when speaking of the same individual (Psalm 99.2-3). Both translations below were given the same grade level by a reading consultant, but the shift from **he** (third person pronoun) to **your** (second person pronoun) will cause severe misunderstanding for the reader of translation A:

A

The Lord in Jerusalem is great;
he is supreme over all the
 peoples,
 Let them praise **your** name;
 it is great, holy and to be
 feared.

B

You are praised in Zion,
 and **you** control all nations
 Only **you** are God!
 And **your** power alone,
 so great and fearsome,
 is worthy of praise.

One of the classic examples of this confusing shift in pronominal references occurs in Song of Songs 1.2:

"Let **him** kiss me with the kisses of **his** mouth!
 For **your** love is sweeter than wine ..."

Evidently such shifts were an important device within the movement of Hebrew poetry, but the effect is lost on present day English readers.

Another factor that makes evaluation of readability difficult for Bible translations is that reviewers too easily overlook nonsense constructions and don't really consider how stylistic details help to determine the readability of a text. For example, **because** is sometimes used to signal opposite meanings in the same context: "All things continue to this day **because** of your laws, **because** all things serve you" (Psalm 119.91); and "Save me from those who are chasing me, **because** they are too strong for me ... Then good people will surround me, **because** you have taken care of me ..." (Psalm 142.6-7).

The texts that follow were taken from translations judged to have approximately the same comprehension level. Among other things, **a** (Psalm 78.51) is difficult in A because of an unsuccessful attempt to imitate the parallelism of the Hebrew text, while **b** (Psalm 147.10) suffers from insensitivity to the emotional value of language.

A

a) He struck down the first-born of
 Egypt,
 the firstfruits of manhood in
 the tents of Ham.

b) His pleasure is not in the
 strength of the horse,
 nor his delight in the legs
 of a man.

B

He killed the first-born son
 in every Egyptian family.

The Lord does not care about
 the strength of horses
 or powerful armies.

The Seven "Other" Readability Tests

Somerset Maugham once stated, "There are three rules for writing the novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are." Maugham's comment sets the stage for the choice of the seven "other" readability

tests suggested below. They are merely an attempt to distinguish some of the less measurable factors that help determine the readability level of Bible translations.

1) Is the text easy on the eyes?

The new **Contemporary English Version (CEV)** has attempted to create a text that is easy to look at, with a proper mixture of “white” space on the page. A printed page is similar in some respects to the keyboard of a piano, where the contrast between black and white keys is especially important for the beginner. Not only does the CEV offer “measured lines” in poetry, but the lines are arranged as artistically as possible. And frequent paragraphing in prose sections keeps the text from being threatening, even to an unskilled reader. In a survey where high school and college students were asked to indicate what made books readable, at the top of the list were “short sentences and paragraphs.”

Another “user-friendly” feature of the CEV is its use of block indentions for lengthy quotations such as parables and speeches. This avoids the complication of quotations within quotations within quotations; in the CEV there is never more than one set of quotations within one other.

2) Is it easy to read aloud?

This factor is especially important in the case of the Bible, since reading aloud often takes place in public worship and in smaller groups. It should be emphasized that the oral readability of a text is a result of giving careful attention to a number of stylistic details, some of which will be mentioned later.

3) Does it make easy listening?

Without thinking, many readers at all levels occasionally “sound out” a text, especially if it displays “poetic” qualities. One reader of a new translation – a person with a background in theater – suddenly noticed that as he was reading the Gospel of John, he had unknowingly shifted from silent reading to oral reading, and found himself “listening” with great enjoyment. Another person said: “When I read this translation to a congregation, they don’t go ‘Huh?’ they say ‘Hmm.’ ”

4) Are the words and sentence patterns familiar?

Sentences should follow the informal patterns of everyday spoken language. In English this is especially needful for those who have difficulty with the standard form of the language, but this feature is valued by educated readers as well, because it gives a “comfortable feeling,” like being with an old friend.

5) Does it capture and hold your interest?

One reading specialist said, “**Readability is excitement.** A punchy

beginning. Forceful and colorful language. Variety in style, including both long and short sentences."

6) *Are the thoughts easy to follow and understand?*

Literature that is not "required reading" – and some that is required too – will not stay long in a reader's hands, if it is difficult to understand. Even faithful Bible readers complain because traditional translations are often so hard to understand. A young woman said to one of the CEV translators, "I am Polish, and I can understand the CEV better than I can my own Polish Bible that was translated in the sixties. Do you think it is right to make the Bible so easy to understand?" The answer is, "Not only is it right, it is our mission!" For the most part, if someone does not understand the Bible, it is the fault of the translators.

7) *Does it "Sing to your heart and soul"?*

"Soul appeal" – above all else – is a necessary ingredient for putting "readability" into a translation of the Bible. This is a feature that is easier **experienced** than explained. It is the "chemistry" that develops between the text and the reader, and it results from detailed attention to all matters of literary style. During a convention someone stopped by the Bible Society booth and was looking at the CEV New Testament with Psalms and Proverbs. The Bible Society representative asked, "Are you familiar with that publication?" She answered, "This is the first time I have seen one with Psalms and Proverbs. But I have read the New Testament, and it is clear and simple, like Christ intended; **it just sings to your heart and soul!**"

Small things make a big difference

When it comes to the relationship between style and readability, small things do indeed make a big difference. In translation the paragraph should be considered the basic discourse unit. And this means that within each paragraph careful attention must be given to such matters as backgrounding and foregrounding, old and new information, focus, time sequence and logical sequence, information that is put into words and information that is left for the reader to draw from the context, and transitional markers. In this light, compare the two translations of 2 Samuel 4.4:

A

Jonathan son of Saul had a son who was lame in both feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel. His nurse picked him up and fled, but as she hurried to leave, he fell and became crippled. His name was Mephibosheth.

B

Saul's son Jonathan had a son named Mephibosheth, who had not been able to walk since he was five years old. It happened when someone from Jezreel told his nurse that Saul and Jonathan had died. She hurried off with the boy in her arms, but he fell and injured his legs.

Undue repetition – even of pronouns – can prove fatal to a reader’s interest, as in the following translation of Luke 1.15-16. Not only does this sloppiness result in ambiguity in the last clause (“**he ... him**”), but there is possible confusion for the hearer, who cannot hear the period after the second occurrence of “drink” (“he will not drink any wine or strong drink from his youth”) or recognize the comma following “Lord” (“he will go ahead of the Lord strong and mighty”):

He will be a great man in the Lord’s sight. **He** must not drink any wine or strong drink. From his very birth **he** will be filled with the Holy spirit, and **he** will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. **He** will go ahead of the Lord, strong and mighty, like the prophet Elijah. **He** will bring fathers and children together again; **he** will turn disobedient people back to the way of thinking of the righteous; **he** will get the Lord’s people ready for **him**.

Notice also Mark 12.44:

“**But she**, poor as **she** is, put in all **she** had – **she** gave all **she** had to live on.”

In this verse **she** is used five times within one relatively short sentence. The text is intelligible enough, but it does not “grab” a reader or “sing to the heart and soul.”

Sometimes the natural flow of discourse within a paragraph requires considerable restructuring, especially where a parenthetical statement or a flashback is involved:

A

Jacob agreed, and when the week of marriage celebration was over, Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as his wife. (Laban gave his slave woman Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maid.) Jacob had intercourse with Rachel also, and he loved her more than Leah. Then he worked for Laban another seven years.

B

At the end of the week of celebration, Laban let Jacob marry Rachel, and he gave her his servant woman Bilhah. Jacob loved Rachel more than he did Leah, but he had to work another seven years for Laban.

Several observations about this passage (Genesis 29.28-30): It is already known from the context that “the week of celebration” is a wedding, and it is assumed that “Jacob had intercourse with Rachel” after marrying her; so translation **B** has left these bits of information unstated. It has also avoided the disruption introduced by the parenthetical statement.

To sum up, the following are some “ingredients” that are essential for cooking up a tasty and well-done text in present day English – many of them will apply to other languages also:

- (a) choose verbs in preference to abstract nouns;
- (b) introduce new ideas at proper intervals and not too often;
- (c) anticipate, rather than contradict, the reader's expectations;
- (d) be alert to any shared information between the writer and the original readers or hearers;
- (e) make pronoun references clear;
- (f) vary the style, including both short and long sentences;
- (g) use familiar patterns of ordinary speech;
- (h) introduce characters and events in time or logical order;
- (i) explain unfamiliar ideas in terms of familiar ones;
- (j) avoid paragraphs that are too long or complicated;
- (k) select forceful and colorful language (yes, even in the Bible!);
- (l) open with punchy beginnings and close with powerful endings;
- (m) guard against suggestive terms or terms that may sound funny;
- (n) listen to the sound of words and syllables;
- (o) don't rely on silent punctuation marks; and
- (p) never use more than three unaccented syllables in a row.

R. KOOPS

OF GOPHER AND GALBANUM: translating biblical flora into Nigerian languages

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This paper is a summary of the material I have compiled in my "botanical guide" for Nigerian translators working on the Pentateuch, that is, the first five books of the Bible. It is also a commentary on that material. Since I started this project I have had an opportunity to look at several Nigerian translations to see what happens in practice when resources are limited or not available. I have also been able to learn some new facts about biblical flora and some important things about Nigerian botanical terms and the way those terms are used.

As my major resources in this project I have used *Plants of the Bible* by Michael Zohary and the recent *Baker Encyclopedia of Bible Plants* by F. Nigel Hepper. *Tree and Shrub in our Biblical Heritage* by Nogah Hareuveni has also been helpful along with various commentaries. Reference is made throughout my guide to the UBS publication *Fauna and Flora of the Bible* (abbreviated to FF in this article).

General observations

Among the major Nigerian translations there is considerable variation in approach with respect to the translation of botanical terms. The southern languages are much more ready to transliterate from English – Igbo, in fact, transfers many words without any change to their English spelling. Hausa, on the other hand, insists on using local words, whether they are appropriate in context or not.