

TRANSLATING THE TRANSLATION—THE LXX IN MODERN LANGUAGES¹

SEPPO SIPILÄ

seppo.sipila@bible.fi

The author is a UBS translation consultant for the Europe-Middle East Area, and is based in Helsinki, Finland.

Introduction

In this paper I shall discuss problems encountered when the Septuagint (LXX) is translated into a modern language. This is a topic that has recently received much attention from scholars working with the LXX. I shall use the new Finnish translation of the Psalms as an example of a modern translation of the LXX.

The Orthodox Church in Finland started preparations for the new Finnish Psalter during 2001 and the translation was drafted in 2003. This translation was then checked and worked on further by a committee between 2004 and 2006. Once the committee had the text ready, it was given to a wider public for reading and comment. This was mainly done via the Finnish Bible Society's website. A surprisingly large number of people read the text and commented on it. The text was further checked by a linguistic editor during 2006 and 2007. At the same time, a musical adviser gave his opinion on the final wording of the text. The text was then presented to the Church hierarchy for decisions as to how and when the Church and its members could use the new translation. The translation was published in 2010.²

The translation process had two important starting points. First, we based the new translation on the LXX, the traditional OT text of the Orthodox world. Never before had anyone published a translation of the Greek Psalter in Finnish. Second, the translation was made in close connection with a revision of the liturgical texts of the Orthodox Church of Finland. Thus, the new Psalter is a liturgical translation of the Greek Psalter. Liturgical translations are by definition different from ordinary interconfessional “multi-purpose” translations. A liturgical translation is designed for one purpose (liturgical use) only and so can never be interconfessional. These,

1 This article was previously published in *Bībeles tulkojumi: teorija, vēsture, mūsdienu prakse* (ed. D. Joma and V. Tēraudkalns; Tulkojums – kultūrvēsturisks notikums 2; Valsts valodas komisija raksti 5; Rīga: Zinātne, 2009), 163–74, and is published here with permission.

2 *Psalmit Septuagintan mukaan: Psalmien ja oodien kirkollinen suomennos* (Helsinki: Ortodoksisen kirjallisuuden julkaisuneuvosto and Suomen Piipiseura, 2010).

in themselves truly interesting issues, are, however, left to one side in the present paper.³ Instead, I shall discuss another interesting question, namely, how to translate a translation, and more precisely, how to translate the LXX, an ancient Greek translation.

Problems in translating a translation

When using an existing translation as the base text for a new translation several fundamental theoretical issues must be addressed and workable solutions found. The topics I shall address are commonly known among people who have participated either in translating the LXX or in discussing the best ways of making modern translations of the LXX.⁴ I shall discuss the role of the parent Semitic text of the LXX in a modern translation project, the nature of the LXX as a translation, and the difficulties that are due to the special nature of the LXX.

As the new translation is based on an older, existing translation, one must think about how to balance the existing translation that is being used as the base text for the new translation, and the base text of that existing, older translation.⁵ Many modern translations of the Bible are based on another translation because the translators do not know Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic. In these cases the translation team takes the existing translation only as a medium to work with the original text which they cannot use. At the same time, the team assumes that the existing translation does not differ from the original texts composed in Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic in any significant way. However, when we translate an ancient version like the LXX, this common starting point of using the existing translation solely as a medium is no longer the only, or even a self-evident, way of working.⁶ In this case we have to choose our main point of departure. Is it the ancient translation or is it the parent text of the ancient translation? In the case of the LXX, the

3 I have dealt with these issues in short in S. Sipilä, "An Orthodox Liturgical Version *Versus* An Interconfessional Version of Psalms," *The Bible Translator* 58 (2007): 171–79.

4 Two events are worth mentioning in this respect. The International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies (IOSCS) held its tenth congress in Oslo (Norway) in 1998. Part of the program of that conference was dedicated to our subject. In 2006 the Centre for Septuagint Studies and Textual Criticism (Faculty of Theology) of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium) and the University of Stellenbosch (South Africa) organized a *Specialists' Symposium on the Septuagint Translation* dedicated solely to the topic of translating the LXX into modern languages.

5 Albert Pietersma offers a helpful discussion of the topic ("A New English Translation of the Septuagint," in *X Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies Oslo, 1998*; ed. B. A. Taylor; SBLSCS 51; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2001, 217–28 [222–24]). One should, however, keep in mind that Pietersma's own solution to the problem is highly dependent on his general understanding of the nature of the LXX as a text that depends on its Semitic sources. For Pietersma, the LXX is not a freestanding document. Therefore, the translator can, and sometimes must, think more about the source than the translation, the LXX. See also Martin Karrer, "Septuaginta Deutsch (LXX.D): Characteristics of the German Translation Project," in *Translating a Translation. The LXX and Its Modern Translations in the Context of Early Judaism* (ed. H. Ausloos et al.; BETL 213; Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 106–7. The German translation Karrer describes is *Septuaginta Deutsch: Das griechische Alte Testament in deutscher Übersetzung* (ed. W. Kraus and M. Karrer; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2009). A team consisting of M. Bauks, E. Bons, R. Brucker, A. Cordes, T. Kraus, S. Seiler, and N. Siffer-Wiederhold translated the book of Psalms.

6 One needs only to consider what Marguerite Harl writes about the LXX as a free-standing document to realize how complex the issues are ("La Bible d'Alexandrie. I. The Translation Principles," in *X Congress of the IOSCS Oslo, 1998*, 181–97 [183–85]).

question is about the choice between the Greek text and its Semitic parent. The question is relevant because the Greek text and the standardly-employed Semitic text—the MT—do not match. This mismatch of the texts while, of course, highly interesting, is at the same time challenging, because there are several possible ways of addressing the issue in translation.

The new Finnish translation of the Psalter is made for the use of the Orthodox Church in Finland, focusing especially on liturgical use. The consequence of this is that the base text of the new Psalter is not a standard scholarly edition of the Greek Psalter, but the traditional Church text.⁷ When using this traditional text, we did not ask historical questions concerning the wording of the Greek Psalter, even in cases where most scholars would say that the traditional Church text is corrupt.

In Ps 17(16).14,⁸ the scholarly text speaks about sons (ἐχορτάσθησαν υἱῶν), but the Church text speaks about pigs (ἐχορτάσθησαν ὑέων)! From a scholarly point of view one would say that it is the Church text that is based on a common misspelling and not the scholarly text, because the Hebrew text speaks about sons (בנים).⁹

If this were not complicated enough, we also followed some other principles, of which the most important was that we tried always to respect the translator's solutions.¹⁰ This is easy to say but difficult to do. There is almost an automatic conflict between using the traditional Church text and respecting the original Greek translator's work, because the traditional Church text is not the same as the original work by the Greek translator. We assumed that we could take the traditional Psalter and use it *as though it were* the original work of the Greek translator. This is theoretically unsustainable. The Church text is younger than the original translation. There are several differences between the Church text and the modern critical editions of the Greek Psalter, mainly because of the complex editorial process that lies behind the Church text.¹¹ However, the assumption seemed to work well when it came to practical decision making. The principle of respecting

7 We used the edition published by the Church of Greece, i.e., *Το Ψαλτηριον του προφητου και βασιλεως Δαυιδ μετα των εννεα Ωδων και της ερμηνειας οπως δει στιχολογισθαι το Ψαλτηριον εν ολη τω εωιαντω* (8th ed.; Athens: Apostolic Diakonia of the Church of Greece, 2002).

8 I shall refer to individual psalms according to the versification found in BHS. Whenever the LXX versification differs from that of BHS, the LXX number is shown in parentheses. In the case of 17(16), the meaning, therefore, is that the psalm is numbered as 17 in BHS, but 16 in the LXX.

9 It is not self-evident that an Orthodox liturgical version should follow the traditional Church text. The new French version *Psautier liturgique orthodoxe. Version de la Septante* (translation, introduction, and notes by Sister Anastasia [Delphine Weulersse]; Paris: Cerf, 2007) follows the modern critical text, and therefore has in Ps 17(16).14 "Ils sont comblés de fils" (emphasis mine). The same is true for the new Swedish translation of the Greek Psalter, *Psaltaren enligt Septuaginta* (ed. P. Beskow; Skellefteå: Artos, 2008), which is also based on Alfred Rahlfs' edition. The editor, however, states that the translators hope that the new Swedish text will be used in the liturgy in Sweden (*Psaltaren*, 7). Their translation for Ps 16.14 is "*de har blivit mättare av söner*" (they have become saturated with sons).

10 In this respect the point made by Harl, *Bible d'Alexandrie*, 184, is important. She says that the text of the LXX is our only source for the ancient translation process. Therefore, she insists, it would be wrong to translate the LXX based on the Hebrew.

11 See the comments regarding the *Septuaginta Deutsch* by Karrer, "Characteristics," 115–16. The differences between the Church text and the critical one are pointed out in *Septuaginta Deutsch* in the footnotes.

the translator's solutions meant that we tried to imitate the special characteristics of the Greek translation without considering the underlying Hebrew at all.¹²

Our aim to respect the ancient translator's decisions in our modern translation of the LXX means that we have to think about how to decide what the actual meaning of the Greek text is. In practice, we had to perform a balancing act between two possibilities. We could base our interpretations on the time and place of the ancient translation of the Psalter. This leads into a discussion about the "correct" meaning of the expressions within the ancient Jewish Diaspora. On the other hand, we could base our interpretations on the meanings adopted by the Church. These, however, are later than the ancient translation itself. They are often tempting when we think about the purpose of our modern liturgical translation, but there is a clear conflict between the practice of deriving LXX meanings from later usage and the principle of respecting the ancient translator's work.¹³

Our discussion about the translations of the Greek expression κύριος τῶν δυνάμεων serves as a good illustration of problems of this kind. This phrase is traditionally rendered in English as "the Lord of hosts" and appears seventeen times in the Psalter. The translator on the Finnish team wanted to use the rendering *sotavoimien Herra* (the Lord of military forces), which would be in line with the ancient usage of the Greek.¹⁴ The members of the committee, however, wanted to have a shorter form *voimien Herra* (the Lord of forces), arguing that the shorter form is consistent with church register.¹⁵ The members of the committee also pointed out the benefit of using the shorter form: the striking military nuance would be removed. That is to say, if necessary, the committee was ready to prioritize the later understanding of the text above our principles, should there be a risk of text containing elements disturbing to the reader. It is clear, however, that the shorter form carries little meaning in Finnish, because the forces are left unspecified. After a debate the committee decided to use the expression *taivaan voimien Herra* (the Lord of the forces of heaven), which is an acceptable compromise.

The traditional Greek text of the Psalter was not the only starting point in our translation. In cases where the Greek text and the Hebrew text can be seen as meaning the same, we used as a matter of principle the existing modern Finnish Bible translation. The principle of respect for the wording of the traditional Greek text and the principle of following a modern high-style Bible translation are in sharp conflict. Respect for the Greek texts leads to a situation where one has

12 It is clear that the decision is based on our understanding of the purpose of the modern translation. Pietersma tries to connect the decision to our understanding of the ancient translation ("New English Translation," 219), but this is a shortcut Pietersma can take only because of the very special purpose of the modern English translation he is concerned with.

13 Cf. Pietersma, "New English Translation," 224.

14 See, e.g., Pietersma, who points out that the Greek word δύναμις could have two different meanings based on the context. In military contexts it means "army," but in other contexts, "might" or "strength." Pietersma claims that decisions concerning the meaning of δύναμις in the LXX are actually based on the underlying Hebrew words ("New English Translation," 224).

15 It is worth noting that the Orthodox register in Finland differs from the Protestant one. The Protestant counterpart for the Greek expression would be "the Lord of Sebaoth," but this is never used in the Orthodox register for obvious reasons.

to prefer Greek over Finnish, but following the modern Bible translation means that Finnish will always have unquestioned preference. In a situation where we wanted to follow both of these principles, we knew from the beginning that the result would be a mixture. Some elements of the new translation would be very different from others. In other words, the issue is that of the style and language level of the new translation. Modern translation theories that focus on communication place emphasis on natural idiom in the target text,¹⁶ but respecting the Greek translation of the Psalms in the way we understood it means that translation places less emphasis on natural idiom. Reasons for this derive from the special character of the Greek Psalter and the way it was translated. Let us look, then, at what we know about the LXX Psalter as a translation.

LXX Psalter as translation

In general, the translation of the Psalms in the LXX can be described as literal. This general classification understandably has limitations. Thus, Pietersma says that literalness must be understood here as a “high degree of consistency in one-to-one equivalence.”¹⁷ Such literalness, however, does not mean a fully concordant translation where the translator would always use one fixed counterpart for every single Hebrew word. In the case of the Psalter just the opposite is true, as Aejmelaeus has pointed out.¹⁸ One may characterize the LXX translation of the Psalter as following an interlinear model.¹⁹ When we speak about model, this does not, however, mean that we would claim that the translator of the Psalter would have followed a theoretical plan or framework. We have no knowledge of any plans or frameworks when it comes to the translations of the LXX. When we speak about the interlinear model, we simply say that such a model is a good way of describing the result, the translation as we know it.

An interlinear translation is a translation where individual Hebrew words are treated separately and with a strong tendency to use a limited number of equivalents. That the Psalms of the LXX represent such a translation can easily be seen by looking at an example, here from the beginning of Ps 2:²⁰

English	Hebrew	Greek	English
1 Why	למה	Ἵνα τί	Why
raged	רגשו	ἐφρούαξαν	were arrogant
nations	גוים	ἔθνη	nations

16 See, e.g., Eugene Nida and Charles Taber, *Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 3–6, or Ernst-August Gutt, *Translation and Relevance. Cognition and Context* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 2000), 83–98. The way Gutt ties naturalness and implicit information together is especially interesting.

17 Albert Pietersma, ed. and trans., *The Psalms. A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), xix.

18 Anneli Aejmelaeus, “Characterizing Criteria for Characterization of the Septuagint Translators,” in *The Old Greek Psalter. Studies in Honour of Albert Pietersma* (ed. R. J. V. Hiebert, C. E. Cox, and P. J. Gentry; JSOT Supplement Series 332; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 54–73 (72–73).

19 Pietersma, *Psalms*, xix.

20 Pietersma has published a draft commentary on Greek Ps 2. See <http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~pietersm/Psalm%202.pdf>. The reader is advised to look at the commentary for details.

English	Hebrew	Greek	English
and people growled vanity	ולאמים יהגו ריק	καὶ λαοὶ ἐμελέτησαν κενά	and people practiced vain
2 set themselves kings of earth and officials took council together against the Lord	יתיצבו מלכי ארץ ורוונים נוסדו יחד על־יהוה	παρέστησαν οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς καὶ οἱ ἄρχοντες συνήχθησαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ κατὰ τοῦ κυρίου	approached kings of earth and rulers kept together against the Lord
and against his anointed one	ועל משיחו	καὶ κατὰ τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ	and against his anointed one
3 Let us burst their bonds and let us cast from us their ropes	ננתקה את־מוסרותימו ונשליכה ממנו עבתימו	Διαρρήξωμεν τοὺς δεσμοὺς αὐτῶν καὶ ἀπορρίψωμεν ἀφ' ἡμῶν τὸν ζυγὸν αὐτῶν	Let us burst their bonds and let us throw away from us their yokes
4 The one sitting in the heavens laughs the Lord mocks on them	ישב בשמים ישחק אדני ילעג למו	ὁ κατοικῶν ἐν οὐρανοῖς ἐκγέλασεται αὐτούς καὶ ὁ κύριος ἐκμυκτηριεῖ αὐτούς	The one living in heavens will laugh at them and the Lord will mock them

The special feature of limited lexical choice means that, e.g., for the Hebrew ארץ “land,” the translator used Greek γῆ “land” 184 times, χώρα “area” four times (104.44, 105.27, 106.3, and 114.9), and οἰκουμένη “inhabited world” once (71.8). Similarly, for the Hebrew verb root הגה “to make a sound,” the translator used almost exclusively the Greek μελετάω “to practice,” and in our texts often “to practice speaking.” Only once did the translator use φωνέω “to make sound” (113.15).

A short example like this illustrates the character of the Greek translation very well. It is easy to identify which Greek expression corresponds to which Hebrew word. Often the Greek counterparts are used systematically, but not always. For a scholar who wants to see how what became the standard Hebrew text, the Masoretic text, deviates from the Hebrew text underlying the Greek translation, this kind of literalness is a blessing. For a translator it is not. There are two important

consequences that may turn out to be puzzling for any translator of the Greek Psalter.

(1) First of all, the way the translator handled the Hebrew verb forms produced odd Greek. There is a strong tendency to use either the aorist indicative or the future indicative in Psalms. This is due to the mechanical handling of the verbs in Hebrew. The Hebrew affixed conjugation (*qatal*) is often rendered by the aorist indicative. Similarly, for the Hebrew prefixed conjugation (*yiqtol*), the translator used the future. The tendency is so strong that Pietersma labels these Greek verb forms as “unmarked,”²¹ meaning that any deviation from these two main verb forms is remarkable.

(2) The second consequence is that because the interlinear translation is literal, it occasionally contains passages that are hard to understand without taking the base text and its meaning into account. Such examples are not rare in the Greek Psalter.

Rendering the verb forms

When we started the Finnish Psalter translation, we wanted to reflect the special character of the Greek translation in our work. This meant that we made a decision to translate the verb forms in a mechanical way. For the Greek aorist indicative we decided to use the Finnish imperfect indicative, the neutral past tense form; and for the Greek future indicative, we opted for the Finnish present indicative, which also covers the future in Finnish. Understandably, the result was atypical even for a poetic text.

Ps 3.2

Κύριε, τί ἐπληθύνθησαν οἱ θλίβοντές με;

πολλοὶ ἐπανίστανται ἐπ’ ἐμέ·

Herra, miksi ahdistajiani tuli vain lisää?

Monet nousevat minua vastaan,

Lord, why my harassers came only more [= why did the number of my harassers keep increasing]?

Many rise against me . . .

The context of the beginning of Ps 3 suggests that the action of the harassers takes place at the moment of prayer, not before it. Here the mechanical translation of the Greek aorist indicative (ἐπληθύνθησαν) as the imperfect indicative (*tuli*) created a red herring. The Finnish text actually means that first the harassers gathered around the psalmist; and only after that, many of them started to rebel or make a noise and they were doing that right at the time the psalm takes place.

The feedback we received was illuminating. Many readers disliked the disturbing and unnatural tenses. Thus, we decided to alter the system, and introduced a large number of changes. The result is stylistically better Finnish. The final text is also easier to comprehend than earlier versions.

21 Pietersma, *Psalms*, xxv.

Herra, miksi ahdistajiani tulee aina vain lisää?

Monet nousevat minua vastaan,

Lord, why my harassers come only more [= why does the number of my harassers keep increasing]?

Many rise against me . . .

Handling difficult passages

Passages difficult or even impossible to understand without considering the Hebrew background of the Greek Psalter will by definition create problems for modern translators.²² The most difficult passages are based on an already difficult Hebrew. How should we translate a text that is hardly understandable?

It is well-known that Ps 90(89) includes several difficult passages. For us the most obscure of these was verse 9.

Ps 90(89).9

ὅτι πάσαι αἱ ἡμέραι ἡμῶν ἐξέλιπον,
καὶ ἐν τῇ ὀργῇ σου ἐξελίπομεν·
τὰ ἔτη ἡμῶν ὡσεὶ ἀράχνη ἐμελέτων.

The Greek translator divided the Hebrew into three units, whereas the masoretes divided it into two. It is not certain in which way the Hebrew text at the translator's disposal deviated from the MT. The MT itself is not clear. Neither is it entirely clear why the translator used the verb ἐξέλιπον when the Hebrew includes the verb פָּנָה "to turn" in the first line. Maybe he found it more natural to say that days "leave" than that they "turn"?²³ The question is connected with the understanding of the total meaning of the line. Is it an image of dying (which we clearly find in the second line) or not?

Our translator rendered the first line of the Greek text as

Sillä kaikki meidän päivämme vaipuivat

Because all of our days sank

The image of days sinking is odd in Finnish and the committee therefore changed this to *kuluivat* (were spent),²⁴ which is a part of a standard image. After the change of tense, the final text became:

22 These passages are explained as resulting from the special way the Greek translation was made; see, e.g., Emanuel Tov, *The Text-critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research* (Jerusalem: Simor, 1997), 83. Cameron Boyd-Taylor argues that the very existence of the "apparent unintelligibility" of the LXX means that the modern translator not only acts wisely when looking behind the Greek but is indeed obliged to do so ("Who's Afraid of *Verlegenheitsübersetzungen*?" in *Translating a Translation*, 197–210).

23 In Hebrew the verb פָּנָה has "day" as its subject only twice. In Jer 6.4 the Greek translator used the verb κλίνω, which is a known metaphor of resting. F. W. Mozley, *The Psalter of the Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905), 145, suggested a *Vorlage* different from the MT (כִּי בָל יָמֵינוּ בָּלוּ) for Ps 90(89).9, but this is hypothetical.

24 Pietersma (*Psalms*, 90) employs the verb "expire" and Sister Anastasia (*Psautier liturgique*, 212) uses the verb "s'évanouiser." Cordes and Kraus use the verb "dahingeschwunden" (*Septuaginta Deutsch*, 845) and the Swedish team (*Psaltaren*, 136) the expression "ta slut" (stop completely).

Kaikki meidän päivämme kuluvat
All of our days are spent

This makes good sense when taken together with the second line, with both lines now including images of dying. Our translation for the second line is

ja vihasi alla me menehdymme,
and under your wrath we perish.

The third line of the Greek verse contains a crux, which the MT does not help to resolve:²⁵

τὰ ἔτη ἡμῶν ὡσεὶ ἀράχνη ἐμελέτων

The Greek text can be understood in two ways. Either “years” (ἔτη) is the subject of the clause or it is the object of it. When “years” is taken as the subject, the predicate ἐμελέτων must be interpreted as a plural and the meaning of the Greek is “our years meditated like a spider.”²⁶ However, if the word “years” is the object, the meaning is “I meditated our years like a spider.”²⁷ I leave it to my readers to decide which one of these makes more sense. With all probability, the image of a spider²⁸ is an image of exhausting oneself in useless work.²⁹

Our translator wanted to keep the image of a spider and understood “years” as the object of the clause. Therefore his translation was

hämähäkin tavoin minä tuumin vuosiamme
like a spider I thought about our years

but the committee members, while commenting on the difficulty,³⁰ had a different interpretation and changed the text to

hämähäkin tavoin vuotemme virittivät verkkojaan
like a spider our years set their webs

The problem with this is that the image is odd in Finnish, where spider metaphors are very rare and there are clearly negative connotations attached to

25 The partly corresponding Hebrew text in MT is שָׁנֵינוּ כְּמַוְהָא (our years like a sigh). It is hard to know how this and the Greek text match.

26 Sister Anastasia (*Psautier liturgique*, 212) takes “the years” as the subject, but then has a different idea about the meaning of the line as she translates “[n]otre vie ressemble à une toile d’araignée.” This is a contextual interpretation based on the next verse of the psalm.

27 The Swedish team interpret the line in this way when they write “våra år tycktes mig som spindelväv” (our year seems to me as spider’s fabric; *Psaltaren*, 136). Cordes and Kraus translate “Unsere Jahre hat man wie ein Spinnennetz betrachtet,” taking the years as the object (*Septuaginta Deutsch*, 845). However, they think that the verb is in the plural and therefore has an empty subject.

28 The best explanation of how the Hebrew could have been turned into a spider is the supposition that “spider” in Classical Hebrew must be similar to the word in Syriac ܥܘܨܥܘܬܐ, i.e., something like גִּנְהָה (cf. BHK and Mozley, *Psalter*, 145). Unfortunately, there is apparently no other evidence that “spider” in Hebrew was anything like גִּנְהָה.

29 There is a possibility that the Greek noun refers to the web (cf. Pietersma, *Psalms*; see also *Psaltaren*, 136, “spindelväv”; and *Septuaginta Deutsch*, 845, “Spinnennetz”), not the animal. According to Edward R. Hope, in the Old Testament the image of the web is connected with weakness (*All Creatures Great and Small: Living Things in the Bible* [New York: UBS, 2005], 211). However, this interpretation is no easier than the one we chose.

30 In normal Finnish imagery, a spider is not regarded as having the capacity to meditate.

spiders. Thus, the final text removes the image of a spider and speaks about the web:

kuin häilyvä seitti ovat vuotemme
like a hovering web are our years.

This has the advantage of communicating the fragile nature of our life, which is in line with the OT image of a spider's web.

Conclusions

The special way the Greek Psalter was translated created two large problems for us. I believe these problems would be shared by anyone who tries to make a modern translation of the Greek Psalter. The use of verbs in the Greek Psalms is peculiar, and the Greek text contains passages that are hard to understand. As we originally wanted to translate the Greek Psalter in a way that respected its typical features, we needed to find a working compromise between the peculiarities of the original Greek text and modern translation principles that demand clarity in translation.

In the case of verb forms, we began by treating them mechanically. We were aware that this was in conflict with normal Finnish grammar and discourse, but we expected that a compromise would work. The feedback that we received showed, however, that readers found the atypical use of tenses puzzling and disturbing. This led to a major change in our translation. In many cases the past tense was changed to the present. Thus, it is clear that when we translate for a non-scholarly audience, we really cannot significantly compromise the translation's discourse quality. Instead we have to take the modern language very seriously. Otherwise, readers will find the text too odd, and that might lead to the rejection of the new translation.

When dealing with difficult passages, our initial principle of respecting the Greek text did not work too well, either. If the text is odd in Greek and we translate that oddly into Finnish, readers will again be puzzled. In our case the committee and the linguistic editor sounded the alarm bell in almost every case of odd translation. This meant that in the end we made the effort to express our understanding of the text in a clear way. It is not a surprise that difficult passages require special efforts from translators. The almost uniform rejection of semantically problematic passages in our drafts was a surprise. It was a surprise but derives, of course, from the expectation of an understandable and linguistically coherent translation on the part of our readers.³¹

I would now claim that when making a translation for normal audiences, one has to give the target language and its requirements priority.

31 Our experience verifies the recommendation of Jacobus A. Naudé that in modern translation projects using the LXX as the base text, one should follow a functionalist approach ("It's All Greek: The Septuagint and Recent Developments in Translation Studies," in *Translating a Translation*, 229–50 [250]). By functionalist approach Naudé means Skopos Theory as explained by Reiss, Vermeer, and Nord; see Katharina Reiss and Hans J. Vermeer, *Grundlegung einer allgemeinen Translationstheorie* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1984) and Christiane Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 1997).