

Unleavened Bread, then the word for “bread” would have been added. But in its absence we may legitimately take a different sense “the first day of things unleavened”, or “unleavenings”.

As recorded in the three parallel verses of Matthew 26.17, Mark 14.12, and Luke 22.7, the day in question was the day when the passover lambs were killed. Therefore it must have been the day *before* the Passover Feast. But also, in some sense it was a “first day”. This may refer to a count-down of the days before the Feast, when the Jews purified themselves in preparation for it (see John 11.55–12.1). Or perhaps it means “the most important day leading up to the Feast”.

I don’t believe these verses in Matthew, Mark, and Luke are saying, “on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread”; to give such a rendering is to embrace contradiction. They *are* saying that the day was a first day, a day for the unleavening of houses and hearts, a day for preparation, and the day on which the Passover must be killed.

To understand these verses in the way I have suggested is to avoid the position where they are made to contradict themselves, and it is to remain in harmony with the account in John and certain other Scriptures.

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(Adapted from the book “The Bread in the Lord’s Supper”.)

### Cut Quotes and Vocative Inversions

It is perfectly all right and natural in English to reverse the order of speaker and quote at times, and have the quote before mentioning the speaker. For example, Luke 7.43 (GNB):

“You are right,” said Jesus.

Or John 9.12:

“Where is he?” they asked.

“I don’t know,” he answered.

In many African languages this is impossible: the speaker must always be mentioned first, then a verb form meaning generally “to speak” or “to say”, often obligatorily followed by a quote introducer particle (“that”), and then the words of the speaker. A copy of the order of the GNB on this point is usually a sure sign that the translator is following his source text too literally.

A natural extension of the reversal of speaker and quote is the cut quote of the type found in Ezekiel 7.21:

“I will let foreigners rob them,” says the Lord, “and lawbreakers will take all their wealth . . .”

Another example is Mark 1.15:

“The right time has come,” he said, “and the Kingdom of God is near!”

In many African languages (as in fact also in Greek), the natural order here will be:

He said, “The right time has come, and the Kingdom of God is near!”

If this is a simple matter of using the right grammatical sentence structure

for a quote, which a good translator will handle automatically, it is not easy in a few cases where a cut quote is found and where, in addition, the speaker is mentioned twice, before the quote, and at the cut. This is usually the result of a literal quotation in the New Testament of an Old Testament text. Take the example of Hebrews 8.8 (continuing with the same problem in verses 9 and 10):

But God finds fault with his people when he says, "The days are coming, says the Lord, when I . . ."

This is the GNB translation. But God and the Lord are the same person, so the question naturally arises whether in the quote of his words God is seen as referring to himself in the third person. The GNB follows the structure of the source text in this, and this is done also by the German, French and Dutch common language translations. (A similar problem arises at Hebrews 7.21. The German common language translation, however, has restructured the quote here in the first person singular.)

In African languages where a cut quote is avoided the problem becomes even more obvious when the translation is literal. We then have:

But God finds fault with his people when he says, "The Lord says: the days are coming when I . . ."

This is the structure of this verse in the recent Bangala and the Tshiluba translations of the New Testament. If we were to translate: But God finds fault with his people when he, the Lord, says, "The days are coming when I . . .", it would sound awkward, and the apposition of a noun to a pronoun might even be impossible grammatically in some African languages. It seems simplest then to drop "says the Lord" altogether, as is done in the Swahili New Testament, and in addition to present the speaker as "The Lord God" as in the Kituba New Testament. An interesting solution, which, moreover, makes explicit that we have a quote from the Old Testament here, is that of the Lingala translation of the New Testament:

But the Lord God found that his people were bad. That is why it is written: "The Lord says: The days are coming when I . . ."

The same problem with "says the Lord" in the middle of a quote (this time of the Holy Spirit) occurs in Hebrews 10.15-16. I am not aware of a similar case occurring elsewhere.

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A translation problem linguistically similar to that of the reversal of speaker and quote is that of "vocative inversion" of the type found in Psalm 124.1b:

"Answer, O Israel!"

Or in Luke 8.28 (RSV):

"What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?"

In these cases the person addressed is mentioned after the words that are addressed to him, which is a natural construction in the source texts. Many translations simply follow this word order. This construction can also lead to cut quotes, as in Hebrews 10.7:

“Here I am to do your will, O God, just . . .”

Or in Psalm 69.16:

“Answer me, LORD, in the goodness of your constant love . . .”

Again, however, in many African languages the vocative expression (or the person who is addressed) has to come before the prayer or the imperative phrase (the address). It may not come at the end, and even less in the middle of it. Restructuring is required in all these cases.

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### Digressions introduced by “for . . .”

During a recent checking session in Sierra Leone, I several times questioned a translator about the use of a word meaning “because” to render “for” in his translation of Matthew. “For” can have the same meaning as “because” in English, but my own knowledge of a related language led me to suspect that the word for “because” in his language could not be used to render “for” in many contexts. My suspicions were confirmed through our discussions. Therefore, we looked carefully at each occurrence of “for” in Matthew’s Gospel. This procedure that we followed resulted in a better translation than would have resulted had we not looked at “for” carefully.

But I was not happy for two reasons. For one thing, I had not been able to explain to the translator clearly enough how to determine on his own whether or not he could translate “for” with his word for “because”. And for another thing, I still suspected that although there were passages where “for” could be replaced by a word meaning “because” with no gross distortion of meaning, somehow “for” was often used to indicate something different than “because”. Fortunately, before the end of the checking session I was able to understand the problem more clearly and could propose a solution to the translator. I would like to share that solution with other translators by means of this note.

Basically, the distinction between the use of “because” and of “for” is that with “because” the author is presenting information as cause or reason for something else, but with “for” the author is presenting information as a digression from the regular stream of what he is writing. Digressions were brought to my attention by an article by Ernst Wendland in *Notes on Translation* number 94 (1983). There Wendland uses the term “digression” to identify what is happening in a wide variety of situations in the Bible, including clauses which are introduced by the word “for”. Wendland calls these digressions because they “digress” or “temporarily depart from the main topic under discussion.” The use of “for” is only one of the different ways that Wendland notes digressions may be signalled.

Wendland recognizes ten classes of digressions. But here I want to present and discuss several “for” digressions found in Matthew. I would especially like to point out the different meanings that are conveyed when a word which means “because” is substituted for “for”. (In all of the following examples “for” is the equivalent used for the Greek conjunction *gar*.)

**Matthew 8.8–9:** But the centurion answered him, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I am a man under authority, with soldiers under me . . .” (RSV)