

A RESPONSE TO LARS LODE

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Lode discusses what is a very real problem for translators. The vast majority of translations of Scriptures being prepared today are for newly literate people who do not know how to use either footnotes or glossaries, and as a result information we put in these is going to be lost to most. And certainly it is true that there is a substantial amount of background information that must be conveyed if the translation is to be comprehensible. Further, the point he makes that this information must be presented in a way that is natural in language is a very good one. It is something that we have not paid enough attention to in the past.

In short, there is much to be commended in what Lode writes. And yet I find myself uncomfortable with the article. It is not so much that I disagree with Lode on the principle, but in the degree of application of the principle. I should therefore like to raise the following question, a question that is not easy to answer, however.

How far do we go? At one extreme one would do a literal translation, making no implicit information explicit. At the other extreme one would produce something closer to an encyclopaedia than to a translation. Lode says a translator should present "all the information communicated by the original to the original audience," no more and no less (page 11). But this is totally impossible. For example, even Lode's rendering of Titus 1.1-4 does not convey to his Cameroonian readers the fact that letters required introductions and that Paul was using and expanding on certain formulae that Titus and other readers would have quickly recognized. In the Mark 2.1-12 example, in addition to the implied information Lode mentions, that God disapproves of sin, there is the equally important information on the role of the Scribes in Jewish religion, the severity with which blasphemy was viewed, the function of the passive as a means of avoiding God's name, the third person usage of the title Son of Man (still disputed!), just to mention a few items that need to be known if the passage is to be completely understood.

The examples Lode gives deal mainly with cultural and historical information. There is also the question of theological information, the beliefs readers had that led them to understand a book in a particular way, or even what there was about certain books that made them sufficiently important in the life of the community to accept them into the Canon. Surely to understand Mark 3.22-23, it is as important to understand the concept of a personified force of evil, an evil spirit that controls all evil and wars against God, as it is to know that "Beelzebul" and "Satan" both refer to him. And how could something as simple as Messiah really be understood without knowledge of the Jews' belief about their relationship to God and their salvation history?

My first point is, then, that we cannot possibly put in *all* information. Secondly, even if we put in no more information than Lode suggests in his examples, there are at least three problems with attempts to communicate all information needed to understand a passage. For one thing, if the text becomes

overburdened with information, it is easy for the reader to lose the basic direction of the text. He could even become too fatigued with it all to continue reading. This is just as much a possibility as giving up reading because there was too little information.

A second problem is that in many places we would be in danger of losing some of the theological thrust of a book. To use a very minor example, compare the story of the stilling of the storm in Matthew 8 and in Mark 4. Mark's version contains a great deal of information about where Jesus was sleeping, on what, and so on. But Matthew has limited himself to a bare outline of the facts. He thus focuses on Jesus' authority and on the teaching of the faith required of discipleship. This brevity of Matthew's is a feature of the book that seems to be more than stylistic, and a translation that filled in too many gaps would surely result in a distortion of some of Matthew's purpose.

A third objection, and a major problem with the article, has to do with a theology of translating. I almost feel that Lode is translating into a void, a situation where there is no church teaching or other witness, where the written Scriptures must stand alone, whereas in fact the message of the Scriptures is only going to have impact on lives if it is accompanied by some witness of Christians and Christian teaching. Just as it is the Church that has chosen and preserved these books we have (certainly with the direction of God's Spirit), it is for the Church and not the translator to teach them. We translate for a church as much as for *the* Church.

This is not to excuse ourselves from doing good translations. It is rather to say the Church's role in teaching should not be overlooked. When we translate the Scriptures we are carrying out only one of the steps involved in making God's Word alive to men, and we should not try to make our translations take on too broad a role.

If we cannot and should not make explicit or implicit all information needed to fully understand a text, what type should we do? Here is a possible guideline:

1. In many cases we will make classifiers explicit. "Nazareth" becomes "village Nazareth", "David" becomes "King David" and so on.
2. Participants implicit in grammatical structures or verbs are often made explicit. "Judge not that you be not judged" becomes "Don't judge other people so God won't judge you" and "looking for the redemption of Jerusalem" may be rendered "waiting for God to redeem Jerusalem."
3. Events that are implicit may need to be made explicit, so that "city of David" may have to be "city where David was born."
4. Very often implicit qualities or quantities need to be understood, and "garment of camel hair" may need to be "rough garment of camel hair."
5. Cultural information that relates to particular objects such as the flutes in Matthew 9.23 or to the symbolic meaning of some action such as spreading branches in front of someone is often made explicit in a translation.

There will also be some cultural, historical and geographical material that helps give to an object or event the setting needed to make it more understandable to modern readers. But much of this information is in fact superfluous, and

obstructive to the clear flow of a passage. Translators must limit themselves to including only information that were it not included would result in loss of understanding of the passage *as a whole*. For example, in Mark 2.23-28 example, the paragraph of background information Lode gives obstructs the flow of Mark's prose. Further, it adds much more information than is needed to understand the point of the story, even by a group hardly familiar with the Gospel. I would instead keep his translation of verses 23-26, adding "your great king" before "David" in verse 26 and possibly making sure that "priest" was translated with "God" in it either as "God's sacrificer" or "the one who went before God for the people." All the rest does not add to the point of the story—in fact it detracts.

Even in Mark 3.1-6, the added information seems unnecessary. The word "accused" informs the reader of the attitude of the people toward healing on the Sabbath. At the most one might say ". . . accuse him with those authorities for doing a work on the Sabbath."

Again, in Mark 1.40-45, the thrust of the story does not depend on all the information Lode offers in his introductory paragraph. It might be necessary to add "who gave us God's law" after "Moses", or possibly to restructure the last sentence as "then offer to God the sacrifice that the lawgiver Moses said people should to prove they were cured of leprosy." This offers enough information for even unsophisticated readers to understand the point that Jesus is making. More than that would detract.

My point, then, is that we must look at the overall meaning of a passage and add the information that prevents a misunderstanding. It is neither necessary nor desirable to make all the information on every detail available to readers.

It is worth mentioning also a rather glaring inconsistency in Lode's article. He points out that glossaries and footnotes do not really help many readers (page 4) and argues instead for incorporating background information in the text in a way natural in the RL, and yet under paragraphs 4.1 and 4.2 he offers footnotes and glossaries as a viable option. It seems to me that Lode, too, is uncertain as to how far we should go.