

WHY DON'T WRITERS SAY EVERYTHING?

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In Matt. 7:1, Jesus told his disciples, "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (AV). Who would judge them if they judged other people? The disciples, and later the Jewish readers for whom Matthew wrote his Gospel, knew very well that it was God. They knew this first of all because every Jew was taught from childhood that God was the judge to be feared. They also knew it, strange as it may seem, just because Jesus did not mention his name. This was because the Jews felt that God's name was so holy that men ought not to pronounce it, and so they used expressions that permitted them to avoid mentioning it. One way they used a great deal was to take a form of the verb called a passive (for example, "be judged" instead of "judge"). So when people noticed that a passive was used in a verse that talked about judgement, they understood immediately that God was meant even though he was not mentioned. If you had asked a hundred of them, they would all have given the same answer.

But if this bit of information, that it was *God* who would judge men who judged others, was so clearly meant by the author and understood by the readers, it must surely be a part of the message. But how can information both be there and not be there at the same time? This puzzled the translators of our older versions, and because they did not know what to do about it they simply left out information of this kind; they were very sincere and careful, and they did not want to add anything to the text of the Bible. In this, they were of course quite right; no one should add anything to the Bible in translating it. The Bible Societies insist very strongly on this.

On the other hand, many readers today are not well taught about the judgement of God, and they do not know anything about the way Jews used the passive to avoid speaking God's name. So when they read Matt. 7:1, they misunderstand it. Many of them think that Jesus told his disciples that if they criticized others, others would criticize them. In other words, a translation that does not mention this bit of information does not give readers today the whole message; an important part of it is lost. And this is just as serious a mistake as adding something to the message. What can a translator do?

Fortunately, thanks to some discoveries made in linguistics and in information science, we can today be more helpful than the old translators and at the same time more faithful to the original text. We can come close to giving our readers exactly the message intended by the original author, without either adding to it or losing anything from it.

The basic fact that makes this possible is that there are two kinds of information in every message, and that both kinds are part of the message.

The first kind is what is actually said in the words and sentences of the message. In Matt. 7:1, this kind of information is as follows: (a) we are not supposed to judge; (b) if we do judge, someone will judge us. This kind of information we call *explicit* information. But the other kind of information is also important, even though it is not spelled out in words. In Matt. 7:1,

there are two bits of information of this kind: (a) who or what we are not to judge, and (b) who will judge us. But when the original readers received this message, they could immediately use their knowledge to supply this information. In fact, the author did not mention it precisely because he knew that the readers would supply it. This kind of information we call *implicit* information.

But why do speakers and writers usually leave some information implicit? Why do they not make everything explicit? There are a number of reasons: (a) sometimes they want to give a message to certain people in such a way that others will not understand. This is what Jesus did when he told certain parables, but gave the explanation only to the disciples (Matt. 13:10-13); (b) sometimes the information is simply not important, and is omitted to avoid cluttering the message; (c) sometimes, as in the use of pronouns, repeating explicitly certain information is bad style, or may even lead to misunderstanding, and even when readers understand, too much repetition is boring and irritating. But whatever the reason for leaving certain information implicit, in every case one important fact is true: the readers already know the information, and the author knows that they know it. If this were not so, it could not be left implicit.

Now when we translate a message, we are doing it for readers whose background knowledge is quite different from that of the original readers. They know many things that the original readers did not, but they are ignorant of many things that the original readers knew well. This is because they live in completely different times and completely different cultures. In such a case, when our readers do not know something which was implicit for the original readers, we must make it explicit for them, or else they will not get it. In other words, since both explicit and implicit information are part of the message, we must make explicit certain information which was implicit to the first readers, so that it will not be lost. We are not adding anything to the text, since it is a part of the message; rather, we are preserving the message whole, so that none of it is lost.

But how can the translator apply this knowledge of explicit and implicit information to his task of translating the Bible? How can he know how much information, and what information, he can make explicit?

The first step is to find the places where some information was left implicit by the author. The translator knows, for instance, that for every action there must be one or more participants and perhaps other objects involved, even if they are not mentioned in the text. He will find, therefore, that most passives require actors, as in Matt. 7:1 (see also Matt. 5:4, 6, 9). He will realize that when the sower went forth to sow (Matt. 13:3-4), it was seeds that were sown, and that fell by the wayside (here even the AV made this explicit). The translator also knows that every quality word describes some object or some action, so that *truth* in Rom. 1:25 means "a true *word*" or "a true *message*". As the translator studies a passage, it is a good practice for him to write down the words which are explicit in the text, and to leave blanks in the right places to remind him of information which the author left implicit. Thus, for instance, when he reads Mark 1:4, "John . . . appeared . . . preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin" (RSV), he

will first of all make all the nouns which express actions into verbs, and then leave blanks for their subjects and objects, like this:

1. John preached (————) to (————).
2. (————) repented.
3. (————) baptized (————).
4. (————) forgave (————).
5. (————) sinned.

The second step is harder, but just as important. The translator must ask himself what the implicit information is, so that he can make it explicit in his study of the passage. Where should he look for this information? The first place to look is the context; that is, the verses that come just before and after the one he is studying. In the verse we are examining, it is clear that "people" is the word to fill the last blank in sentences 1 and 3 and the first blanks in sentences 2 and 5. Similarly, in Eph. 1:10, by carefully studying the use of pronouns in the context and the way the various persons mentioned relate to the different actions, we can be sure that "he" in "that he might gather . . ." (verse 10, AV) is the same as "God" in verse 3.

Beyond the immediate context, we can use our knowledge of the total Bible to fill in some blanks. For example, since we know that only God can forgive sin, we can put "God" in the first blank in sentence 4 (Mark 1:4). But we must not do too much of this kind of filling in from other parts of the Bible, or we will simply mix up all the various messages of the different authors.

One tool which the translator can use in discovering implicit information is *Good News for Modern Man* (The New Testament in Today's English Version, or TEV). The translators of this version have made a very careful study of the problems, and in many places have made explicit information which was clearly implicit for the original readers but which today's readers would not have. Even though this version was done for readers of English, in many places readers of other languages will need to have the same implicit information made explicit. So the translator may make good use of the TEV, and follow its lead in the majority of cases.

Finally, if the translator feels that his readers require some information which even TEV has not made explicit, he should consult the best commentaries. In many cases, he should also write or speak to the translations consultant of the Bible Societies, who can advise him.

But we are still not finished. It is not enough to know ourselves, and to have written down on paper, the information which was implicit for the original readers. We must now ask ourselves how much of this information our readers will actually need to help them understand the message, and also how much we can legitimately make explicit. For we do not, in our final translation, make everything explicit. Of the information which the author

left implicit, we can make explicit only information that the reader will actually use; and we can make explicit only information which was clearly implicit in the language of the text itself. A great deal of the information we have discovered will either remain implicit in the end, or be supplied to the reader in other ways. I will conclude by mentioning kinds of information which should not be made explicit in the translation.

Sometimes, we saw at the beginning, the author does not mention something because it was very unimportant. If we make such information explicit, it will draw attention to itself away from the more important part of the message. If the reader can understand the message without it, such information should be left out.

Sometimes information is too bulky to be put into the text. If the information is important, and can be expressed in a few words, it can be put in. For example, in Mark 11:8, some translators make explicit that the people put clothes and branches in Jesus's path in order to honour him. This is to avoid a real misunderstanding, for in many societies such an action would be an insult. It is quite all right to put in such a few words to explain the meaning of the action. There are also many names of things, animals, places and so on, where the kind of thing can be made explicit. For example, one can say "*city Jerusalem*", "*precious stone called ruby*", and so on. We do this when the name of the thing itself is quite unknown, and when there is no name for it in our language, so that we have to borrow one. But it would be impossible to put into our translation enough words to explain to our readers what a Pharisee was. This kind of information can be put into notes, or in a glossary at the back.

Sometimes, if we give a reader a great deal of information, he becomes confused rather than being helped. It is as if in giving someone directions how to get to some place, we tell him so much that he cannot remember it all; and he is just as likely to forget some really important part as the extra details we have provided. We must avoid making so much explicit in our translation that the readers get lost and miss the important teaching of the passage. It is very important that we take care to give most attention to the information that the author himself emphasized. This emphasis is also an important part of the message, and must not be lost by adding too many other things. No one likes a drink that has been too diluted with water.

Finally, some information that translators sometimes want to include is not a part of the Bible text at all, but comes from some other source. This is not right, nor is it right to put in one book of the Bible information from another book, unless it is a very general kind of information, such as that God forgives sin. For example, some translators want to put into the text the idea that the author of the fourth Gospel was John, the son of Zebedee, and that he was also the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). But this idea is not a part of the Bible at all; it is a very old tradition in the church. Nor is it at all useful for the reader to help him understand the text, even if we firmly believe that it is true. Such information cannot be put into the text of the Bible, because it is not a part of it.

I will now summarize what I have said. In every message, some of the information is explicit, and some is implicit. The author leaves some informa-

tion implicit because he knows that his readers already know it and do not need to be told. But different readers will not know the same things as the first readers, and so they may need to have some implicit information made explicit so that it is not lost. The translator can make information explicit if (a) he can find it in the context or in general biblical knowledge, (b) it is not too long and complicated, and (c) it will be really helpful to the reader in understanding the message.¹ Information which fits (a) and (c) but which is too long to go into the text can go into notes or a glossary. In deciding what information he can make explicit, the translator can follow TEV, use commentaries, and ask for the advice of a Bible Societies' translations consultant.

¹ The Translations staff of the U.B.S. are preparing a special book dealing with this problem in a systematic way.—Ed.

- * The January and April issues of *The Bible Translator* are being sent to all subscribers on our September 1971 lists. This is to give everyone an opportunity to receive one *Technical* and one *Practical* issue. Beginning with the July issue (Vol. 23, No. 3), the new subscription lists based on the letter sent to all subscribers become effective.
- * Beginning with Vol. 23 No. 1, the size of the journal is being reduced. The new format does not reduce the number of lines available for the text, but reduces the margins considerably. This smaller format plus a lighter weight paper will result in considerable savings.
- * Please note that the January issue (Vol. 23 No. 1) began with page 101, instead of page 1. No. 2 begins with page 201, No. 3 with page 301, and No. 4 with page 401. This is to make it easier to identify page number with the appropriate series in the Annual Index and in the Ten Year Index. Any page number beginning with 1 or 3 will belong to the *Technical* series, and a page number beginning with 2 or 4 will indicate that that entry is from the *Practical* series. It will often be of value to a person using the index to know which series he is being referred to.