

Implications for translation

Since "peace" is an ambiguous term, with varying meanings depending on the context, it is important for the translator to understand the meaning and function of the term in a particular context and translate it accordingly. A literal translation of the term would give the impression that it has only one meaning, and the resulting translation would not help the reader in comprehending the meaning of the term.

It should be added that the suggestions above are appropriate for dynamic equivalent translations, which put emphasis not on the form but on the meaning of the biblical text. In formal correspondence translations, where the intent is to stay as close as possible to the form of the biblical text, then "peace" would be translated in a concordant manner, that is, whenever "peace" appears, it is translated by the same word. In a dynamic equivalent translation, however, every effort must be made to translate the term so that its meaning becomes clear in every context. Only in this way can we do justice to the richness of the word and at the same time make sure that the various meanings and functions of the word are appreciated and understood by the readers of the translation.

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POETRY IN THE BIBLE: CHALLENGE TO TRANSLATORS

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One of the greatest challenges to translators of the Bible is the handling of its poetic sections. Not only the Psalms, but about one third of the entire Old Testament, was written in Hebrew as poetry. Included are Job, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, and a large part of the prophetic books, besides brief poetic passages in the other books. The New Testament also contains a number of passages that are poetic in style.

It is generally considered that in translating for dynamic (or functional) equivalence we pay primary attention to the content, or meaning, of the message, rather than to the external form of the original. But with poetry the problem is that important shades of meaning are communicated by means of the form itself. And it is difficult if not impossible to keep in a translation the formal poetical features that are used in the original to convey that meaning. This is because each language has its own ways of expressing shades of meaning by means of such formal features, and in poetry, even if we were able to reproduce the poetic form of the Hebrew text in our translation, it would probably not communicate the same meaning as it did in the original. In

many languages, for example, a direct translation of the parallel expressions so common in the Psalms (as we shall note later in this article) can give the impression, not of emphasis, but of monotonous repetition.

Much has been written on the matter of biblical poetry. In this article we shall discuss just a few of the key notions on the subject, for the benefit of translators who may not have had opportunity to become acquainted with the extensive literature on this topic.

All languages appear to have the capacity for poetic expression, even though in some of those which lack a written literature this capacity has not been significantly developed. The major world languages have, of course, developed poetry as an important part of their written literature. Many other languages use poetic expression as part of their oral literature passed on from mouth to mouth, or else as a style of elegance used in spontaneous discourse on certain more or less formal occasions.

In reading prose, especially in the modern technological world, we tend to think in terms of literal or factual accuracy of statement. But abstract concepts such as love, beauty, joy, or good and evil have to be treated in something more than the analytical language of prose. They require greater use of symbolic and emotive language, and poetic expression therefore often proves more adequate and more meaningful than prose. This is one reason why the Bible contains so much poetry. It is therefore important for the Bible translator to look for ways of translating biblical poetry into a form that will be meaningful and acceptable to the readers (or hearers) and that will to at least some extent communicate, in their language, such shades of meaning as were communicated by the poetic form of the original text.

Poetic parallelism

One outstanding characteristic of poetry, in any language, is parallelism. By this we mean the parallel repetition of sounds, of rhythmic patterns, of words or phrases, of grammatical constructions, or of thoughts. We may illustrate some of these by looking at a stanza of John Newton's well-known hymn:

- (1) Amazing grace—how sweet the sound—
- (2) that saved a wretch like me!
- (3) I once was lost, but now am found,
- (4) was blind, but now I see.

We have assigned numbers to the four lines of this stanza in order to refer to them in what follows. We immediately note that lines 1 and 3 are parallel to each other in a way that differs from lines 2 and 4, and that lines 2 and 4 are parallel to each other in their own way. Lines 1 and 3 end with similar-sounding words; that is, they rhyme in their sound, and the same is true of lines 2 and 4. There is also parallelism of rhythm: lines 1 and 3 each contain eight syllables, while lines 2 and 4 each contain six.

On the other hand, lines 3 and 4 are parallel to each other, but in a

different fashion. Their grammatical structure is parallel, each of these lines consisting of (a) a phrase in past tense, (b) the adversative word "but", and (c) a contrasting phrase in present tense. Furthermore, these two lines are parallel in that they express practically the same thought; line 3 uses the biblical figure of "lost" and "found" to express the writer's previous condition in contrast to his new-found salvation, and line 4 uses the figure—also biblical—of blindness and sight to express the same concept. (The use of figurative language is also a prominent characteristic of poetry, as will be mentioned again later in this article.)

Returning to the matter of sound parallelism, there is a more subtle factor involved in this hymn, in the overall repetition of the sibilants *s*, *z*, and *ch* with a higher frequency than would be expected in normal speech. The phrase "how sweet the sound" has an alliterative quality (that is, the repetition of the same sound at the beginning of each word), and this is reinforced by the frequency of the sibilant sounds in **amazing, grace, saved, wretch, once, was** (two times), **lost, see**. Furthermore, these sibilant sounds occur in the same relative position in line 1 ("Amazing grace") as in line 3 ("I once was lost"), creating a further parallelism of sound between these lines.

These poetic features are further reinforced, of course, by the tone and rhythm of the music when sung as a hymn.

Hebrew poetry had practically no rhyme of sound; but it did have a kind of meter or parallelism of rhythm, and many of the Psalms were sung in the Hebrew liturgy. However, the precise nature of the meter used in ancient Hebrew poetry is not well understood by scholars today. In any case, neither rhyme nor meter can be reproduced with much success in a translation. Fortunately for the translator, Hebrew poetic parallelism consists more in the repetition of words and grammatical constructions and, most especially, in parallelism of meaning or of ideas, in what is sometimes called "thought rhyme". These factors present less difficulty for the translator than those of rhyme and meter; however, if one translates any kind of poetry literally, without attention to the poetic style that is "at home" in the language into which the translation is being made, the result can be merely a poor style of prose, even if it is printed to look like poetry. Such translation can even give a meaning that is contrary to that intended by the original.

Because of this it is usually necessary to restructure the biblical poem, using a poetic structure that will fit the genius of the receptor language. It is usually best, however, not to attempt to use rhyme or meter, since these factors tend to limit or even distort the content of the original and to force the translator either to omit certain details or to "fill in" with extra material so as to make the translation fit the poetic structure. (This is the case with many metrical versions of the Psalms as found in some of our hymnals; these are legitimate and useful in their purpose, but most of them are adaptations or paraphrases rather than strict translations.)

Scholars have distinguished three major types of parallelism in

biblical poetry, with a number of subtypes. The major types are (1) synonymous parallelism, (2) antithetic or contrastive parallelism, and (3) formal or synthetic parallelism. We now give, in broad outline, the characteristics of each of these types.

Synonymous parallelism, or "thought rhyme"

The most obvious form of parallelism in biblical poetry, and perhaps the most frequent, is that in which there are two lines (occasionally three) in which the thought of the first line is repeated in the next one, using other words but with only slight variation in the meaning. An example is Amos 5.24 (quotations are from RSV unless otherwise noted):

But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an everflowing stream.

or Psalm 19.1:

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

In these cases the second line serves to emphasize and enrich the thought of the first. However, in the above translations the use of "and" at the beginning of the second line in each case could suggest that the two lines are talking about two different things; and in other languages this may become even more of a problem. Note the way in which the Good News Bible (GNB) has restructured Psalm 19.1 so as to avoid this:

How clearly the sky reveals God's glory!
How plainly it shows what he has done!

Not only is the word "and" omitted, but in the second line the pronoun "it" is used in order to identify the "firmament" with the "sky" of line 1. This removes any doubt that both lines refer to the same thing.

Another example is the first part of Psalm 78.5, which in RSV reads:
He established a testimony in Jacob,
and appointed a law in Israel.

This sounds like two separate actions whereas both lines refer to the same action. The same problem remains in GNB; however, the lines might well be restructured to read something like:

He gave laws and commandments to the Israelites,
the people who are descendants of Jacob.

In Psalm 105.45 (RSV) one might think that "statutes" and "laws" are two separate things, whereas they are simply synonyms meaning the same thing:

to the end that they should keep his statutes,
and observe his laws.

To avoid this misunderstanding the Spanish common language version (with a slightly different interpretation of the first line) has restructured the lines to read, in effect:

upon condition that they keep and respect
the laws and teachings of the Lord.

Of course in some languages it may not be possible to find adequate synonyms for some of these cases, and there will no doubt be occasions

where two lines are best reduced to one single, straightforward line, without attempt at repetition of the idea. However, even in such cases some attempt should be made to maintain a flavor consistent with the poetic genius of the language.

Some languages may not lend themselves readily to the use of synonymous parallelism, while others may have devices in their poetic structure that are quite similar to it. For example, the Mayan languages of Mexico and Central America show a marked tendency, both in some of their literature that was written down in colonial times and also in certain formal occasions today such as the making of marriage arrangements between families, to repeat each phrase with variation of the words, much like the Hebrew parallelism. However, this is usually done with shorter phrases; that is, each poetic line is briefer in content than in the case of Hebrew poetry. Such a situation would suggest breaking up some of the biblical lines into shorter segments, with the result that in the translation more lines would be required in order to accommodate a given passage. Other languages will, of course, have other constraints.

Antithetic or contrastive parallelism

In this type of parallelism, the idea of the second line is in contrast with that of the first; that is, it states the opposite. A clear example is Psalm 1.6:

For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

Here, and in similar cases, the contrast is obvious and presents no special problem for the translator.

Another example may be noted from the book of Proverbs, which contains a great number of antithetic or contrastive sayings or proverbs:

He who heeds instruction is on the path to life,
but he who rejects reproof goes astray (10.17).

In this passage "heeds instruction" is synonymously parallel to "rejects reproof", and should be translated in such a way as to show that the meaning is the same, while bringing out the overall contrast between the destinies of the two kinds of persons.

In the antithetic sayings in the book of Proverbs, it is best to set off the contrast by using separate lines, as is done in RSV, not by running the contrasting lines together as a prose paragraph, as in GNB; doing this will also suggest more readily to the translator the use of such rhythmic or poetic language as may be available in the language when popular sayings are concerned.

Synthetic or formal parallelism

In this kind of parallelism there is neither repetition of ideas nor contrast as in the previous types; rather, the second line tends to further develop or complete the thought of the first, at the same time keeping a certain parallelism of rhythm and style that lends formal unity to the

poetic composition as a whole. This type presents no special problem to the translator, except for the need of using a poetic style in keeping with the rest of the section. Note, for example, Psalm 138.4:

All the kings of the earth shall praise thee, O Lord,
for they have heard the words of thy mouth.

Most of Psalm 23 shows this type of parallelism; note verse 5, for example:

Thou preparest a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
thou anointest my head with oil,
my cup overflows.

Acrostic poems

A number of biblical poems have a special form in Hebrew, in which successive stanzas or verses each begin with a new letter, in the Hebrew alphabetical order. See, for example, Psalms 34, 37, and 119. It is virtually impossible to reproduce this sort of pattern in translation.

Psalm 119 is, in fact, the most complex poetic composition in the entire Bible; it has 22 stanzas of eight verses each, corresponding to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and within each stanza each line begins with the same Hebrew letter. Also, each line in Hebrew contains the word "law" or one of its synonyms "commandments, ordinances, testimonies, precepts, ways". Few languages have a series of synonyms such that this sort of vocabulary pattern can be reproduced, and any effort by the translator to do so systematically would be futile. Similarly complex patterns are found in the chapters of Lamentations.

Such acrostic poems, because of the limitations imposed upon them by their form, often do not follow as logical a line of thought as do those which are not so restricted, and so they tend to give the impression of a certain monotony; this is something which cannot really be compensated for in a translation.

Figurative language

Another important characteristic of poetry, in the Bible and elsewhere, is the intensified use of figurative or symbolic language. This, together with the other poetic devices, accentuates the meaning and contributes to an emotive effect which permits the readers or hearers to identify more effectively with the message. Poetry thus becomes a more adequate vehicle than prose for expressing abstract concepts.

Psalm 23, for instance, presents the care of God for his people by using the figures of the care of an oriental shepherd for his sheep (verses 1-4) and the attention given by a host to a guest of honor (verses 5-6). In Psalm 91, God is seen under the figure of a mother bird sheltering her young under her wings. In Psalm 18, which also appears in 2 Samuel 22 as a figurative description of how God delivered David from the hands of Saul, we have God's power likened to the force of a tempest.

Examples of figurative language may be seen throughout the poetic

literature of the Bible, far more frequently than in the prose sections. This is part of what makes it poetry. For the translator, if a given figure of speech can be readily recognized in the receptor language with the same meaning as it has in the original, it should by all means be kept. If, however, the biblical figure is unrecognizable or meaningless for those for whom the translation is being made, or if it gives a wrong meaning, something else must be done. Sometimes there is a different figure that is well known and which conveys essentially the same meaning, and which can be used so long as it does not conflict with something elsewhere in the Bible or in biblical culture.

But there are times when a non-figurative expression must be used. For instance, the figure of the "horn" in Psalm 75.4,5,10 is a foreign concept for the reader of English, and in GNB has been translated by the non-figurative expressions "arrogant", "boasting", and "power". Other languages, however, may have a different figure that can be used here. In the Psalms of GNB, there are many cases (perhaps too many) in which non-figurative expressions have been substituted for figurative ones; translators are urged to carefully consider the figures of speech of the original as seen, for example, in RSV, and to either retain some of these or make some adaptation that will keep as much of a poetic style as possible within the poetic genius of the receptor language.

Poetry or prose?

Curiously enough, there are a number of cases in which, in spite of all that has been said in this article, some passages that are poetic in Hebrew should probably be translated straight-forwardly as prose. This will depend upon whether or not in the receptor language it is appropriate to use poetry for a given kind of message. For example, most of the passages in the book of Amos are poetry in Hebrew, and are translated as poetry in RSV, but GNB translates nearly all of them as prose. This appears to be justified by the fact that for English, especially as it is used in the modern technological world, it hardly seems culturally appropriate to use poetry for this kind of message of judgment. The same is true for the "doom oracles" of Isaiah 13—19 and of many other passages in the prophetic books. The Spanish common-language version, on the other hand, uses a poetic style for these passages, since culturally, Spanish is more given to poetry than is English, and the poetic translation seems to be entirely appropriate. And in the languages of societies that are less developed technologically, there appears to be even greater use of symbolic language for abstract concepts—something that is characteristic of poetic style.

The translator should therefore consider whether poetry seems appropriate or not for a given kind of message content in the language into which the translation is being made. Certainly for the Psalms, which are lyric poetry and express emotionally-charged thoughts of prayer and worship, and for numerous other such parts of the Bible, a translation into poetry should be considered. This would also apply to the Song of

Solomon, Lamentations, and parts of many other books. However, other kinds of biblical poetry (narrative, proclamations of judgment, and so on), may or may not call for a poetic translation, depending upon the needs of the particular language and culture.

There are other rhetorical devices in Hebrew poetry which we have not mentioned here, but the above are perhaps the principal ones that the translator needs to keep in mind. Other refinements are discussed in the literature on the subject, and translators are urged to make use of such in whatever way possible.

Reference

An excellent discussion of this subject to which translators are likely to find access appears in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (RSV), pages 1523-29 (Oxford University Press, new edition, 1977), in an article entitled "Characteristics of Hebrew Poetry". Also in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3 (K-Q), pages 829-38 (Abingdon Press, 1962), there is a very useful article entitled "Poetry, Hebrew". And in the *Supplementary Volume* of the same publication, pages 669-72 (Abingdon Press, 1976), there is an article with the same title.

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THE TEMPLE IN THE GOSPELS AND ACTS

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There are almost 100 references in the gospels and Acts to the Temple in Jerusalem. The Temple was the centre of Jewish religious life during the period of time covered by these books; and many of the important events which they relate took place there.

When we read such statements as the following, what do we understand by them?

Led by the Spirit, Simeon went into the Temple. (Lk 2.27)

Once there were two men who went up to the Temple to pray... (Lk 18.10)

One day when Jesus was in the Temple teaching the people... (Lk 20.1)

Although there are references such as Jn 8.20 and Jn 10.23 which name particular locations within the temple area as a whole, for many people the word "temple" gives a picture of the modern-day church building in which people come together to worship. So they get quite the wrong meaning from these statements, thinking that the people mentioned were actually inside the main temple building. There are even some Bible Society illustrations for the parable in Lk 18.9-14 which seem to show a man praying inside a building! (This same misunderstanding is even more common in French-speaking areas, since the word *temple* is used in