

Intrusive Voices: Translating Unexpected Changes of Speaker in the Bible

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Abstract

When a change of speaker in a Scripture text is not explicitly introduced by a speech orienter, Bible readers may feel the text is “intrusive.” This article proposes a taxonomy for categorizing such intrusive voices in various passages of Scripture. The intrusion may be external (due to scribal activity) or internal (as written by the original author). Internal intrusions can be further classified as citations or unmarked conversational turns. Textual signals that a change of speaker has occurred in the original texts include a change in deictic reference (primarily pronominal) and change in semantic content. The article lists orthographic and linguistic devices that translators have used in existing Scripture translations to clarify that a change of speaker has occurred, and also examines several passages where it is not fully clear whether an intrusive voice is present or not.

Keywords

change of speaker, speech orienters, quotative frames, punctuation, citations, intertextuality, conversational turns, scribal intrusion

1. Introduction

In many languages, a change of speaker in a text is explicitly introduced by a speech orienter (Dooley and Levinsohn 2000, 50), sometimes called a quotative frame (e.g., Miller 2003; Finley 2019).¹ It is therefore often a

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challenge for Bible translators and readers when they encounter “intrusive” speech (see, e.g., Culpepper 1983, 17, for this term) in Scripture by a speaker who has not been clearly introduced onto the scene.² When such intrusive voices occur in the text, readers may become disoriented as they stop, reread the text, and wonder whether the speaker has changed or not, and whose the new voice might be. Alternatively, readers may miss the change of speaker completely and think that the same person continues speaking, which leads to a potential misunderstanding of the text, and may have unwanted exegetical and theological consequences.

An example from Jer 31.23-26 illustrates what I mean by an intrusive voice:

²³ Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel . . .

²⁵ I will satisfy the weary,
and all who are faint I will replenish.

²⁶ Thereupon *I* awoke and looked, and my sleep was pleasant to me. (NRSV, emphasis mine throughout this article)

Although v. 26 is not well understood,³ there is a fair consensus that the LORD is no longer the speaker, even though 1 sg. verb forms are used in both v. 25 and v. 26. Many translations and commentaries (e.g., Bright 1965, 288–89; Carroll 1986, 605) take v. 26 as a marginal comment that is not spoken by God, although few affirm directly that Jeremiah is the speaker. Translations such as NRSV, which signals the change of speaker in v. 26 only by a new paragraph, may be quite jarring for readers and force them to reread and rethink the text before (hopefully) arriving at the conclusion that the speakers in the two verses are different. This type of unmarked change of speaker is common in Hebrew prophetic literature, although some passages remain ambiguous (see section 4.1 for an additional example).

and Joshua Jensen for their comments on drafts of this article, to my audience at the BT presentation for their questions and comments, which helped me refine my thoughts on the issues involved, and to the three anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback.

² My usage of “intrusive” is not intended to carry any negative overtones; it merely reflects the fact that the presence of a new voice/speaker in the text in such cases is unexpected and potentially disorienting to the reader (i.e., cognitively intrusive from the reader’s perspective).

³ The UBS *Handbook on Jeremiah* puts it aptly when commenting on this verse: “No one feels confident about the meaning of this verse or of its relation to the context. Some assume it to be an editorial addition; others regard it as a song or proverb intended to be sung or spoken when the promises of the previous verses are realized; and still others believe that it is the prophet’s comment on the vision of the future he has just had” (Newman and Stine 2003, ad loc.)

We can compare NRSV with another English translation of this passage:

²³ This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, says: ". . . ²⁵ For I have given rest to the weary and joy to the sorrowing."

²⁶ At this, I woke up and looked around. My sleep had been very sweet. (NLT)

In NLT, the change of speaker is indicated by two orthographic devices: (1) The quotation marks around God's speech end in v. 25, before the narrator comments in v. 26, and (2) the text of v. 26 forms a separate paragraph from God's speech. The two devices together give a clear indication to the reader that the speaker of v. 26 is different from that of the preceding verses, thereby lessening the reader's feeling of disorientation.

Scholars and translators are more likely than the average Bible reader to recognize intrusive voices in the text, especially if the original languages include clues that are not as visible in the recipient language translation. In such cases, it is our responsibility to convey this information to readers, helping them to resolve the cognitive dissonance triggered by an intrusive voice. The primary goal of this article is to alert Bible translators to some of the issues involved and to offer some practical options to help readers not to stumble over intrusive voices in Scripture. Most of my observations and suggestions are not new, but are an attempt to help translators systematically think through potential solutions to the problem.

Section 2 discusses passages from both Testaments where it is clear that a speaker change has taken place, and categorizes the types of intrusions that occur. Section 3 looks first at textual signals in the original languages indicating a change of speaker, even where no explicit speech orienter exists. It then surveys some devices used in existing Bible translations to help readers understand that an intrusive voice is present, keeping in mind the varying expectations of different language communities. My recommendation to Bible translators, whether working on formal-equivalence or functional-equivalence translations, is that when such unexpected changes of speaker occur, they should carefully render the text in a way that helps their intended audience not to stumble or be confused. Next, section 4 briefly discusses the more thorny issue of passages where the presence of an intrusive voice is debatable. The article concludes with a summary and a few remaining difficulties related to the issue.

2. Categories and examples of intrusive voices

Instead of attempting a list of all instances of intrusive voices in Scripture, it is more useful to categorize the kinds of intrusions, and to survey passages in the Bible where scholars believe an intrusive voice is present. The taxonomy below is pragmatic, rather than dependent on grammatical, text-critical, or semantic categories. It considers the effect that intrusive

voices may have of disorienting unsuspecting readers and keeping them from realizing that an unexpected new voice is present. Intrusions come in two categories: *external intrusion* and *internal intrusion*.

2.1 External intrusion

Here the new speaker is external to the original author/compiler of the text, i.e., it results from a scribal gloss or more extensive addition in a manuscript. When an external intrusion occurs, it unexpectedly interrupts the author's voice with a later voice which has, intentionally or unintentionally, been incorporated into the manuscript. There are several passages that are overwhelmingly believed to be later insertions into the NT text, and can therefore be deemed externally intrusive voices. Examples are the pericope of the adulterous woman (John 7.58–8.11), the shorter and longer endings of Mark, the Johannine comma (1 John 5.7-8), the doxology in the Lord's Prayer in Matt 6.13, and Luke 22.43-44; 23.34.⁴

Other passages, like 1 Cor 14.34-35, are still debated.⁵ Since most cases of scribal intrusions are not certain, and are already the subject of much textual criticism, I will not delve further into this issue, instead focusing my attention on the second category, internal intrusions. But if translators do not indicate to readers that such passages are later intrusions,⁶ most readers would never suspect that these came from someone other than the author.

2.2 Internal intrusion

This includes all cases not due to later scribal activity, where the speaker changes due to something internal to the text as written. These can further be divided into citations (2.2.1) and unmarked conversational turns (2.2.2).

2.2.1 Citations. Passages where the author cites an OT text or another speaker are intrusive if they lack sufficient marking to alert readers to the presence of a different voice.⁷

⁴ For an example from the Old Testament, the headings to the psalms were likely added after the composition of the text of the psalms. Nonetheless, since these headings are systematic, it seems likely that they could have been added during the redactional process of compiling the separate psalms (and five books of psalms) into the single, unified text that we know today. In this case, I would not consider each heading to be intrusive to the book as a whole, but only to the text of the given psalm.

⁵ See, e.g., Fee (2014, 792) and the long textual footnote to this passage in NET.

⁶ Unless, of course, the Majority Text of the New Testament is the base text of the translation, as is the case in projects strongly influenced by Orthodox or conservative evangelical churches. In that event, such passages would not be seen as intrusions.

⁷ For the problem of readers' potential unawareness of intertextuality, see Ahmadian and Yazdani (2013). For the purposes of this article, I do not differentiate between "citation" and "quotation" but use the terms interchangeably.

a. Rom 12.20

Old Testament passages in the New Testament are intrusive if the reader is not aware that the author is citing something. This occurs in Paul's words in Rom 12.20:

¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."²⁰ No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." (Rom 12.19-20 NRSV)

In v. 19b, Paul cites Deut 32.35, but this is clear, since he prefaces the citation with "for it is written" and the citation concludes with "says the Lord." However, in v. 20 he then cites Prov 25.21-22 but with no quotation formulas. Had NRSV not added quotation marks around the words "if your enemies . . . on their heads," it would appear to a reader unfamiliar with the Old Testament that Paul is giving his own thoughts about vengeance. Older translations such as KJV or the Russian Synodal translation give this impression, as they do not mark the citation in any way.

Paul certainly agreed with the divine intention of anything that he cited from the Old Testament. He also likely expected his audience to know when a citation came from Scripture. Bible translators can help modern audiences in such cases without being overly intrusive. Otherwise, readers may lose important theological insights, e.g., that teaching against personal vengeance is not only a NT concept, but one firmly rooted in the Old Testament as well. Helping readers recognize intrusive voices can provide information that is theologically and exegetically valuable. This is supported by intertextuality studies, which confirm that "the reader's awareness of intertextuality and its underlying elements and components in a literary text may help him/her to produce a more reliable and acceptable meaning and interpretation of that text" (Ahmadian and Yazdani 2013, 156).

b. 1 Cor 7.1

Where the author may be quoting another speaker (rather than the Old Testament), the interpretational issue is even weightier and the theological outcomes more serious, because it is not guaranteed that the author actually agrees with the speaker he quotes. Take, for example, 1 Cor 7.1:

Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. (NKJV)

Was Paul affirming the position that "it is good for a man not to touch a woman," or was he quoting the Corinthians? Older interpreters and translations typically understood this as Paul's own statement (thus the Roman

Catholic Church takes it as foundational for celibacy among priests). Modern commentators (e.g., Conzelmann 1975, 115) and many newer translations, however, conclude that Paul is quoting a statement from the Corinthians' letter, to show that he agrees only partially, and thinks they have taken this principle to excess, as he does in several other places in the second half of this epistle. Not recognizing that this voice is intrusive can seriously influence both the interpretation of the rest of ch. 7 and the life and practice of an individual, or even an entire church denomination.

2.2.2 Unmarked conversational turns. In some modern literature, conversational turn-taking is expected and is therefore sometimes not marked with an explicit speech orienter. Modern orthographic conventions, such as quotation marks in English or an introductory dash in Polish, Russian, and French, are often sufficient to signal that a new conversational turn has begun. In classical Hebrew narrative, a speech orienter was the standard, expected marker of conversational turns; in non-narrative genres of Hebrew Scripture, however, we find that turns are occasionally taken by different speakers even though these are not marked in any way. Presumably, the original audience had sufficient cultural background knowledge to interpret the contextual/genre clues for understanding when one speech turn ends and another begins. However, for many modern-day readers of Scripture these internal signals are not clear, because their own cultural conventions differ. Two potentially disorienting examples in which participants in poetic dialogue change without explicit markers are the following:

a. Song of Songs

This entire book is a dialogue between a woman and a man, with occasional speeches by others ("friends"/"daughters of Jerusalem"/the woman's brothers). In Hebrew, the speech turns in this book are fairly clear due to gender marking on verbs and pronominal suffixes. But for some receptor languages, neither verbs nor pronouns indicate gender, and this leads to guesswork on the reader's part. Though these voices do not sound intrusive in Hebrew, they may come across as such in translation unless they are somehow marked as involving a speech turn.

b. Ps 118.19-28

Some passages are recognized as having been liturgical in their original context, involving something like antiphonal voices. An example of this is in Psalm 118, one of the Hallel psalms, which was likely used during the celebration of Sukkoth/Tabernacles (Kirkpatrick 1982, 692–94). ESV, in vv. 19-28, does not make any attempt to help readers sort out the various voices in the text:

- ¹⁹ Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the LORD.
- ²⁰ This is the gate of the LORD;
the righteous shall enter through it.
- ²¹ I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.
- ²² The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.
- ²³ This is the LORD's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.
- ²⁴ This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.
- ²⁵ Save us, we pray, O LORD!
O LORD, we pray, give us success!
- ²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!
We bless you from the house of the LORD.
- ²⁷ The LORD is God,
and he has made his light to shine upon us.
Bind the festal sacrifice with cords,
up to the horns of the altar!
- ²⁸ You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
you are my God; I will extol you.

If the translation does not help the reader sort out the different voices here, the beauty of the passage may be diminished by the reader's confusion when trying to decide who is speaking.

Some translations comment on the multiplicity of voices in a footnote (e.g., NJB's explanation that some of these verses were "chanted by various groups as the procession entered the Temple"). Others, such as CEV, divide these verses into strophes that look like they may correspond to a division into speech turns, but without any indication that this is the function of the strophic division.

Two further subcategories of unmarked conversational turns are somewhat different from unmarked turn-taking by the characters in the text. These I call *narratorial intrusion* and *divine intrusion*.

2.2.2.1 Narratorial intrusion. This occurs when the narrator⁸ himself suddenly starts speaking in the text without giving warning that the speech

⁸For simplicity's sake, I do not distinguish here between the literary categories of "author," "compiler," and "redactor," lumping them together in the category of "narrator," although I realize that scholars versed in redaction criticism may object to this as an oversimplification. The differences among these are not to be ignored, but do not seem to be important for thinking through issues related to signaling intrusive voices in a Bible translation.

of the preceding character is over. Jeremiah 31.23-26, discussed at the beginning of this article, is one example of the narrator unexpectedly intruding into God's speech with a first-person self-reference. Similar examples are found in Acts 16.10 and John 21.24, while the example from Gen 48.7 is somewhat different.

a. Acts 16.10

An unexpected shift from third-person to first-person plural narration occurs in Acts 16.10:

⁹ During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."¹⁰ When he had seen the vision, *we* immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. (Acts 16.9-10 NRSV)

In v. 10, the subject changes from 3 sg. (Paul) to 1 pl. (*we*) with no explanation, and the 1 pl. narration continues almost to the end of the book (28.16). The referent obviously cannot be the same 1 pl. as at the end of v. 9 ("help us"). Traditionally, 16.10 indicates the time and place when the author Luke joined Paul's missionary team, but this is not mentioned in the narrative.⁹

b. John 21.24

At the end of John's Gospel, the third-person narrative suddenly changes to a first-person plural (new narrator) commenting on the veracity of the story told by the previous narrator:

This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and *we* know that his testimony is true. (NRSV)

Whereas the original audience likely knew who the referent of this "we" was and did not need an explicit identification, modern-day readers are far removed from the original setting and are left guessing. A widely accepted hypothesis among scholars is that these are the leaders of the Johannine community, the circle of Christians whose leader was "the beloved disciple" who wrote (most of) this Gospel. In any case, it is clear that the 1 pl. subject is different from the voice of the primary narrator up to this point. This shift to a new, 1 pl. narrator is sudden, with no speech orienter or other quotative marker, which is why it can be called an intrusion.

⁹ Some commentators (beginning with nineteenth-century Tübingen School scholars, such as F. C. Baur) doubt that this is to be taken as an actual historical comment indicating when/whether the author really joined Paul's team, especially if they do not accept the Lukan authorship of Acts. For our purposes, whether or not the author actually joined Paul at this time, the narrative itself clearly exhibits an intrusive voice at this point in the story.

c. Gen 48.7

The narrator's voice can be intrusive in a text without being a first-person form. An example is found in Jacob's speech in Gen 48.7:

“Long ago, as I was returning from Paddan-aram, Rachel died in the land of Canaan. We were still on the way, some distance from Ephrath (*that is, Bethlehem*). So with great sorrow I buried her there beside the road to Ephrath.” (NLT)

In this verse, a contemporary name for the ancient town of Ephrath is embedded in Jacob's speech as an explanation of a place name which may no longer have been recognized by the book's original audience. The name Bethlehem belongs to a later period than Jacob's historical setting (circa eighteenth century B.C.), so the explanation “that is, Bethlehem” cannot be part of Jacob's own words. This is either an anachronism, or much more likely, an intrusive voice (that of the narrator himself) which provides an explanatory note.¹⁰ It might be suspected of being a later scribal addition, but there is apparently no manuscript evidence for this.

It is relevant that the same explanatory note for this town's name is made earlier, in Gen 35.19, where it is outside direct speech by Jacob. There is nothing anachronistic about it in that passage—the explanation of Ephrath as Bethlehem in 35.19 is clearly from the pen of the author/redactor himself.¹¹ The voice that says “that is, Bethlehem” in 48.7 is a similar narratorial intrusion, and should probably somehow be marked as such in translations. Translators could make it clear to the reader that this information is in fact an explanation provided by an intrusive voice. As Schmidt (2018, 5) points out,

If explanatory notes are not recognized, then different levels of the text become indistinguishable. Treating explanatory notes like normal text comes at the cost of leaving the reader to figure out alone the literary and historical relationships. They would have been obvious to the first recipients of the Biblical books.

The parentheses in NLT are not sufficient since they can be interpreted as Jacob's own aside (an impossible option hermeneutically). A better visual option is putting the words “now Bethlehem” outside the quotation mark

¹⁰ Although many scholars use the term “explanatory gloss” to label such information in the Bible, I prefer to follow Schmidt (2018) in designating it an explanatory *note*, since the term “gloss” is often associated with something external to the author's own writing and is more fitting for scribal glosses.

¹¹ The *Handbook on Genesis* recognizes this as the most likely option in its comment on 48.7: “**Bethlehem** is no doubt a later gloss or explanation for readers to be able to identify Ephrath” (Reyburn and Fry 1998, ad loc., emphasis original).

that ends Jacob's speech, a decision followed by NJPS, NRSV, and some other translations:

“when I was returning from Paddan, Rachel died, to my sorrow, while I was journeying in the land of Canaan, when still some distance short of Ephrath; and I buried her there on the road to Ephrath”—*now Bethlehem*. (Gen 48.7 NJPS)

2.2.2.2 Divine intrusion. In this second subcategory of unmarked conversational turn-taking, the voice of God or Jesus is suddenly heard speaking in the text without a warning that the previous character is no longer speaking. This sometimes happens even where the divine speaker is not visibly “onstage,”¹² which differentiates this subcategory from a simple unmarked conversational turn, since when participants suddenly interrupt each other (e.g., in the Song of Songs or Ps 118 examples above), they are already presumed to be onstage. Presumably, God is seen by authors who have such divine intrusions in their works as always onstage and needing no special introduction. Examples of divine intrusion are often found in the Prophets, and several can also be found in the book of Revelation. For instance, multiple intrusions occur in Revelation 22:

Rev 22.1-13

¹ Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life . . .

⁶ And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true, for the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.”

⁷ “See, *I* am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”

⁸ I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me; ⁹ but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you . . .”

¹⁰ And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. ¹¹ Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.”

¹² “See, *I* am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” (NRSV)

¹² For the concept of being “onstage,” see Dooley and Levinsohn's brief but helpful discussion of different activation statuses of characters in a text: “In terminology traditional in narrative analysis, participants are spoken of as being ‘introduced,’ ‘kept on stage,’ and ‘dismissed’; after they have been dismissed, they may at some point be ‘reintroduced’ or ‘brought back on stage.’” (2000, 57).

In 22.1-13, the angel is the third-person subject in vv. 1-6 and vv. 9-11. However, three different speakers refer to themselves in the first-person singular: John in v. 8, Jesus in v. 7 and vv. 12-13, and the angel in v. 9. Note that the shift to Jesus as the first-person speaker is not explicitly marked in either v. 7 or v. 12 by a speech formula (NRSV does mark this with quotation marks). In both of these verses in the Greek, it is possible for readers to think that the angel is continuing his speech following v. 6 and v. 11, until the context forces them to change their interpretation of the 1 sg. referent in v. 7 and v. 12. Also, in contrast to these two unexpected shifts to Jesus as speaker, John's self-reference in v. 8 is explicitly marked by the addition of his name, and the angel's transition from 3 sg. narrative reference in vv. 8-9a to 1 sg. reference in v. 9b is marked by the explicit speech orienter "but he said to me" (καὶ λέγει μοι). Because of these explicit markers, neither John's voice in v. 8 nor the angel's voice in v. 9 feels intrusive.

The voice of Jesus in vv. 7, 12-13, on the other hand, is intrusive because his speech turn is not explicitly introduced, and because Jesus has not been an onstage speaker in the book for several chapters. However, the unexpectedness of this intrusion is mitigated by two factors: first, prior to v. 12 Jesus had already called himself the Alpha and Omega in 1.8 and 21.6, and second, his voice had already appeared intrusively in 16.15 ("See, I am coming like a thief!")¹³ with the same verb as v. 7, "I am coming."¹⁴ Likewise, the reference to coming with a reward to recompense people in v. 12 is an echo of Isa 40.10, where the LORD God is the subject. The attentive and informed reader is therefore likely to quickly realize that this must be the Lord speaking, not John or the angel, and to be jarred less by the intrusive voice.

3. Signaling unexpected changes of speaker

Realizing that unexpected changes of speaker are likely to confuse some readers, Bible translators should be concerned about rendering such texts in a way that is as clear as possible, if the original text clearly involves a change of speaker that was not intended by the author to sound intrusive. In this section, I point out orthographic/translation devices that are used for this purpose in existing Scripture translations, with the recommendation that translators keep in mind the inventory of mechanisms available to them for helping readers understand intrusive voices.¹⁵

¹³ Caird (1966, 208) discusses the views on whether 16.15 is a scribal intrusion, since it is seen by some as "too abrupt to be credible." He concludes that the verse is in fact appropriate to the theology and structure of Revelation and should not be considered a scribal addition.

¹⁴ See Aune 1998, 1184, on the repeated motif of the Parousia in Revelation.

¹⁵ See Schmidt (2018) on how to mark internal explanatory notes in Scripture translations.

3.1 Textual signals of speaker change in the source texts

First, though, we might ask: If there is no explicit speech orienter or orthographic device signaling a change of speaker in the Hebrew/Greek originals, how did the original audience recognize that a change of speaker had actually occurred? The obvious answer is that other signals in the text indicate a change of speaker even without an explicit device. In his paper on speakers in the book of Hosea, Finley says that in the absence of explicit speech frames, “personal reference, explanatory comments, and reference to divine actions” (2019, 6) are the factors in the Hebrew text that guide the audience to determine whether it is the Lord or the prophet speaking. Finley conflates these three factors into two umbrella categories—“personal reference” and “consideration of the unique roles of prophet over against Yahweh” (7). I prefer to designate these two categories as “pronominal reference” and the “semantic content” of the passage.

a. Pronominal reference. When the speaker changes, a new set of pronouns is frequently introduced because the overall deictic framework has changed.¹⁶ It may be the grammatical person that changes (say, third-person subject to first-person subject, as in John 21.24, or the 1 sg. / 1 pl. / 2 sg. / 3 sg. alternations in Ps 118.19-26) or something else, like the gender of the speaker and addressee (as in the Song of Songs.) Presumably, the authors of these texts expected the original audience to pick up on such signals and to correctly interpret who the speaker and addressee were, based on co-text and/or context. Nevertheless, we saw in Jer 31.26 that if the preceding speaker and the new speaker are both using the 1 sg. pronoun to refer to themselves, then the form of the pronoun remains the same, even though the actual referent has changed. So, *lack of change* in pronominal form does not necessarily mean that the speaker is the same as earlier.

b. Semantic content. In some cases, it is clear from knowledge of the world of Scripture that some actions can be attributed to certain speakers but not others, which may indicate that a shift in speakers has taken place. Thus, in Jer 31.26 (narratorial intrusion) it is fairly unlikely that God himself would say that he awoke from sleep, since God never sleeps or slumbers in the Jewish understanding (Ps 121.4), although a metaphorical usage in reference to God does occasionally occur in Hebrew poetry; cf. Ps 78.65.

He mentions the categories of punctuation marking and linguistic marking, which correspond to the categories of devices surveyed in section 3.2.

¹⁶ As noted by an anonymous reviewer, the deictic framework includes other things besides pronominal reference, such as shifts in tense and spatial location. However, pronouns typically catch the eye of the reader first and bear the greatest functional load in signaling that the deictic framework has changed.

Likewise, in Rev 22.12 (divine intrusion), it should be clear to readers that it is unlikely that the angel would say that he is “coming soon,” since in the earlier parts of Revelation it is Jesus himself who is portrayed as coming soon.

The semantic content does not need to be encoded in a verb in order to signal to readers that the speaker has changed. Thus, in Gen 48.7 above, it is the semantic content of “that is, Bethlehem” that alerted original readers that this information was not in Jacob’s possible knowledge frame and is therefore an explanatory narratorial aside. However, what is true of the original readers is not true for most modern readers, since most cannot be expected to know that Bethlehem was a later designation for the town that was earlier called Ephrath. Hence, it is the translator’s duty to work harder than usual to convey this to the modern reader, as NJPS did in this case.

In the case of citations, it is once again the semantic content that points to a different speaker if no explicit quotation formula is used. If readers do not already have a good knowledge of the Old Testament, they are unlikely to recognize Paul’s words in Rom 12.20 as being a citation from Proverbs, unless translators help them to do so.

3.2 Devices used for signaling intrusive voices

We now consider devices used in translations to make intrusive voices less jarring. Some of these devices are used in both formal and dynamic equivalence translations, while others are found primarily in dynamic translations, which have fewer reservations about adding words not explicitly in the original and using more paratextual material. Translators working on a new version of Scripture would do well to ponder in advance which of these devices, and perhaps others as well, are appropriate in their specific linguistic context, and summarize their decisions in the translation brief.¹⁷ Translators should always keep in mind the existing literary tradition in the recipient language and/or language of wider communication (LWC). This is especially true if there is already a respected Scripture translation in the LWC, although devices should not be copied automatically from the LWC, since the recipient language may have different conventions.

The interpretive helps are listed here approximately in order of increasing amount of textual/graphic material that is added to the translation to signal speaker change.

¹⁷ I am grateful to Andy Faust (personal communication) for reminding me of the usefulness of considering this matter when putting together a translation brief for the Scripture project. Schmidt (2018, 4) also points out that “the translation team should at least spell out its practice in the project’s internal guidelines” when choosing how to mark special conventions such as internal explanatory notes.

3.2.1 Division into paragraphs or strophes. We saw in Jer 31.26 above that starting a new paragraph is one way of marking a change of speaker (assuming that paragraph breaks are used this way in other literature in the recipient language). Bratcher (1978, 427) likewise notes that one of the reasons for inserting a strophe break when translating Psalms is to show that a change of speaker has occurred. A similar device, used less frequently for this purpose, is a blank line between units of text in order to indicate some lack of continuity between them (e.g., NJPS in Jer 31.26).

Inserting strophe breaks or blank lines to mark the exchanges in Ps 118.19-26 is a straightforward way of indicating that a change has occurred. As already noted above, CEV does this here, as do many other translations (GNB, NRSV, NJPS, FC, VP, etc.). Nevertheless, deciding where exactly the voices have changed is sometimes difficult, as can be seen by the different choices of these translations about where to put the breaks. Deciding where to put any unit breaks in a translation is always a matter requiring serious exegetical evaluation.

3.2.2 Quotation marks or speech-separation dashes. Separating speech units with quotation marks or dashes is a frequently used orthographic strategy. Even though most modern readers are used to this, these orthographic devices are in fact an interpretive addition to the original text of Scripture, which contained no punctuation marks. Quotation marks are also used in some translations (e.g., NRSV) to mark OT citations. See section 3.2.6 for more discussion of dealing with citations.

3.2.3 Parentheses. Sometimes translations (see the Tuvan example in section 4.3) use parentheses to signal a change of speaker, but this may not be fully successful, since parentheses are not typically used thus in literary works in most languages. In some traditions (for example, in Russia), readers may be disconcerted to see parentheses used in the Bible at all, since they understand parentheses to mark extraneous information or information that is not part of the original text but has been added by translators.

3.2.4 Capital letters for divine referents. This strategy is commonly used in various languages for showing that the referent of a pronoun is divine. It is easy for a reader (though not a hearer) to notice that the pronouns in a passage have changed from capital to lower case or vice versa and thus know that the translator believes that a speaker change has occurred in the text.

Some orthographies may not have a distinction between capital and lower-case letters (e.g., Thai or Indic languages). Even in those that do, this strategy may not always work. For instance, in English, “I” (1 sg. nominative) is always capitalized, whether the speaker is divine or not. In languages where there is no tradition of capitalizing divine pronouns, it may also take time for new Bible readers to learn what such capitalization means.

3.2.5 Red letters. This is an instantly noticeable strategy used in some English New Testaments (as well as in some other languages, such as Swedish) as a graphic device for separating the voice of Jesus from other voices in the New Testament. It is respected by many lay Bible readers as a visual honorific for Jesus' words. (See section 4.2 for a passage where the identification of the words of Jesus is uncertain.)

In my experience with English translations, this device is mostly seen in editions of KJV and NKJV, but also appears in special editions of other versions. One potential drawback to using red letters to set apart Jesus' words is that it may be taken by readers as signaling a distinction between God and Jesus and between Jesus and people that is undesirable from a theological point of view. Some scholars also argue that red letters mislead readers by presenting an oversimplified view of what Jesus actually said.

3.2.6 Italics or cross-references to mark OT citations. In some versions of the New Testament, such as NA27/28, NET, and the Russian BTI/Kulakov version, citations from the Old Testament are marked with italics as a visual signal that the author is quoting Scripture, not speaking with his own voice. UBS4/5 uses a bold font for the same purpose.

This is potentially useful for signaling scriptural intertextuality, but translators should recognize that readers will not automatically understand the function of italics. This is especially true since in some LWCs, italics in Scripture indicate something different, e.g., that the translator has supplied material which is implicit in the original text. Few new readers pay enough attention to the preface in a Bible to learn that italics may be used to signal an OT citation.

Using italics for citations will sometimes lead to difficult decisions, where the echo of the Old Testament is an indirect allusion rather than a direct citation; compare the vast difference in how UBS4/5 and NA27/28 use italics/bold to indicate OT material in the book of Revelation, for instance. Deciding that something is a citation (marked with italics) or an allusion (without italics) may be considered too subjective by some teams, which could discourage them from trying to signal citations in any way. If so, I would encourage them to use cross-references, signaling that there is intertextuality present, without forcing the translation team to distinguish between citations and allusions. As with italics, the difficulty remains that many readers may not immediately understand the function of cross-references, but we hope motivated readers will soon work this out for themselves.

3.2.7 Section headings. Some Bible editions mark the shift of speaker in section headings, i.e., in paratextual material, not in the Scripture text itself. This is frequently done in translations of Song of Songs into languages that do not grammatically mark gender on pronominal forms (including NIV, GNB, Turkish *Kutsal Kitap*, etc.). Thus, the male speaker's turn is indicated

by, e.g., “the man,” “he,” “the lover,” with corresponding equivalents for the female speaker’s turn: “the woman,” “she,” “the beloved,” etc. This strategy does not work well in other books of the Bible.

3.2.8 Footnotes. Some translations indicate a change of speaker in footnotes. This is usually done only where the translators consider it very important to note the new voice and possibly explain exegetical matters related to the shift. For example, NLT adds a footnote to explain the appearance of “we” in Acts 16.10: “Luke, the writer of this book, here joined Paul and accompanied him on his journey.” The translators of NLT believed that this information was worth providing, presumably to keep readers from being confused by the intrusive voice.

Another passage where a footnote is occasionally added is John 3.16-21, where it is not clear whether a change of speaker occurs after the preceding verses (see section 4.2). For example, NRSV adds the footnote, “Some interpreters hold that the quotation concludes with verse 15.”

While footnotes may be useful for signaling a change of speaker, we should remember that not many Bible readers pay attention to footnotes.

3.2.9 Explicit speech orienters. Some translations, especially those focused on the aural impact of the translation, have no compunctions about adding speech orienters in the translated text even if none is present in the original. Thus, in Rev 16.15, CEV adds “Remember Christ says,” while FC adds “dit le Seigneur” (says the Lord), and the Lak translation says “mikku ttun bavuna” (Then I heard . . .) in order to signal that it is not the narrator speaking about coming like a thief.

Although this device resolves the disorienting nature of an intrusive voice, it may go too far in passages such as Rev 16.15 and 22.7, 12, in that it *totally* removes the intrusiveness that was definitely present in the Greek. The author could have added Greek speech orienters in these passages to clearly indicate that Jesus is now speaking, but did not do so. If a translator wants to maintain at least some of the intrusiveness in these passages, it may be better to use another signaling device, such as quotation marks or a speech dash or paragraph break. This may be sufficient to indicate to many readers (though again, not hearers) that a change of speaker has occurred, without spelling out what should be clear from the semantic information present—that it is Jesus speaking here, not an angel or the narrator. However, this depends on the reading ability of the intended audience.

4. Ambiguous passages

It is clear that there is an intrusive voice in the passages mentioned in section 2, but there are places in the Bible where there is no scholarly consensus about whether more than one speaker is involved. In these cases,

the criteria discussed above (deictic/pronominal shift and semantic content) are not sufficient to convince most biblical scholars that a change of speaker has occurred. These passages are more interesting to explore, and more difficult to translate. For reasons of space I will look only briefly at a few such passages to illustrate some of the difficulties involved in determining whether a new voice has intruded or not.

4.1 *The Prophets*

In the OT prophetic literature, we often encounter texts where the speaker changes from God to the prophet or vice versa. Often these are fairly clear due to the shift in pronominal reference or semantic content, but sometimes it is not certain whether a change of speaker has occurred (Finley 2019 offers a good discussion of this problem in the book of Hosea). Thus, there can be ambiguity in the Prophets as to whether the first-person pronoun is being used in self-reference by God or the prophet. Since such passages are numerous, let us take a look at just one example where this is not fully clear.

Jer 9.1-3

Some frequently-occurring expressions, such as “my people,” can be unclear as to the referent of the 1 sg. possessive pronoun. Sometimes this phrase is spoken unambiguously by the Lord (e.g., Isa 1.3) and at other times unambiguously by the prophet (e.g., Isa 22.4). In Jer 9.1-3, however, it remains unclear:

¹ O that *my* head were a spring of water,
and *my* eyes a fountain of tears,
so that *I* might weep day and night
for the slain of my poor people!

² O that *I* had in the desert
a traveler’s lodging place,
that *I* might leave my people
and go away from them!

For they are all adulterers,
a band of traitors.

³ They bend their tongues like bows;
they have grown strong in the land for falsehood, and not for truth;
for they proceed from evil to evil,
and they do not know *me*, says the Lord. (NRSV)

On a first reading of vv. 1-2, it seems straightforward that the speaker is the prophet, since the semantic content (weeping, abandoning sinful people) is typically associated with a human agent. However, in v. 3, the “me” in “they do not know me” must refer to the Lord, and this is reinforced by the

speech formula “says the Lord” that comes immediately afterwards at the end of v. 3. In NRSV, these three verses are grouped together in a single strophe, with the final speech formula apparently having scope over the whole of vv. 1-3. Thus, upon encountering “they do not know me” and “says the LORD,” the reader is forced to reconsider whether the 1 sg. pronoun in vv. 1-2 may have been referring to God also. Strong emotions and anthropomorphic actions (positive and negative) are not foreign to descriptions of God in the Bible (e.g., Ezek 16.38 or Rev 3.16). So, it is possible that the weeping and abandoning in vv. 1-2 is also done by God. However, most translations consulted (e.g., FC, CEV, GNB, Turkish *Kutsal Kitap*) understand v. 3 as a semi-intrusive divine voice and use some sort of device to indicate a change of speaker between vv. 1-2 and v. 3.

4.2 John 3.10-21 and 3.27-36

Translators of John’s Gospel are aware of the difficult choices that need to be made in ch. 3 concerning where Jesus’ and John the Baptist’s words end and theological evaluation by the narrator begins. See Culpepper (1983) for a nuanced discussion.¹⁸

In vv. 10-21, some versions (e.g., NRSV, NLT, CEV, FC) take the entire section as the words of Jesus himself. These translations do not see any intrusive voice present here at all. Other versions (e.g., NIV) end Jesus’ speech with v. 15 and begin the narrator’s at 3.16, presumably because of the shift to “Son of God” phraseology. Yet others (e.g., GNB) believe that Jesus stops speaking in v. 13, with the narrator providing theological evaluation from v. 14.

Likewise, in vv. 27-36, John the Baptist begins as the speaker, but it is possible that the narrator takes over in vv. 31-36. The main reason that some commentators (e.g., Morris 1995, 215; Klink 2016, 220) believe that vv. 31-36 are spoken by the narrator rather than the Baptist are the theological concepts mentioned in these verses. These are very similar to those in the prologue to John’s Gospel as well as other passages that are clearly from the narrator. It is questionable whether the narrator would put words such as “The Father loves the Son” (v. 35) into the mouth of John the Baptist. But, as with the “Son of God” language in John 3.16-18, not all are convinced by this reasoning (after all, John the Baptist does call Jesus the Son of God in John 1.34), and we find respected translations on both sides.

Thus, the traditional interpretation that vv. 27-36 are all spoken by John the Baptist with no intrusion by the narrator is followed both by older

¹⁸ Culpepper concludes that “because of the similarity in Jesus’ and the narrator’s speech patterns, and because of the narrator’s influence on dialogue, it is impossible to tell when Jesus or John the Baptist stops speaking in chapter 3 and when or if the narrator speaks” (1983, 41).

versions and some newer versions, such as NLT and FC. The intrusive voice interpretation is followed by versions such as ESV, REB, GNB, NIV, and Turkish *Kutsal Kitap*. ESV and REB, for example, end John the Baptist's speech with closing quotation marks in 3.30 and have no quotation marks at the beginning of 3.31, indicating that this verse is spoken by the narrator. NRSV makes it even clearer that a change of voice has occurred: The Baptist's speech ends with closing quote marks at the end of 3.30, a section heading intervenes, and 3.31 begins with no quotation marks, so the attentive reader cannot think that the Baptist's speech has continued. NRSV also includes a footnote in 3.30, similar to the one in 3.15, stating that "some interpreters hold that the quotation continues through verse 36."

4.3 | Kgs 13.2

In this verse, which narrates an event in the late tenth century B.C., we see the unexpected mention of the seventh-century king Josiah of Judah:

¹ While Jeroboam was standing by the altar to offer incense, a man of God came out of Judah by the word of the LORD to Bethel ² and proclaimed against the altar by the word of the LORD, and said, "O altar, altar, thus says the LORD: 'A son shall be born to the house of David, *Josiah by name*; and he shall sacrifice on you the priests of the high places who offer incense on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.'" (1 Kgs 13.1-2, NRSV)

There are several ways that the presence in this passage of the name Josiah can be interpreted:

(1) The traditional interpretation is that this detail was spoken by the man of God as a prophecy foretelling the future very specifically. Almost all Bible versions consulted allow only for this interpretation. Many nineteenth- and twentieth-century commentators (e.g., Gray 1964, 326) accept this reading, but take it as a *vaticinium post eventum* prophecy; that is, the author of Kings in the sixth century B.C. was relying on his own knowledge about King Josiah's reforms, and put this knowledge into the mouth of the prophet as though he were prophesying quite specifically, when in fact the man of God did not speak this detail.

(2) It is theoretically possible that this is a scribal gloss (external intrusion), inserted here after the book of Kings was completed. No textual evidence exists to support this view, however.

(3) Since such prophetic references to an individual's name are exceedingly rare in the Old Testament,¹⁹ another possible explanation is that the

¹⁹ The only other case that comes to mind is the well-known multiple mention of King Cyrus of Persia (sixth century B.C.) by Isaiah (44.28; 45.1, 13), who lived at the turn

words “Josiah by name” are in fact a narratorial intrusion—that the narrator did not intend to place these words on the lips of the prophet, but inserted a historical comment as an aside. In this case, this comment is intrusive to the direct speech of the man of God but not to the narrative itself, and is similar to the historical comment, “that is, Bethlehem,” in Gen 35.19 and 48.7 (see above). The only version consulted that attempted to make this interpretational option explicit was the Tuvan Bible (2011), which put these words in parentheses in a separate sentence: “A son shall be born to the house of David. (His name is Josiah.)”

5. Conclusion

This is not an exhaustive survey of intrusive voices in Scripture. Rather, it is a tentative attempt to categorize unexpected changes of speaker, to see how they have been dealt with in existing Bible translations, and to suggest available linguistic/orthographic devices for signaling such changes. If Bible translators undertake this task seriously, the result will be clearer versions of Scripture that do not leave readers feeling that the voices in the text are intrusive, something that the authors of Scripture texts presumably wanted to avoid (with notable exceptions such as the divine intrusions in Revelation). My hope is that a larger collection of such intrusive voices can eventually be produced, and that other categories of speaker change may be added.

Audio recordings of Scripture also need to deal with, or at least recognize, the problem of intrusive voices. Written methods for signaling change of speaker will not automatically work for audio, although some parallels may be found. For example, “red letters” and section headings could be voiced by a different reader, while blank lines or paragraph/strophe breaks could be signaled by a slightly longer than usual pause in the reading. This line of inquiry should be considered seriously by anyone producing an audio version of Scripture, but is beyond the scope of this article, since it requires a general analysis of the difference between these two modalities, as well as an investigation of culturally-specific audience responses to particular

of the eighth century B.C. But the well-integrated presence of Cyrus’s name is one of the main reasons that many commentators believe that these chapters were written by a Deutero-Isaiah who lived in the mid-sixth century and was a witness of King Cyrus’s actions on behalf of the people of Israel. In terms of “intrusive voices,” we could say that according to the Deutero-Isaiah theory, the mentions of Cyrus are not an intrusive voice in these chapters, but rather, the entire second half of the book, beginning with ch. 40, is an intrusive voice (or several voices, if one accepts the existence of Trito-Isaiah in ch. 56–66). The traditional Jewish and Christian point of view is that there is no intrusive voice here, i.e., that Cyrus was mentioned by name as a very specific prophecy by the original Isaiah himself, who authored all sixty-six chapters of the book bearing his name.

audio signals. Sundersingh (2001) is a good example of such an analysis (particularly chs. 8–12), focused on India.

Among many possible directions for further research into the issue of intrusive voices in the Bible, a promising one could be an examination of how Hebrew and Greek manuscripts orthographically mark text units where the scribes wanted to mark a change of speaker.²⁰

In conclusion, it is sometimes tempting for Bible translators to make things too explicit where poetic fuzziness or narrator/speaker blending is a feature of the original text. Since there is often room for multiple reasonable interpretations of a text, translators should be wary of producing single-interpretation renderings if it is at all possible to render the text in such a way that the ambiguity of the original is faithfully reproduced. Nevertheless, it is often impossible to maintain the same ambiguity as is present in the original, and in this case, we should be ready to make a reasoned decision and implement it in our translation. This goes for signaling changes of speaker as much as for any other exegetical decision.

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²⁰ I am grateful to Roy Ciampa (personal communication) for this suggestion.

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Abbreviations

BTI	Bible in modern Russian (Bible Translation Institute)
CEV	Contemporary English Version (1999)
ESV	English Standard Version (2001)
FC	La Bible en français courant (1997)
GNB	Good News Bible (1996)
KJV	King James Version (1611)
LWC	Language of wider communication
NA	Nestle-Aland, <i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> (27th ed. 1993; 28th ed. 2012)
NASB	New American Standard Bible (1995)
NET	NET Bible (New English Translation, 2008)
NIV	New International Version (2011)
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible (1985)
NJPS	<i>Tanakh</i> (New Jewish Publication Society Version, 1985)
NKJV	New King James Version (1982)
NLT	New Living Translation (1996)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (1989)
REB	Revised English Bible (1989)
UBS	United Bible Societies Greek New Testament (4th ed., 1993; 5th ed., 2014)
VP	Dios Habla Hoy (1979)