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"The modern translator," says Professor Schwarz of University College in London, "attempts to produce in his own language the thought contained in the work as a whole, in each sentence and even each word within its context."[1] Attempt to do this, one might, but he will never succeed, and one is apt to be traumatically disillusioned in the process. If Professor Schwarz had ended his statement with the observation on translating the thought within each sentence, success would be possible. It is not possible, however, to translate the meaning of "each word within its context," even though "within its context" does greatly limit the idea of translating each word. This cannot be done because communication is not in separate words. The unit of thought in language is not a word but a sentence. Even the sentence cannot be understood out of its context, though it might be a true unit of thought.

One notices that persons speaking in foreign tongues almost invariably speak rapidly. Only with difficulty can we separate words one from the other when we listen to a native speak in a language we are attempting to learn. The native speaks in sentences while the learner attempts to separate the sentence into words with which he might be familiar.

Will you pardon a personal reminiscence?

During one of my first classes in Hebrew, the professor distributed to each student a list of Hebrew words together with some of their meanings. What reaction other students experienced, I did not know, but mine was one of frustrating consternation. One Hebrew word in the list was given thirteen different meanings, some of which had no discernible relation to one another. Before this experience I had studied English, Norwegian, Latin and Greek, but the real impact of the sentence as the unit of thought had never really penetrated my mind. Hence, the frustration! Words have different meanings in different settings. This is true in every language. Ronald Knox points to the failure in translating the true meaning of the Hebrew word *shalom* because of a word for word tradition of translating *shalom* as peace, when it ought, in some places, be translated health or some such word.[2]

Whether it was the failure to understand the nature of language and communication or an excessive veneration for separate words or a lack of knowledge regarding translation from one language to another, the notion of word for word translation as "literal" or "true to the original" has

1. W. Schwarz, *Principles and Problems of Biblical Translation*. (Cambridge: The University Press, 1955), p. 1.
2. Ronald Knox, *The Trials of a Translator*. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1949), pp. 11, 12, 25.

hampered translation of the meaning of Scripture ever since the LXX began to come into being. As has been mentioned a single word might have quite a number of different meanings, as a glance at any dictionary will show. The Hebrew word *hesed* is rendered in KJ by eleven different renderings and these most certainly do not exhaust its meaning. Translators' attempts to render *hesed* consistently by a single word or phrase have proved to be impossible. "No two languages," says Eugene Nida, "correspond throughout in their words or grammatical usages, and such a literal type of translation actually distorts the facts of a language rather than reveals them."[3]

Not only do single words have different meanings, but, also, one idea is often conveyed by different words. What shall we do with synonyms? Perhaps because of the value we recognize in the Biblical text and the immense amount of analysis of the text through the years, we tend to find differences between words used synonymously, differences which do not really exist.

Repetition, though it conveys a number of ideas, like emphasis and distribution, is a common phenomenon in Hebrew, and in many, many cases is a vehicle of instruction. Parallel words, parallel phrases, and parallel clauses exist on every page of the Old Testament, and is not unknown in the New Testament. In the KJ of Isaiah 1:18 which is more red—scarlet, red or crimson? Again in the KJ, the ideas in the word "love" come from more than a half dozen words in the Hebrew Old Testament and from two basic words in the Greek New Testament. Now all these words in Hebrew or in Greek might not be adequately translated by the single English word "love." Nevertheless, the KJ version does now translate these various words by one single English word. Though the Biblical words translated "love" in KJ might not be wholly synonymous, the English word "love" was thought to convey their meaning (in the places where so translated) better than any other English word.

May we digress a moment? In regard to style rather than meaning, repetition in ancient Hebrew usage does not correspond to modern English usage. Where the Hebrew said, "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob," would not a modern writer of English say, "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," or, perhaps, "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob's God?"

What shall be done with the Hebrew word *heneh?* In modern English no such figure of speech as "behold" is used. A word for word translation of this word cannot be made in common English. The modern Jewish version of the pentateuch *The Torah* often leaves it untranslated.[4] The repetition of the conjunction *wah* as the first word of hundreds of sentences

3. Eugene A. Nida, *Bible Translating*. (New York: American Bible Society, 1947), p. 12.
4. *The Torah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1962). For example, Exodus 2:6; 3:2, 9 etc.

and as the conjunction introductory to clauses of many sorts cannot be duplicated in good English.

Some Biblical figures of speech do not correspond with English figures of speech. The meaning of the separate words does not give the meaning of the words in combination. In Exodus 5:21 several words for a bad odor are used. KJ translates: "...you have made our savour to be abhorred in the eyes of pharaoh." It is a bit difficult to understand how pharaoh sees a bad odor. ASV stayed with the KJ translation here, but RSV improves the translation a little by departing from the Hebrew figure of speech with the translation "...you have made us offensive in the sight of pharaoh." Whatever words should be used to translate the figure of speech the individual meanings of the words will not produce the meaning of the words in combination when translated into common English. The combination doubtless means that they were made offensive or hateful to pharaoh.

In the Bible some ejaculatory utterances appear to convey feelings more than specific ideas—or along with specific ideas. Perhaps this is true of *heneh* in many instances. In the New Testament, how can one translate adequately μὴ γένοιτο ? Certainly the KJ "God forbid" is not a translation of the meaning of the individual words. Will any other English phrase translating the negation of this form of γίνομαι translate the feeling in the phrase any better? Words which indicate emotion or emphasis rather than strictly didactic meanings cannot be literally translated.

Syntactical variations between the Biblical languages and English make word for word translation utterly hopeless. The Hebrew sign of the definite direct object has no corresponding form in English. It is simply not to be translated. The Hebrew sign of the relative often has no translation. The relationship of a verb to its object has many variations in Hebrew and English syntax. In Isaiah 1:15 one might translate word for word, "Your hands are full blood." No preposition is present in Hebrew. The verb means "full of," someone might say, and this is certainly correct in this place. This verb, however, is not always to be translated "full of." Many other verbs have like relations to objects, no preposition being used in places where English does use a preposition. Conversely, Hebrew sometimes uses prepositions where English does not. In Lamentations 1:17, we read (KJ): "Zion spreadeth forth her hands." Hebrew has the inseparable preposition *beh* indicating the instrumental character of hands, which, word for word, might be translated "with." In English no preposition is used in this type of construction. To translate the Hebrew preposition into any English word would be inaccurate. Translations which attempt word for word literalness, like that of Aquila do violence to the syntactical structure of the language into which the original is being translated. "Every detail of the text," says Bleddyn Roberts about the Aquila translation, "was rendered as precisely as possible, nor did

the author shrink from perpetrating outrages on the whole structure of the Greek language."[5]

Can there be no consistency in the translation of words as words? Certainly there can be some consistency. There should be as much consistency as the sense of the words in context allow. Words do have a limited number of meanings and a limited number of translation possibilities. All attempts to translate are, most surely, attempts to convey that which the original text says, whether the method of translation be word for word, sense for sense, or an explanatory paraphrase. One must begin with the realization that no translation is adequate to convey all the meaning in an original text. No translation will prove to be a total exposition of the text one is translating. As James Kelso writes: "A translation is comparable to a photograph in black and white; it is only in the original text that you get a true color photograph."[6]

It is possible, then, to be overly ambitious in the work of translation. The objective of one's particular translation must be set. Because of its excessive literalism Aquila's translation was highly regarded by those who knew Hebrew. The Hebrew text could be reconstructed from Aquila's Greek. It, however, was not a translation which readily gave the message of the Bible to the Greek public.

According to Ronald Knox, a translation must be accurate, intelligible and readable.[7] To this the basic requirements of translation as listed by Eugene Nida agree. Dr. Nida says that a translation, (1) must represent the customary usage of the native language, (2) must make sense, and (3) must conform to the meaning of the original.[8] In order to accomplish these objectives, both Knox and Nida reject anything resembling word for word "literal" translation.

Variant methods of translation existed very early in the Church. On the one hand Aquila "produced a version which did not sound at all like Greek," while Symmachus "produced a new translation...designed to be not merely accurate but also in good Greek."[9] Jerome vacillates in his method. In some prefaces he says that "he does not render word for word, but sense for sense, while in others he maintains that he translates partly the words, partly the sense."[10] Though these variations occur early, a definite change in procedure and general approach to translation appeared through the years. In general, idea translation or sense translation is a child of the renaissance and the reformation. Based on philological

5. Bleddyn Roberts, *The Old Testament Text and Versions.* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1951), p. 121.
6. James L. Kelso, *Archaeology and our Old Testament Contemporaries.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1966), p. 16.
7. Knox, *op. cit.,* pp. 25 ff.
8. Nida, *op. cit.,* p. 13.
9. Ernst Wurthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament.* (New York: MacMillan, 1957), p. 38.
10. Schwarz, *op. cit.,* p. 34.

methodology, as Schwarz shows,[11] following a development through Jerome, Reuchlin, Erasmus and Luther, sense translation triumphed.

Nida doesn't like "Translation of Ideas" much more than "Literal Translations." Instead of either of these approaches, "Translations Based Upon Closest Equivalents" is proposed. This, it is claimed, is a "middle ground between two extremes." The principle of closest equivalence, it is alleged, "is designed to avoid awkward literalness on the one hand and unjustified interpretations on the other."[12] Whatever terms are employed to describe method, it is certain that translation of the truth of God, the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament, cannot be either excessively word for word or excessively free. Nida's principles of closest equivalence describes reasonably well the method to be followed and the goal to be achieved.

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11. *Ibid.*
12. Nida, *op. cit.,* p. 12.