

CHAPTER 9

LANGUAGE AND TRANSLATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

JOHN ELWOLDE

INTRODUCTION

After a brief linguistic sketch of the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Bible (see also Elwolde, forthcoming; McCarter 2004; Creason 2004), this article focuses on the inherent difficulty of ascertaining meaning in the Hebrew Bible (or, in the Christian tradition, the Old Testament, without the deuterocanonical, or apocryphal, books), from both a textual and a linguistic perspective. In order to make this topic accessible to non-specialists, most of the examples employed relate to vocabulary and phraseology. The lens through which the issue will be viewed is mainly that of translations, in particular the most important of the ancient versions, the Old Greek (more loosely, the Septuagint, or LXX, much of which was completed in the late third and second centuries BCE (see Conybeare and Stock 2001 [1905]; Jobes and Silva 2000)), but also other ancient versions and modern translations. The difficulties of translating from Hebrew into other languages, because of differences in the ways that languages (and speakers of those languages) structure the world, will only occasionally be referred to. Accessible presentations of the kind of issues encountered may be found in Clark and Hatton 2004 and other items in the same series.

BIBLICAL HEBREW AND ARAMAIC: LINGUISTIC OVERVIEW

Although the Bible contains material that is diverse in genre, date, and provenance, from after the Exile up to the early Middle Ages this diverse material underwent a process of standardization that gave it a strong veneer of linguistic unity. As for texts actually composed during this post-exilic period, there is evidence both for ignorance of Hebrew and for the encroachment of Aramaic on spoken and literary usage (see Neh. 8, 8, 13: 24, and contrast with 2 Kgs. 18: 26–8). Post-exilic texts seem to reflect the more or less artificial employment of the pre-exilic ‘classical’ literary language, which no longer existed as a spoken medium, as well as influence from a vernacular dialect of Hebrew, from the north of the country, which would eventually find its literary expression in the ‘rabbinic Hebrew’ of the Mishnah (see Pérez Fernández 1997). However, before the Exile it is reasonable to assume that the Hebrew found in the Bible flourished as a literary language, and there is no positive evidence to suggest that the spoken language was significantly different, at least in the southern kingdom. A language somewhat different from that found in this ‘classical Hebrew’ of pre-exilic prose texts is seen in the remnants of the Bible’s earliest, poetic literature. This poetry is usually thought to represent a northern literary idiom that reflects contact with the language and literature of Israel’s Canaanite antecedents and Aramaic-speaking neighbours (see Hadas-Lebel 1995).

The alphabet familiar to us as ‘Hebrew’ is in fact the Aramaic script, used for writing Hebrew after the Exile. A form of the older Hebrew script, found in many Hebrew inscriptions from the pre-exilic period, was retained by the Samaritans. It also continued to be used occasionally, for example, at Qumran in some biblical manuscripts and for writing the divine name, and at the time of the Bar Kochba Revolt (132–5 CE) on coins signalling a hoped-for return to former glory. Hebrew (and Aramaic) is read from right to left and employs twenty-two letters for the representation of up to twenty-nine consonants. In order to ensure that a reader does not confuse, for example, *dabar* (‘word’) with *dibber* (‘he spoke’) or *deber* (‘plague’), small marks, or ‘points’ to indicate vowels and other phonetic information are added to this purely consonantal writing system. In the system of ‘pointing’ found in the Tiberian Masoretic Text (see below), nine basic vowel signs, each one on its own or in combination with another vowel sign or a consonant, represent fourteen or fifteen different vowels.

The basic (or ‘dictionary’) form of most Hebrew words tends to be either mono- or bi-syllabic, with the stress generally falling on the final syllable, at least in the Tiberian system. Hebrew nouns and adjectives do not employ case-endings (for nominative, accusative, or genitive), although there are two genders, unmarked

(masculine) and marked (feminine). Typical ‘feminine’ markers for nouns and adjectives are *-a* or *-et* in the singular and *-ot* (as against ‘masculine’ *-im*) in the plural.

Verbless sentences, in which a subject and complement are simply juxtaposed, without the verb ‘to be’, are common, as are verbs expressing states of being: ‘be big’, ‘be old’, etc. Central elements of the Hebrew verb system include the ‘perfect’, which states that such-and-such an action has taken place (typically, rendered by past forms in English) and the ‘imperfect’, where the focus is on the unfolding of the action or process denoted (typically rendered in English by present, future, conditional, or subjunctive forms). There are also two additional conjugations, traditionally called *waw*-consecutives. The best-known feature of these forms is that, broadly speaking, the conjugation that looks most like the ‘imperfect’ functions as though it were a ‘perfect’, and vice versa. In general, the use of the different forms of the Hebrew verb is dictated not by considerations of time but by often subtle constraints of word order and of previous choices in the verbal system. A series of ‘derived conjugations’, in which the basic form of a verb is modified by the addition of prefixes, duplication of consonants, or changes of vowels, allows Hebrew to express regular modifications of meaning (passive, reflexive, reciprocal, causative, intensive, etc.): e.g. *šabar* (simple conjugation) (‘he broke’); *šubar* (passive-intensive) (‘he was shattered’). Hebrew has a variety of conjunctions, although it also frequently employs simple co-ordination of clauses with *we-* (‘and’) instead of using subordinate clauses. English clauses of the type ‘when he does’ are typically construed in Hebrew as ‘in (or “as”) his doing’. See Joüon 1993; Lambdin 1973.

Aramaic and Hebrew are not mutually intelligible dialects, but separate languages, each with a wealth of literary and spoken traditions that go well beyond the evidence of the Bible (see Beyer 1986; Fitzmyer 1979; Sáenz-Badillos 1993). However, contact between the Hebrew and Aramaic languages and their speakers dates from the very beginnings of Israel’s history (see Gen. 31: 47; Deut. 26: 5) and continued through the intertestamental period and beyond (see Lemaire 1988). Many words in the Aramaic portions of the Bible (Dan. 2: 4–7: 28; Ezra 4: 8–6: 18; 7: 12–26) have recognizable cognates in the Hebrew sections, and there are numerous Aramaisms in biblical Hebrew (and Hebraisms in biblical Aramaic). Obvious features that distinguish biblical Aramaic from Hebrew include Aramaic’s use of a suffixed—rather than prefixed—definite article, e.g. *bayt-a* (‘the house’) (Hebrew *hab-bayit*), the object marker *le-* (rarely *yat*) rather than Hebrew *’et*, *di* (‘which, that, because’) (Hebrew *’ašer*), *man* ‘who?’ (Hebrew *mi*), *la* ‘no, not’ (Hebrew *lo*), and *’itay* ‘there is’ (Hebrew *yeš*). See Rosenthal 1995.

THE HEBREW BIBLE AND THE MASORETIC TEXT

We often speak of ‘the Hebrew text of the Bible’, as though there were one Bible and one Hebrew text. Both assumptions are problematic. Against the notion of ‘one Bible’, we only need to remind ourselves of the use of deuterocanonical books by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Rite churches, preceded by Hellenistic Jews and by the Dead Sea Scrolls community, where the ‘apocryphal’ or ‘pseudepigraphic’ works of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Tobit, *1 Enoch*, and *Jubilees* are attested in their original Hebrew and/or Aramaic forms. As for ‘the Hebrew text’, the evidence of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the LXX is that a variety of Hebrew text traditions existed prior to 70 CE (see Tov 2001; Abegg, Flint, and Ulrich 1999). In short, the picture we have of Judaism from the third century BCE to the first century CE is that of diversity—in beliefs and practice, in canon, and in text.

After 70 CE, one text became overwhelmingly dominant in Judaism (and, especially after the Reformation, in Christianity). That text underlies the so-called Masoretic Text (MT), found today in standard editions of the Hebrew Bible. ‘Masorete’ may be understood as ‘tradent’ or ‘one who hands down’ the biblical text. Individual Masoretes were associated with one of the various Masoretic ‘schools’ or traditions that were active from the sixth to the tenth century CE.

The MT is the result of the fixing, by Masoretes, of the consonantal text into a particular linguistic shape through the ‘pointing’ of the text with this secondary information. Pointing denotes the overlaying of marks on the consonantal text in order accurately to represent its liturgical recitation, grammatical structure, and pronunciation (see Yeivin 1980). It is obvious that once the exact linguistic shape is thus fixed, so also, to a large extent, is the interpretation of the text. The Masoretes also incorporated into biblical manuscripts the *masorah*, a detailed system of notes relating to the text, mainly of a statistical-linguistic nature (see Kelley, Mynatt, and Crawford 1998). The Masoretic tradition that became by far the most important was associated with the town of Tiberias. Because all Masoretic manuscripts, Tiberian or other, rely in principle on the same consonantal text, differences among later biblical manuscripts and, ultimately, printed editions are relatively minor.

That consonantal text (or one very similar to it) preceded the start of Masoretic activity by up to eight centuries, as evidenced by the existence of biblical texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls that vary very little from the MT. This text, which we shall call for convenience ‘MT precursor’, can be compared and contrasted with other ancient consonantal texts that display some degree of substantive difference from it. In some cases, these different Hebrew texts are directly available to us: for example, the Samaritan Pentateuch and those biblical manuscripts from the Dead Sea Scrolls that differ from MT precursor. MT precursor can also be compared with

the hypothetical *Vorlage* (underlying Hebrew text) of the LXX or other ancient versions (obtained by ‘retroverting’ or back-translating into Hebrew).

In practice, when biblical scholars or Bible translators speak of ‘the Hebrew text’, they mean in general the Tiberian MT, although they will rather often diverge from it in respect of boundaries between clauses and (somewhat less) in the vocalization of words. Here, then, scholars might be said to have returned to MT precursor. Less frequent, but hardly uncommon, is the adoption of a reading (extant or retroverted) that differs even from that text. For example, if we combine the footnotes referring to the Dead Sea Scrolls in NRSV, REB, CEV, and NIV, we find that in some 135 different verses (the majority being from 1 and 2 Samuel and Isaiah) evidence from the Scrolls has been utilized.

CHANGES FROM (POINTED) MT TO (UNPOINTED) MT PRECURSOR

If a translator or interpreter approaches the text in its consonantal form only, the opportunities for readings of the text other than those established in MT are multiplied. For example, at Gen. 47: 31, the form *mṯh*, vocalized in MT as *miṯṯa* (‘couch’) is interpreted by LXX as *mate* (‘staff’). At the close of Exod. 5: 16, there is a difficult sequence, vocalized in MT as *weḥaṭat ‘ammeka* (‘You are unjust to your own people’) (NRSV; cf. LXX). However, unvocalized the sequence is open to interpretation as: ‘(this is) the sin of your people’ or ‘your people have sinned’ or even ‘the sin is with you’ (reading, with Symmachus, whose Greek translation appeared between 150 and 250 CE (see Salvesen 1991), the preposition *im* (‘with’) for the noun *‘am* (‘people’)).

According to the Masoretic accents, Prov. 26: 17 reads, literally, ‘one who seizes the ears of a dog is a passer-by who becomes angry over a dispute that is not his’. However, many modern translations effectively change this word division and interpret *‘ober* (‘one passing’) (hence ‘passer-by’) as modifying ‘dog’: ‘one who seizes the ears of a passing dog is one who becomes angry...’. A well-known ancient example of this phenomenon relates to Isa. 40: 3, where the LXX, followed by the New Testament, understands ‘A voice crying in the wilderness, “Prepare...”’ whereas the Masoretic punctuation as well as the parallelism of the verse supports interpretation as ‘A voice crying, “In the wilderness prepare...”’.

Elsewhere, the redistribution of text can cross the boundaries of the Masoretic verse division. (It should be borne in mind here that early Hebrew manuscripts, from Qumran and elsewhere, do not make any obvious mark between verses even

though they clearly do mark a space between different sections of text, which broadly correspond to those found in Masoretic Manuscripts.) For example, at Hos. 4: 11 we read in MT that various activities ‘take (away) the heart’. The next verse then reads ‘My people consult . . .’. However, LXX takes ‘my people’ with the ‘heart’ of the preceding verse, and then reads the verb of v. 12 without an explicit subject: ‘. . . take away the heart of my people. They consult . . .’. Even within the words of MT (rather than between them), a different division of the text is sometimes argued to yield a ‘better’ sense. For example, at Jer. 8: 4, we have a difficult text that appears to say ‘will they fall and not arise; will he return and not return (*’im yašub welo’ yašub*)?’ Following the lead of LXX, most translations extract sense from this by interpreting the repeated verb in two slightly different senses, ‘turn away’ and ‘turn back’. However, the Masoretic notes (*masorah*) to this passage offer a different solution (not, of course, necessarily the correct one): namely, to redistribute the consonants and to read *’im yašubu lo’ yašub* (‘if they turn (away) he will not turn (away)’).

Such rereadings of the consonantal text have been part of mainstream Jewish interpretation. A striking example is provided by the great eleventh-century exegete Rashi, on Gen. 1: 1. Rashi points out that the first word of the Bible, *berēšit*, is most naturally taken to mean ‘at the beginning of’. But with the following word, *br*, pointed in MT as *bara* ‘(God) created’, *berēšit* has to be taken as ‘in the beginning’ (without ‘of’) in order to yield any grammatical sense (‘in the beginning God created . . .’). To resolve this dilemma, Rashi suggests reading the second word not as *bara* but as *bero* ‘(God’s) creating of’. With this slight modification towards expected grammar, the beginning of the Bible may be read as ‘At the beginning of God’s creating of the heavens and the earth, when the earth was . . ., God said . . .’ (cf. NJPS). Short of Rashi’s solution, there really is no way out of the impasse—one must either slip quickly by the grammar, as most translations (including LXX) and John 1: 1 do, or invoke ‘hidden’ senses of the *be-* or the *rešit*, as many early Jewish and Christian interpretations do.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MT AND NON-MASORETIC TRADITIONS

MT itself will occasionally incorporate what might be an ancient textual variant (not merely a re-pointing) that has been rejected by the Masoretes. For example, at Gen. 38: 14 the Masoretes reject the reading *whw’ lw’ ntnh* (‘and he did not give

her'), followed by LXX and Theodotion (mid-second-century CE translator into Greek) and impose *why' lw' ntnh* ('and she was not given'), followed by Aquila (early second-century CE translator into Greek), Symmachus (see above), the Samaritan Pentateuch, and Targum Onqelos (an Aramaic explanatory translation undertaken between the first and fifth centuries CE). At Judg. 18: 30, the earliest form of the Hebrew text probably read 'Moses', but to this name an extra, raised, consonant has been added (and different vowels overlaid) so as to give 'Manasseh', a more appropriate candidate for the ancestor of a priest of a non-Jerusalemite cult! (Manuscripts of LXX vary between the two readings; the Vulgate (Latin translation or revision completed in the fifth century CE) has 'Moses'.)

Other substantive variations between MT precursor and different ancient Hebrew text traditions include the following features. A significantly different word may be used at a given place, for example 'the sixth day' as the one on which God finished the work of creation (Gen. 2: 2) in the Samaritan Pentateuch and the *Vorlage* of LXX and Peshitta (Syriac translation perhaps dating mainly from the first and second centuries CE) instead of 'the seventh day' of MT (and Vulgate), or Mt Gerizim as the mountain on which the tablets of the law were to be placed, according to the Samaritan Pentateuch, as against Mt Ebal in MT (Deut. 27: 4). Additional words may be found—for example, those that Cain said to Abel before they went out into the field (Gen. 4: 8), which are supplied in the Samaritan Pentateuch ('let us go out into the field'), LXX, Vulgate, and Peshitta, but which are not found in MT, the Dead Sea Scrolls, or in Targum Onqelos. Another example is the word 'light' as the object of the 'suffering servant's' sight at Isa. 53: 11, in both Isaiah scrolls from Qumran.

A much larger-scale addition to MT is represented by, for example, 1 Sam. 11: 1. Here LXX includes the words 'And it happened after about a month' not found in MT. Much more dramatically, 4QSam^a has not only these words (in Hebrew) but also, before them, a quite lengthy description of the conflict between Nahash and the people of Gad and Reuben, an account that tallies with the one transmitted by Josephus. NRSV adds the text from 4QSam^a.

Other major differences include the significantly shorter versions of Job and Jeremiah found in LXX. In the case of Jeremiah (where LXX and MT also have substantially different orderings of the text), the Qumran biblical manuscripts represent both longer and shorter versions. The Dead Sea Scrolls (as, to a certain extent, the LXX) display differences, with respect to MT, in the order and content of the Psalms. The LXX has longer versions of (or additional material in), for example, Esther and Daniel, as well as entire books that have no counterpart in MT, even though some of these, such as Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) and Tobit, have been found in their original Hebrew (or Aramaic) versions at Qumran and elsewhere.

ASCERTAINING ‘EARLIER’ READINGS

Of course, aside from such major differences it is almost impossible to be certain at any point that a version (Greek, Latin, Syriac) did not read what MT now has but modified it in some way, consciously or by accident and for any one or more of a number of reasons. The same broadly applies to small-scale substantive differences in other Hebrew texts (Qumran, Samaritan). But what we can say is that Hebrew text traditions other than the tradition represented by MT existed in the third century BCE to the first century CE. However, it should be emphasized that by and large where they share the same material (i.e. outside of the cases represented by Job, Jeremiah, and the deuterocanonical/apocryphal books) there is a very high degree of correspondence between these texts and the consonantal text of MT.

We can never be absolutely certain about which is the ‘earlier’ text in any given instance. As a possible example of where LXX might reflect a form of the text prior to MT (or MT precursor), see Ps. 75: 6 (EVV 5), where MT reads *tedabberu bešawwa’r ‘ataq* (‘you (are not to) speak with a neck impudence’). However, LXX has ‘do not speak against God unrighteousness’, where (leaving aside the difference between ‘impudence’ and ‘unrighteousness’) it seems clear that the translator has read a text that instead of *šw’r*, which could only be vocalized as *šaww’ar* (‘neck’), had *šwr*, which could be vocalized either as *šawwar* (‘neck’) (i.e. a variant spelling of *šaww’ar*) or as *šur* (‘rock’), interpreted by LXX as a title for God. It seems likely here that LXX (here followed by REB) represents an earlier form of the text, with *šwr*, to which the tradition represented by MT has inserted an aleph (’) in order to ensure a ‘neck’ reading over a ‘rock’ one.

On the other hand, at the end of Hos. 14: 3 (EVV 2) MT reads literally ‘and we will repay bulls, our lip’, which appears to mean ‘we will offer in sacrifice words (of praise, thanksgiving) instead of, or alongside, animals’, a sentiment consistent with the beginning of the verse: ‘take with you words and return to Y’. But LXX (followed by NRSV) has ‘and we will repay the fruit of our lips’, which seems to reflect a reading of the text not as *parim šep̄atenu* (*prym šptnw*) but as *peri miššep̄otenu* (‘fruit from our lips’) (*pry mšptnw*) or (invoking the use of ‘enclitic mem’) *peri-m šep̄otenu* (‘fruit of our lips’). However, it is far from clear that LXX has preserved a more original reading here. Instead, it is possible that the translator simply misread the Hebrew text, perhaps under the influence of the expression ‘fruit of the lips’, which occurs in Hebrew and Greek Jewish sources later than the Hebrew Bible, but is not attested (elsewhere) within it.

A more certain example of a mistake in LXX is at Gen. 18: 12, where the LXX translator seems to have read *dnh* not, as in MT, as *edna* (‘(sexual) pleasure’) but as *adēna* (‘thus far’), found at Eccles. 4: 2. The form *adēna* almost certainly derives from a variety of the Hebrew language other than that represented by pre-exilic, ‘classical’ prose. Its use at Gen. 18: 12 is one indication of the influence on the

Greek translators of more or less colloquial and dialectal, ‘post-classical’, forms of Hebrew as well as by Aramaic, which was probably more familiar to them than Hebrew of any kind. This Aramaic influence is reflected in some LXX transliterations of the Hebrew text, based on Aramaic rather than Hebrew (e.g. *pascha* (‘Passover’), *sabbata* (‘Sabbath’)), and occasionally a Greek translator has understood a Hebrew word as though it were Aramaic. For example, at Isa. 9: 4 (EVV 5), in a difficult text, *bedamim* has been understood not as ‘with blood’ but (as in Aramaic) as ‘in compensation’. Studies of the techniques of the LXX translators include Olofsson 1990; Beck 2000; Sollamo and Sipilä 2001.

In various biblical passages, it has been argued that the present text of MT is the result of confusion in the transition from the earlier, Hebrew script to the later, Aramaic one (see above). For example, at Ps. 137: 5, ‘if I forget you, Jerusalem, my right hand will forget’ has been emended to ‘... I will forget my right hand’ by pointing to the similarity between the third person feminine prefix (taw, *t*) in the older alphabet and the first person one (aleph, *’*) in the Aramaic alphabet. Similarly, 1 Sam. 24: 11, ‘and he said to kill you, but she had pity upon you’ has been resolved by the same device, ‘... but I had mercy upon you’, in this case supported by LXX. It has also been claimed that MT precursor (or its predecessor) incorporated a number of abbreviations. For example, at Deut. 32: 35, MT reads ‘to me [*ly*] is vengeance, and repaying at the time their foot slips’. However, here LXX has ‘on the day of vengeance’, a reading that seems to reflect Hebrew *lywm*, which is precisely what we find in the Samaritan Pentateuch, in parallelism with *l’t* (‘at the time’) (cf. REB, CEV). On the other hand, at Judg. 19: 18 LXX has ‘my house’, and many modern translations (and Nova Vulgata (a recent papally authorized revision of the Vulgate intended to represent scholarly editions of the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible)) assume that *bet yhwh* (‘house of Y’) in MT is the result of an early misunderstanding of the first person possessive suffix (*beti* (*byty*) (‘my house’)) as an abbreviation for the tetragrammaton.

For relatively accessible presentations of text-critical matters, such as those presented above, see Barthélemy *et al.* 1976–80; Hognesius 2003; de Waard 2003; see also Schenker 2004.

CORRUPT, OR DIFFICULT, TEXTS

Sequences in MT from which no acceptable sense, from a purely linguistic perspective, can be squeezed are rare indeed. On the other hand, there are not a few passages that, although formally coherent, are counter-intuitive or inconsistent with the rest

of the text itself or with our knowledge or expectations of the world. For example at the end of 2 Sam. 4: 10, we read *'ašer letitti lo bešora* ('which was for my giving him good news'). This sequence, while by no means incomprehensible, seems out of place in context. The simplest remedy would seem to be to assume a confusion of the yodh (*y*) of *lty* (*letitti*) and the waw (*w*) of *lw* (*lo*), which are frequently difficult to distinguish, for example in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and to assume an original *letitto li* ('... for his giving me...'). At 1 Sam. 13: 8, *lammo'ed 'ašer šemu'el* ('at the appointment which was Samuel'), although grammatical, lacks obvious meaning. Here, the least intrusive solution (although not necessarily the correct one) is to revocalize *'ašer* ('that, which') as *'iššer* ('he had blessed'), i.e. 'at the appointment Samuel had blessed' (cf. Vulgate); alternatively, various manuscripts of MT read *'ašer sam šemu'el* ('which Samuel had placed'), suggesting that *sam* might have been omitted by mistake at some point due to confusion with the *šem-* of *šemu'el*. At 1 Sam. 13: 1, MT says that Saul was 'a year old' when he became king. The Vulgate renders literally, but LXX lacks the entire verse (which contains another significant difficulty), and modern English versions almost unanimously insert an ellipsis marker: 'Saul was... years old when he became king' (NJPS). Here, short of following ancient interpreters in claiming that the text means that Saul was as naïve as a one-year-old, acceptance of textual corruption in MT or its precursor appears inevitable. However, in such instances, even where there is an alternative Hebrew text tradition or versional evidence that appears to give a 'better' reading, we should also be aware of the possibility that the alternative tradition was faced with the same text as we have in MT but 'improved' it in some way.

PROBLEMS OF COHERENCE AND CONSISTENCY

In the preceding examples, a degree of incongruity was immediately obvious. However, in other cases the problem of linguistic or logical coherence arises only within a somewhat larger context than that of the sentence or verse. For example, Gen. 3: 21 speaks of God making for Adam and Eve 'tunics of skin', although the slaughter of animals, at least for food, had not yet been sanctioned (cf. Gen. 1: 29; 9: 2–4). Early translators and interpreters saw a problem here and solved it in various ways. A lexical solution was to see in the Hebrew *'or* ('skin') an equivalent of *'or* ('light'); i.e. God covered them with light (cf. Targum Onqelos: *lebušin diqar* ('garments of honour')). A lexico-grammatical solution was to interpret the skin

as belonging to Adam and Eve, not to an animal, and to understand the genitive ('of') construction as conveying the sense of 'for', i.e. 'tunics for their bodies'. A third solution might be called referential: the text was retained in its regular sense, but the skin was taken to be that of the serpent, which periodically sheds its skin.

Whereas Gen. 3: 21 seems to point to a lacuna in our information, Gen. 2: 17 shows two apparent inconsistencies. The first concerns the addressee. In MT it is clearly Adam alone who is spoken to (as Eve had not yet been sculpted): 'you shall not eat . . . ; when you eat . . . you will die', with singular forms throughout. However, LXX, probably with an eye to Eve's reporting of the same words at Gen. 3: 3, switches from singular 'you' in v. 16 to the plural in v. 17. Gen. 2: 17 conceals another problem of inconsistency, in that quite plainly neither Adam nor Eve fell down dead on the day they ate from the forbidden tree. In connection with this verse we can see in the translation of Symmachus how a translator can be at one point more faithful to the text (more 'literal') and at another more interpretative. Unlike LXX, Symmachus renders 'you shall not eat' (etc.) as a singular, in line with the Hebrew; however, later in the verse, perturbed like many by the apparent non-fulfilment of the punishment stated, Symmachus does not, like LXX, render quite literally, but adds a modifying interpretation: 'you will become mortal'. It is, of course, not entirely impossible that this was the meaning intended by the Hebrew (and this interpretation is broadly followed in ancient times by, for example, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, and in modern times by, among others, REB). However, we should note that although the translator has tried to make sense of the text and to help the reader, in presenting one particular interpretation that crystallizes his own exegetical and theological insight into the passage he has removed from the reader the possibility of reaching a different conclusion (albeit one that the translator might regard as erroneous).

INSUFFICIENT INFORMATION

A different kind of problem is faced when we understand the immediate meaning of a word or a sequence of words, but do not possess sufficient information, either from the literary context in which it appears or from our knowledge of the world of the author, to decide exactly to what it refers. For example, at Deut. 32: 36, *'azelat yad* (literally '(their) hand has gone'), although it seems clear that the 'hand' is figurative of strength or power, the combination of the fact that the verb *'azal* can mean both 'come' and 'go' and that the possessor of the 'hand' is not specified means that it is unclear whether the 'going of the hand' refers to the draining away

of Israelite power (as is normally assumed), or, as Targum Onqelos and Rashi interpret, the progress of enemy strength.

At Job 31: 27, literally, ‘and my hand has kissed my mouth’, even when we move past the curious image of the mouth receiving rather than giving a kiss, we are really no wiser as to what is being referred to here (beyond the action described). From the context provided, it is likely that some kind of idolatrous gesture is intended, but we do not have sufficient access to the cultural world of the author of Job to go much beyond this. Moreover, only the most attentive of readers or listeners is likely to make the association, through context, with idolatry, so translations have a choice of effectively leaving the reader in the dark or incorporating information that the original readers or listeners might have had in their minds: cf. TEV: ‘honour them by kissing my hand in reverence to them’.

In some cases, even when we have a reasonably extended section of text, we cannot be quite sure of what the real thrust of the piece is. For example, at Mal. 2: 10–16, although unfaithfulness is clearly being addressed and marital imagery is clearly employed, it is far from evident that what is being specifically denounced is intermarriage of Israelite men with foreign women (and the concomitant divorcing of their Israelite wives), priestly betrayal of the covenant with Levi, or introduction of non-Yahwistic elements into the cult. Part of the problem here is that terms that have a clear application in one context can be used, by extension, or figuratively, in other quite different ones (see Ogden 1988).

WORDS OF AMBIGUOUS OR UNCERTAIN REFERENCE

Related to the preceding problem is the fact that frequently a word will have two or more quite distinct senses, and on some occasions it is difficult to decide which is the most appropriate one. A case in point is the verb *qana*, which generally means ‘to take possession of’ or, more specifically, ‘to buy’, but occasionally signifies ‘to create’ (a meaning associated with the cognate verb *in*, for example, Ugaritic). This meaning has been seen at Gen. 4: 1; 14: 19, 22; Deut. 32: 6; Ps. 139: 13, and Prov. 8: 22. Of particular interest here are the first passage and the last one. In the case of the last passage there is clearly an enormous theological difference between wisdom being ‘acquired’ by God, as a prerequisite of his creative activity (in which case wisdom clearly existed, alongside God, before creation; cf. Job 28: 23–7), and its being ‘created’ by him, in which case the absolute sovereignty of God is maintained.

Against this background we should probably understand the LXX's choice of the verb *ktizo* ('establish, create') here (and in a dependent passage at Sir. 1: 9).

At Gen. 4: 1, *qaniti 'iš 'et yhw*, the issue of what *qana* means (did Eve acquire a man or create one?) is complicated by uncertainty about the meaning of the particle *'et*. One line of interpretation takes *'et* to be the object marker; cf. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (completed after the seventh century CE): 'I acquired a man, an angel of Y' (in allusion to Cain's demonic paternity). In general, though, the preposition *'et* is understood here, not in the usual sense, 'with', but 'by means of', 'with the help of', a sense which, however, is only rarely attested (cf. e.g. Judg. 8: 7). Attempting to conserve the more usual sense of prepositional *'et*, Rashi, basing himself on an earlier tradition, interprets as 'I have become a partner with God in creation' (as against the earlier creation of Adam and Eve by God alone). The interpretative tradition also reflects doubt about the identity of the 'man' (*'iš*). He is generally taken to be Eve's son, Cain, but outside this context the term would more naturally be expected to refer to her husband, Adam. Hence, an early tradition interprets as 'behold, I (re)gain my husband through Y'. Here, then, we have an example of a recurrent basic issue in translation: namely, how to understand an ambiguous or difficult word when an equal amount of uncertainty is attached to the other words that we need to be able to understand in order to provide an interpretation, through context, of the first word!

REFERENCE, CONNOTATION, AND FOCUS

Even when a word appears to have just one, quite concrete meaning, it is frequently difficult precisely to identify the referent. For example, at Lev. 11: 22, what exactly are the four types of creature mentioned? We assume that all are, loosely speaking, 'locusts', of one kind or another, because the first item (*'arbe*) and the last one (*ḥaḡāb*) are well attested elsewhere in the Bible, apparently in this sense. But the other two words (*sol'am* and *ḥargol*) occur only in this verse. And even for the first two, our scientific identification is, ultimately, conjectural. In principle, all these uncertainties have to be faced before we start to think about translating the meanings we have decided upon into a language whose speakers have very limited experience of such creatures or languages which make less or more fine distinctions than Hebrew did (which has an additional five words referring to such insects!) To give another example, it is not certain whether the animals caught by Samson at Judg. 15: 4 were foxes, jackals, or a different creature. In the case of 'behemoth' (in form apparently the plural of *behema* ('beast')) at Job 40: 15, even though the next

four verses provide a description, translations are divided about the reference and the best way to present it to readers—contrast ‘the chief of beasts, the crocodile’ (REB), ‘the hippopotamus’ (CEV), ‘beasts’ (LXX), ‘Behemoth’ (Vulgate, NRSV, NJB, NJPS), ‘the monster Behemoth’ (TEV).

And once we determine what kind of animal we believe to have been signified in the Hebrew text, in many cases we also have to consider what associations such words (and referents) gave rise to in the minds of Hebrew-speakers (as reflected, for example, in the Bible’s use of simile and metaphor) and whether these associations are shared by the culture of those who will use the translation. It is clear, for example, that the number 40 in the Bible has a particular associative load that is difficult to determine and even harder to transmit to another language in a natural way. Or, from a different area of life, what similarity is there in fact or in social perception between a biblical priest (*kohen*) and a priest in a Roman Catholic, or an Orthodox, or a Protestant receptor community? More fundamentally, should we render the office of Melchizedek, Micaiah’s priest, Eli, and the priests of the Jerusalem Temple all by the same term, just because Hebrew does?

Colour terminology (see Brenner 1983) is another example of how complex it is to ascertain referential and associative meanings and then to convey these into another language. The basic problem is that words for apparently the same colour in different languages can cover a significantly different range of the same light spectrum. Sensitivity to this phenomenon must affect our understanding and rendering of, for example, the description of the first horse in Zech. 1: 8; 6: 2 (JPS, NEB: ‘bay’; NRSV, TEV, NJB: ‘red’), depending on whether we interpret the Hebrew colour term *’adom* as basically ‘earth-coloured’ (cf. *’adama* (‘earth’)), i.e. nearer to ‘brown’ (cf. the description of David in 1 Sam. 16: 12 or of the lover in Song 5: 10), or, as traditionally, nearer to ‘red’ (perhaps ‘blood-coloured’; cf. *dam* (‘blood’)). But then, in the case of the Zechariah passage there is also a different, more exegetical, element that enters our consideration: do we believe that the choice of colour is deliberately surreal (a *red* horse) because of the nature of the vision or because ‘red’ has some special symbolic value. In this connection, we should note that the connotations of colour terms in Hebrew do not necessarily correspond with those in other languages. For example, in view of the description of the lover at Song 5: 11, it is quite possible that at 1: 5 ‘black’ is a positive term (as LXX, NRSV: ‘I am black *and* beautiful’, REB, TEV), not negative (as Vulgate, NJB: ‘I am black, *but* lovely’, NJPS, CEV).

Kinship terms also represent a complex area. A simple example is Hebrew *’ah*, which can denote not only a male sibling (‘brother’) but also a nephew, a cousin, or another quite close male relative, and, very often, a ‘fellow tribesman’ or ‘compatriot’. After unravelling what exactly *’ah* does refer to in a particular biblical text, the translator can then sometimes be faced with significant perceptual mismatches between Hebrew and the receptor language—for example, if the receptor language has two complementary terms, one for ‘younger brother’, another for ‘older

brother'. For a translator, having to make such a referential distinction on each occasion is sometimes not only difficult but also theologically problematic (in the New Testament, when dealing with the 'brothers' of Jesus, for example).

Terms for emotions are also notoriously difficult. At Gen. 4: 5, what does the Hebrew, literally 'and it became heated for Cain', really mean? In LXX Cain is grieved, in Symmachus he feels angry, in Targum Onqelos he feels strongly.

In the same way that the precise reference of a word can shift from one text (or context) to another, so can its associative or connotative value. For example, outside Proverbs, NRSV consistently renders the adjective and verb from the Hebrew root *'rm* negatively, as '(be) crafty', '(show) craftiness', or '(be) cunning'. However, in Proverbs it always renders the same set of words positively, as '(be) prudent', '(show) prudence', or, more commonly, '(be) clever'. Similar remarks apply to the corresponding noun, *'orma*: 'treachery' (Exod. 21: 14), 'cunning' (Josh. 9: 4); but 'shrewdness' (Prov. 1: 4), 'prudence' (Prov. 8: 5, 12). NRSV (which is not alone in its choices here) might be correct in reserving the positive usage for Proverbs, but the fact that this positive usage is so well attested might also lead us to consider whether the statement about the serpent in Gen. 3: 1 was actually intended to be as negative as many translations take it to be or whether it simply reflected, more neutrally, ancient folk conceptions about the wisdom and immortality of the serpent (cf. LXX: *fronimos* ('wise'; NJPS: 'shrewd')).

Not infrequently, the associative value of a word is more important in a given text than its actual reference: for example, in the use of 'dog' at 1 Sam. 24: 15; 2 Sam. 9: 8, etc. Somewhat similarly, in words without a high associative value, the function of a particular referent rather than its form can be the most salient feature expressed by the Hebrew text. This distinction between form and function might underlie some of the renderings of the Hebrew *'ohel* ('tent') by the Greek words *oikos* and *oikia* (which normally translate the Hebrew *bayit* ('house')). For example, at Gen. 24: 67, in MT Isaac takes Rebekah into his mother's tent, but in LXX into her house; at Gen. 31: 33, Laban goes searching tent to tent in MT, but house to house in LXX; at Lev. 14: 8 the cleansed 'leper' has to leave his tent (MT)/house (LXX) and stay outside the encampment. Although exegetical motives might sometimes stand behind these changes, in others it seems likely that the LXX translators have used *oikos/oikia* as 'home', focusing on the function of the tent rather than on its form.

Failure to identify the primary semantic focus of a word in a particular passage can lead to distorted and even perverse renderings. For example, at Prov. 5: 7 (also discussed below), it is almost certain that the focus of the word *zara* (in MT) 'strange woman' is on the woman's 'foreignness'. That foreignness is either with regard to the kin group to which the author and reader belongs (in which case here the 'foreign woman', whether in a lawful or in an illicit relationship with an Israelite reader, is a potential risk to the reader's fidelity to his traditional religion) or with regard to the (male) reader himself (in which case the sense of *zara* is a woman, be

she married, single, and/or foreign, who is legally ‘unavailable’ to the reader). On either reading, the focus of *zara* is on the relationship of the author or reader to the woman, not on the character, moral or other, of that woman.

This focus is well captured by NJPS’s ‘forbidden woman’ (TEV’s ‘another man’s wife’ is too specific). LXX, which has *gune porne* (‘a woman, a prostitute’), might reflect a text that read *išša zona*, or simply *zona* (*znh*), for *zara* (*zrh*), but it is difficult to justify the *meretrix* (‘prostitute’) of the Vulgate, ‘adulteress’ of REB and NJB, ‘immoral woman’ of CEV, or the especially remarkable ‘loose woman’ of NRSV, which is not so much a translation as a radical transculturation!

Effectively, these renderings represent in differing degrees the imposition of the translator’s social background and moral judgements on a text that shares neither of these. Note in particular NJB, which, in addition to its choice of ‘adulteress’, also renders the neutral ‘smooth’ by the pejorative ‘unctuous’ later in the verse. We are sharply reminded that translation can never escape being an exercise in the ideological seizure of a text. The translator and his or her interior and exterior world always stand between the reader or hearer of a translation and the original text, and, in effect, guide the reader’s interpretation (at every level) of that text. For introductory surveys of linguistic, and especially, semantic issues in biblical interpretation, see Barr 1961; Sawyer 1972; Silva 1995; for problems in the transfer of meaning to receptor languages, see Larson 1998.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Language is pervaded by semantic extensions and figurative usages of a more or less striking character (see Bullinger 1898; Gibson 1998; Caird 1980). But what was immediately recognized as figurative in the culture that produced the source text may not be so apprehended by those who have access to that text only through non-mother-tongue knowledge of its language or through a translation. For example, at Ps. 24: 4 the point of ‘one innocent of palms and pure of heart’ is lost without the understanding (if necessary, incorporated in the translation) that the body parts here are metonymous for the actions and thoughts associated with them—CEV’s ‘Only those who do right for the right reasons’ is commendably adventurous here. In Jer. 47: 5, ‘baldness has come to Gaza’, there is both metonymy, i.e. baldness for the sense of mourning expressed by shaving the head, and synecdoche, of a place for the people living there, both well expressed by TEV: ‘Great sorrow has come to the people of Gaza’. Just as a place can stand for its people, so can part of a place stand for the whole, as in Gen. 22: 17, ‘and your seed

will inherit the gate of your enemies' (i.e. their city), and Ruth 4: 10, 'and the name of the deceased will not be cut off . . . from the gate of his place' (i.e. from his native city). LXX has 'cities' in the first verse (like Targum Onqelos) and 'the tribe of his people' in the second.

On many occasions, however, the existence of a figurative usage is not so clear. At Isa. 52: 7, 'how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of a messenger', it is unlikely that the aesthetic impact of the messenger's feet is really in primary focus here, but rather what they stand for: the messenger's footsteps (NJPS), his coming (TEV), or the messenger himself (CEV). Sometimes, our blindness to figurative language is caused by our culturally, or theologically, conditioned impressions of the context in which it occurs. For example, it is possible that 'the knowledge of good and evil' at Gen. 2: 17 and 3: 5 does not focus on moral issues at all, but is rather a merism for 'complete knowledge' (compare the parallelism at 2 Sam. 14: 17, 20) or, less radically, that 'good' and 'evil' refer to what is advantageous or disadvantageous.

On other occasions, that a figure is being used is not in doubt, but we cannot be sure quite what its primary focus is. For example, at Prov. 25: 15, 'a soft tongue will break a bone', it is clear from the preceding statement, 'with patience (literally "length of anger") a judge will be persuaded', that metaphorical language is intended. The problem is whether the primary focus of the metaphor is basically that of patience (in keeping with the first statement), or whether, as commonly, the word for 'tongue' is used metonymously for 'speech', in which case the point of the overall figure is that 'gentle talk can . . . overcome any problem' (CEV). Or compare the LXX rendering of 'uncircumcised of lips' at Exod. 6: 12 (*alogos* (literally 'wordless')) with that of v. 30 (*ischnophonos* ('withered of sound')). In the case of Deut. 34: 5, 'and Moses died there . . . at the mouth of [*al pi*] Y', most translations, ancient and modern, interpret 'mouth' as metonymous for 'command, word'. However, a segment of the Jewish interpretative tradition (e.g. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, Talmud, and Rashi) understands *al pi* to mean 'by a kiss (from Y)'. Moreover, some biblical metaphors are especially rich or polyvalent. For example, in the case of 'dust', it is frequently difficult to decide where the primary focus of its use in a particular passage lies: on mortality, lowliness, unfruitfulness, or some other feature.

At Prov. 5: 3 (already discussed, above), the Hebrew translates literally as 'for the lips of a (female) stranger drip honey and her palate is smoother than oil'. Now, given that in the Bible both lips and palate can function by metonymy for speech, which in turn can be called 'smooth', that is, 'flattering', it is likely that the primary image here is one of seductive talk. However, in recognizing this (and expressing it in translation), it is important not to lose sight of the evidently erotic tenor of the figure as a whole, although this is precisely what happens when (as in NRSV or CEV), 'lips' and 'palate' are translated as 'words', 'speech', etc. On the other hand, TEV has over-focused on the erotic imagery, 'The lips of another man's wife may be as sweet as honey and her kisses as smooth as olive oil', and has lost sight of the

main point. In this case the safest course would seem to be, as NJPS, to translate literally and to leave it to the reader to discern, aided by context (and perhaps notes), the interplay of images.

Focusing on the salient point of an image can also lead translators to alter, for the sake of naturalness in the receptor language, some element in the original figure, so long as that modification does not affect the overall thrust of the figure. For example, at Prov. 27: 16 the LXX speaks of seizing the tail of a dog rather than, as in Hebrew, its ears (although here the change might also be for alliteration: *kraton kerkou kunos* ('seizing a tail of a dog'); less likely is a difference in the *Vorlage*: *bznb* ('by the tail of') for MT *b'zny* ('by the ears of')).

A modern translation will often clarify, or decode, a figurative usage, if it is felt that readers will not readily comprehend it. Some precedents are already found in the ancient versions. For example, at Isa. 9: 13 (EVV 14) the Hebrew reads 'head and tail, palm branch and reed' (NRSV), which LXX interprets as 'head and tail, great and small', leaving the first figure as it was but interpreting the second one. The Vulgate adopts the same approach, but 'clarifies' differently, *caput et caudam incurvantem et refrenantem* ('head and tail, the one that bends and the one that holds back'), an interesting illustration of the danger inherent in 'explaining' a metaphor, because, as already indicated, we can never be quite sure that the writer was focusing on one aspect (LXX: status) or another (Vulgate: flexibility).

Moreover, in this matter, as in almost every other in connection with translation, it is often difficult to see where linguistic assistance ends and interpretative imposition begins. An uncomplicated example is Deut. 8: 9, 'a land whose stones are iron', where Symmachus adds an 'as (iron)'. One cannot help but think that here the translator was being more pedantic than helpful! At Exod. 19: 4, where God says that he carried Israel 'on eagles' wings', CEV, as an aid to the secularized reader, renders 'just as a mighty eagle'. LXX and Symmachus, obviously aware of the literal untruthfulness of the Hebrew statement, also inserted a *hos(ei)* ('as, as though'), thus ensuring that the original sequence would be understood figuratively. However, the Greek translators' decision here probably derived less from any supposed linguistic difficulty than from a perceived danger of a materialistic, idolatrous understanding of God. Similarly, in Deuteronomy 32 (the Song of Moses), the Hebrew word *šur* ('rock') occurs eight times, once with literal reference, five times in reference to Y, and twice in reference to other gods. The repeated usage and the context mean that the figurative reference is clear, and so modern versions tend to translate literally, leaving it to the reader to decode the metaphor. In view of this, it is likely that LXX's rendering of *šur* in reference to God as *theos* ('God') is intended less to clarify a difficult metaphor as to avoid any wording that might be conducive to idolatry. Similar comments probably apply to Targum Onqelos's rendering of *šur* as *taqqiḫ* ('strong (one)') and *teqoḫ* ('strength'). Compare as well the LXX's eradication of pagan allusions at Deut. 32: 24, where the parallel Hebrew terms *rešeḫ* and *qeṭeb* (at least the first of which is also found as the name of a Canaanite

deity) are ‘demythologized’ by being rendered as ‘birds’ and ‘destruction’. Within MT itself we see a further stage in this kind of process in the treatment of the name of the god Baal, which is replaced by the dysphemism *bošet* (‘shame’) on various occasions (especially in the names ‘Ishbosheth’ and ‘Mephibosheth’ in 2 Samuel as against ‘Eshbaal’ and ‘Meribbaal’ in 1 Chronicles; see also Jer. 3: 24 and Hos. 9: 10). Although this alteration is reflected in both Masoretic and non-Masoretic (LXX, 4QSam^a) traditions, it seems to have been stronger in the Masoretic one—see Jer. 11: 13, where MT has ‘you placed altars to shame, altars to offer incense to Baal’, but LXX lacks ‘altars to shame’.

Also attested are euphemistic changes, or toning down of language, for example in connection with sex. Thus, the Masoretes replace the verb *šaḡal* (Deut. 28: 30; Isa. 13: 16; Jer. 3: 2; Zech. 14: 2), apparently ‘rape, treat as prostitute’, with the phonetically similar *šakab*, apparently, ‘bed, lay’. LXX reflects the same sensitivities, rendering ‘have’ in the first two instances and ‘defile’ in the second two. In Deuteronomy, the Samaritan Pentateuch has the modest ‘will lie with her’, and Targum Onqelos, ‘will accommodate her’ (in some manuscripts). At Judg. 19: 2, the MT appears to say that the Levite’s concubine ‘prostituted herself [*zana* (*znh*)] against him’, i.e. had sex with another man, but manuscripts of LXX say either that she was angry (*zanaḥ* [*znh*]), or perhaps *zana* in a different sense) with him or, as the Vulgate, that she left him (*’azab*). If MT’s reading is original here, then LXX (or its *Vorlage*) would appear to be an attempt to soften the candour of the sexual imagery preserved by MT.

In other cases, figurative, and non-figurative, language may be interpreted in the service of the translator’s contemporary religious situation. Thus, for example, at Num. 24: 17, LXX renders Hebrew ‘star’ literally, but ‘staff’ (*šebet* perhaps originally in this context ‘comet’) by ‘man’, probably in allusion to a messianic figure. However, in the later Targum Onqelos, the messianic reference is more obvious: ‘star’ is ‘king’ and ‘staff’ is ‘messiah’. In connection with LXX’s rendering of ‘tent’ in MT by ‘house’ (see above), some of the passages might represent a type of exegeticizing interpretation in which the conditions of early Israel are ‘updated’ to those of the translators’ Jewish contemporaries; a striking example is Gen. 25: 27, where for MT *’ohalim* (‘tents’) the LXX has *oikia* (‘a house’), and Targum Onqelos has *bet ’ulpana* (‘a house of instruction’), thus providing from its interpretation of the text an ancient precedent for the study houses of the targumist’s time. Renderings that are explicitly conditioned by ideology can be used not just to guide the beliefs of the receptor community, but also to defend it against the claims of rival belief systems sharing the same text. Against this background may be seen the replacement by the later Greek translators, Aquila and Theodotion, of LXX’s *parthenos* (‘virgin’) in the messianic text (for early Christians) Isa. 7: 14 by *neanis* (‘young woman’). Most scholars would agree that this is a more accurate rendering of the Hebrew (‘*alma*’), but the improvement in translation was probably driven primarily by ideological factors.

GRAMMATICAL AND STYLISTIC FEATURES

Because of its more technical character, we have hardly touched upon the topic of syntax, or the way in which clauses and sentences are combined into particular arrangements (see Waltke and O'Connor 1990). One word-order feature that can be seen quite easily and that has an obvious impact on translation is ellipsis, where certain elements are omitted but need to be supplied, implicitly in order to yield (what we assume to be) the intended meaning. The basic problem here is one of recognizing an ellipsis when it occurs. The following two texts are among the otherwise rather obscure passages that might be illuminated by such recognition. At Mic. 7: 3, the Hebrew text seems to read literally: 'the officer asks and the judge for recompense'. Here, the interpretation is eased by assuming an ellipsis, 'the official and the judge each asks for recompense' (as NRSV) or 'the official asks, and the judge decrees, for recompense', a double ellipsis. A double ellipsis has also been identified at 1 Sam. 16: 7, which reads literally 'for not that which humankind sees', where for sense to be obtained (without emending the text) the words 'God sees' need to be provided.

In the following example, it is not so much ellipsis as a curious arrangement of the text that might be at issue. At Exod. 19: 13, the Hebrew reads 'for it is indeed to be stoned or shot with arrows, whether beast or man, it shall not live'. Here, it is possible that a chiasmic arrangement was intended, with the stoning reserved for the man and the shooting for the beast. Compare Matt. 7: 6, where it is probably the dogs and not the pigs that attack (cf. TEV, CEV).

In fact, parallelistic arrangements, especially 'envelope' (*inclusio*) and chiasmic structures are extremely common in the Bible, not just as a more or less conscious device in poetry (see Watson 1984; Zogbo and Wendland 2000), but also in prose. Note, for example, 'all' at the beginning and end of Gen. 9: 3, 'in booths' at the beginning and end of Lev. 23: 42, 'like him' at the beginning and end of 2 Kgs. 23: 25, and the (almost perfect) chiasmic structure at Isa. 6: 10: 'fatten heart... ears harden... eyes seal... see with eyes... with ears hear... heart understands'.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The examples presented in this article represent but a tiny fraction of the problems that face any interpreter or translator of the Hebrew Bible. It is as though he or she is constantly walking on shifting sands, with neither the text itself nor the meaning expressed by the elements of that text secure. And when a translator or interpreter finds that a passage, or a verse, or a clause, or a word is easy to work out, we must

suspect that this is merely a reflection of the superficial nature of their knowledge of the language or of the culture and society that gave rise to the text. Even in modern language translation, a translator can never be fully sure of what the author meant, just as he or she can never control the meaning that a reader will attribute to the translation. On the one hand, language is essentially malleable, and one can do pretty much what one likes with words. An insult in one context can be a term of endearment in another. On the other hand, there is an essential discontinuity between what one person means and what another understands. Something intended by a speaker as a mild reproach can cause unintended pain to an interlocutor. If such insecurity and dissonance are inherent in intra-language spoken communication, how much more so when that language is abstracted from a specific social interaction and put down in writing. The written text, although purporting to express meaning, actually presents the reader with a bewildering array of uncertainties, many of which would have been resolved in face-to-face spoken communication. An author can control his or her words and can intend them to express such-and-such an idea, but he or she cannot control the meaningfulness (or lack of it) those words will have for any particular reader or listener, let alone for a translator, who, in effect, creates a new text, a kind of fantasia on the original. Just as the original text stands between its author and even those who share that author's culture (including language), beckoning and yet bewildering, so the translator stands between even this illusory communion of meaning and a new set of readers who may be far removed in time, place, and culture from the original author. For the readers of the translation, the only communion of meaning to which they can aspire is that which obtains between them and the translator. The original text, the society in which it was produced, and the intentions of its author are even further beyond their reach than they were for the translator. If a translator, albeit more by chance than on the basis of secure knowledge, does not distort too greatly the emotive impact and the information content intended by the original author, a good job may be said to have been done. However, if a reader is really interested in the meaning of the text, then a translation can only be a first stage, a set of signposts, often unwittingly misleading, which should be supplemented by detailed study of a variety of commentaries and other tools, which give access to the social, material, and conceptual worlds of the Bible, and, ideally, by study of the biblical languages themselves.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ABEGG, MARTIN, FLINT, PETER, and ULRICH, EUGENE 1999 *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible: The Oldest Known Bible, Translated and with Commentary*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.

- BAASTEN, M. F. J., and VAN PEURSEN, W. Th., eds. 2003. *Hamlet on a Hill: Semitic and Greek Studies Presented to Professor T. Muraoka on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*. *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta*, 118. Leuven: Peeters.
- BARR, J. 1961. *The Semantics of Biblical Language*. London: SCM Press.
- BARTHÉLMY, D. et al. 1976–80. *Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project*, i [Pentateuch]. London: United Bible Societies. ii: *Historical Books*. Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1976. iii: *Poetical Books*. Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1977. iv–v: *Prophetical Books I–II*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1979–80.
- BATALDEN, S., CANN, K., and DEAN, J., eds. 2004. *Sowing the Word: The Cultural Impact of the British and Foreign Bible Society 1804–2004*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press.
- BECK, J. 2000. *Translators as Storytellers: A Study in Septuagint Translation Technique*. New York: Peter Lang.
- BEYER, K. 1986. *The Aramaic Language: Its Distribution and Subdivisions*, trans. J. F. Healey. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- BRENNER, A. 1983. *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*. JSOTS.S 21. Sheffield: JSOT Press.
- and VAN HENTEN, J. W., eds. 2002. *Bible Translation on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century: Translation, Reception, Culture and Religion*. JSOTS.S 353. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- BULLINGER, E. W. 1898. *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, Explained and Illustrated*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode; repr. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1968.
- CAIRD, G. B. 1980. *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*. *Studies in Theology*. London: Duckworth.
- CLARK, D. J., and HATTON, HOWARD 2002. *A Handbook on Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*. UBS Handbook Series. New York: United Bible Societies.
- CONYBEARE, F. C., and STOCK, St. GEORGE 2001. *Grammar of Septuagint Greek: With Selected Readings, Vocabularies, and Updated Indexes*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; orig. pub. Boston: Ginn and Company, 1905.
- CREASON, S. 2004. 'Aramaic'. In Roger D. Woodard, ed., *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the World's Ancient Languages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 391–426.
- ELWOLDE, J. F. 'Hebrew and Aramaic Grammar and Lexicography' and 'Hebrew and Aramaic Languages'. In Stanley E. Porter, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation and Criticism*, London: Routledge, forthcoming.
- FITZMYER, J. A. 1979. 'The Phases of the Aramaic Language'. In *A Wandering Aramean: Collected Aramaic Essays*, SBLMS, 25. Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 57–84.
- GIBSON, J. C. L. 1998. *Language and Imagery in the Old Testament*. London: SPCK.
- HADAS-LEBEL, M. 1995. *Histoire de la Langue Hébraïque: des Origines à l'Époque de la Mishna*, 4th edn. *Collection de la Revue des Études Juives*, 21. Paris and Leuven: E. Peeters.
- HOGNESIUS, K. 2003. *The Text of 2 Chronicles 1–16: A Critical Edition with Textual Commentary*. *Coniectanea Biblica Old Testament Series*, 51. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International.
- HORBURY, W., ed. 1999. *Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.
- JOBES, K. H., and SILVA, MOISÉS 2000. *Invitation to the Septuagint*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic.
- JOÜON, P. 1993. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, corrected rev. edn., trans. and ed. T. Muraoka. *Subsidia Biblica*, 14. 1–2; Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico.

- KALTNER, J. and MCKENZIE, STEVEN L., eds. 2002. *Beyond Babel: A Handbook for Biblical Hebrew and Related Languages*. Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study, 42. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.
- KELLEY, P. H., MYNATT, DANIEL S., and CRAWFORD, TIMOTHY G. 1998. *The Masorah of Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia: Introduction and Annotated Glossary*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmann Publishing Company.
- KNOBLOCH, F. W. ed. 2002. *Biblical Translation in Context*. Studies and Texts in Jewish History and Culture, 10. Bethesda, Md.: University Press of Maryland.
- LAMB DIN, T. O. 1973. *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*. London: Darton, Longman, and Todd.
- LARSON, M. L. 1998. *Meaning-Based Translation: A Guide to Cross-Language Equivalence*, 2nd edn. Lanham, Md: University Press of America.
- LEMAIRE, A. 1988. 'Aramaic Literature and Hebrew: Contacts and Influences in the First Millennium B. C. E.'. In Moshe Bar-Asher, ed., *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, August 4–12, 1985; Panel Sessions: Hebrew and Aramaic*, Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 9–24.
- MCCARTER, P. K. 2004. 'Hebrew'. In Roger D. Woodard, ed., *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the World's Ancient Languages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 319–64.
- MAYES, A. D. H., ed. 2000. *Text in Context: Essays by Members of the Society for Old Testament Study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- METZGER, B. M. 2001. *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic.
- NOSS, PHILIP A., ed. 2002. *Current Trends in Scripture Translation*. UBS Bulletin, 194/5. Reading: United Bible Societies.
- La Nouvelle Bible Segond, Édition d'Étude* (Alliance Biblique Universelle, 2002).
- OGDEN, G. S. 1988. 'The Use of Figurative Language in Malachi 2.10–16'. *Bible Translator*, 39: 223–30.
- OLOFSSON, S. 1990. *The LXX Version: A Guide to the Translation Technique of the Septuagint*. Coniectanea Biblica, Old Testament Series, 30. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wicksell International.
- PÉREZ FERNÁNDEZ, M. 1997. *An Introductory Grammar of Rabbinic Hebrew*, trans. J. F. Elwolde. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- ROSENTHAL, F. 1995. *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic*, 6th rev. edn. Porta Linguarum Orientalium, n.s. 5. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrasowitz.
- SÁENZ-BADILLOS, Á. 1993. *A History of the Hebrew Language*, trans. J. F. Elwolde. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- SALVESEN, A. 1991. *Symmachus in the Pentateuch*. Journal of Semitic Studies Monograph, 15. Manchester: The Victoria University of Manchester.
- SAWYER, J. F. A. 1972. *Semantics in Biblical Research: New Methods of Defining Hebrew Words for Salvation*. Studies in Biblical Theology, 2nd ser. 24. London: SCM Press.
- SCHENKER, A., ed. 2004. *The Earliest Text of the Hebrew Bible: The Relationship between the Masoretic Text and the Hebrew Base of the Septuagint Reconsidered*. Septuagint and Cognate Studies Series, 52. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- SILVA, M. 1995. *Biblical Words and their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, rev. edn. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan.
- SOLLAMO, R., and SIPILÄ, SEPPO, eds. 2001. *Helsinki Perspectives on the Translation Technique of the Septuagint*. Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society, 82. Helsinki: The Finnish Exegetical Society; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.