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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18820/23099089/actat.v41i2.6>

ISSN: 1015-8758 (Print)

ISSN: 2309-9089 (Online)

Acta Theologica 2021
41(2):96-117

Date received:
27 May 2021

Date accepted:
22 October 2021

Date published:
15 December 2021



Published by the UFS
<http://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/at>

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“I must speak to you plainly”: A history of English Bible translations, independent of the King James Version (1611) tradition

ABSTRACT

The dominance of the King James Version (1611) began to fade in the late 19th century, when its language became too remote from standard English, leading to various revisions in both Britain and the United States. However, numerous English translations that are independent of the King James Version tradition and its revisions also emerged, specifically with the goal of producing translations in contemporary, accessible English. This article provides a historical narrative of the Bible translations in English, by focusing on the most important (authoritative, influential, or innovative) translations, independent of the continuing King James Version tradition, in order to explain how and why they were produced. Special attention is paid to the translational context within which the translations are produced, the translation process, and the strategies for rendering the cultural terms of the source texts in contemporary English.

1. INTRODUCTION¹

The dominance of the *King James Version* or *Authorised Version* of 1611 began to fade in

1 This article is a revised version of an invited public lecture at The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. read on 26 March 2019 sponsored by the Department of Semitic and Egyptian Languages and Literatures. I want to thank

the late 19th century, when its language became too remote from standard English, leading to various revisions in both Britain and the United States. In Britain, the revision process resulted in the *Revised Version* of 1881 (New Testament) and that of 1885 (Old and New Testament). A parallel revision process in the United States commenced in 1897 and was published as the *American Standard Version* (ASV) in 1901. The outcome of a movement towards more extensive revision of the *King James Version* tradition resulted in the *Revised Standard Version* (RSV: New Testament 1946; whole Bible 1952), which was an authorised revision of the *American Standard Version*. To make this version truly international, the hope was expressed that the collaboration of British scholars might be obtained. Unfortunately, several Protestant churches in Great Britain favoured the idea of an entirely novel translation (NEB 1970:v). This move resulted in numerous authorised/institutionalised/international Bible versions in English, independent of the *King James Version* (1611) tradition since the second half of the 20th century, where the goal was to be faithful to the meaning of the original text and to render it in contemporary and intelligible English: “I must speak to you plainly” (Acts 2:29 TEV; see also Omanson 2000). According to Daniell (2003:769), 35 novel English translations of the whole Bible, and 80 novel translations of the New Testament emerged between 1945 and 1990. Although there are existing catalogues, books, and essays of Bible translations in English,² no study provides a systematic and coherent description and explanation of the features and contributions of this specific group of Bible translations in English.

This article provides a historical narrative of the Bible translations in English, by focusing on the most important (authoritative, influential, or innovative) translations, independent of the continuing *King James Version* tradition, in order to explain how and why they were produced. It will be shown that the new meanings created by new translations keep the Bible alive. However, although the new translations achieved greater accessibility to the text for a wider audience, at the same time access to the otherness or alterity in the source text was unfortunately closed off. The article focuses on the period from the beginning of the 20th century and does not provide an account of the retranslations that are claimed to be within the *King James Version* tradition (for example, the *Contemporary English Version* (1995) and *Common English*

Prof. Andrew Gross for the invitation and the audience for their comments, which strengthened this article. This work is based on research supported, in part, by the National Research Foundation of South Africa (J.A. Naudé UID 85902). The holder of the grant acknowledges that opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in any publication generated by NRF-supported research are those of the author, and that the NRF accepts no liability whatsoever in this regard.

- 2 See, for example, Barton (2019), Bruce (1978), Daniell (2003), Hammond (1987), Kubo & Specht (1983), Lewis (1981), Metzger (2001), Naudé (2005), Orlinsky & Bratcher (1991).

Bible (2011)). It does not include new translations within the Roman Catholic tradition (for example, the *New Jerusalem Bible* (1985) and the *New American Bible* (2010)); translations by Jewish scholars (for example, *The Hebrew Bible: Translation and Commentary* [Alter 2019]), and new translations for special purposes (for example, *The Bible for the Deaf* (2019)). All these translations are unique and will be dealt with in a separate publication.

The article is organised as follows. Section 2 provides the translational context of English Bible translation since the end of the 19th century. Section 3 gives an overview of independent translations in contemporary speech. These were mostly unauthorised translations initiated and produced by individuals. Section 4 summarises independent interdenominational translations into global speech. These were mostly authorised translations produced by translation teams. Section 5 deals with independent translations, which assimilate cultural differences, into colloquial speech. These were translations by individuals or dedicated movements.

2. TRANSLATIONAL CONTEXT OF ENGLISH BIBLE TRANSLATION

2.1 Introduction

Since the end of the 19th century, the translational context of Bible translation in the English-speaking world dramatically changed with respect to the biblical source texts, the role of translation theory, and sensitivity to gender issues.

2.2 New critical editions of the Hebrew and Greek source texts

At the beginning of the 20th century, the source text for the Old Testament was the standard Hebrew text (the Masoretic text) based on the second Rabbinic Bible of Jacob ben Chayyim. It was first published by Daniel Bomberg in Venice in 1524-1525, but the most widely used published editions are those of Meir Halevi Letteris, the so-called *Letteris Bible*, published first in 1852 and revised in 1866, followed by numerous reprints deep into the 20th century, and Rudolf Kittel's first (1905) and second (1913) editions of the *Biblia Hebraica*.

The contemporary source texts for the Old Testament are based on *Codex Leningradensis*. It reflects a textual tradition that was given its final form by Aaron Ben Asher of the Tiberian group of the Masorettes (Tov 1992:22). The most widely used and complete critical editions are the third edition of the *Biblia Hebraica* and the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart 1967-1977; fifth edition: 1997). These were the source texts for most of the English

Bible translations in the last half of the 20th century. The *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* includes a much wider selection of variants from the Cairo Genizah texts and from the Qumran Scrolls than *Biblia Hebraica*.

Concerning the Greek New Testament source text, the source text for almost all translations into modern languages through the 19th century (Metzger 1971:xxiii; 1994:10*) and for a few in the 20th century is the *Textus Receptus* (“Received Text”), the term used by Bonaventura Elzevir, an enterprising publisher from The Netherlands, for his Greek New Testament (1633) (Metzger 1971:xxiii; 1994:19*). In the 20th century, Bible translations mostly followed either the Nestle-Aland or the United Bible Societies text-critical traditions. The most widely used edition was the fourth edition prepared by Eberhard Nestle and published in England in 1904. It is based on the critical editions produced by L.F.K. von Tischendorf (1869-1872), B.F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort (1881), and B. Weiss (1894-1900). Where two of these three editions agree on a variant, the reading is printed by Nestle. In 1958, a new edition of Eberhard Nestle’s 1904 text was published, edited by Erwin Nestle and several other scholars; it has textual changes in about 20 passages. A new approach, in which the text and critical apparatus are verified against the manuscripts themselves, culminated in 1963 with the twenty-fifth edition, known as Nestle-Aland. Nestle-Aland reached its twenty-seventh edition at the close of the 20th century in 1993. In this revision, the text-critical apparatus, in particular, was once more extensively modified with a view to enhanced reliability and reader-friendliness. As of 2012, Nestle-Aland is in its twenty-eighth edition.

The other standard critical edition of the Greek New Testament in the 20th century is the one prepared by the United Bible Societies (first edition 1966, second edition 1968, third edition 1975, third corrected edition 1983, fourth revised edition 1993, with second to fourth printings 1994-2000). As of 2014, it is now in its fifth edition. These provide a rating of each disputed reading in four categories ranging from the editor’s virtual certainty about the text to an indication of a high degree of doubt. The textual commentaries by Metzger (1971, second edition 1994) and Omanson (2006, corrected 2012) explain in non-technical language the basis for each decision, and the reasons for disagreements among the editors.

These two traditions of text-critical editions (Nestle-Aland and United Bible Societies) contain essentially the same Greek text, with only minor differences of format and punctuation. It is not always easy to determine which Hebrew and Greek editions serve as source texts for the various English translations (Daley 2019).

2.3 Realist epistemology and the role of translation theory

At the beginning of the 20th century, Bible translation was still conducted from a philological standpoint. The Bible was translated word-for-word because of the tendency to think that religious truth can only be communicated by means of distinctive vocabulary and religious idiom and the view that the surface features of the text are sacred. However, given the existence of so many textual variants in the source texts, the view of the Hebrew and Greek texts as eternally fixed diminished along with the urge to follow the surface level of the text in translating. As a result, translators of the Bible in the second half of the 20th century began to focus on meaning rather than form (Nida & Taber 1974). If the message can be separated from the linguistic form of the Hebrew or Greek, then one can translate the Bible afresh, shaping the message for a new context.

The focus on translating the meaning rather than the form of the source texts was given scientific validity through the emerging discipline of translation studies and the efforts of the Bible translator, Eugene Nida, in developing a dynamic equivalent method of translation (Nida & Taber 1974). Furthermore, the rise of functionalism in translation studies meant that the intended function of the target text determines which translation methods and strategies are used rather than the form or function of the source text (Nord 2018 (1997)).

2.4 Inclusive language

One of the most significant changes in English usage in the last 25 years of the 20th century related to gendered language. English, like Hebrew and Greek, lacks gender-neutral third person pronouns. In addition, the traditional English use of “men” to mean “people” or the use of “he” for a person of either sex became increasingly unacceptable, with the result that Bible translators had to determine how to translate instances in which the source languages use generic masculine pronouns or masculine terms of address such as, for example, “brothers” when the whole community is in the view (see Carson 1998; Poythress & Grudem 2000; Strauss 1998).

Devices to avoid gender-specific language in English when translating singular generic statements include using a plural generic statement (“they”) or translating as “one” or “a person”. In referring to the community, some translations explicated “brothers and sisters” for “brothers”. Renderings into gender-neutral language also create a conundrum in that the patriarchal culture that lies behind much of the masculine language of the Bible is itself also part of the source text data to be translated; translations differ in the extent to which they want to obscure or represent the culture of the source text

(for example, the translation of the Hebrew “sons of Israel” with “Israelites” or the Greek “brothers” with “brothers and sisters”).

3. TRANSLATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY SPEECH

3.1 Introduction

The increased knowledge of Greek through the discovery of Greek papyri written in everyday language led to the realisation that the New Testament documents were written similarly in a plain, simple style to meet the needs of ordinary people (Decker 2014:7-8). To communicate the message of the New Testament, it must be translated into the same kind of English, namely non-literary contemporary speech for people who are not conversant with the archaic language of the traditional English versions. This failed to capture the attention and understanding of ordinary Bible readers. In the first half of the 20th century, individuals or groups pioneered many new unauthorised translations in modern speech to fulfil this need. Their origins were independent of the *King James Version* and its revisions (*Revised Version* (1885) and *American Standard Version* (1901)) and were mostly based on a critical edition of the source text. Only a selection of the most successful ones of this era, which have revisions and reprints and which are representative of the various translation strategies, are discussed in what follows.

3.2 *Twentieth-Century New Testament*

A group of over 20 translators representing various religious denominations published this translation as a single volume in 1901. All words and phrases not used in contemporary English are excluded and cultural terms (measurements and values of coins) are domesticated. Based on the Critical Text of Westcott and Hort, 14 passages considered as later additions are placed in square brackets. The usual groupings of books are retained, but books are ordered chronologically in each group.

3.3 *The New Testament in Modern Speech and The New Testament in Modern English*

The first modern speech version translated by an individual is the *New Testament in Modern Speech*. The translator was Richard Weymouth, fellow of University College, London, and editor of *The Resultant Greek Testament* (1892), which represents the text on which the vast majority of modern editors (Tischendorf, Weiss, Westcott, Hort, and so on) agreed and which served as source text for his translation. The first three editions appeared respectively in 1903, 1904, and 1905. A well-known New Testament scholar, J.A. Robertson,

revised the fourth and fifth editions of 1924 and 1929, respectively. Weymouth translated in idiomatic, dignified everyday English and without ecclesiastical or doctrinal bias (Weymouth 1938:i).

A similar but later translation by an individual is *The New Testament in Modern English* published in Britain in 1958 by J.B. Phillips, an Anglican minister. A specific feature of this bestseller is the use of paraphrase (Phillips 1958:vii).

3.4 *The Holy Bible in modern English*

An American business person, Ferrar Fenton, translated the complete Bible from the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek source texts with introductions and critical notes into modern English as “an instrument to restore a knowledge of revelation again” (Fenton 1966:xiv). For example, Hebrew poetry is translated and represented into rhythmical English poetry. Statements in a supposed dialogue of the Sophist and Paul are explicated in the translation of 1 Corinthians 6:12-13 as follows:

(Sophist.) “Everything is allowable to me.”

(Paul.) “But everything does not benefit.”

(Sophist.) “Everything is permissible to me.”

(Paul.) “But I will not be deluded by any.”

(Sophist.) “The foods for the stomach, and the stomach for the foods.”

(Paul.) “But God can abolish both it and them...”

Fenton (1966:vi, viii) followed the order of the Hebrew Bible for the books of the Old Testament.

However, there are idiosyncrasies such as the transliteration of proper names in the Old Testament; for example, Jhoash, king of Israel, Amatziah, king of Judah, and Hazahal, king of Aram (Fenton 1966:ix, 392). The translation of the first verse of Genesis 1 is also idiosyncratic:

By Periods God created that which produced the Solar Systems;
then that which produced the Earth. But the Earth was unorganized
and empty.

The following explanatory footnote is added:

Literally “By Headships”. It is curious that all translators from the Septuagint have rendered this word B'RESHITH, into the singular, although it is plural in the Hebrew. So, I render it accurately. – F.F.

Note that *rē šīt* is a singular noun in Hebrew. The translation was first published in 1903, but frequently reprinted.

3.5 *A new translation of the Bible containing the Old and the New Testaments*

This translation by James Moffatt was a very popular modern speech translation of the complete Bible, published in London in 1926, with an American revision in 1935. Moffatt (1935:vii) followed a translation strategy of producing a translation in

effective, intelligible English [and] to let his readers enjoy part of that pleasure which the original once afforded to its audience in some far-off century.

However, the translation reflects the Scottish rather than the English renderings (for example, barrister, cairn, hie, kilt) (Fee & Strauss 2007:142). Moffatt (1935:xx) regarded the source text as corrupt and went to the extreme of implying that nearly every page requires some emendation of the Hebrew, including the rearranging of some verses and the omission of others.

[A]s an honest translator to distinguish one or two of the strata which have been fused and confused in the traditional text,

Moffatt (1935:xxi) used Roman and Italic type in different sizes to indicate multiple authors in the Pentateuch, according to the Documentary Hypothesis, as well as various square brackets to indicate editorial additions or later interpolations.

3.6 *The Bible: An American Translation*

This translation by J.M. Powis Smith and E.J. Goodspeed originated from North America. In 1923, Goodspeed published the translation of the New Testament, which was based on the Westcott-Hort Greek text (1881), except for John 19:29; Acts 6:9; 19:28, 34; James 1:17; 1 Peter 3:19 and Revelation 13:1. The story of the adulterous woman (John 7:53-8:11) has been omitted from this translation. Using the second Rabbinic Bible as source text, Smith and his three collaborators, all of them trained experts in Hebrew and the related Semitic languages, completed the translation of the Old Testament in 1927 according to the same translation principles as Goodspeed’s New Testament. The New Testament and Old Testament translations were combined in 1931. Goodspeed proceeded to translate the books of the Apocrypha, which was included in the 1939 edition, because it is historically and culturally an integral part of the Bible.

The most urgent demand for the translation comes from the progress in the knowledge of Hebrew and Greek vocabulary and syntax available in newly published dictionaries and grammars; a fuller appreciation of fundamental textual problems in light of vast discoveries of texts, and the need of readers to be able to read the Bible in a popular, contemporary style (Powis Smith & Goodspeed 1939:xiii; Goodspeed 1945).

3.7 *The Bible in Basic English*

One of the most widely read translations of the New Testament in the latter half of the 20th century is by S.H. Hooke, emeritus professor of Old Testament Studies, University of London, who published *The Bible in Basic English* in 1949. The translation uses basic English, which is a simple form of the English language produced by C.K. Ogden to render the sense of anything using an inventory of 850 words (Hooke 1949:v). This number was increased to 1,000 for the purpose of translating the Bible into basic English. Hooke and his wife did not modify any existing English translation, but produced an independent translation from the source texts (Hooke 1949:v).

3.8 *The Cotton Patch version*

Clarence Jordan, a farmer and New Testament Greek scholar, translated the New Testament, based on the twenty-third edition of Nestle-Aland, into a local dialect version for the southern part of the United States (especially the area around Atlanta) and published it as a series from 1968 to 1973.³ Jordan substituted biblical place names for local place names and used modern-day equivalents of ideas, names, and classes of people. This changed the ancient cultural context of the Bible, so that modern readers have the same sense of participation as the first readers. For example, he retitled “Paul’s letter to the 1 Corinthians” to “A Letter to the Christians in Atlanta”. In the sense that it is a contemporary translation in a colloquial English dialect, this translation is transitional from contemporary English to colloquial English (see Section 5 below).

3.9 Summary

Most of the translations were by individuals or freelance people, who used the following translation strategies: exclusion of all words and phrases not used in contemporary English; translating in the way in which an inspired writer would have written, had he lived in modern times; the use of paraphrase; the representation of dialogue as English dialogue and poetry as rhythmical English; reproducing an effect similar to that of the source text on its readers

3 See also Daniell (2003:761-762), Fee & Strauss (2007:33), Kubo & Specht (1983:329-330).

or audience; translating in a popular, contemporary style, and the use of a restricted inventory of simple vocabulary.

4. TRANSLATIONS INTO GLOBAL SPEECH

4.1 Introduction

The idea of translating the Bible into modern speech continued in authorised/institutionalised/international translations during the second half of the 20th century, independent of the *Revised Standard Version* (1952). A growing interest in the idea of the Bible as literature, supported by a need for more accessible translations in English-speaking communities beyond the United States and England, arose after the Second World War.

4.2 *The New English Bible* and *The Revised English Bible*

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland paved the way for new official translations in modern speech when it adopted a resolution in 1946 that a translation of the Bible should be made in contemporary English. The outcome was an ecumenical version, *The New English Bible* (NEB: NT 1961; whole Bible including Apocrypha 1970), which was a project of the Bible Societies and the Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Congregational, Roman Catholic, and other churches in Great Britain, with oversight by the leading British biblical scholar C.H. Dodd.

The third edition of *Biblia Hebraica* (Stuttgart 1937) served as source text for the Old Testament; for the New Testament, the translators selected from various sources the reading which, in their judgement, seemed most likely to represent what the author wrote. The Greek text that the translators followed has since been published as *The Greek New Testament* (Tasker 1964).

The New English Bible, an entirely new translation, reads like an original composition and not like a translation – there was no effort to confine it to the *King James Version* tradition (Barr 1974:381-405). The translators, therefore, employed contemporary English and avoided traditional biblical English as well as the reproduction of grammatical constructions of the original languages in the translation. The intended readership included those outside the ambit of the church (Coleman 1989). Scholars, drawn from various British universities, formed three translating panels (Old Testament, New Testament, and Apocrypha). In the Old Testament panel, reinterpretation of rare Hebrew words took place in terms of derivation from roots preserved in other Semitic languages such as, for example Ugaritic.

The initial draft of a biblical book was entrusted to an individual member of a translating panel; the draft circulated among the other members of the panel, who would then discuss the draft sentence by sentence. The amended draft was retyped and passed on to the literary panel, which read all the material and offered suggestions to the translating panels. The joint committee, entrusted with the final responsibility for the work, included representatives of the participating churches (roughly in proportion to their membership), representatives of the Bible Societies (British and Scottish), representatives of the University Presses of Oxford and Cambridge, and the conveners of the panels.

A revision was published in 1989 (*The Revised English Bible*) (REB 1989). The source texts were the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* and the twenty-sixth edition of Nestle-Aland. As a result, the revision reversed a number of the textual decisions of *The New English Bible*. The *Revised English Bible* revisers replaced male-oriented language in passages, which evidently apply to both genders, with “more inclusive gender references where that has been possible without compromising scholarly integrity or English style” (REB, Preface, ix).

4.3 Today's English Version

Today's English Version (TEV), known as the *Good News Bible* (GNB) (1976), was commissioned by the American Bible Society to be a completely modern translation on a level of language that does not conform to traditional biblical vocabulary or style, but rather expresses the meaning of the text in words and forms that could be readily understood by any reader of English, regardless of the reader's education, and that are accepted as standard by people everywhere who employ English as a means of communication. There was a demand for a translation especially designed for those who speak English as an acquired language. It was published in what is termed “common language” (the overlap between the literary and the colloquial), the same level of language in which the New Testament was first written (the so-called Koine Greek), in order to reach out beyond the church to a largely secular constituency (Nida 1976:12).

This was the first English translation to make consistent use of advances in general linguistics and in translation theory. Their translation theory was based on the scholarship of Nida and the product exhibits a dynamic equivalence translation technique. The basic principle underlying the choice of vocabulary, sentence structure, discourse structure, and other features of English style was that the translators should find the closest natural equivalent in English.

In 1966, the New Testament was published in paperback as *Good News for Modern Man: The New Testament in Today's English Version*. The draft of

the entire New Testament was prepared by R.G. Bratcher, a professional Bible translator and translation consultant, and was reviewed by a panel of scholars. Bratcher translated from the 1966 edition of the *Greek New Testament* of UBS. He replaced “blood” with “death” because Bratcher understood the Greek term *haima* to point metonymically to Jesus’ violent death and not merely to physical blood (Stine 2018:343) in passages such as Colossians 1:20: “God made peace through his Son’s death on the cross”. Despite the favourable reaction to the translation (for example, the strong Catholic interest), the loss of figurative language especially involving theologically significant terms such as “blood” led to severe criticism and even violent reaction in the form of Bible-burning ceremonies and Bible burial rallies (Nida 1976:10-11). Additional innovations include the illustrations by a Swiss artist, Annie Vallotton, who used simple lines to convey emotion and character, as well as the publication of the new translation in paperback. Three revisions followed in 1967, 1971 (based on the second edition of the UBS *Greek New Testament* (1968)) and 1976 (based on the third edition of the UBS *Greek New Testament* (1975)) in light of evolving scholarly advances, review comments and suggestions, all aimed at enhancing clarity and textual refinement. In the 1971 edition, a four-page appendix listed significant variant readings and possible translation alternatives (NT 1971 third edition, 643-646). In this edition, passages that lack textual support in the oldest and best ancient Greek manuscripts were handled by setting them within single brackets in the text itself, as a way of indicating their uncertainty (for example, Mark 16:9-20; John 8:1-11; Acts 8:17). The 1976 edition introduced textual notes as footnotes on the page.

Serious work on the Old Testament began in 1969. The textual base for the translation was the Masoretic Hebrew as published in Kittel’s *Biblia Hebraica* (third edition). Bratcher served as chairperson of a committee of six, all of whom had professional experience in translating. The American Bible Society translation committee and board reviewed the Old Testament drafts extensively, a process which often put them in conflict with the translators and which eventually led the American Bible Society to publicly renounce responsibility for the Old Testament. The conflict concerned mostly theological interpretation — the translators were unwilling to compromise concerning the clear meaning of the text and specifically did not want the Old Testament (for example, Gen. 1 and Isa. 7:14) to be translated in light of the New Testament. Nida then led the process of revising the version that the translators had put forward, so that it met the requirements of the American Bible Society translation committee members (Stine 2018:341-345).

During this time, gender sensitivity became important. The translators made allowances where the text permitted (Stine 2018:342), using “person”, “people”, “human” or “someone” instead of “man/men”. For example, “Happy

is the man" (Ps. 1:1) reads "Happy are those" in the GNB. The translation was published in 1976.

An interconfessional edition, the *GNB with Deuterocanonicals/Apocrypha* was published in 1979. The translation committee was selected from those who had translated the Old Testament. The *Deuterocanonicals* were printed in two separate sections between the Old and the New Testament. The first section comprises the deuterocanonical books as canonised by the Council of Trent (1545-1563); the entire text of Greek Esther appears in this section, with the six additions not found in the Hebrew text of Esther interspersed as Chapters A-F. The second section, "Some additional books", includes 1 and 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh.

By 1986, the American Bible Society contemplated a revision. The revision process was thoroughgoing and collaborative, with all English-using Bible societies participating. The focus was on passages in which the translation had been unnecessarily gender-exclusive, and in which the translation had been perceived as problematic or insensitive from either an exegetical or stylistic viewpoint. Over 6,000 revisions were proposed and reviewed, with 2,500 meeting consensus. Most of these revisions were related to gender-exclusion (Ps. 37; Matt. 16:24; Luke 18:27 versus Amos 5:8) or discrimination in language (the anti-Jewish expressions in the New Testament (John 11:8)), but a few were exegetical (for example, Daniel 8:14). In the revision process, the figurative wording in some of the "blood" texts was adjusted to literal "blood", but with the earlier reading presented in a footnote (for example, Acts 20:28). However, Hebrews 10:19 holds the earlier metonymic wording (Burke 2018:347-365). The revised edition was published in 1992.

According to Stine (2018:346), until 1998, the GNB had a distribution of at least 225 million worldwide. The GNB was published in both the United States and British editions from its early days. An Australian usage edition was published in 1987. An edition containing the New Testament, using metatextual or paratextual materials to recontextualise it for readers in Muslim contexts, was published in 2001 (Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2019:280-299). The GNB has had its greatest (and continuing) impact as a model translation for translators working in hundreds of languages worldwide; it has influenced similar translations in, for example, German, Dutch, Afrikaans, isiXhosa, Sesotho, SiSwati, and Xitsonga.

4.4 *New International Version of the Bible* and its revisions

The *New International Version of the Bible* (NIV) was first published by Biblica (formerly the International Bible Society) in 1978 (NT 1973), with an initial

revision released in 1984. A more thorough revision was published in 2005 as *Today's New International Version* (TNIV). The updated NIV of 2011 builds on both the NIV of 1984 and the TNIV of 2005. The *New International Reader's Version* (NIRV), published in 1996, is a simplified version at a third-grade reading level for children and people who have difficulty reading English, such as non-native English speakers; it is intended as a steppingstone to the *New International Version*.

Over 100 scholars from the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, under the oversight of a committee of 15 scholars,⁴ contributed to the translation, giving it an international scope. The translators recognised the worldwide character of the English language by avoiding overt Americanisms, on the one hand, and overt Anglicisms, on the other. The translators were from many denominations, including Anglican, Assemblies of God, Baptist, Brethren, Christian Reformed, Church of Christ, Evangelical Covenant, Evangelical Free, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Wesleyan, and so on, producing a transdenominational character. Each book was translated by a separate team of experts, then submitted to three successive editorial committees. For the Old Testament, “the latest edition of *Biblia Hebraica*” was the source text; for the New Testament, “an eclectic one, based on the latest editions of the Nestle-Aland/United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament” was used (Barker 1999:23-40). The goals of the translation were to reflect the source languages

in the way the original authors might have said it had they been speaking in English to the global English-speaking audience today, [and to be] suitable for public and private reading, evangelism, teaching, preaching, memorizing, and liturgical use (NIV 2011:xi-xii).

The style reflects literary rather than spoken English.

One of the shifts in later revisions involves the representation of gender. When referring to men and women equally, the translators moved from the generic usage of the third person masculine singular pronouns to other constructions. The translation of Romans 12:1 in NIV 1984 “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices” was revised to read in NIV 2011: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices.”

The NIV gained the widest readership in all parts of the English-speaking world since the *King James Version*. Twenty-five years after its release, over 110 million copies were in print (Fee & Strauss 2007:149). It remains enormously popular.

4 For a description of the committee approach, see Barker (1999:17-21).

4.5 Summary

The translations of the second half of the 20th century, independent of the *Revised Standard Version* (1952), are sensitive to their readership in the use of global English and of corporate committees consisting of transdenominational members.

5. TRANSLATIONS IN COLLOQUIAL SPEECH ASSIMILATING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

5.1 Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, translations by individuals or dedicated movements into colloquial speech, independent of the *New Revised Standard Version* (1989), play a mediating role in shaping new religious identities.

5.2 *The Message*

The translator of *The Message* (NT 1993, the whole Bible 2002), E. Peterson, was a former seminary professor of Hebrew and Greek. He started to work in 1990 on a new translation with the intention

simply to get people reading it who don't know that the Bible is readable at all, at least by them, and to get people who long ago lost interest in the Bible to read it again (Peterson 2002:6).

He refrained from simplifying the translation by choosing simple English words, but chose instead words that forcefully convey the meaning to the reader; for example, he translated 1 Corinthians 10: 23-24 as follows:

Looking at it one way, you could say, 'Anything goes. Because of God's immense generosity and grace, we don't have to dissect and scrutinize every action to see if it will pass muster.' But the point is not to just get by. We want to live well, but our foremost efforts should be to help others live well.

The language used in the translation is the same language as that which the readers would use in their jobs and in their conversations with friends. However, the choice of colloquial vocabulary and idioms runs the risk, in light of language change, to outdate the translation within one generation, for example "to see if it will pass muster" in the above example. The language use also reflects the translator's social class and age.

5.3 *The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation*

This translation was published in 2009 (NT 1994) by Priests for Equality, a global movement of laity and clergy, working for the full participation of women and men in church and society. Based on Hebrew and Greek source texts, it is

a fresh dynamic translation of the Bible into modern English, carefully crafted to let the power and poetry of the language shine forth – particularly when read aloud.

References to God in the Old Testament adopt the Tetragrammaton (YHWH). As an inclusive language translation, it does not merely replace male pronouns, but uses new, non-sexist ways to express the source texts faithfully. For example, Hebrews 12:7-9 uses not only gender-inclusive language for human beings, but also a gender-neutral metaphor for God:

Endure your trials as the discipline of God, who deals with you as daughters and sons. Have there ever been any children whose parents didn't discipline them? If you aren't disciplined--and everyone receives discipline--then you are illegitimate children and not heirs. Moreover, we had our human parents to discipline us, and respected them for it. Wouldn't we much rather submit ourselves to our spiritual Parent and live?

5.4 Summary

Both the translations discussed in this section suppressed the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign source text by assimilating them into dominant values in the English culture, in order to sustain an emergent new Christian lifestyle that empowers the religious individual to live in a meaningful way.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Still within the philological approach to translate word-for-word, English Bible translation in the first half of the 20th century was experimenting with translation strategies focusing on words to overcome the tendency to think that religious truth can only be communicated by means of distinctive vocabulary and religious idiom.

Influenced by translation theory, the second half of the 20th century was primarily concerned with meaning and readability in the target language as well as with a focus on larger translation units such as sentences. As this way of translation emerged into the 21st century, the linguistic and cultural

differences of the source text were gradually suppressed by assimilating them to the dominant values of the target-language culture.

Therefore, a new trend in Bible translation will be necessary to instil a new sensitivity among readers to the sociocultural distance between them and the original contexts of the Bible, by refraining from suppressing the linguistic and cultural differences of the source text, on the one hand, and from assimilating them to dominant values in the target-language culture, on the other.

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Keywords

Cultural assimilation

Inclusive language

Contemporary speech

Global speech

Colloquial speech

Trefwoorde

Kulturele gelykstelling

Inklusiewe taal

Hedendaagse taalgebruik

Globale taalgebruik

Omgangstaal