

Newsletter on	
	African Old Testament Scholarship
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Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship aims at being a meeting place where African Old Testament scholars and non-Africans interested in African Old Testament scholarship can exchange ideas and information. The newsletter wants to bring brief notices on research projects and teaching programmes, as well as books and conferences related to African Old Testament scholarship. It also wants to comment upon research policy and methodological questions. The readers of the newsletter are encouraged to use it as a means of communicating.

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Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship

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Translation

and interpretation of the OT are two sides of the same thing: a reasonable reading. Both the translator and the interpreter attempt to make the ancient Hebrew or Aramaic texts intelligible for contemporary readers, and in doing so they face some of the same basic exegetical and hermeneutical challenges.

Africa has a long history of translating and interpreting the OT, stretching from the Septuagint and its way of expressing the relationship between text and translator's context, two or three centuries B.C., and up till the large number of translations in our own century, with new ways of expressing the same relationship. Some of the questions created by the present situation of translating and interpreting the OT in Africa are addressed in this issue of the newsletter; in addition comes a note documenting OT literature in the NEGST library, Nairobi, and notes on books and conferences.

Knut Holter

Interaction between exegete and translator: A translator's view

By Aloo Osotsi Mojola

Translation involves a movement or interaction between two languages and their underlying cultures as well as value systems. It involves a transfer of meaning from a source language X to a target language Y. Indeed it involves a re-reading of the source text in terms of the categories, concepts, syntax and semantics of the target language, an interpretation of X from the vantage point of Y. The translator is inevitably involved in the exegetical and hermeneutical enterprise. He or she plays the role of active mediation between source text and target text, source language and target language, source culture and target culture, or between the underlying source and target value systems, ideologies or belief systems.

It is no wonder then that the translator is expected to be a competent speaker of both the source and the target languages, and especially at home in the knowledge and practice of the target social cultural world. Translation is no doubt a multi-disciplinary act of cross-cultural communication.

To translate any given source text X, it is necessary to understand it in terms of its spatial and temporal location, its cultural and ideological orientation and its bearing on the present. Such an interpretational, exegetical or hermeneutical enterprise is necessarily cross-cultural! Even those working within one language but across different time periods, and a different socio-historical, economic, technological, political, ideological and cultural matrix are caught up within this cross-cultural bug. A source text in a given language and culture at a particular point in time can only be understood within the matrix of a given target language and culture from the perspective of a given historical conjuncture. The idea of an objective exegesis independent of time and space, of language and culture, or even of the prejudices of the exegete is untenable and at best a myth. Any given exegesis necessarily presupposes a standpoint, a perspective, a telos or *raison d'être* for its origination.

The question has been posed, whether it is possible to arrive at the meaning of the text originally intended by the author. Some exegetes do indeed aim for this elusive author-intended-meaning! It is doubtful

however, whether there is any direct access to the original human authors of biblical texts or their redactors or even their intentions.

Exegetical tools and methods which are author-centred are currently under crisis precisely because all efforts geared at recovering author-meaning and intention are at best probable. What we have is the text and the clues within the text for the recovery of the meaning embedded within it. Translation works best with text-centred exegesis and hermeneutics. It calls for an encounter with the text itself and a close reading of that text using the best available literary critical tools. Such a reading should however point beyond the world of the text to the community that produced the text - its world, its characters, its institutions, its values, its hopes, etc. But these are once again interpreted through the prison house of the exegete/translator's world. No neutral prism exists. It is necessarily culture and time bound as well as coloured by certain perspectives, orientations, ideological frameworks, etc.

African translators and exegetes, like others elsewhere, do not come to the biblical text with a *tabula rasa*. In the past many such translators and exegetes have brought to the biblical text the results of western biblical scholarship which were held to be "scientific, objective, assured, neutral and value-free." Ignoring the rich insights to be gained from a close social scientific study of African cultures and peoples such scholarship has alienated itself from the daily life and struggles of the common people. Translation calls for an encounter with the language and culture of the people and a rediscovery of the concepts, categories, names, maps and systems of the native social world. It confronts the biblical world armed with the native mind set, values, questions and interests. Questions of meaningfulness and relevance in the target-language and culture are given priority and dominance. The reformulation of the Biblical text in the native tongue and socio-cultural categories no doubt opens this text to a wider audience and to new exciting and liberating readings of the Biblical message.

The movement in Africa of so-called "African independent" or "African instituted" churches is to a great extent a product of Bible translations in local African languages. These translations empowered the readers, freeing them from dependence on missionary mediated interpretations of the text. These readers, no longer dependent on missionaries for access to the Scriptures, could now appeal to the same sources as the missionaries. This no doubt led to a new hermeneutic and

exegesis grounded in African cultures, traditions and values. Dr. David Barret in his classic work *Schism and Renewal in Africa* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968:127) noted that the "one ingredient indispensable for independency" was the availability of the vernacular scriptures. These churches were certainly pioneers in the search for relevance and the development of a hermeneutic that is deeply grounded in the African soil and soul. These pioneers no doubt saw the Scriptures through the prism of their cultures, traditions, interests, needs and as mediated in the words, figures, metaphors, concepts developed and moulded in their native tongue and by their history.

There is no doubt that this process happens everywhere. And it will certainly be taken more notice of by the next generation of African exegetes and biblical scholars.

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The Centre for Bible Translation in Africa

By Christo H. J. van der Merwe

The Centre for Bible Translation in Africa was founded in 1995. Initially it was situated in the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Studies, but from 1999 it will be situated in the brand new Department of Ancient Studies (an amalgamation of the former departments of Ancient Near Eastern Studies, Greek and Latin) at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa. The University of Stellenbosch provides the infra-structure for the Centre, but its operations are privately sponsored. The first director of the Centre was Prof. Ferdinand Deist. Unfortunately he died

unexpectedly in July 1997. In October 1997, Dr. Christo van der Merwe was appointed as his successor.

The mission of the Centre is to cooperate and advance academic know-how and expertise in the field of Bible translation on the continent of Africa. It purports to achieve this goal by means of research in the field of translation theory, the facilitating of post-graduate training courses in Bible translation, and the establishment of an academic support system for Bible translators - in particular as far as the interpretation of the Biblical texts is concerned.

The founding of the Centre was inspired by the observation that Bible translation projects in Africa are still by and large owned by non-Africans. Indigenous translators are seldom trained in the biblical languages and cultures, and consequently work under the instruction of non-African consultants. Although there are concerted efforts by most of the major Bible translation agencies to involve local scholars and train them as consultants, most of the projects are plagued by an acute shortage of financial means. The result is that translation consultants often are involved in many more projects than that they could handle properly, mother-tongue translators are seldom properly trained and most of the time have little or no access to, and/or the skills to use, appropriate exegetical tools.

In order to make certain that the Centre addresses "real world" problems and then also according to the priorities set by practitioners of Bible translation, a colloquium was held in 1996 in Stellenbosch. This venue was attended by most of the Bible translation agencies that operate on the continent. At the colloquium it was established that the Centre can play an important role in the short term in especially the following areas: (1) the creation of appropriate introductory courses in Biblical Hebrew, and (2) the academic support of translators and consultants (as far as the solving of exegetical and linguistic problems that they may encounter are concerned). In the medium and long term the Centre is expected to play a pivotal role in (1) the facilitation of courses and post-graduate research programmes in Bible translation for team exegetes, exegetes of major languages and translation consultants (referred to by the United Bible Societies as the levels 2, 3 and 4 training programmes respectively), (2) the co-ordination and advancement of research in the fields of Bible translation theory and methods - in particular in the area of translation as inter-cultural communication, (3) the establishment of databases of

information relevant to Bible translators, and (4) the development of electronic exegetical tools for translators.

Although the Centre is currently situated in a Department of Ancient Near Eastern Studies, its activities are managed by an executive committee consisting of members from the Departments of Old and New Testament and Greek. Since its two first directors had/has an Old Testament and Biblical Hebrew academic background, most of the Centre's activities in its initial stages did and are expected to focus in this area. For example, Van der Merwe is currently developing interactive electronic courses in Biblical Hebrew and assists members of the Bible Society in South Africa telephonically in solving problems with the interpretation of Biblical Hebrew constructions. He also facilitated a structured M.Phil. course in Bible Skills, with specialization in Bible translation. This course, that is presented at the University of Stellenbosch in 1998, was designed according to the needs of a Bible translator that will be starting to translate the Bible in Kalanga in 1999. It covers recent developments in linguistics (in particular in semantics, pragmatics, discourse analysis and anthropological linguistics), translation theory and advanced Biblical Hebrew linguistics. This course is presented by scholars at the University, but use is also made from experts with experience in field work. For example, in the above-mentioned courses, Dr. Ted Hope and Dr. Eric Hermanson will be presenting seminars on Hatim and Mason's translation theory and the translation of metaphors respectively. Negotiations are underway to involve also Dr. Ernst Wendland more closely with the activities of the Centre.

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Dr Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Director of Centre for Bible Translation in Africa, Eric Samson Chair for Biblical Hebrew Grammar, Department of Ancient Near Eastern Studies, University of Stellenbosch; address, cf. above.

The African Bible Project

By Vicor Zinkurature

For a long time many people in Africa have felt and frequently expressed the need for an edition of the Bible specifically prepared for African readers of the Bible in English. The main reason has been that the notes and study aids found in Bibles produced in the West do not really address the specific needs and interests of an African readership. Moreover, these imported Bibles are usually too expensive for the majority of Africans to afford.

It was in order to meet the particular needs of Africa that the Daughters of St. Paul, an international religious congregation using the press, radio, TV and films to spread the Gospel message, initiated the African Bible Project.

The first attempt at producing such a Bible edition started several years ago, culminating in the publication of the New Testament in 1995. This was really a pilot project in view of a more ambitious one to produce an African edition of the whole Bible.

In 1996 the Director of Paulines Publications Africa (Nairobi), Sr. Teresa Marcazzan, convened a meeting of biblical scholars, theologians and pastors to discuss the project and make proposals on how it best could be carried out. The first thing was to decide which of the several existing English Bibles to use as the basic text. The daunting task of making a new English translation specifically for the project was of course out of the question. Fortunately the American Catholic bishops, copyright owners of the *New American Bible*, kindly gave permission to use their Bible translation.

The detailed planning of the project took place in April 1997, with the appointment of two general editors, Rev Dr Angelo Colacrai and Rev Dr Victor Zinkurature, and the selection of scholars, mostly African, from all over the continent as contributors. Each contributor was assigned a book or several books according to his or her preference and area of competence, whenever this was possible. The following is a brief description of what should ideally characterize the Bible edition according to the defined aims of the project.

Firstly, for each book the contributor writes a general introduction, giving relevant and up-to-date information about the book, such as author,

place and date of composition, and intended readership. This information should not be too technical or too detailed, but neither should it be oversimplified. The introduction should point out the theological and pastoral relevance of the book as a whole for the contemporary world and for the Church, with the African context as the main focus: What message does the book have for Africa?

Secondly, for each literary unit of the book, which in many cases corresponds with a chapter or section of a chapter, the contributor writes a concise commentary intended to help the reader to understand that section. The commentary should attempt to point out the theological and pastoral relevance of the section in the context of present day Africa, whenever this is applicable. This, needless to say, should be based on rigorous modern biblical scholarship and nothing should be forced just for the sake of relevance.

Finally, the contributor writes footnotes to explain and clarify a verse or group of verses. These are mostly exegetical notes and they should be based on the findings of modern biblical scholarship. The footnotes should also explain difficult words and phrases, as well as words that are theologically important.

What contributors should bear in mind while writing these comments and notes is the African context. As much as possible they should, first of all, make use of African cultural and religious traditions to clarify the meaning of the text. This can in many cases be done, particularly for the Old Testament, where many family and social customs of semi-nomadic peoples have their close equivalents in most traditional African societies today. But any such comparison must be based on a sound knowledge of African social anthropology to avoid misinterpretation. Western biblical scholarship has been making use of the languages, cultures and religions of the Ancient Near East, particularly Canaan and Mesopotamia, to comment on and explain many biblical texts. In the same way traditional African religions and cultures can profitably be used for the same purpose.

Secondly, after making use of African cultural and religious traditions to explain the meaning of the biblical text, the contributor should also bear in mind the ultimate purpose of this Bible. It is meant to help the readers discover Jesus Christ, the Word of the Father, in the words of the Scriptures as they address us in our situation today. This

means that the Bible must speak to and challenge the social, economic and political realities of present day Africa.

The original target date for the publication of this Bible was December 1998; however, at this stage there is no likelihood that so will be possible, because many contributors have not yet sent in their work as they should have done by now. Once all the contributions are in, the general editors will do the basic editorial work of checking the quality and suitability of the material, and putting everything together. Then the draft will be sent to several experts in various fields of specialization, including biblical scholars but also theologians, pastors, social anthropologists and specialists in African traditional religions. These will assess the work of the contributors and make suggestions for improvement. It is only after this feedback that the general editors can begin the final stage of meticulous editing and preparing the manuscript for publication.

Although Catholics initiated the project it is hoped that other Christians will also find this Bible helpful. In fact, some non-Catholics will be involved in the final assessment of the manuscript before publication and their views will certainly be taken into account.

This is without doubt an ambitious and difficult undertaking, and there remains a lot of hard work to do. But we are hopeful that when the project is finally concluded, this African edition of the Bible will be a significant landmark in African biblical scholarship at the service of evangelization. However, this being the first attempt at producing a Bible of this nature we should perhaps not expect that its first edition will be completely satisfactory. But it will certainly be a good beginning and a necessary foundation for improved editions in the future.

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Translating the Old Testament in Africa: An Afrocentric approach

By Gosnell L. O. R. Yorke

Translating the Old Testament (OT) has a long and revered tradition in Africa, going back to the Septuagint in Alexandria. Still, the proliferation of translations, especially in the sub-Saharan sector of the continent, can best be pegged to the inception of the mid-to-late nineteenth century missionary era. In their own way, and in keeping with their vision and version of mission, Europe- and North American-based missionary societies have played their part in helping to make the Bible available in various languages of Africa. Today, the United Bible Societies (1946), as a world fellowship of Bible societies, is responsible for hundreds of translation projects not only around the world, but also throughout Anglophone, Francophone, Hispanophone and Lusophone Africa.

One of the most noticeable features regarding Bible translation in Africa is the unmitigated joy and spirit of celebration, the "song and dance" that usually accompany the launching of the Bible (especially for the first time) within a given language community. This is not at all surprising since it is fairly well established that Africans, generally, love and even adore the Bible as the living and transforming Word of God.¹

In recent years, there has been a clarion call for a more Afrocentric approach to the whole question of Biblical exegesis and hermeneutics and, still more recently, to that of Bible translation as a whole.² Admittedly, such an Afrocentric approach is informed and influenced by various contemporary liberationist genres of biblical theology and hermeneutics.³ The Afrocentric approach is an attempt to translate Scripture from a premeditatedly Africa-conscious perspective and, in doing so, to break the apparent hegemony and, at times, what, for some,

¹ Cf. J. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*. Nairobi 1986; Y. Schaaf, *On their way rejoicing: The history and role of the Bible in Africa*. Carlisle 1994; and UBS *World Annual Report*, Bulletin Number 180/181, 1997.

² Cf. G. Yorke, "Biblical hermeneutics: An Afrocentric approach", *Religion and Theology* 2/2 (1995) 145-158; E. Yamauchi, "Afrocentric biblical interpretation", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39 (1996) 397-409.

³ The literature about such issues is already vast and continues to grow at a steady pace. For me, it encompasses (at least): Latin American liberation theology, feminist theology, womanist theology, black theology, Caribbean emancipatory theology, and, of course, African theology(ies).

seems to be an ideological stranglehold that various Western versions now enjoy in relation to the Bible. As a method, the Afrocentric approach seeks to put Africa, Africans and Africana generally (e.g. fauna and flora) back into the Bible by raising their profile and visibility at the level of translation - especially into the no-less-than fifteen hundred languages of Africa. The practical usefulness of this approach, of course, is that it may encourage the African readership to embrace the Bible with even greater enthusiasm than is now the case. Not only should the Bible be translated into the languages of Africa (usually based on one carefully chosen Western language or version, or another),⁴ but Africa and matters related thereto should be shown to be an integral part of the Biblical drama as well - not just in a negative sense, but positively too. To demonstrate briefly what an Afrocentric approach to translating the OT in Africa would mean, in a practical sense, one passage is used as a test case, namely Gen 2:10-14. Other passages relevant to this whole enterprise would include the following inexhaustive list: Gen 6:10.16, Num 12, Ju 3:1-11, 1 Kings 17:1-5, Isa 1:18, Jer 13:23, and Zeph 1:1.⁵

Translating Gen 2:10-14 for an African readership

This section, of necessity, is meant to be more illustrative than exhaustive in scope. A full discussion of the subject would require more than a very succinct article such as this would allow.

Basic to an Afrocentric approach to translate the OT in Africa is the contention that we have to begin at the beginning - with Genesis, the beginning. And in doing so, we need to come to grips with what appears to be an African presence in an Garden of Eden passage, Gen 2:10-14. Not only do(es) the Genesis account(s) of Creation serve a useful etiological function, but Gen 2:10-14 undercuts any and all de-Africanizing tendencies. Mention there is made, for example, of four rivers (Pishon, Gihon, Hiddekel and Euphrates) emanating from the Garden; and of the lands of Cush and Havilah, geographically associated with it.

What is noticable in a number of (Western) versions and translations (cf. *Revised Standard Version*, *New International Version*, *Good News Study Bible*, *A Boa Nova*, *Dios Habla Hoy*) and even in some

⁴ Cf. E.A. Nida & al., *The theory and practice of translation*. Leiden (1969) 6.

⁵ This is part of an initial and preliminary investigation. Comments from readers would be most welcome.

interlinear transliterations (cf. *The NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament*) is that the word Hiddekel, associated with Euphrates in Mesopotamia (v. 14) is correctly (and for the sake of clarity) replaced by the less obscure word Tigris (with or without a note to draw the reader's attention to the substitution; incidentally, the Septuagint has Tigris as well). However, what is also quite noticeable is that the same translational logic seems not to have been applied when it comes to the possible African elements of the passage in question; in particular, the rivers Pishon and Gihon and the lands of Havilah and Cush. David T. Adamo, Knut Holter and others have rightly shown that there is a questionable hesitation on the part of some scholars to identify it with what would pass today as a part of modern Ethiopia and all of Sudan, that is, with Africa; rather with, say, Mesopotamia or Saudi Arabia.⁶

In addition, and unlike their treatment of Hiddekel in v. 14, scholars generally do not substitute the Blue and White Nile the Pishon and Gihon respectively and, perhaps correctly so, since it is still not a settled issue. But at least, in our opinion, there should be a note to draw the (African) reader's attention to the possibility of this African connection. William F. Albright, for example, espoused the view that the two unknown rivers before us most likely refer to the two branches of the Nile, the Blue and White Nile, and so does Cain H. Felder, the general editor of the *Original African Heritage Study Bible*.⁷ Moreover, the only place in the Septuagint where both rivers are mentioned (and together) is in the deuterocanonical text of Sirach 24:25, where they seem to be associated with the two branches of the Nile.

As for Havilah, scholars are equally hesitant to associate it with Egypt. This is so in spite of the fact that whenever it appears in the OT, Havilah is associated with Egypt (cf. Gen 10:7, 29, 25:18, 1 Sam 25:8). At times one encounters what appears to be incredibly specious arguments to justify the non-association of Havilah with an area in the region of Egypt. John Skinner, for example, argues that Havilah could not have been in Africa but in Arabia.⁸ The reason for this is that bdellium and onyx, gold and other precious stones associated with Havilah in Gen

⁶ Cf. D.T. Adamo, "Ancient Africa and Genesis 2:10-14", *The Journal of Religious Thought* 49 (1992) 33-43; K. Holter, "Should Old Testament 'Cush' be rendered 'Africa'?", *The Bible Translator* 48 (1997) 331-336.

⁷ Cf. *Original African Heritage Bible*. Nashville 1993, *ad loc.*

⁸ J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*. Edinburgh (1912) 59-61 (International Critical Commentary).

2:11-12 were, presumably, not found anywhere in Africa but in places like Arabia, India, Media, Babylonia and Greece. Still, the context strongly suggests an African location in each case.

In our view, the African reader should be made aware of this if not at the level of the actual translation of the passage then at least by way of a study note or comment. I do recall sharing this "African" reading of Gen 2:10-14 with a group of translators from Chad and Cameroon at a workshop for translators and there was, predictably, a spontaneous expression of pleasant surprise and absolute delight. One of them wondered out loud why, in all his years as an African translator in his particular project, he was not made aware of this psychologically liberating translation of the passage.

Conclusion

An Afrocentric approach to the translating of the OT in Africa is still in its infancy although a spate of articles, relevant to the issue, have seen the light of day in recent years. As a translation strategy, it is predicated upon the fairly undebatable conviction that all Bible translation, however "scientific" or "objective" it purports to be, is ultimately perspectival in nature and even ideological in thrust whether translators themselves are aware of it or not. For us, there is no such thing as a value-free theory and practice of translation which exists in some hermeneutically abstract, absolute or autonomous realm far removed from the biases and blind-spots to which we are all susceptible as fallible "fallen" human beings.

The hegemonic hold that male Western translators have long had on Bible translation is now being openly challenged not only by women but by those committed to an Afrocentric approach as well. This article, though very modest in scope, is meant to be an illustration of that.

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Morphological and syntactical similarities between Hebrew and Bantu languages

By Victor Zinkurative

In the course of my teaching Hebrew to Graduate students at the Catholic University of East Africa over many years, I came to realize that it is useful for the teacher to refer to African languages and see if there is something that can help students to understand certain features of Hebrew grammar. The English language, which we use as the medium of teaching, is very different both from Hebrew and from Bantu languages. Very frequently there were cases where students found a Hebrew grammatical or syntactical feature rather strange and difficult to understand when seen from the point of view of English grammar and syntax. But occasionally we discovered that these peculiar features in Hebrew seemed difficult only because we were comparing them with English. When we tried to compare them with some Bantu languages we were often amazed to discover that what had seemed so strange, when seen from the English speaker's point of view, was perfectly normal from the Bantu languages point of view. The languages we tested included Kiswahili, which is practically the lingua franca of East Africa, Luganda of south-central Uganda, a group of related languages in western Uganda collectively designated as Runyakitara - the present writer's language, Kikuyu of Kenya, and Chichewa of Malawi and Zambia.

In this short article, which is only exploratory, I will give some examples of certain morphological and syntactic similarities between Hebrew and Bantu languages. I will only give a few that come to mind but I am sure that a systematic search would discover a lot more. I would therefore encourage African teachers and students of Hebrew to look up the Hebrew Bible for more examples of these similarities.

I shall begin with the examples based on morphology and taken from only one but very important area of Hebrew grammar, namely the Hebrew verb system or conjugations. It will not be necessary to cover all the conjugations although every one of them contains examples. After the morphological examples I shall give some syntactical ones. Three minor examples will be about 'redundant' pronouns and adverbs of place. But my main example of comparison will be taken from a much more important feature of the Hebrew language, namely the *qatal+wayyiqtol*

verb sequence used in past tense narrative. Basically this will be a comparison between Hebrew narrative, in which the *waw*-consecutive is prominent, and Bantu language narrative, which uses a special past tense somehow comparable to the Hebrew *waw*-consecutive.

1. Morphological similarities

One of the most difficult features of Hebrew grammar that a beginning student faces is the Hebrew verb system or what some grammarians sometimes call ‘conjugations’ for lack of a better term. I shall also be using this term in what follows. These conjugations are: *Qal*, *Piel*, *Hiphil*, *Niphal*, *Hithpaal*, *Pual* and *Hophal*. *Qal* refers to the simplest form of a verb. The rest of the conjugations are forms which derive from the *Qal* and whose basic form they modify in one way or another to express related meanings of the same verb. For example they may change the verb from the stative or intransitive mood to the factitive or transitive, from active to either causative or reflexive or passive, from a simple action to an intensive or repeated one, and other semantic modifications of this nature.

a) Examples from the Piel Conjugation:

The *Piel* form expresses the intensive meaning of the simple form. For example שִׁבַּר *shabar*, is the *Qal* form of the verb to break. The *Piel* form of this verb is *shibber* from the same root and it means to smash or shatter. The basic meaning of the *Qal* form is intensified by the *Piel* form. In such cases the English language normally uses either a different verb or a phrase to express the intensive meaning, e.g. to smash or break into small peaces. Bantu languages on the other hand use the same verb and simply give it a different form like in Hebrew. For example to break is *kwata*, in my native language. To smash is *kwatagura*. The same verb is used with a morphological modification, just like in Hebrew. In this case it is easy to explain to a Bantu speaking student the difference between a *Qal* and a *Piel* by simply referring to this similarity instead of giving abstract explanations.

There are times when the *Qal* form of a verb is either stative or intransitive, whereas the *Piel* form is transitive. For example טָהַר *tahar*, means to be clean (stative) but the *Piel* form *tihar* means to make clean or to cleanse. In my language the equivalent of the *Qal* is *kwera*, to be clean,

and the *Piel* equivalent is *kweza*, to cleanse. In this case the English is forced to use an adjective because it does not have a stative verb like in Hebrew and Bantu languages. Another example is the verb יָרֵחַ *yareh*, to be afraid (stative). Its *Piel* form *yireh* means to terrify, to make afraid. In my language to be afraid is *kutiina* (stative) and to terrify is *kutiinisa* (transitive). Exactly the same verb is used with a morphological change, just like in Hebrew. Sometimes the *Qal* form of a verb is active whereas its *Piel* form is causative. For example לָמַד *lamad*, means to learn whereas *limed* means to cause to learn, to teach. In my language to learn is *kwega* (active, corresponding to *Qal*) and to teach is *kwegyesa* (causative, corresponding to *Hipnil*). It should again be noted that the English has to use a different verb or a phrase, unlike in Hebrew and Bantu languages where the same verb is used with the appropriate morphological adjustment. This makes it a little easier for the Bantuphone students to understand the morphology of the Hebrew verb.

b) Examples from the *Hipnil* Conjugation:

Another Hebrew conjugation that can be easily explained to Bantu speaking students is the *Hipnil*. This has some semantic overlap with the *Piel*, especially in the causative mood. Some examples of this are: the *Qal* form אָכַל *akal*, to eat, becomes הֵאָכַל *he'akal*, to feed, in the *Hipnil* form. In my Bantu language to eat is *kurya*, which corresponds to the Hebrew *Qal*. In the causative it becomes *kuriisa*, to feed, and corresponds to the Hebrew *Hipnil*. Another verb is שָׁב *shub*, in the *Qal* form, which means to return. Its *Hipnil* form הֵשִׁיב *heshib* means to cause to return, i.e. to bring back or restore. In my language the verb *kugaruka* means to return (active) and corresponds to the Hebrew *Qal*, and *kugarura*, which corresponds to the Hebrew *Hipnil*, means to cause to return, i.e. to bring back or restore, just as in Hebrew.

c) An example from the *Hithpael* Conjugation:

My final example is taken from the *Hithpael* conjugation. The verb הָלַךְ *halak*, in the *Qal* form, means to walk. The *Hithpael* form of this verb is הִתְהַלֵּךְ *hithalek*, and it means to walk around repeatedly or to roam. In my language to walk is *kugyenda*, and it corresponds to the Hebrew *Qal* form. To walk around is *kugyendagyenda*, corresponding to the Hebrew *Hithpael*. It is interesting to note that the Hebrew conjugation *Hithpael*, which makes this verb iterative, i.e. expressing a repeated action, is

morphologically longer than its *Qal* form. This is exactly the same with the equivalent verb in my language: from *kugyenda* to *kugyendagyenda*, the root of the verb being simply repeated to express the repetition of the action.

I would like to point out that the above examples of morphological similarities between Hebrew and Bantu languages are not isolated cases. They are quite common and consistent and can be found in all the Hebrew conjugations. It is therefore important for teachers and students of Hebrew to know how to exploit them for making the study of Hebrew a little easier and more interesting for Bantu-speaking students.

2. Syntactical similarities

There are also certain similarities of syntax between Hebrew and Bantu languages. The first example is what appears to be a redundant use of a pronoun in relative clauses. For example in Hebrew the phrase “in the land where you dwell” is literally “upon the land which you dwell in it”, *בַּהּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּם יֹשְׁבִים בָּהּ* (Num 33:55). The Hebrew *bah* בַּהּ (“in it”) can puzzle students when seen from the point of view of English syntax. But as a matter of fact Bantu languages use similar ‘redundant’ suffixes. In my language, for example, the above is translated as *omuri egyo nsi ei mutwiremu*. The last syllable ‘*mu*’ of the last word corresponds exactly to the Hebrew בַּהּ. Even the word order is remarkably the same. Something similar is *הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עוֹמֵד עָלָיו* (Exod. 3:5). The literal translation is “the place where you are standing *on it*”. My language puts it exactly the same way: *omwanya gu oyemereireho*. The *ho* corresponds to the Hebrew עָלָיו. Even here the word order is the same.

Another example is the seemingly redundant adverb of place. In Genesis 13:3: “to the place where his tent had been” is expressed in Hebrew as *עַד־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה שָׁם אֹהֶלָהּ* = “to the place where his tent had been *there*”. In my language it is translated as *omu mwanya ugu eihema rye ryabaire ririmu*. The suffix ‘*mu*’ in the last word ‘*ririmu*’ is the adverb of place translating the Hebrew שָׁם *sham* (“there”). The literal translation from my language is “in the place where his tent had been *in there*”. This is exactly like in the Hebrew.

The next example of a syntactic similarity between Hebrew and Bantu languages is found in Hebrew narrative texts. Here the Hebrew uses what is known as *waw*-consecutive or *waw*-conversive. This is a very

common feature in Hebrew narrative, especially in the historical books. The sequence of tenses is often very puzzling to beginning students of Hebrew, but that is only when it is compared with English narrative. In Bantu languages on the other hand past tense narratives use a sequence of tenses which functions very much like the Hebrew *waw*-consecutive in the *qatal*+*wayyiqtol* verb sequence. At the beginning of the narrative a normal past tense is used, but the subsequent verbs are put in a special narrative tense, exactly corresponding in function to the Hebrew *waw*-consecutive. The examples are abundant in the historical books of the Old Testament. Just one example from the story about the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca in Genesis 24 will suffice.

The chapter opens with a past tense: “Abraham was old”. The English narrative continues with the normal past tense in the rest of the story. But in Hebrew and Bantu languages the past tense is used only in v. 1. From v. 2 onward the *waw*-consecutive (in Hebrew) and a special narrative tense (in Bantu languages) are used. In v. 2 the *waw*-consecutive is **וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם** *wayyomer abraham*, “and Abraham said”. The normal past tense, which Hebrew grammar calls the perfect, would have been **אָמַר** *amar*. Similarly in my language we say: *Aburhamu yagambira: yagambira* is the narrative tense corresponding to the Hebrew *waw*-consecutive *wayyomer*. The normal past tense would have been ‘*akagambira*’. There is no need to go through the whole chapter because these special tenses are consistently used throughout the story. The Bantu speaking readers can easily check this out for themselves. Even those who do not know Hebrew will note that a special narrative tense in their language, with no equivalent in English, is used. It is this narrative tense that corresponds to the Hebrew *waw*-consecutive. The two are used very much in the same way.

The discovery of these similarities has, in my view, important implications. First of all, for those who teach Hebrew through the medium of English to Bantu students a comparison with the Bantu languages will quite often facilitate the explanation and understanding of certain features of biblical Hebrew. From my teaching experience I know that there are cases when students have problems understanding some of the issues I have mentioned simply because English grammar and syntax stand in their way.

Secondly, there are implications also for Bible translation into African languages. Some African students of Hebrew will later on be

involved in translating the Bible into Bantu languages. When they are already aware that there are certain grammatical and other similarities between Hebrew and their language they will exploit them to the full. The temptation of African translators of the Bible is to depend too much on English (and other European) translations. This is quite understandable because that is what they are most familiar with. For those who do not know biblical languages there may not be any alternative to such translations. But for someone who has studied Hebrew it is very useful always to go to the Hebrew text first and examine the grammar and the syntax of the verse to be translated and then compare it with that of the target African language. The translator will sometimes be surprised to discover that it is so much easier to translate straight from the Hebrew into a Bantu language without going through a European language. In any case it is the text of the original language that should always be the primary basis of any translation.

This short article is only meant to draw the attention of African Old Testament scholars and students to the possibilities of African languages, the Bantu group in particular, as an auxiliary medium for the teaching of biblical Hebrew. It would be interesting for the other non-Bantu African groups of languages to make the same kind of comparison with the Hebrew for finding out any similarities. It is most likely that the Hamitic and Nilotic groups of languages would yield a still closer and more radical resemblance with Hebrew than the Bantu languages do. The existence of such similarities might even have other implications beyond their usefulness for teaching Hebrew and translating the Bible. They could encourage African Old Testament scholars to examine the potential of using mainly African Bible translations (instead of European ones) in conjunction with the Hebrew (and Greek) Bible. I believe that this might prove to be one promising route towards a genuine African biblical exegesis that will facilitate a more contextualized interpretation of the Bible for Africans.

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Old Testament literature in the NEGST library

By Dorothy N. Bowen

Since the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST) opened in 1983, there has been steady growth in the size and quality of its library collection. The collection now contains more than 30,000 volumes and more than 280 periodicals are received on a regular basis. Approximately 6% of the 30,000 volumes and 21% of the periodicals could be considered Africana (published in Africa and/or deal with African topics).

There are approximately 1100 volumes directly dealing with the Old Testament in the circulating collection of the library. Some of the major journals which would assist in doing Old Testament research are as follows:

Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology 1982-
Biblical Archaeologist 1938-1965; 1985-
Biblical Archaeology Review 1981-
Biblical Interpretation 1993-
Bibliotheca Sacra 1916-
Catholic Biblical Quarterly 1987-
Evangelical Quarterly 1929-
Hebrew Studies 1993-
Interpretation 1947-
Journal for the Study of Judaism 1993-
Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 1976-
Journal of Biblical Literature 1955-
Journal of Jewish Studies 1993-
Journal of Semitic Studies 1956-1962;1985-
Old Testament Abstracts 1986-
Religion Index One: Periodicals 1949-
Vetus Testamentum 1985 -

Some of the titles in the reference collection are as follows:

Anchor Bible
Anchor Bible Dictionary

Calvin's Commentaries
 Encyclopedia Judaica
 Hermeneia
 Illustrated Bible Dictionary
 International Christian Literature Documentation Project: A Subject,
 Author, and Corporate Name Index of Nonwestern Christian
 Literature
 International Critical Commentary
 International Standard Bible Encyclopedia
 Interpreter's Bible
 Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible
 Jewish Encyclopedia
 New Century Bible Commentary
 Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
 Topical Concordance of the Old Testament
 Tropical Africa and the Old Testament: A Select and Annotated
 Bibliography
 Word Biblical Commentary

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Book notes

- ♦ E. Wendland, *Analyzing the Psalms: With exercises for Bible students and translators*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns 1998 (235 pp., \$18.00).

This textbook introduces students and translators of the Old Testament to the basic compositional structure and literary style of Hebrew poetry, and it focuses especially on the question of how to achieve a translation that is faithful both to the original content and to the dynamics of poetic expression. Wendland follows a discourse analysis approach, examining different aspects of the texts as an

integrated whole; the primary focus is upon the formal features of the psalms, but elements of content (key terms) and function (psalm types or genres) also receive due consideration. The book has already been used in a number of locations in Africa as a basic tool in workshops focusing on the Psalms, and an appendix offers much practical advice on how to organize a biblical poetry workshop, especially in an African context. However, the book will also be useful in exegetical classes on the Psalms in universities and theological seminaries.

(K. Holter)

- ♦ J. de Ward, *A handbook on Isaiah*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns 1997 (Textual criticism and the translator; 1.) (xviii + 228 pp., \$29.50). The book is the first in a series initiated by the United Bible Societies. The series is intended to provide translators of the OT with some help with regard to the textual critical problems they face. This first volume contains a bibliography on Isaiah (pp. xi-xviii), a very brief introduction (pp. 1-3), and then follows a detailed discussion (pp. 4-228) of some major textual problems throughout the book of Isaiah. Each problem is discussed from three points of view; (i) textual decisions, (ii) evaluation of problems, and (iii) proposals of translation. One could have wished a more thorough discussion of some of the criteriology; still, this first volume in the new series creates the impression of a systematic, convincing and useful piece of work.

(K. Holter)

Book projects

- ♦ Dr Lynell Zogbo and Dr John Ellington, United Bible Society consultants working in West and Central Africa, have written a manuscript on *Translating poetry in the Old Testament: A practical guide for translators*; the manuscript is now sent to the editors of the United Bible Society. The book will help translators with little or no access to the Hebrew Scriptures to understand the features of the source text and challenges them to make poetic adaptations in their own language. Both authors have lived and worked in Africa for

many years; thus, they have provided many examples of poetic features in African languages which correspond to those in the Hebrew. Queries can be sent to Dr Lynell Zogbo, B.P. 1869, Daloa, Côte d'Ivoire.

- ♦ Drs Zogbo and Ellington are also preparing a manual in French dealing with issues relating to the translation of the OT into African languages. Topics covered will include translating names of God, book titles, geographical and personal names. There will also be brief chapters on features of Hebrew syntax and poetry aimed at helping translators understand the structures in the original and adapting them into their own language. It is hoped that the first draft of the manual will be ready by the end of 1998.

Conferences

- ♦ The sixteenth congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament will be held in Oslo, August 2-7, 1998, under the presidency of Professor Magne Sæbø. There will be main lectures on "Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible" (K. Nielsen), "A plea for a historical-critical study of the OT" (B. Becking), "Can biblical texts be dated linguistically?" (A. Hurvitz), "Onomastik zwischen Linguistik und Geschichte" (S. Norin), "Zur Funktion der Soziologie im Studium des ATs" (C. Schäfer-Lichtenberger), "A new 'history of Israel'?" (P. Machinist), "Ras Shamra and the present state of Ugaritic studies" (M.S. Smith), "The Deuteronomists between history and theology" (G. Auld), "Recent developments in Wisdom studies" (G. Sheppard), "Die Erforschung der Psalmen nach Mowinckel" (E. Zenger), "Qumran et le texte de l'AT" (E. Puech), "The future of OT theology" (M.G. Brett), "Die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, ihr Stand und ihre Zukunft" (O. Kaiser). Further, there will be panels on "Intertextuality and the plurality of methods" and on "Bible and history". And finally, there will be a number of short papers on different aspects of OT scholarship; especially

related to Africa are "The Chagga scape-goat purification ritual and another re-reading of the goat of Azazel / azazel in Leviticus 16: Some preliminary observations" (A. Mojola), and "The institutional context of OT scholarship in Africa" (K. Holter). For information: Professor Hans M. Barstad, Department of Biblical Studies, Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, P.O. Box 1023, Blindern, N-0315 Oslo, Norway.

- ♦ The 1998 annual conference of the Old Testament Society of South Africa will take place in Harrismith, hosted by the Qwa-qwa campus of the University of the North, September 16-18, 1998. The theme of the conference is "The book of Ezekiel". For information: Dr G.M. Augustyn, Department of Biblical and Religion Studies, University of the North Quaqua Campus, Private Bag X13, Phuthaditjhaba 9866, South Africa, e-mail: augustyn@uniquwa.ac.za; or Prof Herrie van Rooy, Old and New Testament, Potchefstroom University for CHE, Potchefstroom 2520, South Africa, e-mail: onthfvr@puknet.puk.ac.za
- ♦ The 1998 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) will take place in Orlando, Florida, November 21-24, 1998. The "Section on Bible translation" plans two sessions; one on how literary theory effects Bible translation, and another where papers on any topic related to Bible translation are invited. The "Section on Bible in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean" will in two sessions focus on volumes in the forthcoming series *The Bible and Post-Colonialism* (Sheffield Academic Press), ed. by R.S. Sugirtharajah. All participants here have already been invited. For information: Society of Biblical Literature, 1201 Clairmont Avenue, Suite 300, Decatur, GA 30030-1228, USA; e-mail: sblexec@emory.edu
- ♦ A conference on "Fostering unity in the body of Christ in Nigeria", brought biblical scholars together at the Institute of Church and Society, Ibadan, Nigeria, February 18-21.

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As the very idea of this newsletter is to be a forum for exchange of ideas and information, the editor constantly needs response from the readers. Your ideas and meanings, your research and book projects, your meetings and conferences - all is of interest for other scholars working with the Old Testament within the context of Africa.

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