BOTSA

Bulletin for Old Testament Studies in Africa

18 • 2005

Bulletin for Old Testament Studies in Africa
Paper edition: ISSN: 1502-0819
Online edition: ISSN: 1502-0827
Website: http://www.mhs.no/article_204.shtml

Bulletin for Old Testament Studies in Africa (BOTSA) aims at being a forum for exchange of ideas and information about Old Testament studies in Africa. In brief articles *BOTSA* comments on pedagogical, methodological and research political questions related to Old Testament studies in Africa, and it also brings notices on research projects, teaching programs, books and conferences. The readers are encouraged to use it as a means of communication.

BOTSA is published biannually; in May and November. The paper edition is sent free of charge to African Old Testament scholars and African theological libraries (i.e. libraries in university departments of theology and religion, and degree granting seminaries and colleges). The annual rate for other subscribers is US $ 14.00.

BOTSA is indexed in:

- ATLA Religion Database, published by the American Theological Library Association, 250 S. Wacker Dr., 16th Flr., Chicago, IL 60606, USA;
  Website: http://www.atla.com/

- Old Testament Abstracts, published by The Catholic Biblical Association, 294 Leahy Hall, The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC 20064, USA;
  Website: http://cba.cua.edu/OTA.cfm

From 1996 to 1999 (issues 1–7) *BOTSA* was published under the name *Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship* (paper edition ISSN: 0808-2413, online edition ISSN 1500-7383).

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Issue 18, May 2005

Do we really need to learn Hebrew?

I have met the question in various corners of Africa. Should we not concentrate on contextualizing or Africanizing Old Testament studies, rather than bothering our students with a dead language? The clear answer of this issue of *BOTSA* is that African Old Testament studies proceeds from the Hebrew texts of the Old Testament. Not for historical reasons, "this is how it traditionally has been done in Europe". Rather for practical and principal reasons. The Hebrew language is the door into the world of the living and relevant texts of the Old Testament.

Knut Holter

The study of Hebrew and the Old Testament in Africa

Philip Nel

The tendency to ignore the original languages of the Bible is widespread. Many denominations do no longer emphasize the importance of the original biblical languages, sometimes seen as a deterrent. The tendency towards more functional translations of the Bible for different target audiences have, however, raised the question again regarding the command and authenticity of readings of the Bible. The study of Hebrew and Greek is certainly not a prevention of questionable readings, but at least the knowledge, if required justifiably, should assist a closer entry to the text.

My intention here is not to supply detailed examples of how Hebrew may provide an advantage for Old Testament studies and exegesis, but rather to link the benefit of Hebrew to broader contextual issues and emerging fields of study important to take cognizance of. Although some remarks refer to the South African context, it would arguably also be applicable to other African countries.

The South African context

In South Africa two tendencies, which do not communicate well with each other, are observable in the public domain of religious discourse. The first has to do with the *de facto* situation where Hebrew and its cognate fields are dwindling in the knowledge emporium. Fully fledged courses in biblical Hebrew are offered now at only 6 universities. Old Testament studies are in a slightly better position, and are offered at 12 accredited tertiary institutions and are also part of the curricula of denominational teaching schools. It needs also to be said that the way in which typical Semitic and Near Eastern Studies departments are running their curricula currently, differs considerably from what has been the case during the nineties. The reason being that in terms of the decline in student numbers as well as the diminishing state subsidy, the departments have been forced to broaden the scope of their offering, resulting in a stronger emphasis on cultural dimensions of the Ancient Near East.

The development went through different phases: Until the sixties the offering of Hebrew and Greek were aligned to the requirements of the theological curricula and were seen as support subjects for theology

training. Since the sixties, one encounters what may be called the renaissance of Near Eastern Studies as an autonomous field in South Africa. The autonomy of the subject was claimed and developed in line with most European departments of Semitics or Ancient Near Eastern studies. Although the "service" dimension to theology was maintained, the Humanities aspect of the discipline was encouraged and strengthened. It was also a productive period for Old Testament studies under the flagship of what has become known as "Biblical Theology". The cultural and religious contexts of the Ancient Near East have been exploited to the benefit of Old Testament religion and hermeneutics. Since the nineties, most departments have come under threat of closure or rationalization. The consequence of which was continued alliance with disciplines in the Humanities as well as an incorporation of comparative religion. In 1999 the author (Nel 1999:1-19) made a plea for the inclusion of spirituality and religion in comparative manners should Ancient Near Eastern studies maintain its value in the re-arranged academic emporium. The plea was in particular articulated in terms of the necessity to take the African context more seriously.

The second tendency referred to in the opening statement relates to the socio-political discourses of Southern Africa, in particular about revival and renaissance of Africa. Now that the African Union is established, the Pan-African Parliament in place, the focus is also very much on the value and spiritual revival of Africa. A prominent aspect of these discourses has become the emphasis on African cosmology and indigenous knowledge systems and how these could be integrated with schemes of development so that society and human development are geared towards moral and spiritual values. There currently appears a stronger recognition of indigenous religion and a greater openness towards hybrid forms of Christian religious expressions. In South Africa these discourses are often inherently connected to aspirations of roots and identity.

The reason why I said that these two tendencies are not communicating well with one another is of a twofold nature. It is a pity, and indeed an irony, that now that contextual discourses are so fruitful for dialogue with the spiritual and indigenous knowledge of the Near East and the Bible, the strength and general pool of knowledge represented by these disciplines are so small. The study of the biblical languages and Old Testament theology certainly has much to offer, as we will see later. The other aspect relates to an honest admission that the way in which biblical languages and Old Testament studies have been taught was not successful in mainstreaming in the current socio-political

discourse. The current biblical language and Old Testament theological discourses are not public in the market place of the ongoing discourse of Africa's renaissance. This is not to say that they should have become socio- or political ethics or identity ideology, but merely that their absence is conspicuous. This position may arguably be contested as an unreasonable accusation, and that seemingly efforts such as that of the West and proponents of contextual theology (cf. Nolan Essays 2001) have aspired to exactly that. There are a few laudable efforts, but generally speaking the African context was not mainstreamed in the offering.

Mainstreaming the study of biblical languages and Old Testament theology

The moral question is forcing itself on all participants of the discourses of the disciplinary fields mentioned above, namely: What is the purpose of these disciplines if the societal impact is null and void? One might reason that the inherent scientific value and international academic dialogue justify the position. The question then arises; but what would prevent these academic dialogues from becoming elitist monologues leaving society untouched? One would also have to consider what flow or direction should be given to an agenda towards societal involvement if embarked upon. Should it be determined from the internal dynamics of the discipline itself to clarify the societal impact, or should it, as Mosala (1989) would argue, be derived from the impact of socially pre-conditioned readings? Gerald West (1999) has argued that one should listen to the voices of society and how ordinary people read the Bible and then translate it into academic dialogue without prescriptiveness or dominated by traditional authoritarian orthodoxy. Masoga has gone a step further and claims that biblical hermeneutics should become conversational theology. This implies that one should listen to the narratives and prayers of ordinary people in the market place (in the heart of the community but on the periphery of academic society) and then dialogue the manner in which they read and understand.

The task is not easy. What transpires, however, is the inevitable requirement to interact with the African society and its traditions of reading and meaning construction. It deconstructs the unidirectional methodology of reading the Bible in the original, make it relevant for Old Testament and then apply it to concrete societal and human conditions. In this manner the disciplines will encircle the skies above society, with

apparent presence, but uninvolved in the dynamics of real life experiences. Dialogue should be dialogue in a reciprocal manner, engaging existing realities as well as existing interpretations of the Bible. There are rich and relevant readings "out there" and they should be part of the pre-understandings and a prerequisite for the participation in dialogue. Biblical language study and Old Testament hermeneutics should become part and parcel of the discursive environment of Africa's future and development. It should be part of the existing hybridities of Christian God-talk and leave the academic emporium to become part of the market place – to use an idea of Masoga.

In concrete terms, the debate should stop to focus on what Old Testament studies can offer in a disengaged manner, but to join the discourse of the current realities of Africa without final answers, committed to the healing and well-being of a spiritually complex and dislocated society. The Hebrew language in which a people not only voice their aspirations and definitions of a nation of God, but also a language which shape their mental and spiritual conceptualizations amongst the diverse surrounding cultures, may become an important partner. When the Deuteronomist reflects upon the economic and social onslaught brought upon Israel by international imperialism and internal economic power of the rich, then the most fundamental values of the society and the belief system require an in-depth reflection; not to maintain an orthodox theology, but to protect society from disintegration. This relates well to what happened also in the Mesopotamian context when constitutional laws failed to protect the rights of the poor and underprivileged. Marxism, many centuries later, has its basis of counter dialogue precisely upon the same economic disruption of society. Africa is experiencing the onslaught again in the guise of globalization and requires a committed partner in dialogue. The space is there for Near Eastern Studies and Old Testament theology. The Ancient Near East has the best recorded history of societies moving from sedentary or rural settings to urbanized economies. Their religion and existence are both affected in fundamental ways. Historical memory is meaning shaping and still provides points of entry in critical issues of Africa's urbanization. The space is also there on an individual level as well, when answers are sought for, in the wake of the most terrifying experiences of anguish, distress and removal from the Divine. These are but a few illustrations of voice spaces for the fields often regarded as esoteric and religious enclaves.

Biblical Hebrew and cultural studies

In order to direct the light specifically to the contribution the study of Hebrew and Near Eastern Studies may offer to the study of the Old Testament, the prominence of cultural studies presents itself obviously. On a historical and material level, the study of the societies of the Ancient Near East offers a rich repository of knowledge of the beginning of all societal structures and institutions, ranging from systems of administration/governance to systems of economy, law and official religion. On a material level it exposes the first efforts of produce and consumer utensils, as well as weaponry and currency, to name but a few. On a conceptual level, reflections are available about abstract concepts of God, ritual and myth as part of what makes life meaningful. It offers the beginnings of reflections of the past and the future and produces mega stories of origin and fate. It offers reflection upon moral and spiritual behaviour, and a search for norms to instruct responsible conduct in individual and collective sense. It offers a rich source of information to be part of any discussion of Africa's societal patterns and indigenous family religion. The Ancient Near East and the Bible is as indigenous as the repositories of African indigenous knowledge.

The emergence of cultural studies since the seventies has also brought along a very important critical register, which allows critical engagements with the reigning discourses. In particular, it opens the veils of power and vested ideologies. In terms of critical culture theory, it is possible to study biblical material and social changes in new perspectives. It also allows re-definition of Israel's most constitutive ideas or ideologies. The social and cultural perspective of Israel's religion is probably the single most important outcome of the critical cultural focus. The critical cultural perspective is of major importance to understand the "theologies" of the Old Testament, in particular how they were brought about by socio-cultural changes through the different historical periods. The typical Judaic theology of Jerusalem (Zion) evolved from the monarchy and the preference for the idea of a covenant between God and the Davidic king. The most pregnant concepts of this theology not only provide significant concepts of Messianism, but it also provided a norm to discourage and even ban ideas foreign to it. This theology centralized the Yahwistic cult and attributed ideas to God never thought of before, and thus established one of the richest domains of religious symbolism regarding Jerusalem and God as King. The language itself portrays these conceptualizations and one could even say that the language itself was instrumental to achieve this aim. Without knowledge

of the Hebrew language, the topical terms and their cognates may become concealed through translation.

The cultural perspective has also brought to the fore the requirement to study the Hebrew language and its literature in terms of the typical cultural and societal organizations/institutions. Cultural institutions and the way in which a particular culture organizes its conceptualizations of surrounding realities differ. These are however of essential importance to understand the text correctly. The way in which social institutions are organized together with the levels of authority and designation, become extremely important to understand the family relations referred to by the texts. The rights of family members cannot be assumed in terms of current relationships, but should reflect the reality of Israel's culture. The patriarchal rights were different from that of contemporary society, and equally the position of women and children. The right to inherit and possess land differs from that of a market economy. The law stipulations of the Deuteronomist, for example, prohibit to collect interest on money, which is nowadays (except in Islam tradition) common practice.

Two important conclusions have been drawn from the reality that Israel's socio-cultural system differs significantly from what we may assume currently. The one consequence is the impetus to redress the typical alphabetical manner in which dictionary entries are done of Hebrew, because they do not reflect the socio-cultural arrangements. It is therefore suggested that the vocabulary should be organized in such a manner that, say, the natural family and institutional organization are clear. This would imply that dictionaries should keep in mind the family structure (cf. e.g how Deist (2000) organized family terminology). The implication is further that the natural semantic fields should be reflective of words. In other words, if one wishes to know what "holy" means, it is necessary to look at words similar or equivalent in meaning but also to the opposites of these words. The particular context of usage could then be determined better. The dictionary project of De Blois (2002) is based on this principle. For translation studies, these developments are of central significance.

An implication emanating from the critical focus on the cultural context of the Biblical text is the question of legitimacy or normativity. In other words, if the context is playing a determining role in the definition of cultural and religious concepts of Israel, can one assign normativity to them? This constitutes a serious issue and requires that a degree of cultural relativity should be upheld as well. Say for example, the Old Testament defines the role and responsibilities of women and slaves; what is the status of those instructions for the current reality?

Even more so, could one dare to translate these sentiments of Biblical texts clashing with the current sentiments in such a way to alter the text or to soften the claim? These pertinent issues cannot be addressed without a full understanding of Israel's culture and language representation thereof in the original language.

Hebrew and reading Old Testament texts

The improvement of exegetical procedures in terms of closer attention to the specific literary characteristics of the different genres of the Bible, as well as the availability of different translations and complementary study guides pertaining to the background of the cultural and textual contexts of the Bible, have all contributed significantly to the reading and interpreting process of the Bible. For the expert, however, the requirement still persists to acquaint him/herself with the original. The rationale being that any translation is an interpretation and that the study guides reflect the state of the academic debate at a particular point in time.

The translation of poetry is extremely difficult, particularly because the meaning is co-encoded by the sound level of the original text. Sound is exploited in poetry not only to complement meaning, but it also serves purposes of coherence in the text. The tone or atmosphere can only be gauged from the original rhythmic patterns. It is therefore of significant importance to see for example where the dirge rhyme is used in Hebrew poetry, which points to lamenting (cf. Ps 22:3-4). In poetry, the coherence often depends on subtle allusions without which the connection cannot be understood between parts of a poem. In Ps 19, verses 2-7 refer to the skies and the sun and verses 8-12 to the law. Allusions in the second segment such as "radiant" and "make light" (v. 9b) refer to typical aspects of the sun, thereby creating internal cohesion. In Ps 22, the supplicant's cry is dehumanized as "roar" (v. 2) and only later (v. 14) the roar of the threatening lion is introduced. In narrative texts, thematic recurrent words are often used to indicate topic coherence but also plot sequence, see for example "eat" in Gen 2-3 and "laugh" in the story of Isaac (meaning "laughing") in Gen 21ff.

The God-talk of the Old Testament is highly metaphorical. Therefore, the metaphorical background of the Hebrew is required to make sense of the text. The shepherd metaphor in Ps 23 is not only alluding to sheep keeping, but is also exploited in terms of the juridical rule of the king as "shepherd", often used as a honorary title or epithet of

Ancient Near Eastern kings. When Job is confronted with the "wild beast" and "Leviathan" in the Divine speeches (Job 40:14-41:34), reference to chaotic monsters is implied and should be interpreted with due recognition to the broader cultural context of Israel's neighbours.

This brings us to the last remark with regard to the value of Hebrew for Old Testament studies, namely the intricate connection between language and thought structures.

New developments in linguistics and its contribution

Hebrew grammar and exegesis implementing the original Hebrew have always benefited from developments of literary theory and linguistics. A current trend of particular importance to Hebrew is cognitive linguistics. The aim of cognitive linguistics is to view a linguistic expression as a reflection of concept formation. Abstract concepts do have a bearing on empirical experiences. The way in which metaphors are construed suggests that they are commonly transported from concrete domains of experience into abstract ideas. If anger is experienced as "getting hot" or "cooking over" it becomes obvious why the following abstract metaphors may be construed: *His nose gets red; he explodes with anger; he is steaming*. In Old Testament exegesis, it has become extremely important to understand the experiential domain from which Hebrew metaphors are mapped onto abstract concept formation. In Ps 22, the disfiguring of the body at death is mapped onto the distressful experiences of being separated from a helping God. To read and interpret a word or phrase in context and not to operate with basic meanings of words are established procedures, but now it has also become a requirement to research the conceptual background of expressions. It is not, for example, enough to recognize in the expression *God turns his face upon us* a reference to sun mythology. The exact meaning should be obtained as to whether the face associated with light signifies well-being or blessing, or whether it refers to the provision of justice, a typical function of the sun god (e.g. Shamash) in the Ancient Near East. One should bear in mind as well, the way in which people of the African continent would relate to such expressions and what the best way to bridge the cultural divide between the Bible and Africa would be.

Form and content cannot be divided absolutely. This does not render the Bible untranslatable, but it requires from the exegete the capacity to inquire into the close connection between language expression and concept formation. The Hebrew language does not only transport ideas as

a medium, but the language itself is an expression of the thought patterns of Israel without which full appreciation is impossible. The language embodies some of the peculiar conceptualizations of Israel's religious concepts.

One may cherish the hope that Old Testament studies in Africa will take up the challenge, not only to maintain Hebrew as an important complementary capacity of the expert, but to regenerate an interest in Hebrew that would kindle the desire to explore the untouched terrain of Hebrew and African conceptualization. Through the Hebrew language, the God-talk of the Old Testament may find unaccounted and unexpected reverberations in Africa's conversational encounter with the Divine. Africa is a resourceful partner when it comes to God-talk!

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Teaching Biblical Hebrew at a Historically Disadvantaged Institution in South Africa in the Mid-1990s: A Recollection

Jaqueline S. du Toit

In 1995 and 1996 I held a two-year contract position in the Department of Semitic Languages, University of the North (UNIN), South Africa. My experiences in teaching at UNIN and, especially at the satellite campus at Giyani, caught the attention of my colleagues at the then South African Society for Semitics (SASSEM), now the South African Society for Near Eastern Studies (SASNES). This happened largely because of the huge number of students attracted to the first year Biblical Hebrew course: 254 in 1995 and 157 in 1996. As no one could believe the sheer numbers of students involved, I presented a paper on my experiences at the June 1996 conference of SASSEM in Durban, South Africa. This is a condensed version of that paper.[1]

The University of the North, now the University of Limpopo, historically was the creation of the Apartheid Government set to serve the language groups of the northern parts of South Africa. The alma mater of anti-apartheid stalwarts such as Cyril Ramaphosa, Matthews Phosa, and Ngoako Ramatlhodi; and with Nelson Mandela as chancellor, the university by the mid-1990s nevertheless had suffered through student protests and the worst of the political and financial upheaval of the latter years of the Apartheid regime. By the mid-1990s, most of the best and brightest of the formerly disadvantaged students had been lured to the moneyed environment and academic opportunity offered by the historically advantaged institutions in the bigger centres of South Africa, or overseas. The future of the historically disadvantaged tertiary institutions was in doubt and they were burdened by huge debt.[2]

Under these circumstances I accepted a two-year contract position as lecturer in Semitic Languages at the main campus of the University of the North, while my colleague, Prof. André Conradie, fulfilled the requirements of a postdoctoral Fulbright Fellowship in the United States. I was solely responsible for the teaching of all undergraduate Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic on main campus (which, traditionally, was taken only by Theology students of which there were not a large number at the time). Mr. Jacob Chabane taught Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic at the Qwa Qwa satellite campus. It was expected of me to also teach two to three times a week at the satellite campus of Giyani, approximately 150 km northeast of main campus (where the students were mostly in the

field of education). This implied leaving at five o'clock in the afternoon and travelling two to three times a week, after a full day's teaching, to teach first year Biblical Hebrew at Giyani. The travelling was done in unmarked minibuses provided by the University of the North and posed its own problems as the route on which we travelled was at the time contested in a taxi-war by rival taxi associations. On at least one occasion during my tenure at the University of the North, a minibus filled with lecturers returning from Giyani at night, were fired upon in drive-by shootings by taxi gangs mistaking the vehicles for rivals moving in on their territory.

Giyani is situated near the border with the Kruger National Park and the climate is subtropical. The campus was housed in a series of asbestos structures, with just the basic lecturing facilities available. The biggest classroom could accommodate 80 students. No air-conditioning and limited ventilation was to be found in the, as a rule, overcrowded classrooms. A rudimentary library was set up in one of the rooms, with most students opting to move their desks and chairs outside and studying in the open air where it was less stuffy, until it got too dark.[3]

As for the students at Giyani, I was assured at the time that this would involve a minimum of three to six mature, first year students. They were usually teachers trying to better their qualifications and took Hebrew, an odd choice as it was not as a rule part of the teaching curriculum in secondary schools, because they were devout Christians interested in the ancient languages of the Bible. The students rarely continued with Hebrew after their first year, as the only object of taking this elective was the personal or religious benefit of being able to read the biblical text in Hebrew.

The class of 1995 and 1996

The first evening I taught the promised class of five students, but had to change the class schedule because of room clashes. The next time I arrived, it was to face a crowd of over two hundred trying to fit into a class able to accommodate twenty. The class still consisted of non-theological, mature students, and what was particularly interesting, was that it was also predominantly female (approximately 97% in both years). At first I thought there was some mistake. Perhaps they mistook the class for the larger Criminology or Geography classes? But it was no mistake: for some inexplicable reason, the scheduling change made it easier for a huge number of students to enrol.

This state of affairs posed a number of obvious and seemingly insurmountable difficulties: a) even when I changed classrooms, to one of the biggest, we still could only fit 84 students comfortably, and about 120 in a squeeze, into the room. This the students overcame by building rather precarious structures outside the windows – thereby allowing them to follow the class through the open windows. I had to learn to come to class at least a quarter of an hour in advance, as the blackboard was at the front, and the door at the back, and I was otherwise unable to get to the front without literally climbing over chairs and desks; b) the next, and even more pressing problem, was study material. No bookshop in Giyani was willing to stock the relatively expensive Hebrew textbooks. The problem was eventually solved after a desperate plea to the University of the Free State, my alma mater. The University allowed me to copy their study material for Biblical Hebrew free of charge. My students, most of whom were heavily cash strapped, could therefore buy their study material at the price of what it would cost to photocopy it, without the fear of infringing copyright; c) I also soon realised that although English was the medium of instruction, not all students were sufficiently conversant in the linguistic terminology needed to enable a lecturer to successfully impart the intricacies of Hebrew grammar.[4] Additionally, as Biblical Hebrew classes are as a rule relatively small and therefore intimate affairs, the teaching method for such large and ill-equipped classes had to be drastically re-examined; d) furthermore, I had to overcome (in a respectful manner) social conventions and taboos: although predominantly female, I found that only the males in the class would offer to answer questions. At first my own gender (and the fact that I was relatively young and unmarried), also seemed problematic in establishing my authority as teacher.

Reflections

In Jacob Chabane's May 1997 account entitled, "Teaching Biblical Hebrew to non-theological students", much is made of the "self-examination" that was the result of "rethinking and redefining" the nature and focus of teaching Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic to non-theological students in South Africa.[5] I agree wholeheartedly with Chabane's assessment but I am wary of putting too much emphasis on lessons learnt. The huge student numbers at Giyani was not sustained or sustainable under the circumstances, and soon petered out after the huge intake of 1996, to the point where the Department of Semitic Languages

closed its doors completely at the end of 2001. As my appointment ended in December 1996, I lost touch with my Giyani students and can therefore not really comment on the reasons why so few, if any, decided to continue with Biblical Hebrew. In 1997 I moved to Montreal, Canada, where I was accepted into the doctoral programme of McGill University's Department of Jewish Studies.

I returned in 2002 to teach at the University of South Africa. I nevertheless have to concede that even if I had stayed at the University of the North, I doubt whether, physically and psychologically, I would have been able to continue much longer the commute that meant arriving back at home at midnight, only to teach again at eight a.m. the next day on main campus.

Given the disadvantages of a lack of personal attention (impossible with such big classes) and a divergent, mostly rural student body, "among the country's poorest and educationally ill-equipped for university" (Garson 1996), it was therefore not surprising that the failure rate was also disproportionately high. Although the huge numbers therefore indicated the keen interest of a non-theological and non-career oriented student base in the study of biblical languages, the circumstances and limitations at Giyani did not allow scope to explore this potential.

The road ahead

At a time when student numbers in traditional programmes for theology students are dropping steadily, and when the compulsory inclusion of biblical languages in the theological curriculum is also no longer guaranteed, we can ill afford not to take note of the potential of a non-traditional student populace interested in studying these languages. Tertiary education institutions in Africa have to accept the integral part the Bible and its languages play in the indigenous knowledge systems of our continent.

In the words of Mogomme Masoga: "... the biblical text stands in a central position ... It is used daily in a variety of contexts – it is used on trains by preachers; it is used to divine and heal by *abathandazeli* (spiritual/faith healers); it is used in some South African magistrates [*sic.*] courts for the swearing of the oath; it is used by both the dying and those that comfort themselves after the loss of their loved ones as a result of the endemic diseases that ravage our (South) African societies and communities; it is used and *read* at many night vigils, by independent

and indigenous church preachers and their followers, in cold tents and shanty buildings, throughout the night (mostly on Fridays), ... the Bible is indigenous, after all" (Masoga 2004:141-142, 155).

After two years teaching at a distance education institution (UNISA), I have now returned to the teaching of Biblical Hebrew to a more traditional audience of mostly theological students. I still maintain that the future of our discipline, however, lies in the less traditional and hitherto little explored territory of non-traditional, mature students eager to study Hebrew for personal enrichment or for reasons of faith (see Boshoff & Du Toit 2004). In 2005 a pilot project was launched to explore various teaching methods in the teaching of such an audience in the Department of Afroasiatic Studies, Sign Language and Language Practice at the University of the Free State. I currently teach Biblical Hebrew to five mature students with no theological background, by non-traditional means. It is still too early to make any predictions as to its success.

Notes

1. A short account on the extraordinary number of students in 1996 was also published in the May 1997 issue of this journal's precursor, *Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship* (Chabane 1997). You'll notice some discrepancies in my account and that of my colleague, Jacob Chabane. Mine is based solely on memory and what papers I still have at my disposal ten years later. The Department of Semitic Languages at the University of the North has since closed its doors and there is no means of verifying the details
2. In 1996, Philippa Garson of the *Weekly Mail & Guardian*, writes of the situation at the University of the North: "The university has a student debt of R81-million, a backlog in its capital building programmes of R650-million, and needs just about everything: new libraries, classrooms, residences (many students live in caravans and shacks), offices and sports facilities."
3. Jonathan Jansen's recent and rather cynical Hoernle Memorial Lecture on the status of universities in South Africa, "When does a University cease to exist?" uses Giyani (now included as an adjunct to the University of Venda) as an example of a state of affairs that has obviously changed little since 1995 and 1996 (Jansen 2004:4)
4. In an anonymous poll taken in 1996, I determined that at least 60% of the class had a mother tongue other than any of the eleven official languages spoken in South Africa. As Giyani is close to both the Zimbabwe and Mozambique borders, chances are that many of the students were immigrants from the neighbouring countries. Especially in the case of immigrants from Mozambique, English would at best be a third language, but mostly a fourth or fifth.

5. I refer the reader also to a recent article by Boshoff and Du Toit (2004) on the current state of affairs of Semitics in South Africa. See also Nel (1998-2001) in this regard.

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Introducing Bible Translation Skills in Hebrew Courses

Victor Zinkuratire

When I started preparing this short article its title was 'Introducing Vernacular Bibles in Hebrew Courses' and as a matter of fact most of it is about that. But when I received and looked at the programme of the Old Testament Society of South Africa, from the Centre for Bible

Interpretation and Translation in Africa, I realized that the ultimate purpose of why I thought of introducing vernacular bibles in Hebrew courses was to learn something about Bible translation. It was for this reason that I tried, in mid-stream, to steer the article in the direction of Bible translation.

The neglect of vernacular bibles by students

The majority of the students who study biblical languages in theological colleges and university faculties of theology do so as part of their training and preparation for the Christian ministry as priests and pastors. In the African context, which is mostly rural, this means that they will be using vernacular bibles in church services, in preaching and teaching the Bible and the Christian faith in general. But since throughout their theological training they have used mostly, if not exclusively, bibles in English or some other European language, they may be totally unfamiliar with a Bible in their own language. This can prove to be a practical handicap because they lack a ready 'biblical' language that they can spontaneously use in the course of their pastoral ministry. Everything is remembered in English and so there is always a certain amount of mental translation going on whenever they are using the vernacular. This is an issue that has interested me far a long time and I have often discussed it with my students of Hebrew and some colleagues as a problem that needs addressing.

Looking for a solution

A few years ago I decided to introduce vernacular bibles in my Hebrew classes, especially for the more advanced students who have covered the grammar and are at the stage of reading long passages from the Hebrew Bible. Each student is expected to bring to class a Bible in his or her own mother tongue besides the BHS and one English version, such as the RSV, NRSV, NEB, NAB, NJB, NIV. I had several reasons for introducing the vernacular Bible in Hebrew classes. At the beginning my main reason was to address the problem I have outlined above. I wanted the students to develop an interest in the vernacular Bible and to read it frequently in order to become familiar with the translation in view of the fact that most of them will be using it in their pastoral ministry. So from time to time I would ask each student to read an Old Testament passage

from his or her vernacular Bible after we had translated the same passage together from the Hebrew. At this stage my intention was simply to persuade them that vernacular Bible versions are important. The unfortunate truth in my experience was that the majority of these students did not even own, let along read, a Bible in their mother tongue. Since they owned several good translations in English they saw no need for a vernacular Bible and it was not even easy to persuade them to acquire one.

Later on we went a step further. After reading the passage from his or her vernacular Bible the student has to translate it into English as literally as possible for the other students who are not familiar with that African language or dialect. Here the students begin to notice many differences in the way each vernacular Bible has translated the passage, and this is in itself a good learning experience. For the translation exercises and some tests I have also started asking the students to translate directly from Hebrew into their mother tongue. This is a most difficult thing to do. They admit to me that they first translate, at least mentally, the passage into English and from English into their mother tongue! This is disadvantageous because in many cases it is a lot easier to move directly from the Hebrew to an African language instead of making a detour by way of English. Certainly the English language has its own linguistic resources and possibilities of expression which are very different from those of African languages but to use an English translation as a base can easily block out the genius of African languages to express the meaning of the Hebrew text directly.

Lately we have been concentrating on the differences between four major English bible versions (NRSV, REB, NAB NJB), on the one hand, and on the other, the differences between three or four vernacular Bible versions used by the students. After translating a Hebrew passage the students have to account for the differences between the English versions. They are sufficiently equipped to do this because they know how to read the *apparatus criticus* of BHS. They all possess a copy of E. Würthwein's *The Text of the Old Testament*, and we do a good deal of textual criticism when we read any passage from the Hebrew Bible.

Accounting for the differences between the vernacular versions used by the students is a little easier because we have discovered that many of these versions have relied heavily on one or other of the English versions. But from time to time we come across a verse in the vernacular Bible that does not seem to have been influenced in any way by the English versions. In the East African region most of the vernacular versions of the Bible are still first generation translations that were done under the

auspices of the United Bible Societies. They are of course a lot better than the very first translations that were prepared by missionaries, but there is still plenty of room for improvement. This is because most of the African translators of these bibles have little or no knowledge of Hebrew and Greek and have therefore heavily relied on the English versions for their translation.

A proposal

From the above experiences I have come to the conviction that students of Hebrew (and Greek) should also be introduced to the theory and practice of Bible translation. Our efforts to translate Hebrew texts into African languages have shown us how difficult Bible translation is, but how necessary. I was therefore very pleased when I received a communication from the Centre for Bible Interpretation and Translation in Africa and looked at the programme of the forthcoming OTSSA Congress. Among the challenges facing Bible translation and interpretation the programme mentions: 'the lack of adequate training of competent mother-tongue speakers in Bible interpretation and translation. Another challenge listed is 'the need to coordinate research activities at various tertiary institutions across disciplines throughout the continent and *to establish Bible translation as an integral component of theological curricula*' (emphasis mine). I think this is the sort of thing I was groping for when I introduced the vernacular Bible in my Hebrew courses. Asking the students to translate from Hebrew into their own language was really a case of the blind (or at best a one-eyed man) leading the blind! The exercise, however, has been useful. By looking closely at the various vernacular versions and their differences we have been able to understand some of the problems that Bible translators have to face. We have also observed the different ways in which they have tried to solve those problems. What I would want to see is a short manual introducing the theory and practice of Bible translation and specifically prepared for the needs of teachers and students of Biblical Hebrew and Greek. Such a manual would supplement the language courses by demonstrating their practical application in the actual translation of Biblical texts. It would also serve as the first stage in the 'training of competent mother-tongue speakers in biblical interpretation and translation'. It is my hope therefore that the Congress of the Old Testament Society of South Africa will address the issue and, in collaboration with the Centre for Bible Interpretation and Translation in Africa, come up with a practical

solution, such as the one I am suggesting or another one that would serve the same purpose.

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Recent Literature on Old Testament Translation in Africa

Knut Holter

It seems that today's increasing focus on the translation of the Old Testament into vernacular African languages leads to a parallel increase of scholarly attention to the various challenges facing a translation of the Old Testament in Africa. From the relatively few and often quite narrow case studies that characterized the latter decades of the 20th century,[1] we now see an increasing number of research projects with broader and deeper approaches. This article will survey some recent contributions to the study of Old Testament translation in Africa; all belong to the first half of the present decade, that is the period 2000-2004. Only monographs and essay collections explicitly related to Old Testament or Bible translation in Africa are included. Articles appearing in other contexts – not least in *The Bible Translator* – will not be included this time. The material will roughly be divided in two: monographs and essay collections.

Monographs

An example of a monograph with a historical approach comes from Dr Aloo O. Mojola (Uganda), currently Regional Translation Coordinator for Africa in the United Bible Societies. His book *God Speaks in Our Own Languages* (2000) gives a detailed survey of various challenges facing the enterprise of translating the Bible into vernacular languages in East Africa, from 1844 on.[2]

Another example, this one with a quite technical approach, comes from Dr David Koudouguéret (Central African Republic), who teaches at the Bangui Evangelical School of Theology. His book *Poétique et traduction biblique* (2000) is an analysis of the relationship between four narrative texts in Genesis (1:1-2:4, 4:1-16, 11:1-9, 24) and three Sango (Central African Republic) story cycles.[3] After a discussion of various literary devices in the Genesis texts, a corresponding analysis of devices in the Sango material follows. Against this background there is a discussion of how and to what extent Bible translators can transform the literary devices in the Hebrew texts into relevant forms from the Sango narrative tradition.

A third example, this one with a more principal approach, comes from Dr Innocent Himbaza (Rwanda), who teaches at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland). His book *Transmettre la Bible* (2001) is an analysis of the relationship between biblical text and translation context, based on a comparison of two Rwandan translations: *Biblia Yera* (Protestant, 1957, rev. version 1993) and *Bibliya Ntagatifu* (Catholic, 1990).[4] After brief introductory chapters presenting the project and outlining the historical background of the two translations, the book consists mainly of a close reading of texts taken from Exodus, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Hosea, Malachi, Psalms, Esther, and Nehemiah. In each instance the target translations are discussed in relation to the Masoretic Text and to possible influences from English and French translations. And in each instance it is also discussed how, and to what extent, the target translations manage to express the message of the Hebrew text in a language that is sensitive to Rwandan traditional culture.

Essay collections

Two essay collections should also be mentioned. The first is *Biblical Texts & African Audiences* (2004), edited by two translation consultants within the United Bible Societies, Ernst Wendland (USA/Zambia) and Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole (Ivory Coast).[5] The essays of this collection are grouped in three. The first part deals with Bible translation in relation to the work of African intellectuals. A.O. Mojola discusses the challenge of the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiongo to African Bible translators, whereas P.A. Noss and P.M. Renju discuss aspects of the literary skill of Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, the late President of Tanzania, who translated the gospels and Acts in the form of traditional Kiswahili *tenzi* verses, and the challenge of finding poetic forms of parts of the Bible translation.

The second part of the essay collection deals with Bible translation in relation to specific social contexts. J.-C. Loba-Mkole offers a discussion of inculturation theology as it has been developed in the Catholic Faculty in Kinshasa sine the 1960s. A. Boniface-Malle discusses the image of God and its implications for the image of African women suffering from HIV/AIDS. And G. Joseph describes a project in Senegal in 1997, involving Muslims in reading the Bible. Finally, the third part of the essay collection deals with Bible translation and multicultural complexities. E. Wendland discusses challenges of producing a study Bible in Chechewa. J.P. Sterk & M.J. Mutthwii outline some sociolinguistic challenges of publishing Christian scriptures in Africa. And F.N. Dapila discusses the relationship between Bible translation and interfaith relations in Africa.

A second example is *Bible Translation & African Languages* (2004), again edited by two translation consultants within the United Bible Societies, Gosnell L.O.R. Yorke (South Africa) and Peter M. Renju (Tanzania).[6] The essays of this collection fall in three parts. The first part offers some historical perspectives. P.A. Noss outlines the whole history of Bible translation in Africa. Then follow some exemplifications; G.A. Mikre-Sellassie on Ethiopia, E. Hermanson on Zulu, G.L.O.R. Yorke on lusophone Africa, and R.L. Omanson on Spanish-speaking Africa. The second part of the essay collection goes into certain regional contexts. A.O. Mojola discusses the Swahili Bible in relation to post-colonial translation theory. L.R. Bliese discusses cultural and political aspects of Bible translation in Ethiopia. J.-C. Loba-Mkole discusses New Testament hermeneutics and translation in francophone Africa. D.D.K. Ekem locates priestly Christology in an Akan setting. And P.M. Renju discusses how to render the "passover lamb" in East African translations. Finally, the third part of the essay collction presents some general challenges. T.S. Maluleke discusses the role of the Bible in African Christian theology. J.P. Sterk outlines some changes in translation theory and discusses the consequences for Bible translation in Africa. And E. Wendland discusses the relationship between interpretation and contextualization in African translation projects.

Conclusion

The increasing scholarly attention to various aspects of translating the Old Testament in Africa, and the corresponding publishing activities, reflect the current academic institutionalization of Bible translation in

Africa. On the one hand, international organizations devoted to the translation and distribution of the Bible, such as Wycliffe/SIL and the United Bible Societies, employ scholars with high academic standards in linguistics, exegesis, etc. as translation consultants. And, on the other hand, several academic institutions throughout the African continent have established study and research programmes related to Bible translation in Africa. One example is the Centre for Bible Interpretation and Translation in Africa, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, which offers programmes in Bible translation related to the African context on B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. levels.[7] Other examples are Faculté de Théologie Evangélique de l'Alliance Chrétienne, Abidjan, Ivory Coast, which offers a M.A. programme in Bible translation, and Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology, Nairobi, Kenya, which offers M.A. as well as Ph.D. programmes.[8]

Notes

1. For a survey of the situation up to the mid-1990s, cf. K. Holter, *Tropical Africa and the Old Testament: A Select and Annotated Bibliograpy*. Oslo: University of Oslo, 1996 (Faculty of Theology: Bibliography Series; 6).
2. A.O. Mojola, *God Speaks in Our Own Languages: Bible Translation in East Africa, 1844-1998*. Nairobi, Dodoma and Kampala: Bible Societies of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, 2000.
3. D. Koudouguéret, *Poétique et traduction biblique: Les récits de la Genèse dans le système littéraire Sango*. Leiden: University of Leiden, 2000 (CNWS Publications, 92).
4. I. Himbaza, *Transmettre la Bible: Une critique exegetique de la traduction de l'AT: Le cas du Rwanda*. Rome: Urbaniana University Press, 2001.
5. E.R. Wendland & J.-C. Loba-Mkole (eds.), *Biblical Texts & African Audiences*. Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2004.
6. G.L.O.R. Yorke & PM. Renju (eds.), *Bible Translation & African Languages*. Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2004.
7. Cf. the website of Centre for Bible Translation and Interpretation in Africa (Stellenbosch, South Africa): http://academic.sun.ac.za/as/cbta/index.htm.
8. Cf. the following websites: Faculté de Théologie Evangélique de l'Alliance Chrétienne (Abidjan, Ivory Coast): http://www.fateac.org, Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (Nairobi, Kenya): http://www.negst.edu.

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Upcoming conferences

Abraka (Nigeria): The 18th Annual Conference of the Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies (NABIS) will be held at Delta State University in Abraka, Delta State, from 19 to 22 July 2005. The overall theme of the conference is "Biblical studies: sex and sexuality from an African perspective", and there will be commissioned papers by Prof J.O. Akao, Dr Ojo, Dr H. Amolo, Prof C.U. Manus, Dr J.D. Gwamna and Dr O. Olajubu. For further information, see the webpages of NABIS: www.nabis.8m.com.

Pietermaritzburg (South Africa): The 48th Congress of the Old Testament Society of South Africa (OTSSA) will be held at the University of KwaZula Natal, Pietermaritzburg, from 19 to 23 September 2005. The overall theme of the congress is "Biblical interpretation in Africa". For further information, see the webpages of OTSSA, www.otwsa-otssa.co.za, or contact Prof Gerald O. West, West@ukzn.ac.za. A number of other organisations and groups will join the congress. Notice especially the Centre for Bible Interpretation and Translation in Africa (University of Stellenbosch), which will have sessions on "Biblical interpretation and translation in Africa: an interdisciplinary dialogue". For further information, contact Prof Christo van der Merwe, cvdm@sun.ac.xa.

Singapore: The 2005 International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature is hosted by Trinity College in Singapore, and the meeting takes place from 26 June to 1 July. For further information, see the SBL webpages: http://www.sbl-site.org/Congresses/

Philadelphia (USA): The 2005 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature is held from 19 to 22 November in Philadelphia. For further information, see the SBL webpages: http://www.sbl-site.org/Congresses/.

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BOTSA is part of the
«Africa and Old Testament Program»
School of Mission and Theology, Stavanger, Norway
Website: http://www.mhs.no/article_152.shtml

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