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Abstract

It is by now a commonplace to speak of “double” translation in the Aramaic targums of the Hebrew Bible. In its simplest form, this involves “the rendition of a single verb or noun by a translational doublet.”¹ In fact, the phenomenon is broader than the translation of single words. Michael Klein has focused on one important aspect of the larger phenomenon. He notes that many biblical phrases and longer passages are duplicated or even triplicated, in comparable but not identical language. “The targumim, in many of these cases, equalize the varying texts by translating one of them in conformity with the other—or, less frequently, by altering both versions in a mutually complementary fashion.”² But double translation is not restricted to this process of equalization. More often, as Martin McNamara points out, “The point in the double rendering may have been the targumist’s desire to bring out the wealth of the [Hebrew text].”³ One example appears at the very beginning of Targum Neofiti, where the Hebrew word בראשית of Gen 1:1 is translated “From the beginning with wisdom”—that is, once literally and again understanding the word in a midrashic sense based on Prov 8:22.⁴

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Syntactic Double Translation in the *Targumim*

MICHAEL CARASIK

It is by now a commonplace to speak of “double” translation in the Aramaic targums of the Hebrew Bible. In its simplest form, this involves “the rendition of a single verb or noun by a translational doublet.”¹ In fact, the phenomenon is broader than the translation of single words. Michael Klein has focused on one important aspect of the larger phenomenon. He notes that many biblical phrases and longer passages are duplicated or even triplicated, in comparable but not identical language. “The targumim, in many of these cases, equalize the varying texts by translating one of them in conformity with the other—or, less frequently, by altering both versions in a mutually complementary fashion.”² But double translation is not restricted to this process of equalization. More often, as Martin McNamara points out, “The point in the double rendering may have been the targumist’s desire to bring out the wealth of the [Hebrew text].”³ One example appears at the very beginning of Targum Neofiti, where the Hebrew word בראשית of Gen 1:1 is translated “From the beginning with wisdom”—that is, once literally and again understanding the word in a midrashic sense based on Prov 8:22.⁴

This essay will focus on an aspect of targumic double translation that has not yet been recognized.⁵ I call this particular technique “syntactic double translation.” The basis behind this technique is the recognition, found already in Tannaitic literature, that some verses in the Hebrew Bible can be grammatically parsed in more than one way. In such cases, the targum sometimes

1. Klein, “Associative and Complementary Translation,” p. 138*.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 134*. In fact, the biblical text itself is often the result of the phenomenon that Klein describes. See Talmon, “Synonymous Readings”; *idem*, “Textual Study.”
3. McNamara, *Neofiti 1: Genesis*, p. 30.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 52. For the Proverbs link, see Rashi’s commentary, *ad loc.*
5. Grossfeld (*Neofiti 1: Genesis*, p. xxxiii) includes “Clarification of difficult Hebrew syntax or lexicography” as #13 in his list of 22 causes of “syntactic expansion”; but see his comment to Gen 49:6–7, cited below.

translates in accordance with *both* possibilities. In what follows, I will describe this phenomenon and speculate on its implications by looking at a series of biblical passages and their targumic renderings.

Song of Songs 2:12

Let us begin by considering syntactic double translation through the lens of the phenomenon to which Cyrus Gordon gave the name *Janus parallelism*.⁶ What Gordon meant by the term is that a word seems to carry one meaning if read with what precedes it and a different meaning when read with what follows it. It is a “Janus” word in that it means something different when it faces backward than it does when it faces forward. Gordon’s example, which has become the classic one, is Song 2:12:

הַנְּצַנִּים נִרְאוּ בְּאֶרֶץ וְקוֹל הַתּוֹר נִשְׁמַע בְּאֶרְצֵנוּ: עֵת הַזְּמִיר הִגִּיעַ

The middle word of the middle phrase of this line, זמיר, can mean either “pruning” or “singing.”⁷ We have, then, “the time of זמיר has arrived,” with no clue but context as to what it means. Having read “the blossoms appear in the land,” the reader is thinking along botanical lines and takes זמיר at first to mean “pruning.” But when one continues by reading “and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land,” with its reference to birdsong, one retroactively rereads זמיר as singing. Both meanings serve a function in the line and in the poem from which it is taken, and both were undoubtedly intended by the author of the poem.⁸

Psalms 93:1

In the previous example, it is meaning only, not syntax, that alters. Syntactically, it is clear that the phrase is to be interpreted as “the time of *zamir* has come,” and the only question is what זמיר means. But there are other cases where it is not the meaning, but the syntax, that is potentially two-faced. Ps 93:1 provides an example.⁹

6. The term was originally coined in Gordon, “New Directions,” p. 59. He subsequently (at the suggestion of Paul Friedrich) sharpened the term by calling it *Asymmetric Janus Parallelism* (Gordon, “Asymmetric Janus parallelism,” 80* and 81* n. 4; Song 2:12 is discussed here as well). But the shorter phrase continues to be more commonly used. My thanks to Theodore A. Perry for pointing out to me the connection between Janus parallelism and double syntactic translation, and for bibliographical assistance.

7. According to *HALOT*, זמר I and II, the two meanings come from two different original Proto-Semitic roots, “singing” from *zmr* and “pruning” from *zbr*.

8. Edward Greenstein of Tel Aviv University, at the conference “Remembering H. L. Ginsberg” in New York City on April 28, 2004, proclaimed “Greenstein’s law”: “If a word can mean A or it can mean B, it means both until proven otherwise.”

9. I have added an upper and a lower set of brackets to the verse to demonstrate the two different ways in which the phrase can be parsed. I first learned this example in a class taught by Stephen Geller at Brandeis University. Geller refers to this phenomenon as an

י-ה¹⁰ מִלְךְ גָּאוֹת לְבָשׁ [לְבַשׁ י-הּ] [עַד] הַתְּאֵזֵר אֶרֶץ-תְּכוּן תִּכְלַל בְּלִתְמוֹט:

The LORD has become king, He has donned majesty . . . the very world is made firm, never to totter.

It is the phrase **לְבַשׁ י-הּ עַד הַתְּאֵזֵר** that causes the difficulty here. The standard usage of the verb **לְבַשׁ** in the Qal is that it demands an accusative of the garment that is put on, as at the beginning of the verse: “He has donned majesty.” The natural way to continue reading, then, is **לְבַשׁ י-הּ עַד**, “The Lord has donned might.” The Masoretic punctuation marks here, however, mark **י-הּ** with a disjunctive accent, and group **עַד**, “might,” together with **הַתְּאֵזֵר**, the verb that follows it: “With might has He girded Himself.” Though the word **עַד** appears only once, we read it twice, first as the end of one phrase and again as the beginning of the next. Here, unlike our first example, the meaning of the word stays the same, but it is *syntactically* reread, again with the result that the verse packs two meanings where only one seems to be written. Again, it is likely that this is a deliberate effect.

This kind of effect is the bane of translators. The NJPSV translates our phrase, following the Masoretic punctuation marks, as follows: “the LORD is robed, He is girded with strength,” ignoring the usual use of **לְבַשׁ** and eliminating the first of the possible readings of the verse.¹¹ The KJV is just slightly more successful: “the LORD is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girded himself.” Here **עַד** is translated twice, once as one would naturally interpret it at first reading, syntactically related to what precedes it (“the LORD is clothed with strength”), and again a second time, as a relative pronoun, following the Masoretic accents (“wherewith he hath girded himself”).

Exodus 17:9

A passage from the Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael, the Tannaitic midrash to Exodus, recognizes explicitly that there are five verses in the Pentateuch that are syntactically “undecided” in this fashion.¹² Here, for example, is Exod 17:9:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-יְהוָה עֲבֹדָה לְיְהוָה וְצָא אֲנִי מִן-הַר וְצָא אֲנִישִׁים וְצָא הַלְּחֵם בְּעַמְלֵק [מִהָר] אֲנֹכִי נֹצֵב עַל-רֹאשׁ
הַגִּבְעָה וּמַטְהָר הָאֱלֹהִים בְּיָדֵי:

example of “X-Y-X,” since the Y term makes sense in either direction, but the three terms together do not.

10. For religious reasons, I will transcribe the Tetragrammaton euphemistically in this article.

11. *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985). This is the “new” JPS version in relation to an older translation published by the same organization in 1917.

12. *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* Amalek 1, to Exod 17:9 (Horovitz-Rabin ed. p. 179, Lauterbach ed. 2:142–43). The five are Gen 4:7, 49:6–7; Exod 17:9, 25:34 (= 37:20); and Deut 31:16. They are listed as well in *b. Yoma* 52b.

If we forget about the Masoretic markings on the verse (which were of course not in existence at the time the rabbinic passage was formulated), this can be translated in either one of two ways:

1. Pick us some men and go out to fight Amalek tomorrow. I will stand on top of the hill. . . .
2. Pick us some men and go out to fight Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill. . . .¹³

And here is how Onqelos translates it:

בחר לנו גברין ופוק אגיה קרבא בעמלק מחר אנה קאים על ריש רמתא

Lacking punctuation, this translation exactly mimics the Hebrew verse. “Tomorrow” is located precisely in between “Amalek” and “I” and can be read with either of them or both, as one chooses. Unlike the English translators of Ps 93:1, the Aramaic translator of Exod 17:9 was able to preserve the indecisiveness inherent in the original Hebrew.

Qohelet 10:6

But this approach is not always possible. When it is not, the only way to preserve the undecidability of a particular syntactic construction is by translating it twice, as the King James translators did with Ps 93:1. The Targum to Qohelet does in fact use this method, as the following example from Qoh 10:6 will show:

נתן הַסֵּקֶל [בְּמְרוֹמִים רַבִּים] וְעִשְׂרִים בְּשֶׁפֶל יִשְׁבוּ:

This verse has been identified by modern biblical scholars as one in which the accent marks do not fit the most natural reading of the text.¹⁴ The NJPSV nevertheless translates in accordance with them: “Folly was placed on lofty heights, while rich men sat in low estate.” But this translation ignores the grammatical incompatibility of **בְּמְרוֹמִים**, which has the definite article, and **רַבִּים**, which does not.¹⁵ Perhaps for this reason, the NEB implicitly transposes the *etnachta*, the major pause in the verse, from **רַבִּים** back to **בְּמְרוֹמִים**. It

13. Note that the Masoretic accents accord with translation 2, which (with its apparent suggestion that Joshua should fight today while Moses will not act until tomorrow) makes slightly less sense. I have suggested elsewhere that the Masoretic accents are sometimes intended to push the reader in the direction of a more difficult reading with the intent not to contradict the simpler reading (which readers can easily find on their own) but to add to it. See my “Exegetical Implications,” p. 165.

14. See the discussion in Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, pp. 314–15; Breuer, “Dissonance,” pp. 207–8; Kogut, *Correlations*, pp. 198–99.

15. Against this, Kogut (*ibid.*, p. 198) points to **הַגְּרִים רַבִּים** in Ezek 39:27, where the punctuation is not in question, to show that the punctuators might well have considered this syntax possible in Biblical Hebrew. Note also Qoh 3:19, where both the sense and the cantillation marks suggest that **מִקְרָה** (twice) is a construct form, though spelled with the *seghol* of the absolute form.

translates, “the fool given high office, but the great and the rich in humble posts.” The English translators felt constrained to select one or the other of the two possible syntactic alternatives, but the Aramaic translator did *not* feel such a constraint:

יהב ית אדום רשיעיא ושטיא למחוי במזלא ומשמיש באצלחותא מן שמי מרומא
וחילותי גיוותנין וסגאיין ועמא בית ישראל משתעבדין תחותי בגלותא ומן
סגיאות חוביהון עתירי נכסין דיבהון מתמסכנין ובמכיכותא יתבין ביני עמא

The Lord enabled the wicked and the foolish Edom to enjoy good luck and to enjoy prosperity from the highest heavens [מן שמי מרומא] and his armies are proud and numerous [גיוותנין וסגאיין] while the people of the household of Israel are enslaved under him in exile. Because of the multitude of their sins [סגיאות חוביהון], those rich [עתירי] in property become poor and dwell in a lowly state among the nations.¹⁶

This, of course, is not a literal translation of the Hebrew or anything close to one. Alexander Sperber has characterized the Targum of *Qohelet* as falling under a translation category that he describes as “Translation and Midrash completely fused together.”¹⁷ Nonetheless, despite this fusion, the targumic “leave-no-word-behind” translation policy is still clearly in effect.¹⁸ For example, the Hebrew *במרומים* appears in the targum as “from the highest heavens [מן שמי מרומא],” and *עשירים* appears in the phrase “those rich [עתירי] in property.” But the word in between them, *רבים*, is translated (by its standard Aramaic cognate, *סגאיין*) twice: once in the first part of the translation, along with the translation of *במרומים* (“his armies are proud and numerous [גיוותנין וסגאיין]”), and again in the second part of the translation, with *עשירים* (“because of the multitude of their sins [סגיאות חוביהון]”). The word *רבים* is not merely “not left behind”; it is “not left behind” from *either* of the two possible ways it could be read in the verse. Because of the expansive nature of this targum, the option taken by Onqelos in Exod 17:9, leaving the word to be parsed either way as the reader chooses, was not possible. But unlike the English translators, the Aramaic translator has not felt compelled to choose one version of the Hebrew syntax and ignore the other. By translating twice, he provides the reader with both.¹⁹

Ruth 4:5

In the Targum of *Ruth*, where the expansions to the text are more easily separated from the straightforward translation than in the Targum of *Qohelet*,

16. Knobel, *Targum Qohelet*, p. 48.

17. Sperber, *Bible in Aramaic*, vol. 4a, v.

18. This again is a well-known phenomenon; see method #30 in Luzzatto, *Philoxenus*, p. 21, where it is attributed to the need not to surprise listeners to an oral translation, who could follow closely enough to realize if a Hebrew word were left untranslated.

19. The same phenomenon can be found elsewhere in the Targum to *Qohelet*. See my “Exegetical Implications,” pp. 152–54 on *Qoh* 6:10; pp. 158–59 on 9:17; pp. 161–62 on 10:11; and pp. 162–63 on 11:3.

there is just one verse, Ruth 4:5, that is syntactically difficult, and here too the targum offers a syntactic double translation.²⁰ The Hebrew text reads:

וַיֹּאמֶר בָּעֵז בְּיוֹם קְנוֹתְךָ הַשְּׂדֵה [מִיַּד נְעֻמִי וְיִמְאֵת רוּת הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה] אֲשֶׁת-הַמֵּת קְנִיתִי
[קְנִיתָהּ] לְהָקִים שֵׁם-הַמֵּת עַל-נַחֲלָתוֹ:

The phrases *מִיַּד נְעֻמִי* and *וְיִמְאֵת רוּת הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה* seem to belong together in the first part of the verse, and this is how the NJPSV translates it: “When you acquire the property from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabite, you must also acquire the wife of the deceased.” But the *etnachta*, the Masoretic equivalent in this verse of the English comma, falls not after “Ruth the Moabite” but after “Naomi,” and that is how the KJV translates it: “What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead.”²¹ Here too, the targum manages to translate the verse *both* ways:

וַיֹּאמֶר בּוֹעֵז בְּיוֹם זְבִינְתְךָ יֵת חֲקֵלָא מִן יֵדָא דְנְעֻמִי וּמִן יֵדָא דְרוּת מוֹאֲבִיתָא אֵיתָא מִיתָא
חַיִּיב אַתְּ לְמַפְרוֹק וְבְעֵי לִיבְמָא יֵתָהּ וְלְמַסְבָּה לְאַנְתּוּ מִן בְּגַלְל לְאַקְמָא שׁוּם מִיתָא עַל
אַחַסְנִיתָהּ

On the day that you buy the field from the hand of Naomi and from the hand of Ruth the Moabite, wife of the deceased, you are obliged to redeem and required to act as her brother-in-law and to marry her in order to raise up the name of the deceased upon his inheritance.²²

The phrase “Ruth the Moabite, wife of the deceased” is parsed (against the later Masoretic reading) with “from the hand of Naomi”—to the extent that “the hand of” Ruth is added to it. Then the entire phrase is reread as part of the second half of the verse and translated again in the new syntax, albeit this time represented merely by the pronoun “her” (יֵתָהּ).

Genesis 49:6–7

So far we have seen the technique of double syntactic translation only in the Writings, the *targumim* of which are late and notoriously expansive. But

20. Philip Alexander describes the Targum to Qohelet as “periphrastic” (Alexander, “Targum,” col. 328a) but notes that the Targum to Ruth, though moderately expansive, “alternates blocks of aggadic material . . . with passages of more or less literal translation” (col. 327b). Similarly, Sperber characterized Targum Ruth’s approach to including additional material as “*Quellen-Scheidung* [that is, separation of sources] still possible” (Sperber, *Bible in Aramaic*, vol. 4a, v).

21. For a full discussion of the difficulty of this phrase in the Hebrew text, see Sasson, *Ruth*, pp. 120–22. Note that in this case, unlike our example from Qohelet, it is the KJV that is faithful to the Masoretic Text and the NJPSV that silently revises it, despite the latter’s claim (on its title page) to be translating “the traditional Hebrew text.”

22. Beattie, *Tg. Ruth*, p. 30. He gives a different version of the Aramaic text in “Preliminary Edition,” p. 279, from what is cited here, but the differences do not materially affect our conclusions.

Gen 49:6–7 provides an example from Targum Onqelos. We begin with the Hebrew text.

6 בְּסָדֶם אֶל־תָּבֵא נַפְשֵׁי בְּקֹהֶלֶם אֶל־תִּתְּחַד כְּבָרֵי
 כִּי בְּאַפָּם הָרְגוּ אִישׁ וַיִּכְרְצֻנָם עֲקָרֵי־שׂוֹר:
 7 אֲרֹרְךָ אָפֶם כִּי עָז וְעִבְרָתָם כִּי קָשְׁתָה
 אֶחְלִקֶם בְּיַעֲקֹב וְאֶפְיָצֶם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:

In the NJPSV translation:

Let not my person be included in their council,
 Let not my being be counted in their assembly.
 For when angry they slay men,
 And when pleased they maim oxen.
 Cursed be their anger so fierce,
 And their wrath so relentless.
 I will divide them in Jacob,
 Scatter them in Israel.

There is not any immediately evident difficulty in the Hebrew of this verse, as in the earlier examples we have seen. But it is one of the examples listed in the Mekilta as a grammatically undecidable passage. The issue turns on whether the adjective אָפֶם, which begins v. 7, is to be read with the following word, אָפֶם (“cursed be their anger”), or with the word that precedes it at the end of v. 6, שׂוֹר (“they maim cursed oxen”). The latter reading (as explained by Rashi in his comment to the same listing of passages at *b. Yoma* 52b) would suggest that the ox that Simeon and Levi maimed was that of Shechem, “cursed” because he was a descendant of Canaan, who was cursed in Gen 9:25 because his father, Ham, saw *his* father, Noah, naked. And indeed the Aramaic of Targum Onqelos provides *both* possibilities:

... ארי ברוגזיהון קטלו וברעותהון תרעו שׂוֹר סנאה ליט רוגזיהון ארי תקיף
 וחמתהין ארי קשיא

[I]n their fury *they executed a great slaughter*, and at their whim *they razed the wall of the enemy*. Cursed be their fury for it is fierce; and their anger for it is extreme.²³

Verse 7 begins by translating אָפֶם “cursed,” in a straightforward rendering of the Hebrew of that verse: “Cursed be their anger so fierce.” But אָפֶם has already been translated at the end of v. 6 as סנאה, “the enemy,” with שׂוֹר connected to it in a construct chain: “they razed the wall of the enemy” (reading Hebrew שׂוֹר אָפֶם as a unit).²⁴ The translator reads through the *siluq* at the end of v. 6 to include the first word of v. 7; then he returns to the first

23. Grossfeld, *Onkelos: Genesis*, p. 158.

24. Luzzatto (*Philoxenus*, p. 21), in discussing the 30th of the 32 methods used (according to him) by Onqelos, points out that שׂוֹר, “wall,” reflects Hebrew שׂוֹר, “ox,” even though it does not accurately translate it. But he does not specifically note the phenomenon of syntactic double translation.

word of v. 7 as if it were indeed the beginning of a sentence, and continues normally. Note that Pseudo-Jonathan offers a double translation based on the same syntactic rereading, but with different language:

ארום ברוגיהון קטלו מלכא ושולטניה וברעותהון שור בעלי דבכיהון (ז) אמר יעקב
לוט הוה כרכא דשכם כד עלון לנוה למחרבה ברוגיהון דתקיף וחמתהון על יוסף
ארום קשיא

“For in their anger they killed *the king and his ruler*, and at their whim *they demolished the wall of their enemies*.” Jacob said, “Cursed was *the city of Shechem when they went into it to destroy it* in their anger that was fierce; and (cursed was) their wrath *against Joseph*, for it was cruel.”²⁵

Rather than שורר סנאה, we have שור בעלי דבכיהון, a different phrase for “the wall of their enemies.” This still understands the Hebrew ארום at the beginning of v. 7 to represent Shechem and his fellows, and for the same reason; again, the translator returns to ארום as if it were indeed the beginning of v. 7 rather than the end of v. 6, going so far as to add a superfluous אמר יעקב (“Jacob said”) before it.²⁶

Nahum 1:8

I have focused exclusively on the most dramatic kind of syntactic rereading, that which shifts a word or phrase from one half of the verse to the other or even from one verse to another. But syntactic rereading of a more general kind is no doubt responsible for a great many of the double translations found throughout all the targum. An example appears in Targum Jonathan to the Prophets. We begin with the Hebrew text.

וּבְשֹׁטֶף עֹבֵר כְּלָהּ יַעֲשֶׂה מְקוֹמָהּ וְאֵיבֵיו יִרְדֹּף-חֲשָׁדָּהּ:

And with a sweeping flood He makes an end of her place,
And chases His enemies into darkness. (NJPSV)

David Toshio Tsumura has pointed to the word מקומה in this verse as another that is capable of being read as a Janus parallelism.²⁷ The word מקומה can be read as the Masoretes have pointed it, with its feminine-singular suffix referring (evidently) to Nineveh, or (as the Septuagint apparently read it) as some form of the word קמים, “those who rise up in enmity,” paralleling

25. Maher, *Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, p. 158. Neofiti is essentially equivalent to Pseudo-Jonathan here. Grossfeld (*Neofiti I: Genesis*, p. 292) notes בעלי דבכיהון and סנאה merely as “an explanatory addition.”

26. I note here Paul Flesher’s observation that “whenever [Neofiti] and [ms. V in Klein, *Fragment Targums*] share an expansion in the special sections [Genesis 49, Numbers 21 and 22–24, Deuteronomy 32–33] that does not appear in [Pseudo-Jonathan], PJ tends to have a different expansion for that verse. . . . PJ may have once had the expansions but later replaced them with other material” (Flesher, “Translation and Exegetical Augmentation,” pp. 66–67).

27. See the full discussion in Tsumura, “Janus Parallelism in Nah 1:8.”

איביו (“his enemies”) of the second half of the verse. Here is how Targum Jonathan renders this verse:

וברגיו חמין ובחימא תקיפא גמירא יעביד עם עממא דקמו ואחריבו ית בית מקדשא

The English translators of this targum render it as follows: “But in fierce anger and in great wrath he shall make an end of the nations which rose up and utterly destroyed the Sanctuary,” and they note: “MT *mqwmh* has been rendered both as the noun meaning ‘place’ (and hence ‘Sanctuary’ . . .), and as a part of the verb *qwm*, which in the *Hithpolel* means ‘rise in opposition.’”²⁸ In fact, the Hebrew phrase *כלה יעשה מקומה* has been reread so that *מקומה* is first the object of God’s destruction (as it is the object in the original Hebrew), then the *subject* exercising destruction, and a third time again the object of destruction by the enemies, the Sanctuary.

Qoheleth 9:10

As the previous example makes clear, an expansive translation may in fact be based nonetheless on a close syntactic rereading of the Hebrew text. Our next example demonstrates such a case with an additional feature: the fact that a syntactic rereading has taken place may not be obvious without an awareness of rabbinic midrash. This is the case with Qoh 9:10:

כָּל אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יָדְךָ [לַעֲשׂוֹת] [בְּכַחֲךָ] עֲשֵׂה

Seow explains the syntactic problem: “The Masoretic punctuation suggests that [בכחך] is to be read with the infinitive [לעשות]: ‘Whatever your hand finds to do with strength, do!’ We should, however, follow [several manuscripts, the Syriac text, and the Vulgate] in taking [בכחך] with the imperative [עשה]: ‘Whatever your hand finds to do, do with strength!’ The point is that one should wholeheartedly do whatever one is able to do.”²⁹ The standard rabbinic exegesis of this verse reads in accordance with the Masoretic cantillation, giving to the word *בכחך* the particular meaning “while you are alive.”³⁰ The following example from *Deuteronomy Rabbah* (Margoliot) 2:27 makes this clear:³¹

זשׁׁה כל אשר תמצא ירך לעשות בכחך עשה כל מה שאתה יכול לעשות מצוה עד שכתך עליך עשה למה משאדם בטל מן העולם בטלה מחשבתו כל מה שאתה יכול לחטוף מצות עד שאתה בחיים וכן עשה

This is what Scripture says, “All that your hand finds to do [בכחך, do]” (Qoh 9:10). All you are able to do in the way of commandments while your strength

28. Cathcart and Gordon, *Targum Jonathan of the Former Prophets*, pp. 132–33 and n. 25.

29. See the discussion in Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 302.

30. See my “Exegetical Implications,” pp. 157–58.

31. Similar interpretations are found in *Qoh. Rab.* 9:10, *Midrash Zuta Qoh.* 9:8, *Pirke Rabbati* 3:3, and *Otzar Hamidrashim Yelammedenu* 4.

is still upon you, do. Why? Once a person is nullified from the world, his intentions are nullified. As much of commandments as you can grab, you *should* grab while you are still in life, and do them.

The assumption here, as in the other texts that follow this interpretation, is that “whatever your hand finds to do” refers to your ability to perform God’s commandments. More significantly for our question, however, is that they all interpret the word **בכחך**, “with your strength,” as meaning “while you are alive.” This explanation, of course, is based on the rest of the Qohelet verse: “For there is no action, no reasoning, no learning, no wisdom in Sheol, where you are going” (NJPSV). The Masoretic punctuation seems to be another example of the Janus phenomenon, aimed at pushing the reader (who may be assumed to have naturally read the verse as does Seow, “do them with all your might”) to reinterpret the verse in accordance with the midrashic understanding.

Reading the Targum to Qohelet through this lens, we see that it is not merely expansive in a general way but that part of the expansion results from specifically translating the Hebrew verse in accordance with both of its possible punctuations: “Whatever *charity* your hand finds to do *for the needy* do it with all your strength [**בכל חילך**], for *after the death* [**ארום בתר מותא**] a man has neither work nor reckoning nor knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going *and nothing will help you but good deeds and charity alone.*”³² “Do it with all your strength” clearly translates **בכחך עשה** as a phrase, in accordance with Seow’s suggestion. “A man has neither work nor reckoning” and so forth just as clearly translates the second half of the Hebrew verse. Without an awareness of the midrashic reading of this verse, the phrase “after the death” would simply seem to be an awkward addition, making “in the grave where you are going” into a redundancy. But a reader who is tuned in to the midrashic reading of the verse can recognize “after the death” as based on a *second* translation of the Hebrew word **בכחך**, now recontextualized (in accordance with the Masoretic punctuation) to read as the second word of the phrase **לעשות בכחך**, “to do while you are in strength,” that is, “alive.” The phenomenon of double syntactic translation permits the targumist to read the biblical verse both in accordance with the most natural reading and in accordance with the traditional understanding.

Deuteronomy 31:16

To be sure, there are cases where it is not clear whether an expansion is indeed based on a close reading and syntactic double translation or whether it is motivated solely by other factors. A case in point is another of the five verses cited in the Mekhilta as being undecidable, Deut 31:16:

32. Knobel, *Tg. Qohelet*, p. 45.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה [הֲנֵךְ שָׁכַב עִם־אֲבוֹתֶיךָ] וְקָם הָעָם הַזֶּה וְזָנָה | אַחֲרַי | אֱלֹהֵי
נְכַר־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר הוּא בְּא־שָׁמָה בְּקִרְבּוֹ וְעִזְבֵנִי וְהִפֵּר אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר כָּרַתִּי אִתּוֹ:

The straightforward reading of the verse is provided by the King James translation:

And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land.

Here the semicolon after “fathers” corresponds to the *etnachtta* under the word אֲבוֹתֶיךָ in the Masoretic Text, and the second half of the verse begins with the word וְקָם, “will rise up.” The other alternative is to move the Masoretic pause forward one word and interpret the verse as if it read הֲנֵךְ שׁוֹכֵב עִם וְקָם, אֲבוֹתֶיךָ וְקָם, “Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers and shall rise up.”

There are two serious difficulties with this reading: first, the verb וְקָם is third person, not second person, as the English translation of the rereading makes it seem; second, moving the verb to the first half of the verse leaves the phrase “this people” without a plausible interpretation, since a separate clause begins immediately after it. The reason that rabbinic tradition declared this verse undecidable was undoubtedly to provide a reference within the Pentateuch to the resurrection of the dead. According to *m. Sanh.* 10:1, anyone who maintains that there is no reference to resurrection in the Torah “has no share” in the World to Come.

Now let us read Deut 31:16 as translated by Targum Pseudo-Jonathan:

וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ לְמֹשֶׁה הֲנֵךְ שָׁכִיב בְּעִפְרָא עִם אֲבוֹתֶךָ וְנִשְׁמַתְךָ תְּהִי גִגְיֹזָא בְּגִנְיֹז חַיִּי
עֲלִמָא עִם אֲבוֹתֶךָ וְיִקָּם עִמָּא הַדִּיךְ וְיִטְעוֹן בְּתוֹר עֲטוּתָא עֲמַמְיָא אֲרַעָא
דְּהִינְוִן עֲלִילִין תַּמְן בְּנִינְהוֹן וְיִשְׁבַּקוֹן דְּחִלְתִּי וְיִשְׁנוֹן יִתְּ קִימִי דִּי גִזְרִית עִימְהוֹן

Then the Lord said to Moses: “Behold, you are about to lie in the dust with your fathers; and your soul shall be deposited in the treasury of eternal life with your fathers. Then the wicked ones of this people shall arise and shall stray after the idols of the nations.”³³

There is certainly no reference to resurrection of the *body* here, nor does even Moses’ *soul* “rise” again. But the inserted assurance to Moses that his soul will be “deposited in the treasury of eternal life with your fathers” would seem, nonetheless, in light of rabbinic tradition, to be a second reflex of the verb וְקָם in the original Hebrew of the verse, reread together with אֲבוֹתֶיךָ of the first half of the verse as a reference to a continuation of life beyond physical death.³⁴ At least Moses’ soul, if not his body, “will rise” after death to some transcendent form of ongoing existence. If this reading is correct, then

33. Clarke, *Pseudo-Jonathan: Deuteronomy*, p. 87.

34. I refer to this as a “second” reflex because it is conceptually secondary to the literal “shall arise,” which follows in its proper place and is thus second in consecutive order of reading.

here too we find the targum translating a verse twice, in accordance with two different possible syntactic readings of the original Hebrew. Moshe Goshen-Gottstein observes, “[O]ne can only wonder to what extent it makes sense to treat Targum Studies as a sub-area of Bible Studies in general, but not as a sub-area of Rabbinic Studies.”³⁵

Exodus 22:12

It might be possible to conclude that such double translations are the result of a combination of two earlier translation variants. Note the following example of translation variants in Targum Neofiti, described by Moshe Bernstein:

Exodus 22:12 reads **ואם טרף יטרף יבאהו עד הטרפה לא ישלם** (“If it be totally torn apart, let him bring it as a witness; he shall not pay for the torn animal”). Neofiti: **ואין מטרפה יטרף יתון סהדין קטילא לא ישלם** (“If it is totally torn apart, let them bring witnesses; the torn one he shall not pay”); Margin I: **מתקטלה יתקטל שהו ליה מן אברוי שהו** (“[if it is] indeed killed let him bring one of its limbs as a proof”). Both of these translate the Masoretic Text, although there is an interesting exegetical dispute regarding the nature of the proof which is required to exempt the bailee from payment. Is the torn piece of the animal sufficient proof, or are human witnesses demanded? But Margin II reads **עד גושמת חיובא (= היווא) דתבירא ולא ישלם מיטנין[יה] עד גושמת** (“let him bring him to the body of the torn animal and he shall not pay”). This version seems to read **עד הטרפה**, a reading, incidentally, which is found also in midrashic halakhic literature.³⁶

And here is Pseudo-Jonathan’s rendering of the same verse:

אין איתברא יתבר מן חיות ברא מייתי ליה סהדין או ימטייניה עד גופת דתביר לא ישלם

If it was torn *by a wild beast*, he shall bring him *witnesses*, or *he shall bring him to the body of* (the animal) that was torn; he shall not make restitution.³⁷

“He brings witnesses” reads the Hebrew text with the Masoretic vowels and punctuation; “let him bring him to the body of the torn animal” rereads **עד** as **עד** and reads across the Masoretic break between the two words.

Given the variants in the margins of Neofiti, it is possible to argue that Pseudo-Jonathan (or its predecessor) had only a single translation here and that the other translation was added secondarily. This model would conceivably also explain the example we saw in Ruth 4:5. Philip Alexander notes, too, that “[Pseudo-Jonathan] regularly has doublets in which one element corresponds to [*Onqelos*], while the other appears to represent a Palestinian

35. Goshen-Gottstein, “Recent Developments,” p. 8.

36. Bernstein, “Aramaic Targumim,” p. 151; n. 34 there provides the rabbinic citation, pointing to the view of R. Yonatan in *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, Neziqin 16 (Horowitz-Rabin ed. p. 305, Lauterbach ed. 3:125–26). See also Kogut, *Correlations*, p. 132 n. 26.

37. Maher, *Pseudo-Jonathan: Exodus*, p. 226.

Targum.”³⁸ It has been observed elsewhere that the text of Targum Jonathan, too, “is not free from later additions; from this cause arise the double translations of which the Targum contains several.”³⁹ But we have found the phenomenon of double syntactic translation even in Targum Onqelos. I would add that all the examples given here were found without an exhaustive search.⁴⁰ There may well be many more.

Conclusion

Since this phenomenon is so easily found in such a wide range of *targumim* (the various Targums to the Torah as well as those to the Prophets and the Writings), my suggestion is that in most cases this is *not*, in fact, an additive phenomenon created inadvertently, either by the accumulation of translational doublets from various sources or as an artifact of simultaneous interpretation in a synagogue setting.⁴¹ Rather, the translators were “actuated by a desire to preserve the indeterminability of the text.”⁴² Even after post-modernism, it is natural for a twenty-first-century reader to think of a text as having a single, fixed meaning, intended by its author. This, after all, is how most of us ourselves write most of the time. But it is just as natural for a Jewish reader to look at the originally unpointed text of the Hebrew Bible and see it as deliberately open to multiple intended meanings. As we have noted in our discussion of Exod 17:9, it is sometimes possible to translate in a way that leaves the multiple possibilities open.⁴³ More often, the shift to a new language demands that the translator choose a single one of the possible options. But the Jewish translators of the Bible into Aramaic sometimes refused to make this choice.

I have referred above to the targumists’ “leave-no-word-behind” translation policy. Speaking of the targumists as a group (though they cover a fairly

38. Alexander, “Targum,” p. 322b, citing as examples Gen 3:5, 4:13, 8:11, 27:29; Exod 1:19; Lev 16:4; Num 26:9; and Deut 5:3.

39. “Targum,” *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1913), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14454b.htm>.

40. I approached the problem experimentally in three ways: (1) by making a close reading of the targum and biblical text of *Qohelet* and of *Ruth*; (2) by examining the five verses cited in rabbinic literature as “undecidable”; and (3) by examining some verses that biblical scholars have explained as containing Janus parallelism. The intent was to mimic an archaeologist’s use of various test trenches by quickly probing the biblical text from three different angles.

41. The role such interpretation played in the creation of the *targumim* is still in dispute and cannot be resolved here; compare the opinion of Shinan, “Live Translation,” p. 47 (“the text’s oral provenance is evident”) with that of van der Kooij, “Origin and Purpose,” p. 213 (whose examination of three passages does “not support the idea that the Bible translations as written versions originated in a liturgical or synagogal setting”).

42. I made this suggestion previously with regard to the unusual punctuation of some of the verses in the Masoretic Text of *Qohelet*; see my “Exegetical Implications,” p. 165.

43. This seems to be the case as well in another of the *Mekilta*’s undecidable verses, Targum Onqelos to Exod 25:33 (= 37:20).

wide range both temporally and geographically), it seems to have been their intent to preserve as much as possible of the “extra” information provided in the biblical text alongside a straightforward, univocal reading. I believe that the phenomenon of double syntactic translation is not an artifact of mindless compilation of variants but a bold attempt to make the *targumim* convey what the translators saw as the richness of an intentionally manifold revelation.

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