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# Evidence that demands a verdict?<sup>1</sup>

David Weber<sup>2</sup>

*Source—Meaning—Receptor (SMR) theories of translation, such as “dynamic equivalence” and “meaning-based” theories, shifted focus from the equivalence of FORM to the equivalence of MEANING. SMR theories were a significant advance and have been the basis for many modern English translations.*

*However, SMR theories were formulated when the dominant theory of communication was the code model. Consequently they presumed that meaning was determined almost entirely by a text (utterance) itself. This theory is now rejected in favor of theories that understand interpretation as the inferential product of the interaction of the text with (mind-mediated) context. These newer theories shift the focus from meaning, largely a semantic notion, to the pragmatic/rhetorical dimensions of the text.*

*It is thus natural to wonder if there is evidence that a SMR approach to translation leads to pragmatic/rhetorical oversights that have negative effects on translations. Here I will propose some candidates, drawing them from various modern English translations.*

## Introduction

The translation of ancient and authoritative documents is exceedingly difficult. Those who bless us with modern translations of Scripture deserve our respect and gratitude. I am grateful for each of the translations mentioned below. Each reflects a delicate balancing of criteria designed to meet the needs of a particular readership in a particular way. My remarks should in no way lead anyone to appreciate any of these translations the less.

In the last fifty years much thinking about language has been dominated by the CODE MODEL of communication, which assumes that meanings are transmitted from speaker (author) to hearer (reader) across a channel much like information can be transmitted across a wire by electric impulses. The speaker encodes the meaning to be communicated into a linguistic form (sound, writing, sign) using a lexicon and grammar. The form is transmitted over some channel (speech, writing, . . .) to the hearer, who decodes the meaning using the same (or very similar) lexicon and grammar:

$$\text{MEANING}_S \text{---} \boxed{\text{encode}} \text{---} \rightarrow \text{FORM} \text{---} \boxed{\text{decode}} \text{---} \rightarrow \text{MEANING}_R$$

where the subscripted S refers to the source or speaker and R refer to the receptor or hearer.

The code model is simple and intuitively appealing, but its influence on serious thought about language owes much to Claude Shannon’s 1948 paper that laid the mathematical foundations of information transmission [16]. The code model was seen to be subsumed by Shannon’s transmission

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model, thus inheriting respectability from the scientific basis Shannon had provided for information transmission.

Early in this period there was considerable optimism about machine translation. It was thought that linguistics—a rapidly developing discipline—would provide the enabling technology: a proper understanding of syntax and semantics. Armed with proper grammars and lexicons of the source and target languages, it should be possible to decode meanings from a source language text and then encode those meanings into a target language text. Why, the process is so mechanical—it was thought—that it should be possible to make a machine do it!

It was during this period that Source—Meaning—Receptor (SMR) theories of translation were developed. The first was the flagship theory of Nida [12]. From this grew two traditions: the functional (or “dynamic”) equivalence theory of Nida and Taber [13] and de Waard and Nida [3], and the meaning-based theories of Beekman and Callow [1] and Larson [8]. These theories shifted focus from the equivalence of the FORM of source and target texts, to the equivalence of their MEANINGS. This represented significant progress. However, these theories were based solidly on the code model and thus inherited some of its liabilities: a preoccupation with text, the notion that texts contain meanings, a rather mechanical image of how texts communicate meanings based on the notions of encoding and decoding, and so forth. And while virtually all who helped shape SMR theories recognized the necessity of considering contextual and pragmatic factors, these remained largely at the peripheries of the theories. They exerted pressure on both the theory and the practice of translation, but never penetrated to the point that context-driven inference was incorporated at the very core of interpretation.

By contrast, current theories (e.g., Relevance Theory [17]) regard the interpretation of an utterance to be the inferential product of the interaction of a text with its (mind-mediated) context. This shifts the focus from “meaning” as a semantic notion to a broader pragmatic and rhetorical one; this should become clear from the examples considered below.

Given the intellectual roots of SMR theories of translation, it is natural to wonder if there is evidence that they lead to pragmatic or rhetorical oversights, with negative effects on translations. In this paper I will propose some cases of this, drawing them from various modern English translations. Some of these reflect—in my opinion—wrong exegesis (perhaps a consequence of exegetical practice not based on a proper theory of communication). Others are poor translations, reflecting a failure to appreciate the rhetorical impact that the translation should achieve.

So I wish to show that the legacy of the code model can still be seen in recent SMR-influenced translations. But it is no easy task to make a good case, for to do so requires meeting various challenges:

1. It must be shown that the passage being considered followed a code model concept or SMR translation principle. Even if the translation contains a statement of the translation principles employed, it remains to be shown, for the case in point, that some particular code model concept or SMR translation principle was responsible for the rendering being challenged. And this can only be surmised, since translators’ thoughts are not subject to direct inspection.
2. For each case it must be demonstrated that a rhetorically-informed exegesis and/or translation is better than the one being challenged. This is a daunting task because the interpretations reflected in modern translations are usually based on considerable scholarship, perhaps even a consensus of scholarly opinion.

In the cases I propose below, I will not argue from details of the source language, but give what I take to be a fairly transparent interpretation based on how the text makes its point, as enlightened by insights from Relevance Theory (along the lines followed in Weber [18]).

3. “Meaning” was used liberally throughout the literature on SMR translation theories, but generally without definition. So what is the meaning of “meaning”? When those who shaped SMR theories spoke of meaning, what should we understand?

For example, what is the meaning of *Do not cook a kid in its mother's milk*? It obviously *means* what it says: it is a prohibition against cooking a kid (goat) in its mother's milk. This is the meaning that results from the application of grammar and lexicon. It is a notion of meaning focussed very squarely on semantics.

However, *Do not cook a kid in its mother's milk* has a deeper meaning that results from submitting its semantic meaning to context-driven inferences, along the lines of "Do not practice magic."<sup>3</sup> In some sense this is the *real* meaning, going far beyond the matter of how one should or should not cook a kid.

Under the influence of the code model, SMR theories of translation generally employed "meaning" in the former, semantics-focused sense, whereas current translation theories, benefiting from cognitive theories of communication and rich theories of pragmatics, use "meaning" in the broader sense that encompasses both semantics and pragmatics.

The translations from which I draw examples are:

**CEV** The Contemporary English Version [2] is intended as "biblically accurate, reader friendly, and understandable—even for first-time Bible readers."

**NIV** The New International Version [6] is intended as "a thought-for-thought translation in contemporary English for private and public use."

**NLT** The New Living Translation [7] is intended as "exegetically accurate and idiomatically powerful."

I begin each discussion by giving the text as rendered in the NASB [10], a translation that "attempts to bring the contemporary reader as close as possible to the actual wording and grammatical structure of the original writers." I sometimes highlight phrases about which I comment.

Section 1 considers two cases of echoic utterance. Section 1.1 considers a passage for which one translation suppresses clues for understanding the situation, thus leading the reader to a "literal" interpretation very different from what I believe was intended. Section 1.2 considers a case of irony or sarcasm<sup>4</sup> which, if not taken into account, can cause serious distortion.

Section 2 deals with some subtle but significant issues of referring expressions. 2.1 considers a case where denotational equivalence leads to translations with connotative infelicities. 2.2 considers a phrase which is commonly translated in a way that fails to activate the main premise of the argument that follows.

Section 3 considers the rhetorical significance of an instance of repetition and how this case is rendered in various translations.

## 1 Echoic utterance

**Rhetorical antennae remain sorely singed.**

An ECHOIC utterance gives voice to a thought expressed or attributed to someone other than the speaker, or a thought which the speaker previously expressed or held. For example, suppose that I bought a car advertised to be highly reliable and, after having driven just a few miles, it broke down. If I were to say "This car is very reliable," I would be echoing the thought expressed in the advertising, NOT a thought that I held. And if you had convinced me to buy this car on the basis

<sup>3</sup>Or more specifically, "Do not attempt to manipulate the weather by practicing magic, as the pagans around you do."

<sup>4</sup>Relevance Theory [17] analyzes irony as a type of echoic utterance, and sarcasm as a strong form of irony.

that it was very reliable, and I say this to you, you would understand my utterance as echoing your words, triggering inferences about my opinion of your advice and perhaps even about you!

We now discuss two cases of echoic utterance that some translations fail to recognize. (The first was discussed in Weber [18].)

### 1.1 Matthew 15.21–28

Consider the NASB rendering of Matthew 15.21–28:

<sup>21</sup>Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup>And a Canaanite woman from that region **came out** [*exelthousa*] and began to **cry out** [*ekrazen*], saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." <sup>23</sup>But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples **came** [*proselthontes*] and implored Him, saying, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us." <sup>24</sup>But He answered and said, "**I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**" <sup>25</sup>But she **came** [*elthousa*] and began to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" <sup>26</sup>And He answered and said, "**It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.**" <sup>27</sup>But she said, "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." <sup>28</sup>Then Jesus said to her, "O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed at once.

I claim (following Weber [18]) that Jesus spoke echoically in verses 24 and 26. In 24 "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" echoes a thought the disciples were using to justify dismissing the woman. In 26, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" echoes the racist sentiments of others around Jesus (perhaps including those who had come from Jerusalem mentioned in Mt. 15.1, who may have accompanied Jesus to the region of Tyre and Sidon).

This interpretation rests on understanding that the Canaanite woman was initially kept at a distance from Jesus by the disciples. Evidence for this is that she had to SHOUT in her attempt to make Jesus hear (v. 22), the disciples had to COME to Jesus to speak to him (v. 23), and only subsequently was the woman able to COME to Jesus (v. 25). Each of these is an important clue to the situation, and hence the context that must be brought to bear on interpreting Jesus' words.

Significantly, when verses 24 and 26 are interpreted as being echoic, this passage is understood as a strong statement against racism. It is a rejection of Jewish exclusivism. As such, it follows naturally the discussion in verses 1–20 in which Jesus rejected a tradition linking hand washing and clean-versus-unclean. In 21–28 he rejected the tradition that linked race to an extension of this distinction to the domain of people: (Jewish = clean; non Jewish = unclean).

Now consider how this passage is rendered in the NLT:

<sup>21</sup>Jesus then left Galilee and went north to the region of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup>A Gentile woman who lived there came to him, pleading, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! For my daughter has a demon in her, and it is severely tormenting her."

<sup>23</sup>But Jesus gave her no reply—not even a word. Then his disciples urged him to send her away. "Tell her to leave," they said. "She is bothering us with all her begging."

<sup>24</sup>Then he said to the woman, "I was sent only to help the people of Israel—God's lost sheep—not the Gentiles."

<sup>25</sup>But she came and worshiped him and pleaded again, "Lord, help me!"

<sup>26</sup>"It isn't right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs," he said.

<sup>27</sup>"Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even dogs are permitted to eat crumbs that fall beneath their master's table."

<sup>28</sup>"Woman," Jesus said to her, "your faith is great. Your request is granted." And her daughter was instantly healed.

The NLT eliminates two of the three clues mentioned above. In verse 22 “pleading” is used instead of “cry out,” removing the suggestion of distance. In verse 23 there is no indication that the disciples “came” to Jesus.<sup>5</sup> The reader is thus deprived of two clues to understand that, when Jesus said “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” he was echoing to the disciples their mistaken justification for dismissing the woman, and that, upon understanding this, they returned to the woman and allowed her to approach Jesus. And the rendering of verse 24 further undercuts this interpretation in two ways: (1) it explicitly states that Jesus said this to the woman and (2) it fails to reflect the adversative (*de*), which I take to contrast Jesus’ response with the disciples’ expectation that Jesus would agree to dismiss the woman. (And “But” at the outset of verse 25 (rendering *de*) then contraposes the woman’s persistence to Jesus’ rejection, rather contraposing her ultimate good fortune with the initial negative expectations raised by the disciples’ attitude and conduct.)

The result is that the NLT has reshaped this passage, making it simply about the woman’s faith, treating the rejection of Jewish exclusivism as at best a very minor issue.

## 1.2 1 Corinthians 11.19

Consider the NASB rendering of 1 Cor 11.19–22:

<sup>17</sup>But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. <sup>18</sup>For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. <sup>19</sup>**For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you.** <sup>20</sup>Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper, <sup>21</sup>for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. <sup>22</sup>What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.

Verse 19 should be understood as highly ironic or sarcastic.<sup>6</sup> The reasons for this are as follows:

1. 1 Corinthians was written in part to counter disunity, a theme announced in the first chapter: “<sup>10</sup>Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. <sup>11</sup>For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe’s people, that there are quarrels among you...”
2. Verse 19 is in the middle of a stern scolding regarding division, beginning with “I do not praise you” (v. 17) and ending with “What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you” (v. 22). This is hardly the place for a reflective comment on the virtues of division!
3. In no other place does Paul write anything consistent with a literal interpretation of verse 19, that is, advocating division.

Sperber and Wilson [17] take irony (including its strong form, sarcasm) to be echoic utterance. Applied to verse 19, we may suppose that Paul was echoing to the church a twisted justification that was being used to justify division, either something that had been expressed or something that Paul had reason to believe some Corinthians were thinking.

The CEV does not interpret verse 19 as ironic, translating it as follows:

<sup>5</sup>Strangely, verse 25 says “she came and worshipped him” even though verse 22, by saying that the woman “came to him,” has already located the woman at Jesus.

<sup>6</sup>I am grateful to Bruce Hollenbach for pointing this case out to me.

<sup>19</sup>You are bound to argue with each other, but it is easy to see which of you have God's approval.

But is Paul really saying that disagreement is inevitable and that "God-approved" is so obvious? The NIV rendering could be interpreted as ironic:

<sup>19</sup>No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.

"No doubt" may nudge some readers toward an ironic interpretation but it can just as well be taken literally. Indeed, the NIV Study Bible [14] adds a footnote that reads, "As deplorable as factions may be, they serve one good purpose: They distinguish those who are faithful and true in God's sight."

By contrast, the NLT rendering, by the addition of the exaggerated "of course" and the exclamation mark, does an admirable job of inviting an ironic interpretation:

<sup>19</sup>But, of course, there must be divisions among you so that those of you who are right will be recognized!

### 1.3 The exegetical bias toward literal interpretations

Why have exegetes and translators understood John 4.24,26 and 1 Corinthians 11.19 literally? The answer, I believe, lies with the code model and the view of pragmatics that grew out of it. The code model viewed texts as CONTAINING meanings encoded and decoded by means of grammatical and lexical information. As such, it fostered a bias toward literal interpretation and to the view that non-literal interpretations were deviations from the literal norm. This bias is discussed—and rejected—by Gibbs [5, p. 398]:

"...According to this traditional view, which I have dubbed the STANDARD PRAGMATIC MODEL (Gibbs, 1994), understanding what any nonliteral utterance means requires that listeners analyze a sentence's literal meaning before other figurative meanings can be derived. Another implication of this model is that understanding tropes requires that a defective literal meaning be found before the search for a nonliteral meaning can begin. Figurative meaning can be ignored if the literal meaning of an utterance makes sense in context. Finally, additional inferential work must be done to derive figurative meanings that are contextually appropriate.

The results of many psycholinguistic experiments have shown these claims to be false (see Gibbs, 1994, for a review). Listeners and readers can often understand the figurative interpretations of

**metaphor** (e.g., *Billboards are warts on the landscape*);

**metonymy** (e.g., *The ham sandwich left without paying*);

**sarcasm** (e.g., *You are a fine friend*);

**idioms** (e.g., *John popped the question to Mary*);

**proverbs** (e.g., *The early bird catches the worm*); and

**indirect speech acts** (e.g., *Would you mind lending me five dollars?*)

without having to first analyze and reject their literal meanings when these tropes are seen in realistic social contexts. These studies specifically demonstrate that people can read figurative utterances as quickly as—sometimes more quickly than—they can read literal uses of the same expressions in different contexts or equivalent non-figurative expressions. Research also shows that people quickly apprehend the nonliteral meaning of simple comparison statements (e.g., *Surgeons are butchers*) even when the literal meaning of these statements fits perfectly with the context (Glucksberg, Gildea and Bookin, 1982; Shinjo and Myers, 1989). Even without a defective literal meaning to trigger a search for an alternative figurative meaning, metaphor, to take one example, can be automatically interpreted. Moreover, experimental studies demonstrate that understanding metaphor, metonymy, irony, and indirect speech acts requires the same kind of contextual information as do comparable literal expressions (Gibbs, 1986b; 1986c; Gildea and Glucksberg, 1983; Keysar, 1989). These observations and experimental findings demonstrate that

the standard pragmatic view of nonliteral language use has little psychological validity, at least insofar as very early cognitive processes are concerned (see also Recanati, 1995)."

In light of Gibbs' claim and the considerable research on which it is based, it is high time that exegesis shed its bias toward literal interpretations.

## 2 Referring expressions

**Identities may overwhelm arguments.**

We will consider two cases in which referring expressions are translated in a way that undercuts the message of the text.

### 2.1 Jeremiah 7.1–15

Consider the NASB rendering of Jeremiah 7.1–15:<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, <sup>2</sup>"Stand in the gate of the LORD'S house and proclaim there this word and say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah, who enter by these gates to worship the LORD!'" <sup>3</sup>Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. <sup>4</sup>"Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, 'This is **the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.**' <sup>5</sup>"For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly practice justice between a man and his neighbor, <sup>6</sup>if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, nor walk after other gods to your own ruin, <sup>7</sup>then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever. <sup>8</sup>"Behold, you are trusting in deceptive words to no avail. <sup>9</sup>"Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known, <sup>10</sup>then come and stand before Me in **this house, which is called by My name**, and say, 'We are delivered!'—that you may do all these abominations? <sup>11</sup>"Has **this house, which is called by My name**, become a den of robbers in your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," declares the LORD. <sup>12</sup>"But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I made My name dwell at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel. <sup>13</sup>"And now, because you have done all these things," declares the LORD, "and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you but you did not answer, <sup>14</sup>therefore, I will do to **the house which is called by My name**, in which you trust, and to the place which I gave you and your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. <sup>15</sup>"I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brothers, all the offspring of Ephraim."

"Temple" (*hekhāl*) occurs three times in the "deceptive words" in verse 4. Thereafter, in verses 10, 11 and 14, the building in question is referred to as "house, which is called by my name." These two expressions refer to the same building, but each attributes a different status to it.

Crucially, unlike the people who deceived themselves by calling it the temple, the Lord does not refer to it as such, reinforcing the claim that this building has been made unworthy of being called the temple because of the conduct of those who entered there to worship. (Verse 12 reflects the same avoidance of "temple" with respect to Shiloh.)

Now let us consider some modern translations, ones that reflect an SMR theory of translation. The NIV inserts "temple" in verse 14:

14 Therefore, what I did to Shiloh I will now do to the house that bears my Name, the **temple** you trust in, the place I gave to you and your fathers.n

<sup>7</sup>I am grateful to Christoph Unger for bringing this case to my attention.

Presumably the translators added “temple” to help the reader understand that “house that bears my Name” refers to what was erroneously being called the temple. Unfortunately this puts “temple” into the Lord’s mouth, undercutting the very point He was making, namely, his refusal to endorse the “place” at Shiloh as the temple.

The CEV and the NLT go further:

1. Both use “temple” in verse 2 instead of “house of the Lord.”
2. Both remove the repetition of “temple” in verse 4, repetition that calls attention to the error of calling the place “temple.”<sup>8</sup>
3. Both use “temple” in verses 10, 11 and 14. The NLT goes one step further in using “temple” twice in verse 14, which reads:

<sup>14</sup> So just as I destroyed Shiloh, I will now destroy this **Temple** that was built to honor my name, this **Temple** that you trust for help, this place that I gave to you and your ancestors.

The NIV, CEV and NLT have the Lord referring to the building as the temple, thus attributing to it the status of the temple, affirming the very idea that He is rejecting.

Why should the NIV, CEV and NLT translators have made this adjustment? I think there are two main reasons. First, they placed a high value on producing natural English text (as stated in the introductions of each translation). The phrase “this house, which is called by my name” is long and clumsy, whereas “temple” is short and tidy, so the change was undoubtedly motivated by naturalness and, in the case of the CEV, by “economy of words (see Newman [11, p. 16]).

Second, and perhaps more significantly, the translators understood “temple” and “house that bears my Name” to be denotationally equivalent, that is, as referring to the same building. In verse 2 the CEV even adds a footnote to “temple” explaining, “The Hebrew text has ‘house of the LORD,’ another name for the temple.” Clearly, their justification for the change is denotational equivalence.

The code model, with its semantics-focused notion of meaning, fostered the feeling that denotatively equivalent expressions should be largely interchangeable, with perhaps minor connotational differences. So the translators may not have considered the broader consequences of replacing the clumsy by the simple.

## 2.2 Matthew 11.2–6

Consider the NASB rendering of Mt 11.2–6:<sup>9</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of **the works of Christ** [*ta erga tou Christou*], he sent word by his disciples <sup>3</sup>and said to Him, “Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?” <sup>4</sup>Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and report to John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup>the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. <sup>6</sup>“And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me.”

The NIV and CEV render *ta erga tou Christou* as “what Christ was doing,” the NLT as “all the things the Messiah was doing,” and *The Message* [9] as “what Jesus was doing.”<sup>10</sup> Each of these interprets and renders *tou Christou* as a referring expression denoting Jesus.

<sup>8</sup>Perhaps the repetition even mocks those who thought they could make this building become the temple by repeatedly calling it so. If so, this would be another case of rhetorical oversight.

<sup>9</sup>I have benefited from discussion with Ann Nyland, Iver Larson and Peter Kirk about this passage.

<sup>10</sup>The Net Bible mentions that some manuscripts of the Western tradition have “Jesus” at this point. I am grateful to Iver Larson for pointing this out to me.

After the fact, in the “mutual cognitive environment” of the evangelist and his readers (including us), Christ (or Messiah) is known to be an appropriate expression for denoting Jesus. But did John know this? No, he suspected it but did not know it. Indeed, it was his uncertainty that motivated him to put the question to Jesus (by means of his disciples).

In light of what John had heard, what he suspected, and the nature of Jesus’ response, I claim that *tou Christou* should NOT be interpreted and translated simply as denoting Jesus<sup>11</sup> and that *ta erga tou Christou* should be interpreted and translated in a way that emphasizes messianic expectations over directly identifying Jesus. That is, (a) should be favored over (b):

- (a) the works of the Christ (whoever He might be)
- (b) the works of Christ (who we know to be Jesus)

*ta erga tou Christou* might be rendered along the lines of “events/activities characteristic of the Messiah” or perhaps even simply as “messianic activity.”

What is the nature of Jesus’ answer to John? He does not answer the question directly, as he might have done by saying, “Yes, I am the Messiah.” Rather, he responds with an abductive argument: he encourages John to ABDUCE that he was the Messiah from relevant evidence. This depends crucially on the activation of the messianic expectation, a major part of which is an implication of the form: IF *x* is the Messiah, THEN *x* gives sight to the blind AND *x* makes the lame walk AND *x* raises the dead AND... This—I maintain—is activated by *ta erga tou Christou* in verse 2. And once activated, *ho erchomenos*, “the coming one” in verse 3 can be understood as a reference to the Messiah (which justifies the NASB’s rendering of *ho erchomenos* as “the Expected One”). And, I maintain, the force of this argument is undercut if *ta erga tou Christou* is translated in a way that fails to activate the messianic expectation, which, I believe, is the case if *tou Christou* is translated in a way that can pass as a simple reference to Jesus.

Why have translators translated *ta erga tou Christou* as “what Christ/Messiah was doing”? Here are some speculations:

1. The SMR theories of translation rooted in the code model were largely formulated in terms of local, equivalence-maintaining “adjustments” that could be made in translating from the source to the target text.

One class of adjustments for the New Testament deals with Greek genitives. One frequent case is a genitive phrase modifying a noun that expresses a verbal idea (often a de-verbal noun), for which the genitive indicates the subject. Such cases can be translated by expressing the head noun as a verb and the genitive as its subject. Thus “deed [of X]” can be adjusted to “[X] did/was doing/is doing/will do/... Y.” As a relative clause this becomes “what [X] is/was doing.”

So translators may have translated *ta erga tou Christou* as “what Christ/Messiah was doing” simply because it follows a generally accepted and frequently applied adjustment.

2. The translators may have constructed a different understanding of the dynamics of the text, one that does not place importance on the activation of the messianic expectation or does not understand *ta erga tou Christou* as playing a crucial role in its activation.

For example, it might be thought that the messianic expectation is adequately activated by *ho erchomenos* ‘the coming one’ (which the NASB renders as “the Expected One”) in verse

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<sup>11</sup>In a discussion of my claim, one discussant suggested that the article *tou* with *Christou* favored interpreting the expression as a direct reference to Jesus, but another discussant countered that *tou Christou* could just as well be understood as ‘the anointing,’ activating the concept of messiah rather than denoting Jesus. I believe that both interpretations are GENERALLY possible, but that which is appropriate in any SPECIFIC case must be decided on the basis of what makes the text coherent.

3. I believe, however, that this phrase succeeds in referring to the Messiah only because the messianic expectation has already been activated by verse 2.

3. The translators may have judged that *ta erga tou Christou* should be understood from the evangelist's perspective, not from John's perspective. The evangelist knew that Jesus was the Christ and could well have assumed that his readers also knew this, and thus could have been simply referring to Jesus. But did he?

I think not, for this would diminish the text's impact on the reader. If, at the outset, Jesus were identified as the Messiah, the reader would not need the argument that Jesus gave John. This early identification would diminish the extent to which the reader is drawn to identify with John: his need for confirmation and his construction of the abductive argument that makes Jesus' response an affirmation that He is indeed the Messiah.

### 3 Repetition: John 4.17–19

Simplicity may trump rhetoric.

Cases in which the same meaning is expressed twice are awkward for the code model. If the meaning is TRANSMITTED once, that should suffice; repetition should be unnecessary. This idea is inherited by the SMR translation theories: if the meaning is TRANSLATED once, that should suffice; repetition should be unnecessary.

A case in point is found in Jesus' interaction with the woman of Samaria reported in John 4. The NASB rendering is as follows:

<sup>16</sup>He said to her, "Go, call your husband and come here." <sup>17</sup>The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "**You have correctly said**, 'I have no husband'; <sup>18</sup>for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; **this you have said truly.**" <sup>19</sup>The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.

Why is "You have correctly said" (v. 17) followed so quickly by "this you have said truly" (v. 18)? And how should it be translated?

The NLT rendering simply eliminates the repetition, suggesting that Jesus is straightforwardly praising the woman's honesty:

<sup>17</sup>"I don't have a husband," the woman replied. Jesus said, "You're right! You don't have a husband—<sup>18</sup>for you have had five husbands, and you aren't even married to the man you're living with now."

The CEV reflects the application of a criterion of "economy of words" [11, p. 16], whereby most repetition is removed (especially that found in Hebrew poetry). However, in Jn. 4.17–18, the CEV keeps the repetition, but brings the two statements together into the very natural "That's right, you're telling the truth.":

<sup>17–18</sup>The woman answered, "I don't have a husband." "That's right," Jesus replied, "you're telling the truth. You don't have a husband. You have already been married five times, and the man you are now living with isn't your husband."

As with the NLT, this rendering suggests that Jesus was simply praising the woman's honesty, with no hint that his words should NOT be taken at face value.

Contrary to the approach taken by the NLT and the CEV, I believe the repetition had an important rhetorical function: It provoked the woman to go beyond a straightforward understanding of Jesus' words as praise for honesty. It invited her to understand that Jesus recognized that, in effect,

she was using the literal truth to tell a lie. And because the repetition succeeded in doing this, the woman is lead to perceive that Jesus is a prophet.

The rhetorical effect I posit here for Jesus' words is consistent with Pilkington's [15] analysis of the cognitive effects of repetition. He claims (very approximately) that, because repetition causes additional work (processing effort), the hearer expects interpretive compensation, and this expectation motivates the hearer to search for deeper effects.<sup>12</sup>

## Conclusion

I claim that modern translations continue to be influenced by the code model and SMR theories of translation. They err in ways that can be traced back through SMR translation theories to their code model roots.

I discussed two cases of echoic utterance (Matthew 15.21–28 and 1 Corinthians 11.19) that have been translated literally with detrimental effect, two cases of referring expressions (Jeremiah 7.1–15 and Matthew 11.2–6) that have been translated in ways that undermine the rhetorical point of the passage, and a case of rhetorically-motivated repetition (John 4.17–19) translated in ways that leave no clue to the rhetorical effect.

I have presented evidence; the verdict now rests with you, the reader.

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<sup>12</sup>I believe the effect is much like the American English "heLLOo!" tacked onto the end of an utterance and pronounced with an exaggerated high-low pitch contour. It is an instruction to reevaluate the proposition expressed by the utterance. With this device, Jn. 4.18 could be colloquially translated, "Right, you don't have a husband. . . . heLLOo!"

Another possibility, suggested by Susan Quigley, is "You don't have a husband. . . . Yeah, right. Sure."

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