BASIC TYPES OF FOOTNOTES FOR OLD TESTAMENT TRANSLATIONS (based mainly on RSV and GNB)

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In his recent book, *Marginal Notes for the Old Testament* (UBS, 1980), Dr. Robert G. Bratcher identifies nine different classes of marginal notes, or footnotes, that may be used for the purpose of providing the kind of information that will help the reader understand the text more fully. These are:

   1. Textual—notes that show the more important textual variants or **alternative readings** on which the translation is based.

   2. Translational—notes that provide other possible translations of the same Hebrew reading. These are known as variant or **alternative renderings.**

   3. Linguistic—notes that explain plays on words, popular derivations of meaning, or the meaning of technical words and phrases.

   4. Cultural—notes explaining ancient beliefs, customs, rituals, or festivals.

   5. People—notes identifying important personalities and explaining their significance as far as the immediate text is concerned.

   6. Historical events—notes identifying important events and explaining their significance in the context of the immediate text.

   7. Places—notes identifying important geographical locations and explaining their significance.

   8. Dates—notes identifying the dates of events and people as accurately as possible.

   9. References—notes referring to other passages in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament.

A tenth class not mentioned by Dr. Bratcher but which is found in the book of Psalms (GNB) is the listing of the headings or superscriptions to individual psalms found in the Hebrew text. Many translations (RSV and others) place these headings at the beginning of each psalm even though they were probably not a part of the original and contain a number of terms whose precise meaning is not known. The GNB has replaced these with headings designed to help the reader understand what the psalm is about, giving the Hebrew headings at the lower margin of the page.

   The most difficult kind of footnote for the translator to handle is the first class, or textual note. And yet this is perhaps the most important type of footnote for the reader who is concerned for the accuracy of the translation. The second class, or translational note, is probably second in importance. These two types provide the translation with an easily accessible defense, and they help the sensitive reader to understand the reasons for the many variations with other translations.

   The following is an attempt to describe for the translator *four* basic types of *textual* footnotes, all under the first class identified by Dr. Bratcher, and two basic types of *translational* footnotes under the second class. I hope that the description and examples of each of these six basic types will help the

translator to recognize the function of the footnote, and suggest the appropriate formula which should be used if a similar footnote is required in the new translation. Translators should understand, of course, that many footnotes in the English translations are inappropriate or unnecessary in other language translations. Similarly, there will be occasional need for footnotes in other languages for which there are no models in the English translations. The translator who is familiar with these basic types, however, should be able to determine just where a footnote may be needed in the new translation and what formula should be used in the wording of that footnote.

Type A (Textual)

When the translation follows a *reading* that is different from the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT), RSV names the ancient versions and/or Hebrew manuscripts on which the translation is based. GNB simply says, "Some ancient translations" or "One ancient translation", and then repeats the appropriate words of the translation text. Both RSV and GNB then specify what the "Hebrew" (RSV, "Heb") actually says, referring of course to the MT.

Examples: Ps 11.1 (RSV
Gk Syr Jerome Tg: Heb *flee to your mountain,*
    O bird
Ps 11.1 (GNB)
Some ancient translations like a bird to the mountains;
    Hebrew bird, to your (plural) mountains.

Type B (Textual)

This is the same as type A, except that the Hebrew is not easily understandable even by the experts. Consequently, both RSV and GNB then explain that the Hebrew is "unclear" (GNB) or "obscure" or "uncertain" (RSV).

Examples: Ps 16.2 (RSV)
Jerome Tg: The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain
    Ps 68.3 (GNB)
Some ancient translations Ambassadors;
    Hebrew unclear.

Type C (Textual)

When the translation is based on a reading that is not supported by manuscript evidence, it is identified as a scholarly conjecture ("Cn", RSV) or as the "probable text" (GNB). In this case, the GNB repeats the appropriate words of the translation text. Both RSV and GNB then specify what the "Hebrew" (MT) actually says.

Examples: Ps 7.7 (RSV)
Cn: Heb *return*
    Ps 7.7 (GNB)
Probable text rule over them from above;
    Hebrew return above over them.

Type D (Textual)

This is the same as type C, except that the Hebrew is not easily understandable even by the experts. Consequently, both RSV and GNB then explain that the Hebrew is "unclear" (GNB) or "obscure" or "uncertain" (RSV).

    Examples: Ps 16.4 (RSV)

                Cn: The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

                Ps 16.4 (GNB)

                Probable text Those . . . themselves;

                        Hebrew unclear.

Type E (Translational)

When there is no question concerning the reading on which the translation is based, but yet there is more than one possible *rendering* of the Hebrew text, then both RSV and GNB provide the alternative rendering. RSV assumes that the reader will be able to identify which words in the translation text are being referred to. GNB first repeats the appropriate words of the translation text. Both RSV and GNB then introduce the alternative rendering with the word "or".

    Examples: Ps 26.3 (RSV)

                Or *in thy faithfulness*

                Ps 26.3 (GNB)

                Your faithfulness always leads me;

                        or I live in loyalty to you.

Type F (Translational)

When RSV makes some adjustment from the Hebrew text for the sake of clarity or explication, a literal rendering of the Hebrew is sometimes provided. Since GNB is a dynamic equivalent translation, such adjustments are made in just about every sentence. Footnotes of this type would consequently be too extensive for practical purposes. The basic pattern, however, should identify first the appropriate words of the translation text and then provide the literal rendering.

    Examples: Ps 23.2 (RSV)

                Heb *the waters of rest*

                  Ps 23.2 (Suggested form)

                still waters; *Hebrew* the waters of rest.

                  Ps 7.12 (RSV)

                Heb *he*

                  Ps 7.12 (Suggested form)

                man . . . God; *Hebrew* he . . . he

    (Note: RSV for Ps 7.12 has:

                If a man* does not repent, God* will whet his sword;

                  GNB for Ps 7.12 has:

                If they do not change their ways, God will

                    sharpen his sword.)

            *Heb *he*

Variations

There are a number of variations to most of these basic types. For example, type A may also be recognized in the GNB footnote to Ps 22.16:

> *Some ancient translations* they tear at; *others*
>   they tie; *Hebrew* like a lion.

And in the RSV footnote to Ps 24.9, another variation of type A is found:

> Gk Syr Jerome Tg. Compare verse 7: Heb *lift up*

In Ps 55.9, RSV again employs a variation of type A in the footnote, explaining that the Hebrew text actually lacks certain words, and the translation is consequently based on the Targums, or the ancient Aramaic translation of the Hebrew scriptures. The first phrase of the verse in the RSV reads: Destroy their plans*, O Lord, . . . The footnote then reads:

> Tg: Heb lacks *their plans*

Similar variations of other basic types are also to be found, depending upon the nature of each problem. The translator should learn to recognize the basic types and their respective functions and then allow for various additions or alterations to the usual formula. It should be obvious that a translator should never attempt to prepare a footnote of the textual or translational class until he fully understands what a footnote is saying and why it has been used in each case. A comparison of the RSV and GNB translations will usually make the function of the footnote clear. Whenever there is any doubt or uncertainty, even after commentaries have been consulted, the help of the UBS Translation Consultant should be sought.

Conclusion

The following diagrams should help the translator to distinguish the six basic types of footnotes. In the grid for **Textual Footnotes,** the vertical column at the left identifies the first part of the footnote formula. The horizontal row at the top identifies the second part of the formula, usually separated from the first by a semi-colon.

	Reading in Hebrew text	Hebrew is unclear
Manuscript evidence and Translation	A	B
Probable text (Cn) and Translation	C	D

Grid for Textual Footnotes

In the grid for **Translational Footnotes,** the first part of the footnote formula, indicated at the left is the actual word or words of the translation text. The second part of the formula then identifies either the "Alternative rendering" or the "Literal meaning of Hebrew".

	Alternative rendering	Literal meaning of Hebrew
Translation only	E	F

Grid for Translational Footnotes

Footnotes of these basic types are an important part of the translation, so translators should include them even as they prepare their first drafts. However, the types of footnotes to be used and their frequency will depend on the kind of translation being prepared and the audience for whom it is intended. A common language translation intended for popular use, for example, will have less need for footnotes than a literary or liturgical translation intended for a more highly educated audience. Furthermore, there is probably no need to burden the average reader with footnotes of types B and D, for he would be confused by a footnote simply informing him that the underlying Hebrew text is "unclear" or "obscure".

Other factors will need to be considered also, such as the agreement or disagreement between the RSV and the GNB. Certain key passages or verses frequently used in support of doctrinal positions should probably be noted if the translation does not follow the traditional interpretation. A more detailed policy of when and where to place footnotes should be worked out by the translators in consultation with their translation consultant early in the translation process. This will help to insure that the finished translation will at least have a consistent pattern of functional footnotes to aid the intended readers.

In a few copies of the April 1982 issue of *Practical Papers,* some pages were misplaced. The printers will be happy to supply replacement copies. Their address may be found on the inside back cover.