



LANGUAGE AS "KEY" TO COMMUNICATION

by

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Introduction:

Of all forms of communication, nothing equals language as a conveyor of the inner mental process. With language we express joy, fear, desires, and other positive and negative emotions, as well as our most profound ideas and complex rational thought.

Spoken language serves all purposes of mental and inner communication. With the invention of writing, however, the value and importance of language went far beyond what preliterate man could have imagined. Spoken language enabled diverse individuals to communicate with one another in a limited span of time and space, but with written language, they record and share information and could communicate along both spatial and temporal axes. In other words, written language revolutionized communication among globally and chronologically disparate and remote peoples.

We humans use reason and language on extremely varied and advanced levels. There is no proof however, that other living beings, into whose inner world we cannot enter, do not use some form of reasoning, or that the varied and complex sounds many animals make are not forms of language. Moreover, other living beings, like humans, have their respective industries; they can build various structures, such as bridges and multi-level towers, as well as many diversified habitats for themselves.

Man, however, is the animal who writes and has done so for the last 5000 years. There is hardly any society on earth where some individuals, whatever their sex, age, ethnic background, or social status, have not used writing in some way. The sharing of information from person to person through writing, from one culture to another, and from one generation to another, makes the accumulation of massive amounts of knowledge possible, and this is what has made our present world what it is.

Among all forms of writing the alphabet is unique. In our modern age of word-processors, copiers and fax machines, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and the ever-

expanding institutions we call the school and the library, the value and unifying influence of alphabetic writing as a tool of communication remains unparalleled.

Many other forms of communication and transportation, television, videos and movies, telegraph, telephone, air travel, etc. have made an indelible and irreversible mark on life on earth and revolutionized world culture.

Still, people are as distant, if not more distant, from each other as ever. Peace and understanding among them remain as elusive as ever. It is language, one of the earliest and most fundamental forms of communication, that remains the insurmountable obstacle in communication. By its very nature, language can be a source of personal, national, and international misunderstanding. If two people do not speak the same language, there cannot be communication; if they communicate through translation there may not be adequate understanding. If they speak the same language with opposing or offending nuances, intentional or unintentional communication may revert to misunderstanding and hostility may erupt. (Compare Perot's "your people" in his speech to the NAACP, to the battle of the Iota and the Early Church or Queen Victoria's misunderstanding of Emp^ere^or Theodore's letter.)

✓ | Language, whether written or unwritten, an *a priori* presupposition for the creation of society^k whether a gift of God, as the Bible suggests, (according to the story of the Tower² of Babel, Man was punished for his actions by the confusion of languages), a human invention, as Rousseau thought, or necessitated by emotion, as J. Herder postulated, has aptly been described as the "key", to designate an instrument that opens something that has been locked. A key is more than that, however. It offers access and entry, but it also prevents them. Hence, in some languages the word for "key" is "opener",^k and in others, "shutter".^{x^x} In either its verbal or written form, language, like a key, can either facilitate real human communication, or prevent it.

Even if a universal language were to emerge and translations were to become unnecessary, the problem of language as a key that shuts the door, preventing access to better human understanding, will remain with us for a long time to come. In addition, the same media__ radio, television, and the telephone __ that have revolutionized communication are, paradoxically, making language a barrier by reducing and interfering with direct human contact.

* Maftach

x^x Schlüssel

Language, Key to Human Psyche :

In the ancient world, the importance of words as key to religio-psychological function were taken for granted. In the Near East, people were given names from the vernacular, with specific religious significance attached to the component words of their names and their innermost meaning to predict the fate of a child. The written word, even single letters of the Torah were regarded by early Jewish sages and Christian theologians as so fundamental that they tried to dig even deeper into their meaning to discover their religious value. Their method shows us how far the human spirit can go to reach the divine realm through language.

The Greek philosophers, including Plato and Aristotle, were ambivalent about the relationship of language and the realm of true reality. Nonetheless, they taught that words are clues to reality. Aristotle asserted that "spoken words are the symbols of mental experience" and built a good deal of his logic on the analysis of the Greek language, in particular the verb "to be." The Stoics analyzed words hoping to grasp reality. The Hellenistic Jewish philosopher Philo, like the Tannaitic Rabbi Akiba, probed further to find meaning in each letter of the written word. Throughout Medieval and Renaissance periods philosophers and theologians explained the human mind and religious thought by analyzing vocabularies. Indeed, it can be said that "theology" consists of the interpretation and comparison of texts and words.

As Edward Sapir has rightly argued, in addition to its formal characteristics, language has certain psychological qualities. Sapir writes that "this is indicated by the widespread feeling, particularly among "primitive" people, that virtual identity or close correspondence of word and thing [which] leads to the magic of spells." He further points out that "it is generally difficult to make a complete divorce between objective reality and our linguistic symbols of reference to it; and things, qualities, and events are on the whole felt to be what they are called." His statement that "action speaks louder than words" may be an excellent maxim from the pragmatic point of view, but betrays little insight into the nature of speech. All forms of language — proverbs, maxims, anecdotes, folk tales, songs, prayers, religio-magical and magico-medical formulae, orations and the like, — have deep moral, spiritual, and psychological functions, in addition to their function in cultural accumulation and historical transmission.

Furthermore, whether one approaches language philosophically or linguistically, whether one considers its development and evolution diachronically or synchronically, its function as a key to inter-human communication is complex. Linguistic scholars from de Saussure to Chomsky would agree that even the mechanistic and scientific aspect of speech can teach us a good deal about the way the human mind operates. As Sapir correctly puts it, "the fundamental quality of one's voice, the phonetic patterns of speech, the speed and relative smoothness of articulation, the length and structure of the sentences, the character and range of the vocabulary, the scholastic consistency of words used, the readiness with which words respond to the requirements of the social environment... all these are so many complex indicators of the personality" — and of the human spirit.

Language, Key to the Mind of Other Culture:

Language is *par excellence* a medium of communication of thoughts and feelings. It is the single unchallenged key to the human mind, hence to person-to-person and people-to-people understanding.

Language is the key to the working of the thought processes of other cultures. In the early eighteenth century, J. Herder, the German Protestant theologian and poet, propounded a view that religion sprang indirectly, through mythology, from human aesthetic instinct in general and from poetry in particular. The same view was propounded by G. Vico at about the same time. Almost a century later, F. M. Muller, the historian of religion, put forth a similar view, calling mythology a "disease of language."

Even if we consider these extreme views exaggerations, there is no doubt that language and culture are bound together. An important key to acquiring a profound understanding of the culture of any people is understanding the encoded meaning and nuances or specific symbiology of their language. Language and thought are like the chicken and egg story for distinctions among peoples in their thoughts and world views are *ipso facto* grounded in the diverging modes of their respective languages and vice versa. It is not far-fetched to say that the root of much misunderstanding in the world today is the ignorance of languages not our own. Indeed, knowing other languages is of direct relevance and primary importance for cross-cultural

communication. As the early twentieth century cultural philosopher Levy-Bruhl once noted, "an exact knowledge of the native's [sic] language is necessary to ensure" understanding between Europeans and non-western peoples. C. Ehret, a student of African languages also notes in "Language Evidence and Religious History," "words are the carriers of ideas, and thus on the history of a people's words can be built a history of their ideas, religious and social."

Unfortunately, in the many nineteenth and early twentieth century, many students of world cultures considered non-western languages irrelevant. Instead of making the effort necessary to study and appreciate these languages, they violated the principle of scientific objectivity and made blanket judgements about peoples who spoke them. They considered African and Asian languages simple and poor, lacking complex grammar and vocabulary, and representing the lowest scale of human speech. Herbert Spencer thought "the mind of the primitive...unspeculative, uncritical" because their language consisted of vocabulary and grammar capable of expressing "only the simplest thoughts," consisting chiefly of "sounds, nothing more: signs, grimaces, guttural sounds, bodily gesticulation, facial contortion..." It is said that Sir Francis Galton compared the mental capacity of the Damara of Southern Africa to that of his dog, and considered their language nothing but grimaces and gesticulations, which meant they could not speak at night since visual signs cannot be communicated in the dark. There are many such examples to illustrate how the disregard for non-Western languages closed communication, led to confusion, and generated serious misunderstanding or misunderstandings of comical proportions.

Language, Key that Closes Off Inter-Cultural Communication:

The pattern, and content of linguistic structures, hence the pattern of thought in languages, differs from one culture to culture. This makes thought communication even harder. For instance, the word "religion" does not exist in ancient Egypt or Biblical Hebrew. This is also true for many Asian and African languages. There are important religious terms, including words for prayer, praise, sacrifice, oblation in these languages. The people who use these languages are also profoundly religious people. "Religion" is thought of, not as a conceptual system, but as an "existential" way of life. The word "faith" is the equivalent of "trust", a more concrete concept, and piety is expressed in an equally concrete manner. Words expressing "religion" as a theory do not generally exist. The only common denominator in Western and non-Western thought is the idea of Divinity or the

spiritual-mind realm; but the understanding of the meaning, role, and purpose of religion are broadly divergent, for linguistic reasons.

It may surprise some that many non-Western languages, such as the Semitic languages, do not usually possess an equivalent expression for the Greek copula "to be". Neither do they need it to communicate or express themselves intelligibly. A subject takes a predicate more directly and clearly without any need for a copula. It is superfluous to say "I am John"; "He is a carpenter", and the like; it is more direct to say "I John" and it is clearer to say "He does woodworking." The closest verb to "to be" that these languages have is "to become". But "to become" designates real action, a transformation or change from one thing into another, an arrival at a new or different stage in life. Most importantly, these languages do not seek to predicate a subject as to describe its essential primary or secondary nature. One does not ask what God is, but rather what God does.

T. Bowman points out that certain Hebrew verbs that designate inaction also designate movement, an apparent contradiction. The Hebrew words for 'stand', 'sit', 'lie', etc. have therefore, two meanings, which to our way of thinking are opposed to one another. Words of this sort are common in Semitic languages. The Hebrew word "qum" (stand), is a typical example of this phenomenon, but it allows us to anticipate how this concept is to be understood psychologically...even 'life' and 'death' form a unified pair of concepts, (p. 29, n.1). Only motion has meaning. Likewise, verbs that designate "being" are meaningless, unless they designate "becoming". A person is not "strong", "wise", "angry", "tall", or the like, but becomes "strong", "wise", and so on. No distinction exists between "being" or "becoming", or between a stative condition and an active enfoldment. What appears to be a visible, static condition, for example, "to be silent", is but the result of a conscious becoming, a willful activity, "to hush". Thus, many intransitive and stative verbs, "to live", "to rejoice", "to shine" (as in "the sun shines"), and so on, indicate conscious activity.

Heraclitus, the ancient Miletian philosopher, once said: "Everything changes; and a man cannot step into the same stream twice." Bowman says; "this high estimate of change and motion is un-Greek", (p.52), and suggests that Heraclitus may have been under indirect "Oriental" influence. " In this respect, however, Bowman may be wrong; the problem is that he takes "change" and "motion" as necessary partners. Hebrew, like other Afroasiatic languages, may be dynamic, emphasizing motion, but

"motion" does not necessarily mean "change" in a Heraclitian sense. Bowman is, however, right in contrasting Eleatic and Platonic thought with Hebrew thought, not because the former denied change but because they denied motion. Whereas the language pattern of Semitic and other Afroasiatic speakers implies that reality is in motion, Eleatic and Platonic thought sees motion as non-real and illusory.

In Bantu Philosophy, Father Placide Tempels, like Bowman, attempts to show that the difference between African and European thought is the way in which they conceive the idea of "being". He writes: "Christian thought in the West, having adopted the terminology of Greek philosophy and perhaps under its influence, defines reality differently." Father Tempels argues that the Christian West can conceive the transcendental notion of "being", by separating it from its attribute "force", but the Bantu do not. Without the element of "force", being cannot be conceived. He concludes by saying "we should most faithfully render the Bantu thought in European language by saying that Bantu speak, act and live as if, for them, beings were forces. Force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force".

What Tempels calls "force" is really "energy", "power", and "motion". This view is the direct product of the fact that language and thought are inextricably bound up with one another. The environment in which we live, the climate of our respective regions, and a multitude of personal and social experiences affect our linguistic thought patterns. Our languages affect how we express our world view, inasmuch as our views are fundamentally affected by the language we speak, which is itself, dialectically speaking, affected by the way we think.

Many non-Western languages do not have words that communicate in an equivalent sense abstract ideas like reason, truth, faith, logic, and the like. *Reason* in these languages is abstract but not absolute. It is the function of an act, the function of a mind, but not pure Kantian actuality furnished by passive thought. Neither is it impersonal or immaterial. It is concrete and active, but relative. Similarly, *word* is an abstract idea but is at the same time active and concrete. It is not the Heraclitean *logos*, "moving and regulating principle in the universe", but it can be a dynamic cause in human action, hence it can also mean "something in the air", "a promise to be fulfilled", "a moral and legal discussion or dispute", "a battle". It is not a Stoic *logos*, "cosmic governing or generating principle, immanent and active in all reality", nor is

it Philo's "principle intermediate and divine reality and the sensible world", nor John's "divine person".

Yet *word* can be a powerful spiritual and moral force affecting inter-human relations, on the one hand, and human and divine relations on the other . A single word used as a curse is to be feared; as the name of a person it is believed to influence the individual. As a religio-magical principle, a word can affect human affairs more powerfully than sheer physical force. In an argumentative context it validates thought and the principles of reasoning-- correct word for correct reasoning. *Truth* is also a dynamic concept that has an abstract dimension. To utter the very word *truth* is a serious and inviolate commitment-- binding morally or legally. There is, however, nothing absolute about it. It is not Aristotelean formal truth, and certainly not independent of external existence. It is a faithful and "objective" conformity or agreement with what the senses can witness. It is not ontological nor absolute. It is abstract, dynamic, and relative. *Faith* is an abstract concept, but it too has dynamic force.

Translation, Key to Understanding or Misunderstanding:

Translation is also a key that can open or close the world of communication. The problems associated with language as a form of communication are also associated with translation.

Translation is re-conceptualizing in another language. It is a key communication that opens the door between languages. Although the modern system of simultaneous translation has revolutionized translation, as a form of intercultural communication it is as old as human history . Translation as a tool to bringing peoples closer is attested to throughout world history.

Translation, however, has also been abused, and has in some cases given rise to international conflict. It has not only been influenced but has influenced the development of ideas. As Mario Pei rightly noted, language and religion have a long history of mutual influence. According to O. Jespersen, translators are responsible for introducing the great majority of "intrusive words" into a given language.

Because translation is the conversion of a speech or a given literary work, from one language to another, the nature of a translation is directly dependent on the nature of the speech or the history and quality of the original language, {the certainty and semantics of the speech or the text as well as its clarity and accuracy.) Second , since no two languages are morphologically and lexically identical or, for that matter, as no two potential translators express themselves in an identical literary style, the nature of a given version of a religious text depends on the translator} — the translator's accurate knowledge of the language of the *Vorlage*, in both its historical and linguistic dimensions, and his or her expressive ability.

In any case, a textual translation is tantamount to a translation of culture. The author of the prologue to Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus), rightly claims that a translation never adequately conveys the thoughts and power of the text. This fact is made more complicated by the historical dimension of translation. The translators of KJV in 1611, already noted the difficulty of dealing with ancient religious texts like the Bible, full of obsolete and obscure words whose meanings have been debated for centuries and whose concepts have evolved over the ages.

Therefore, an exact, let alone perfect, translation of any part of a religious text is never possible. A translated work but its very nature must be a different work from the original, neither identical with nor perfectly equivalent to it. Also, the impact that a translated work may have on a given culture can vary greatly from that intended in the original. This depends, however, more on the nature of language than on the nature of the translation or the translator's feel for the ancient culture and languages, its mores and so on.

Many words and passages of the Hebrew Bible, for instance, have their own distinct histories, going back two thousand years from the days of the (LXX) to Jerome and thereafter, long before the KJV (1611). Many of these words and passages remain enigmatic to this day. For example, there are several linguistic and "theological" problems associated with the text of Exodus 34:29-35, particularly the statement, "When Moses came down from Mount Sinai... Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone."

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Ex. 34: 29-35 reveals the problems involved, in both the history of translation as a form of communication and the translation of culture. It reveals that a study of the history of translation of the Hebrew Bible is a lesson in the uncertainties and pitfalls of communication by translation. It is also a good example of the power and influence a translated work can have, regardless of whether that translation is historically or culturally sensible.

At a first glance, the Hebrew text wyhy brdt ms^h mhr syny..wm^sh l' yd'a ky grn 'ar pnyw... seems simple and straightforward. But generations have struggled with it and have still not come up with a convincing translation of the original. The Septuagint rendition dedoksastai he opis tou khromatos tou prospopou autou and Jerome's Vulgate version cornuta esset facies sua have given rise to divergent artistic traditions of Eastern and Western Christendom. In the East, Moses is represented with a luminous halo: in the West he is horned.

When Jerome translated the Hebrew of Exodus 34:29-35 into Latin, he probably did not intend to say that Moses physically became a person with a horn or horns. But his cornuta esset "was {became} horned" has had far-reaching implications on Western art and thought. In her book The Horned Moses in Medieval Art and Thought, Ruth Mellinkoff demonstrates that, beginning with the eleventh century English drawings in Aelfric's Biblical Paraphrases and throughout the Middle Ages and early Renaissance, and climaxing with Michelangelo's not-so-impressive sculpture (stunted rather than majestic horns) of Moses, the "horned Moses" motif has been popular and ubiquitous.

In early Christian thought horns were regarded as symbols of honor and power. In fact the word *corona* "crown", the majestic headdress of sovereignty, the symbolic wreath of victory in antiquity is derived from *cornu* (*cornus, cornum*) "horn". While it may not sound impressive to our ears, a coronation ceremony is really a ceremony of horning a king! But horns are also associated with beasts. Thus the ordinary medieval Christian may not have distinguished between the horns of glory or bestial horns, and confused Moses' horns with those of the devil, the cuckold, or other symbols of evil." This further led to the notorious anti-Semitic idea--the fantastic belief of some

Christians in the Middle Ages that Jews had horns and "were in league with the devil."

The Hebrew verb *qrn* which gives rise to the "horn" idea, is a key word in Ex.34:29-35. Interestingly, *qrn* is one of the most ubiquitous Semitic words; there is not a Semitic language I know that does not have the word in its nominal or verbal form. Yet its meaning in Exodus 34:29-35 remains obscure and elusive. The word itself can also conjure up various psychological reactions: *taqarani* "opponent", one of the Ge'ez (classical Ethiopic) terms for "devil", is derived from the word *qarin*., cognate of the Hebrew *qrn*. Even the English "horn" and "crown" can give rise to varieties of reactions: "hardness", "sharpness", "wildness", or "power", "beauty", etc.) *Qrn*, in its nominal form, meaning simply "horn", appears in the Hebrew Bible more than eighty times.

There are three (two, if we identify *glory* and *light* as related, as some interpreters do) possible divergent translation and concepts of *qrn* in different combinations: *glorified* (LXX, Onkelos, Peshitta,) and "radiated with light" (Pseudo-Jonathan, Samaritan, Neophyti); and "became horned" (Aquila, Vulgate.) The Jewish *midrashim* and Christian commentaries combine these same notions of *glory*, *light*, and *horn* in their respective interpretations of Ex. 34: 29-35.

Was Moses horned, as many medieval commentators and artists (including Suter and Michaelangelo), presumably following the Vulgate, depict him, and as some modern scholars such as J. Sasson also believe? Did Moses wear a horned ritual mask, as other modern scholars such as H. Gressman, E. Auerbach, A. Jirku, and K. Jaros claim? Or did his face become ossified and disfigured, hardened by a kind of heat burn from being exposed to divine *kabod*, as W. H. Propp insists? Or, as many ancient translators and commentators, and indeed some modern scholars, among them U. Cassuto, J. Morgenstern, M. Noth and B. S. Childs feel, is that Moses' face shone or radiated light and glory.

Is *garn 'ar pnyw* the best grammatical way of expressing a head that grew horns or a face that became ossified? We do not find similar expressions elsewhere in the Hebrew language. Secondly, is there no better way of conceptualizing a head that sprouted a horn (cf. Ez. 29:21) or a facial skin that became ossified (cf. Jb. 7:5)? It is difficult to think that even the ancient Hebrews did not observe that horns do not

come out of "the skin of {the} face," but out of the head (which Propp also recognizes). Moreover, compare the natural way of expressing a hardened skin: *sfd 'arm 'al-asm ybs hyb k'es,* "their skin has adhered to their bones, it has become dry [hard], like wood" (La. 4:8.) Third, as Cassuto rightly objected, how could Moses have been unaware of a mask on his face? The same argument can be brought against the "ossified," "blistered," "calloused," or "deformed skin of the face" hypothesis.

In any case, the objective of this paper is to look at the problem of the history of translation as a form of communication and the concomitant translation of a culture by an idea that comes from a translated work, not to resolve the issue of the meaning of the phrases *qrn ar pnyw* in Ex. 34:29-35.

If we were to create an artificial language with empirical rules and control over its syntax with all sorts of degrees of quantification, as C.G. Hempel suggests, control over the vocabulary of such a language would eliminate all relative signs and nonsensical words, but would not only void ambiguity (possibly) but also of the emotional element as well. None of the Semitic languages is close to being such a language.

In the dispute between the traditional literalists and the modern interpretavists in the translation of religious texts, one should side with the literalists. But in the dispute between the absolutists and the relativists, one should side with the relativists. In other words, one should side with relative literalists: a translation should not be an interpretation that strays from the text, but neither should it be a word-to-word conversion. Every language has its quaint or obscure expressions, foreign loan words or concepts, slang expressions or right kind of jokes. A translator must know the entire repertoire of a language and the subtle differences in our simple, yet complicated systems of describing reality.

The Power and Influence of Communication Through Translation

The interpretations of Jerome's Vulgate translation ascribing horns to Moses gave rise, on the one hand, to extensive Western art, and, on the other, the notorious belief that Jews had horns. The fact that such a belief developed does not reflect upon the influence of translation *per se*. Rather, it reflects upon the power of language and ideas. Assuming that Jerome's version constituted the source of the image of "the

horned Jew" , one can postulate that powerful ideas, not intended in the original language, can be made explicit and then germinate in translation. A powerful word or idea may arise from translation, but the idea has power because of the nature of language and thought, and in this case, because of the influence of the Vulgate as the Bible and its Latin as *the language* in medieval Catholic Europe.

Furthermore, the power of translated works is in the mode of transmission, that is in writing. Despite his narrow-minded view of non-Western cultures, Hegel was not entirely wrong in implying that civilization without writing is not possible. (see the Philosophy of History.) Records can, of course be transmitted orally in an uninterrupted line from teacher to student, which can then have a powerful influence on other people. Alphabetic writing, however, makes such transmission democratic. As M. Pei observes: "the written-tongue tradition brings a stabilizing influence to language, slowing its rate of change by creating standards which both writers and speakers feel impelled to follow and by giving rise to concepts of 'correct' and 'incorrect,' which , however arbitrary they may be at the outset, soon receive the sanction of tradition and social custom." The same can be said not only of language but also of ideas and beliefs, particularly when they are sanctioned by social custom and religious authority. The influence of translated work is not in the nature of translation but in the nature of written language. Already in New Testament times the expression *gegraptai*, "it is written," implied authority and influence.

From the perspective of the audience, what matters is the feeling. The words "to translate" and "to transfer" derive from the same two Latin roots: *trans* "across, beyond" *fero* "to bring, carry, bear" (Greek *pherein*; Sanskrit *bharati*). A translation, therefore, is the carrying over of an idea from one language to another. Given the relative accuracy of equivalencies in linguistic expressions, this function can be relatively uncomplicated. But the carrying over of an idea from one language to another in non-technical works, in general, and in religio-philosophical works in particular, is more than a mechanical operation. A translator for a Faenza ceramic company once told me that hardly anyone questioned her renditions of chemical and technical language describing ceramics from Italian into other languages, but words describing ceramic aesthetics always caused arguments and strong emotions.(?)

Malcolm Cowley's definition of translation as "an art that involves the re-creation of a work in another language for readers with a different background" is

probably one of the most accurate. Translation is an art intended to reflect approximately the meaning and structure of original text. In this context key words become important, for they affect the nature of the transmission of a given version. When I was translating the Book of Enoch, there were times when I would spend a whole day researching and thinking about a single key word or phrase, like "giants," "wind vehicle" (instead of whirlwind), "landlords" (instead of "those who seize the land"), "antecedent of time", (instead of "ancient of days") "Son of Man," or "portions" (instead of wings.) I knew that such words and phrases would determine the character of my translation. I was trying to address a twentieth-century audience on behalf of Enoch without introducing new ideas external to the cultural setting and conceptions, at least to what I believed was the *Sitz Im Leben* of the original.

Traduire C'est Choisir. To Translate is to Choose, a French author entitles his book. Or Traduttore Traditore, "A Translator is a Traitor" goes the Italian proverb. "Oh, I just love the New English Bible translation," shouted a choral director at a recent rehearsal in Princeton. One of the singers shouted back, "I love the King James Version." I said to myself, "Only the Hebrew original makes sense."

Why such emotional reactions to translation? Language is relative and deeply rooted in human feeling. According to the Book of Enoch, God gave humans a mouth not only for eating but also for speaking. "Out of the mouth come all the secrets of wisdom." Out of the mouth also come blessings, curses and oaths. The emotional consequence of our use of the same mouth for eating and speaking (cf. *lang* "tongue, *afan* "mouth" or "language" in Cushitic Oromo) cannot be underestimated.

For generations to come, translation will always be like the man, his son, and their donkey passing a critical crowd. Whatever the man and his son do, there will always be someone who will criticize their action. No translation of a language will ever be considered perfect. (What is the story?)

The Study of Language as a Tool of Communication:

Inasmuch as language is the instrument of human thought and a tool of human culture, understanding other cultures should naturally include the study of their languages. Even today, the importance of languages in cross-cultural communication remains undervalued. There are few who have come to recognize the

importance of studying languages in order to understand other cultures. Many still prefer to depend on interpretations and interpreters, putting greater emphasis on the observation of the social setting or ecology. Even as recently as 1965, as distinguished an anthropologist as Max Gluckmann (in Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society) went so far as to say: "to carry out anthropological field work, one need not know the whole language, with its whole vocabulary... a few thousand words will see one through ordinary questioning and enable one to follow everyday conversation, as in Europe..." For the scientific study of a religion, however, nothing less than a thorough knowledge is really adequate. As R.S. Rattray, one of the most perceptive students of African folklore writes, in his introduction to a collection of Akan-Ashant Folk-lore, historical African myths are the "Old Testament" of the African people.

The study of languages raises many questions and presents many problems that are unlike those in most other fields. The immense number of languages spoken by some six billion people can reduce even a highly technical discussion to one of mere numbers. How many languages are there, and how should they be classified? Moreover, the problems in collecting data can be overwhelming. It will take decades before we even have basic accounts of all, or even a large majority of, languages (and many die out every day).

The knowledge of languages is important not only for linguists and philologists, but also for objective students of human communication across time and space. Many languages, such as Egyptian, Sumerian, and Akkadian; Hebrew, Aramaic and Ge'ez; Greek, Latin, and Coptic; Hindi, Chinese, and Korean; and many other languages of the world__ are rich in written literatures that are indispensable to all serious students of history, religion and culture. They are the key to the study of the oldest and most intriguing civilizations, extensive bodies of literature significant for the historian, valuable to the student of early Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and Islam, and other literatures and history.

There are numerous other languages throughout the world that are rich in religious mythologies and oral literature: and several other languages in remote parts of the world that are significant in commercial and educational fields. In all cases, the study of languages is a fundamental tool for effective international communication.

Unfortunately, the serious study of specific languages is only at a beginning stage. The task is made more difficult because of the multiplicity of languages spoken throughout the world. The student who wishes to acquire a firm foundation in international understanding will learn more from a thorough study of a few languages rather than from the superficial collection of a few words from numerous ones.

The difficulties encountered by students of international communication due to the unavailability of serious study of languages is made even more complicated because of the chronologically broad historical and cultural development of languages. Language, the very key to personal communication, can become an insurmountable barrier, the key that locks the door to international understanding.

One can learn a great deal about another people's culture through translations and with the help of interpreters. But can a serious student of religion acquire a truly scholarly perspective this way? Can a theologian claim to have access to the best possible sources of religious thought without the aid of linguistic tools? Can one grasp the profound thoughts and inner concerns of a people or acquire an insight into the nature of their world view through translation?

Language is the most important tool of communication. But it is also a tool that can close that communication. Although forms of communication in the world today are growing fast in types and numbers, understanding among individuals or peoples is not getting any simpler. On the contrary, such understanding is becoming more complex. Nations are dividing into smaller nations. Peace is as elusive as ever, and conciliation even more distant. I believe that language as key to human communication has not yet been refined. The modern tools of communications have not contributed to this; if anything they have made it more complex.

Yes, the world today has become a global village because air, sea, and land have been conquered by electronic communication and supersonic jets. Language made such technology possible. The key to the more inter-human communication remains language. But people are as far apart as ever because of the diversity in cultural and private languages. Ideally, it would be wonderful if we had a universal language, like Esperanto. This, however, seems impossible, at least in the near future. Therefore we must give greater weight to the study of the existing languages.