

The English Used in Some Modern Translations of the Bible.

There are some who won't want to know about a fresh translation of the New Testament, suspecting anything new. There were people like that when the *KJV* appeared nearly 400 years ago. Some will argue that the *KJV* has more authority. But what if the lexicons disagree, or if it shown that the text used or the *KJV* rested on late manuscripts? Does that make it authoritative? There are some who know next to nothing about manuscript evidence or language or even English grammar and idiom, apart from some unscholarly twaddle that is hawked about. Let them go their own way! Such people should know that God can be served by patient, accurate, and scholarly work. Martin Luther had to combat people in his day who made noises about what they did not understand. They should read Martin Luther on translation work, and say no more till they have! Some people will say: "Won't a translation made just by Lutherans be suspect?" In fact, wherever you look translations follow a denominational line. The *NIV* is Reformed. The *Good News Bible* is Baptist. The Roman Catholics have the *Jerusalem Bible*, and the Jehovah's Witnesses their *New World Translation*. However, we are not interested in a denominational Bible as such, but a translation that is accurate, uses the best lexical aids, and has an eye to good English idiom. There will be some who will be genuinely interested. This article is for them. Regular Bible reading in the family circle should not be neglected, and heads of households should be reminded of their responsibilities here. Those who used *Manna* for home devotions were probably well satisfied with it. May we suggest that people of the Parish take up for devotional reading in the New Year the aim of reading right through the New Testament? The fresh translation is available from Pastor Priebbenow on computer disk or as printed copy.

How about one simple question for those who minds are made up and don't want to be confused by facts? Explain the current English use of "shall" and "will"!

Some of the recent translations of the New Testament sound very wooden or unnatural because of the tendency to translate the Greek aorist indicative too often by the English past tense. The Greek aorists within passages in primary sequence, when there are no definite references in the context to time, should often be translated by English perfects. Otherwise the impression is given that the action is past and gone. For example, when Jesus is present with His disciples, He should not be made to say, "The Son of Man came", but the Son of Man has come." See the little section in Wenham's *The Elements of New Testament Greek*, page 140. Similarly with "you believed." It suggests an event in the past, which then did not carry on. It should have been construed as ingressive: "You became believers", or "You began to believe."

In general, the proper sequence of tenses is often ignored. For example, "This _ the Gospel which _ preached to you" should be "This is the Gospel, which has been preached to you" (1 Pt 1:25).

Far more often, when the Greek aorist expresses relative time, as in relative and temporal clauses, the English pluperfect should have been used.

English has a much wider range of tenses than Hebrew, and far too often not only the English perfect, but also its continuous perfect is overlooked in translating the Hebrew perfect. Often the English present tense is used when the continuous perfect would have been better. Psalm 34: 17 is one example. In some contexts, not something like "I cried to you", but "I have been crying to you" is better.

In final clauses in English "will", "can", and "do" often appear instead of "may" in primary sequence, and their historic partners instead of "might" in historic sequence. People should not assume that the auxiliary "may" is notional, denoting permission, and should remember that in final clauses "can" denotes ability. (Adding "can" does not skew the meaning when it is inserted in some result-clauses). Moreover, since imperatives are always primary, "might" should never appear in the purpose clauses of prayers, should it? The above points alone go a long way towards explaining why the English in *NIV* is often ugly.

Sometimes when $\text{o}\tau\alpha\text{n}$ is prospective rather than general, it is mistakenly translated as "whenever", with ludicrous results. For example, *NET*, Revelation 20:7.

There is a case to be made for distinguishing "forever" (= continually; as in "Why are you forever ignoring me?") and "for ever" (= for eternity).

In formal written English there is still a case to be made for simple future "shall" in the first person and "will" in second and third persons, and the usage reversed to express determination. (Spoken English mostly uses "will" in simple future). At a wedding the groom and bride do not say, "I shall", but, "I will." It means, "I want to." "I will do it whether you like it or not", but preferably "shall" instead of "I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever." In the commandments the categorical "You shall not!" is surely better than, "Don't!" People who blindly opt for the *KJV* or *NKJV* can easily be embarrassed over the use of "shall" and "will." The deliberate use of

“shall” instead of “will” in elevated style, in passages like Jeremiah 31:31-34 in *NRSV* will probably leave most readers bemused.

NKJV often introduces new sections with an unnecessary “Now.”

The *GNB* should at least be thanked for making people more aware that using verbs instead of event-nouns can often produce good Modern English idiom, and adjectives and adverbs instead of abstract nouns. It is in the area of relations (for example, prepositions and connectives) where the *GNB* often wrongly skews the meaning. The *NET* has unnecessarily translated every “and” in Revelation, even at the beginning of sentences. However, the Greek *gar* (meaning “for”) is far too often ignored in *NET*.

The attempt to find meanings appropriate to context is often very laudable in many modern translations, but it is sometimes overlooked that key words that recur in sections often have a role in linking the sections. Compare “name” in Mark 9:38 and 41, where Beck omits it in v 41. The key-word “house” in 2 Sam 7 is difficult, because of the switch in meanings between “temple” and “family.”

There is often a careless use of the relatives “that” and “which” when they are the subjects or objects in relative clauses. I am not talking about “which” when it is governed by a preposition, where “that” is impossible. The *NKJV* often wrongly uses the relative “which.” According to English grammarians like Partridge, after a definite antecedent (a name, a noun with “this”, or some other way of defining it), the relative clause is essentially parenthetical, merely giving more information, not used to define the antecedent further. Accordingly, a comma should regularly precede the parenthetical “which” and “whom”, and “that” should be used to introduce defining relative clauses, with no comma before it. (“This is the house that Jack built,” but “This is John’s house, which was built last year”). “To know the truth which promotes godliness” (*NET*, Tt 1:2) should be either “To know the truth that promotes godliness” (with the relative clause defining which truth -in context this is preferable, because not previously mentioned in the letter) or “To know the truth, which promotes godliness” (Note the comma. “Which” suggests that “the truth” is already defined, so that the relative clause is then parenthetical).

English does not usually use “will” after “if” and “when.” Not “when His glory will be revealed”, but “when His glory is revealed” (*NET* 1 Pt 4: 13).