

CLASSIFYING *COTTON PATCH VERSION* AND SIMILAR RENDERINGS AS ADAPTIVE RETELLING RATHER THAN TRANSLATION

Freddy BOSWELL

Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL)

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Listen to a reading from the Scripture:

Now during the fifteenth year of Tiberius as President, while Pontius Pilate was governor of Georgia, and Herod was governor of Alabama, his brother Philip being governor of Mississippi, and Lysanias still holding out over Arkansas; while Annas and Caiaphas were co-presidents of the Southern Baptist Convention, the word of God came to Zack's boy, John, down on the farm. (Luke 3:1-2) *Cotton Patch Version*.

1.2 COTTON PATCH VERSION: A BRIEF ANALYSIS

Clarence Jordan's work in the late 1960s was described by his publisher as "a modern translation with a Southern accent, fervent, earthy, rich in humor." Typically, the label "translation", especially as it relates to Scripture, is tied to issues of canonicity and historicity. *The Cotton Patch Version* (CPV) is far removed from these benchmarks. What is the usefulness of such a product?

1.2.1 Reasons for the CPV

From the introduction to Paul's Epistles, here are the stated reasons for the Cotton Patch Version: (I note here that it is a good idea for all translations/adaptations to have their motivation adequately spelled out in the beginning):

1. Jordan determined to translate the events of Scripture, not the words. Quoting him: "Translations have left us stranded in some faraway land in the long-distant past. We need to have it come in our tongue and our time. We want to be participants in the faith not merely spectators. In the story of the Good Samaritan, we need to participate in the story, so we change Jerusalem and Jericho to New York to Boston,

or our hometown to the next. Change the setting from 1st century Palestine to 20th century America.”

2. He determined to take the Scriptures out of “the classroom and stained glass sanctuary and put them out under God’s skies where people are toiling and crying and wondering, where the mighty events of the good news first happened and where alone they feel at home.”
3. He pointed out that “the locale of these letters (i.e. translated ones, not original ones) is the South. Cotton has figured prominently in the problems of this region—problems to which the letters eloquently and pointedly and compassionately speak.”
4. The main reason for his translation is found in his reflections on his life spent on the farm in southwest Georgia “where I have struggled for a meaningful expression of my discipleship to Jesus Christ.” His co-workers in the fields were “like their predecessors in the Bible, humble people, I have longed to share God’s word with them. So in making the translation, I have kept in mind the little people of great faith who want to do better in their discipleship but have been hindered by big words they don’t understand or by ancient concepts they don’t grasp.” Some insisted to Jordan that his translation was not “elegant, dignified, or even nice.” He has let the earthy New Testament (NT) participants speak for themselves, which is why he used “hell no” and “damned bastard.” He said there was no overt “intent to shock, offend, or startle –or please– anyone.” He did not want to shield anyone from the blunt, vigorous language of the book.

1.2.2 Some characteristics of CPV

1.2.2.1 *Anachronisms galore!*

Consider how they occur in the following subsections.

1.2.2.1.1 *Geographic place names*

He substituted biblical names for mostly names of southern USA locations: Alabama, Mississippi, Atlanta, Washington, Selma, Columbus, Smithville, AL. Jordan said these were chosen at random, without reason. The name had no significance other than stage setting.

1.2.2.1.2 *Personnel references (which are not only anachronistic, but for the most part, US-culture specific)*

Examples from the book of Happenings –Acts– 1:12ff: Rock, Jack, Jim, Andy, Phil, Tom, Bart, Matt, Jim Alston, Simon the Rebel, and Joe Jameson.

Another example, this one from 2 Timothy 4.19: “Say hello to Prissy and Adrian and to the Butterfinger family. Hank stayed on in Atlanta. I left Troy sick in Meridian. Please try to get here before winter. Rube and Dan and Len and Claud and all the brothers send their regards.”

1.2.2.2 *Lexically, very expressive:*

1 Corinthians (1 Atlanta) 15:33: Don’t make an ass of yourself. Such shoddy thinking destroys decent conduct.

1 Atlanta 1:18ff. “To the so-called practical people, the idea of the noose is a lot of silly talk, but to those of us who have been let in on its meaning, it is the source of divine power. It’s just like the Scripture says: I will tear to bits the dissertations of the Ph.D.s. I will pull the rug from under those who have all the answers. Then what becomes of the “bright” boy? What does this do to the “egghead”? Where does the worldly-wise professor wind up? Hasn’t God made human reasoning appear utterly ridiculous?”

He used lynched for crucified: 1 Atlanta 1:17, “We go right on proclaiming a *lynched* (italics by Jordan) Christ.” ØFootnote: “It may be that ‘lynched’ is not a good translation of the Greek word which means ‘crucified.’ Christ was legally tried, if we may call it that, and officially condemned to death. So, technically speaking, it was not a lynching. But anyone who has watched the operation of Southern justice at times knows that more men have been lynched by ‘legal’ action than by night-riding mobs. Pilate publicly admitted that his prisoner was being lynched when he called for a basin and washed his hands of official responsibility. If modern judges were as honest, then ‘lynching’ would be an appropriate translation of ‘crucifixion.’ ”

1 Atlanta 15.26f “It appears as though God deliberately selected the world’s “morons” to show up the wise guys, and the world’s weaklings to show up the high and mighty, and the world’s lowly and rejected—the nobodies—to put the heat on the somebodies. So then no human being should puff himself up in the presence of God.”

Washington (Romans) 9:29 “And Isaiah cries out regarding White American Protestants...” (Footnote: see footnote, verse 3. The word here, as well as in verse 3, is actually “Israel”, which refers to Judaism both racially and religiously. Even though the WAPs (i.e. White American Protestants outnumber the sands of the seas, it’s *those that are left* that shall be saved.”)

Washington 11:1 “I ask, therefore, ‘Has God walked out on his people?’ Absolutely not. For I myself am also a WAP—a pure Anglo-Saxon and a Baptist. God has *not* walked out on his people whom he knew from way back. Don’t you remember the story of Elijah, how he made a case against the WAPs before God?”

Washington 9:3 “For I would be willing to sacrifice even my own life in Christ for the sake of my native white American Protestant brethren.” (Footnote: There is no intent whatsoever on the part of the translator to single out Protestants above any other Christian group. Since Paul was an ex-Pharisee, and the Pharisees were the predominant sect of Judaism, we have brought him over into the modern times of “cotton patch” perspective as a white, American ex-Protestant, since this group predominates in the United States, particularly in the Southern region.)

Jordan adds further justification to his lexical gymnastics in the introduction to the Epistles (1968:9): “There is no adequate equivalent of “Jew and Gentile.” My translation as “white man and Negro” is clear evidence of superimposing my own personal feelings, which is the unpardonable sin of a self-respecting translator. But in the Southern (USA) context, is there any other alternative? The same goes for “eating meat offered to idols”, which I translate as “working on Sunday.” As strained as this may be, it was just the best I could do.”

1.2.2.3 Grammatical angles

1.2.2.3.1 Marking emphasis

He used “hell no” to express the Greek phrase *me genoito*:

Washington 3:3,4: “All right, so some of them are hypocrites; does their hypocrisy nullify God’s sincerity? Hell no.” (Footnote: Just about the proper strength for the Greek phrase.) This is also used in 6.2.

He was also liberal with the use of italics in numerous references to indicate emphasis. I cite just one example here from Washington 12:19:

“Revenge is *my* job,” says the Lord,

“*I* will tend to it.”

1.2.2.3.2 a translation of (sorts of) onomatopoeia:

Jesus’ Doings (Luke) 6:20ff: “It will be hell for you rich people, because you’ve had your fling.” (Footnote on the use of “hell”: The Greek Word, generally translated as “woe,” is the sound of an agonizing groan, “o-o-oh” as from someone in great anguish or torment, as “in hell.”)

1.2.2.3.3 not shy about pointing out grammatical irregularities

In 1 Atlanta 9:15 Jordan did not venture far to justify what he felt was a broken or incomplete sentence in Greek. He simply translated it as “For I’d much rather die than—no one is going to rob me of that of which I’m so proud.” Then he pointed out in the accompanying footnote to the verse: “Paul does not complete this sentence.” Compare Jordan’s rendering with the New International Version (NIV): “I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast.”

1.2.3 Criteria for judging its translation value

It is clear and natural! But it is not acceptable because of these obvious and insurmountable barriers.

Without extensive discussion, I offer just two factors (among many) which weigh against the CPV as a ‘legitimate’ translation. First, there is a judgment against accuracy. For example, the CPV makes extensive use of anachronistic references and terms, such as those related to geographical and participant referent terms. These are of course unacceptable in a translation deemed to be accurate. Another factor is a judgment against recognizability. That is, the rendering in the CPV is often so far from any semblance of the form of the original that readers can be left wondering if what they are reading is an original manuscript or if it is in fact supposed to be a rendering of the original. It does not resemble any English translation with which they are familiar, and thus can be subject to being discarded as unacceptable.

1.2.4 Is it of any use? (not for his label of *translation*)

Of what use is a rendering such as CPV?

Is it useful for study? Note Jordan’s own comments: “Obviously the “cotton patch” version must not be used as a historical text. The RSV (Revised Standard Version) and NEB (New English Bible) are excellent for this purpose.” It would rank low on the end of usefulness for study, (i.e. study that is beneficial for biblical literacy) since the translated text departs so far from the source.

What about for preaching/evangelism/discipleship? In approaching this, one would have to determine if it does in fact help one to garner the main idea of a passage. It is interesting to note that Jordan saw this area of usefulness as the basic motivation for his product. I point out that this motivation and approach is similar to what Peterson intended in *The Message*, as noted below.

Is it useful for a general introduction to the biblical message? Broadly speaking, it could be considered a bridging strategy (Hill, 2003) for building Scriptural acquaintance within a people group. As such, it does serve some usefulness in this area. The use as a bridging strategy will be discussed further below.

It is fair to say that the CPV demonstrates a widely-published and practical application of a relevance-theoretic (RT) approach to translation practice. That is, it is an example of a translation (or a form of translation, which I propose here to be an Adaptive Retelling) for which the translator filled his product with geographical and personal names, colloquial expressions, and common vocabulary to match the cognitive environment or encyclopedic knowledge of his readers, doing so to immediately reduce the mental load required to process ‘new information’. That was his goal. His success is hard to judge, because his primary audience—“my companions along the dusty rows of cotton, corn and peanuts”—would need to be surveyed. However, I believe that the CPV can be classified as an application of successful communication from a relevance theory viewpoint. Although there are no doubt many RT concepts which could be commented on arising from an analysis of the CPV, I highlight in italics just the following two:

1. Jordan intentionally modified NT vocabulary to *reduce the processing costs* of his intended audience and thus make the text more immediately relevant. Thus, Jordan wrote: “So in making the translation, I have kept in mind the little people of great faith who want to do better in their discipleship but have been hindered by big words they don’t understand or by ancient concepts they don’t grasp.” He surely felt that he was doing his readers a favor by modifying vocabulary, even without clear translational theoretical grounds or stated boundaries of acceptability.

2. Following on from the first point, I add that Jordan modified NT vocabulary and used certain grammatical devices because he wanted to take advantage of *shared encyclopedic knowledge* with the hearers. They could relate immediately to his lexical choices and certain grammatical markers which were inherent in the daily speech of his hearers. One of the points behind his work seems to be: what do my hearers already know that I can build upon? Taking advantage of shared contextual understanding was certainly a great motivator for him, and is one indicator which can be used to judge successful and efficient communication.

One way in which the modified vocabulary could work against Jordan’s intention, though, was if the reader/hearer were not aware of the information in his book introduction that the geographical place names he chose did not relate to spatial orientation. He said that he chose them at random. For example, he used Birmingham and Atlanta, but he did not intend to indicate that one of those is larger than the other, or that Birmingham is actually west of Atlanta. Thus he did not substitute these for biblical place names in light of this kind of orientation. If the reader were left wondering about the significance of the place names, author intent would be lost, which was to simply substitute a locally familiar name and press on with the main idea of the story. This would tend to work against relevance.

Jordan was broadly encouraged to share his translation more widely, and that display of enthusiasm led to its publication. This is one indication that it was appreciated by many, initially at least in the circles in which Jordan traveled. I note that it is still for sale, and thus has not gone out of publication or circulation. This kind of market appreciation is significant to note, since it speaks rather clearly that there is an ongoing interest in Jordan’s work. We presume that this interest is much more than just a fascination with such a different approach, and that readers are actually being helped by it.

1.3 ADAPTIVE RETELLINGS RECENTLY PUBLISHED

Other recent adaptive retelling attempts in English could be similarly examined, including *The Message*, *The Aussie Bible*, *The Cockney Bible (Well, Bits of it Anyway)* and *Black Bible Chronicles*. I will not take time to do even a brief analysis approaching what was done for CPV, but will simply point out that these have been recently published and that they share a similar motivation: bridge the gap from the historical source text to a meaningful retelling which dispenses with “the big, fancy words of the Bible” and gets right to the core of the biblical message.

1.3.1 The Message (Eugene Peterson):

The Message has achieved great popularity since its inception. The entire Bible is now in print. Note his motivation, as recorded in the introduction:

“This version of the New Testament in a contemporary idiom keeps the language of the Message current and fresh and understandable in the same language in which we do our shopping, talk with our friends, worry about world affairs, and teach our children their table manners. The goal is not to render a word-for-word conversion of Greek into English but rather to convert the tone, the rhythm, the events, the ideas, into the way we actually think and speak...In the midst of doing this work, I realized that this is exactly what I have been doing all my vocational life. For thirty-five years as a pastor I stood at the border between the two languages, biblical Greek and everyday English, acting as a translator, providing the right phrases, getting the right words so that the men and women to whom I was pastor could find their way around and get along in this world where God has spoken so decisively and clearly in Jesus. I did it from the pulpit and in the kitchen, in hospitals and restaurants, in parking lots and at picnics, always looking for an English way to make the biblical text relevant to the conditions of the people.”

1.3.2 The Cockney Bible (Well, bits of it anyway) (by Mike Coles)

Mike Cole has published nine Old Testament stories, the Gospel of Mark, and the Lord’s Prayer. From the introduction:

“Why write this book? In my experience as a teacher in the East End of London over the past fourteen years, I have often found that pupils haven’t a clue what many Bible passages are going on about. The pages are full of strange words and names which mean nothing to them. It has been my aim over the years to bring these Bible passages down to earth, and re-telling many famous passages in Cockney rhyming slang which is not as common as it once was. But most importantly, people are not only enjoying the stories, they are understanding the message, that this Jesus geezer, God’s currant bun, really does love us all. No matter how dodgy we’ve been, no matter how many times we’ve done bad things, this Jesus bloke still loves us, and will forgive us...I know people who have told me that they would never dream of picking up a Bible and reading it, but when Bible stories are translated into Cockney, they love the idea and enjoy reading the passages. And that can only be a good thing. There’s now a chance that the real message of the Bible can reach them, and

that is my aim. Archbishop Carey commented: “If it manages to get people reading the Bible who would not normally do so, then it has achieved an invaluable work.”

1.3.3 The Aussie Bible (by Kel Richards)

Aussie Bible was written (which is a better descriptive verb than “translated”!) by Aussie author and journalist Kel Richards. It is a retelling of the story of Jesus’ life from His birth to resurrection in the Australian vernacular. The publisher states that it is a “90 page book... aimed at those who may not normally pick up a New Testament or a Bible.”

The Aussie Bible was first broadcast as a series of radio talks by Kel Richards on a Sydney radio station. Richards wrote the series after reading about Coles’ Cockney version, and in turn determining that “Australians deserved their own copy of the story of Jesus.”

Sample text:

Who is The Bloke? (Mark 8:27-30)

Jesus and the team were visiting the townships around Caesarea Philippi. As they made their way down the track one day Jesus said to the team, “Who do the mob say I am?”

The team told him, “Some blokes say you’re John the Baptist, or maybe that old timer Elijah back again. Other blokes reckon you’re one of the prophets.”

Then Jesus stopped and said, “But what do you say I am?”

Peter replied, “You are... the Christ! The Promised One!”

Jesus then warned them not to spill the beans to anyone about this, just yet.

From the aussiebible.com website, note the following responses on its effectiveness:

G’day! I reckon this AUSSIE BIBLE is gonna be a winner! This is the kinda stuff that keeps the kids into religion! (as well as any other Aussies that ain’t got the faintest idea of what the Bible goes on about!)

Good luck with the sales of this book! I’m with it all the way!

From a true-blue Aussie.

14 yrs, Sydney

Kel,
Just to encourage you ... I have just returned from bible study tonight where I heard of a young chap who was never able to understand the language of the bible. He was given a copy of The Aussie Bible by a loving Christian work colleague and came back after reading it stating "the penny's finally dropped. Now I get it!" Thank you for your Aussie Bible.
Mandy

1.3.4 Black Bible Chronicles (by P. K. McCary):

I have not personally examined a copy of the *Black Bible Chronicles: From Genesis to the Promised Land*, though on an auxiliary website of the the University of Minnesota I have read the Good Samaritan story. The information which I present is brief, and taken from the pkandcompany.com website:

Here is an example of the witty nature of the translation:

"Take a bite, don't be shy; it won't hurt! Would I lie?" Snake to Eve

On the same website, Ingrid E. Bridges of the *Chicago Defender* describes this rendering with the following general comment:

"A biblical dialogue with urban clarity...Throbbing like a heartbeat, McCary's words jump across each page at the lost and the proud, as God speaks in an affirmative dialect like our ancestors did or our grandparents still do...Her slang-style words meet any kid's wildest imagination with conviction to rid cynicism worn in the soul of trembling generation, those in tremendous need of orchestrating Godspeed in their lives."

1.4 RALPH HILL'S PROPOSAL: ALTERNATIVE LANGUAGE PROGRAM PRODUCTS USED IN A BRIDGING STRATEGY

I now turn to classifying the CPV and other similar renderings as an adaptive retelling rather than as a "translation", aligning it with the category proposed by Ralph Hill (2003). After considering Hill's comments, one major set of questions must be raised:

- a) are these renderings similar to what Hill intended, or are they too extreme?
- b) if they are acceptable as retellings, and as such legitimate for a bridging strategy for a certain classification of reader or *biblical literate*, how do the uses compare with those mentioned as possibilities under CPV, or those reflected on by the Aussie Bible testimonials?
- c) if they are too extreme, are there any guidelines we could suggest for bringing them within an acceptable boundary or parameter of "adaptive retelling"?

I here summarize Hill's discussion with these key points:

1. New readers/listeners need increased biblical context, or biblical literacy.
2. Scriptural materials, which are not necessarily "accurate translations" can be useful for outreach to unbelievers and for introducing new believers to the Gospel message.
3. The products can vary in their content (strategic portions, stories selections, etc.) and in their deliverable form (print (within a range of various forms), video, radio, audio).
4. Variant forms (i.e. variant from "traditional" or "acceptable" translation deliverable forms) need to be noted as such so that there is no misunderstanding as to purpose.

Hill mentions ways in which context is built into the hearts and minds for the new readers, and asks how much liberty do we take with the text. In discussing this, he suggests a bridging strategy.

Quoting him:

"While speaking of context-building strategies to aid in understanding the translated Scriptures, we are also looking into other approaches that we are calling *bridging* strategies. Bridging strategies involve vernacular-based products and programs designed either to prepare a people group for understanding the Scriptures in the vernacular, or to prepare them to access the Scriptures in the language in wider use by the church in the area.

We are now asking whether leaders would be more supportive of materials in the mother-tongue if they were designed for evangelism, discipleship, and education of new believers or children, that is, activities where the heart-language communicates most effectively."

I will leave the readers to investigate Hill's proposals, but I will point out a key difference between his original thinking and proposal related to this subject and that which I mention in this paper regarding adaptation and retelling. Namely, Hill suggests that relevant information be freely added as necessary to the biblical narrative which the first readers certainly knew but about which the modern reader is clueless. The adaptation would in turn be more recognizable as related to the source text than the extreme example of the CPV, but would cross the line of faithfulness since so much information is in fact added. However, this bridging strategy and cognition-building attempt would be more grounded in the biblical worldview and language as a means of context-supply than that of the CPV which is more emphatically (and unapologetically) geared to the relevance of the modern hearer in his own time, space, and lexicon.

1.5 PUBLISHED REFLECTIONS BY SIL TRANSLATORS ON SIMILAR DILEMMAS

Beyond the examination of the purpose of CPV for an inter-racial south Georgia Christian community, and the others for their intended audiences, I turn now to consideration of using these as a bridging strategy in SIL translation projects.

1.5.1 Tom Headland and the Dumagat translation

Tom Headland (1981) certainly wrestled with the merit of something approaching an adaptive retelling for the Dumagat of Philippines.

“In Bible translation, all of us have struggled intensely with the text, trying to make the message bridge the gap from the original language and culture to the minds of the readers in our various target languages and cultures. This sometimes seems a near-impossible task...This frustration (of seeing the message not get across) has tempted most of us, at one time or another in our early translation experience, to try the route of the translator of the “Cotton Patch” Version of the Scriptures. This is a method of translation which, while violating the historical framework of the New Testament, would allow us to translate using the world view of the target culture, thus giving more vivid and immediate meaningfulness to the local tribal believers (for example, translating ‘pig herder’ for ‘shepherd’). Fortunately, our mentors (for example, Nida, 1970, and Beekman and Callow, 1974:35) have led us away from falling into such a dangerous theological bog.”

Commenting further, he stated his basic dilemma: how can one adapt the “full” biblical content to make it understandable to his Receptor Language (RL) group? He surmised that to attempt an adaptation felt like a violation of translation principles and acceptability.

Headland continues:

“To restate the problem, the Dumagat translation of the New Testament is filled with information overload, to the point where communication of messages is greatly hindered. I hypothesize that the information rate cannot be spread out for Casiguran Dumagat, as Callow suggests, but that secondary information would be better eliminated altogether in those passages where it hinders the message from getting through to the hearer. My own doctrine of the Scriptures keeps me from applying this hypothesis. At least one recent consultant thought I had done too much of it already.

Headland’s article points up the necessity for a widespread and informed theoretical basis and justification for Adaptive Retelling and a clear signal allowing pragmatic freedom to apply the principles. Also, he states what many must be facing:

The source language and culture will not easily handle the distribution and processing of this biblical information within a traditional type ‘translation’ approach. May the translator be allowed to take liberties with the text, repackage it to make it more immediately relevant, allow an introduction to the biblical message for this people group, and then upon acquaintance with the Gospel message move more towards a “standard translation”? One could consider this kind of adaptation a helpful first step, but not the final word for the people group in terms of scripture delivery.

Reflecting on his comments about interacting with the translation consultant and the translator’s effort to push the boundaries of acceptable translation, I also note here that the translation consultant could play a key role in helping to determine the best shape and form of the translation. This could meaningfully be done by working in tandem with a language program

planning consultant on how to implement and how to promote such a reduced-scope product (at least in its initial stages).

I commend Headland's excellent article to readers of this paper, and my hope is that they will read the article and consider the merits and possible implementation of the bridging strategy concept.

1.5.2 Peter Kingston and the Mamaindé

Peter Kingston (1975) reflected on the same type of issues for the Mamaindé of Brazil. Kingston begins:

"In translating the book of Mark, I became conscious that the message of the Gospel is couched in a specific cultural setting, and that it is impossible to translate for a primitive culture in the traditional way (that is, 1.1 to 16.20) without presenting that culture also. In certain tribal situations, the receptor culture is so radically different from that of the Gospel, that there is considerable danger of the message being lost in a confusing welter of new cultural information.

"Our own Western culture closely parallels the Graeco-Roman-Jewish culture so that we can fairly readily discern what belongs to the locale, time, and culture of the setting (for example, rolling stones in front of tomb doors) and what constitutes the Good News (for example, Jesus rising from the dead). Could it be possible that an Indian would get so hung up on the fact that people were buried in caves and that stones were rolled in front of these cave-tombs that he would miss the implications of Christ's actual death?"

In the article, Kingston categorizes Gospel passages and marks with an asterisk those which present new information to the members of the RL. This information was new in the sense that it was completely foreign to their culture. He then points out extensive cultural and cognitive gaps which need to be bridged in order for his readers to arrive at the proper implicatures, namely active response with belief to the message. He advocates a liberally edited version of the Scripture (in the language of this paper, an adaptive retelling) which is used to reduce the rate of information presentation. For example, he writes, "instead of translating, "...He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom..."", we would say, "...He saw Levi, sitting in a house...". Instead of, "He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets", we could say, "...He saw James and John, working." The amount of information included would, of course, vary from tribe to tribe, depending on cultural equivalences. From these edited versions, the Indian would have a minimum amount of new cultural information to overcome, and would be much freer to focus on the kernel truths portrayed. Then, with these firmly entrenched in his mind, I believe he will find his way successfully through the cultural maze of the Gospel."

I surmise that by removing the label of "translation" for this approach and replacing it with "retelling", one is much less encumbered by the strictures and boundaries of "acceptable translation." Beyond the pragmatics of simple labeling, though, the Gospel message can be conveyed in a re-packaged form which can be useful for introduction to what Kingston calls the "kernel truths."

1.5.3 Karl Franklin and the PNG Storying Approach

Though not employing as dramatic cultural adaptation as the CPV, Karl Franklin (2003) is currently testing an adaptive retelling storying approach in Papua New Guinea.

Noting that there are hundreds of small language groups in Papua New Guinea (a reported 233 with 500 or less speakers), Franklin suggests that “the retelling of Bible stories” be regarded “as the front-end default strategy for these small language groups.” This would be accomplished in culturally appropriate ways by using gifted storytellers who are taught the stories and trained to understand the content and then allowed to retell in their own languages. The source text for these stories would be an agreed-upon text which would have been derived through careful agreement by those who are involved on a wide-spread basis. The source text would not be classified as canonical. Furthermore, SIL’s language program involvement and commitment would be significantly reduced.

Franklin thus believes that this repackaging of the Scripture message would allow for its more immediate delivery and thus dismiss many contextual barriers inherent in a “canonical” translation program.

In the article he addresses problems of:

- checking the ‘translated’ text,
- the use of the source text,
- issues related to exegetical accuracy,
- the details related to the story ‘genre’,
- and the paradigm shift required for those helping who must be sold on the idea of actually working in stories instead of “canonical translation”.

1.6 ADAPTATION FOR VIDEO

An area of profitable discussion which is unfortunately outside the scope of this paper concerns the merits of adapting a retelling of the Scriptures for video or drama. This was done successfully for CPV by Harry Chapin and Tom Key in the critically acclaimed *Cotton Patch Gospel*. As language teams consider the implementation of an adaptive retelling approach, they might want to examine the potential usefulness of a dramatic presentation based on the written text.

1.7 CONCLUSIONS

Here are some closing comments and questions which might prove useful for further thinking on this topic.

1. When understood by practitioners and theorists, Adaptive Retelling is a useful label for identifying ‘translations’ which ‘go too far.’ By not labeling *Cotton Patch* as a translation, but as an

adaptation or a retelling, we remove the acceptance and use difficulties inherent in such a publication. We are able to say, “it’s not a translation, and should not be judged on the same criteria as those which are recognized as such” (even though Jordan himself called it a translation—that is beside the point).

2. As reports have shown regarding the effectiveness and receptivity of similar type publications to the CPV, an Adaptation, or a Retelling serves a useful place in introducing readers and hearers to the “broad strokes message” of the Good News. It is a bridge to further reading, learning, and growth. While probably not particularly useful for study and discipleship (though this was Jordan’s hope), these adaptations can set the stage for in-depth and ‘proper’ study of a ‘proper’ translation.

3. Thus, these bridge-like adaptations, which can take various shapes, should not be dismissed as useless or meaningless, but as important for an introduction to the Gospel. However, the reader/listener should be made aware through an explicitly published statement (as Peterson did in the preface to his entire Bible publication) this is not an “accurate translation” (the definition of which is admittedly still a topic for discussion), but is a rendering done with certain liberties to accomplish a certain purpose. *Perhaps it is better classified as a particular “art form” of translation rather than a more “scientific form”.*

4. Receptor language translation teams will have to decide what kind of approach to take in the adaptation, and then promote the concept to the intended audience. For example, will it be freely (and unapologetically?) anachronistic, or will it hold more tightly to the forms of the source but take necessary and even extensive liberties with the source text when they feel that the receptor culture and language requires it, doing so until the audience is better acquainted with the message of the Scripture?

5. At what phase in the acquaintance of the language group with the Gospel should a translation team employ Adaptive Retelling? At the beginning, as an initial ground-breaking? (This is certainly one approach which is useful, as Franklin has commented.) Or, does an Adaptive Retelling begin after a more ‘proper’ translation is in place (and if so, for how long?), and thus the retelling supplements that effort by giving a more instructive and dynamic approach to understanding the scripture, all the while with an affixed label which designates this as a particular product with a particular focus? In reflecting on the timing for the placement of an adaptive retelling, we must ask, is there an inappropriate time for the delivery of such a “translation”?

6. What kind of buy-in is needed by church leaders, evangelists, and Good News promoters in order for a retelling to be successfully marketed and used?

7. Similarly, what are the pitfalls which can doom a retelling from being anything more than an irritating novelty to church leaders and others who are key players in the translation program for a language group?

8. Continued discussion in appropriate levels of the translation organization (such as at regional or international meetings of key academic and organizational personnel) need to take place so that these and other questions are systematically and satisfactorily handled. I believe that Adaptive Retelling is indeed useful as a Bridging Strategy (or another strategy which can be

modified from Hill's category and description). As such it must be seriously considered by the organization, and it will perhaps address the needs noted by Headland and Kingston and give further merit to efforts such as those of Franklin.

9. Regarding points of caution for such an approach, I note that Key Terms (either the actual term or descriptive phrase) can become embedded in the lexicon of a language group through the use of such a product. One can never underestimate the impact of such an introduction of terms, and care must be taken to render them meaningfully and appropriately. Guidelines for use of key terms would be much appreciated by those just beginning to think about such an approach.

10. Translation consultants need time to discuss, improve, and assist in the development of this kind of approach to the delivery of Scripture in a language group. One of the main questions a consultant can ask at the beginning of a consultant checking session is: what kind of translation are you striving for? The consultant needs to be aware of the biblical literacy background of the RL group, the needs for different types of translations, and the feasibility of employing an Adaptive Retelling. Of course, this brings up questions regarding training for the consultant in checking such a work, agreed-upon theoretical boundaries and practical applications of such an approach, and ways to gauge and test feasibility of initial efforts of this type of product before enormous amounts of energy are expended in a product that is not suitable. I see the consultant as a key player in the promotion and acceptance of the concept.

11. Perhaps it goes without saying, but I will state the obvious: I believe the Adaptive Retelling approach definitely qualifies as a legitimate, useful, and potentially highly successful entry point for delivering God's Word to a language group.

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