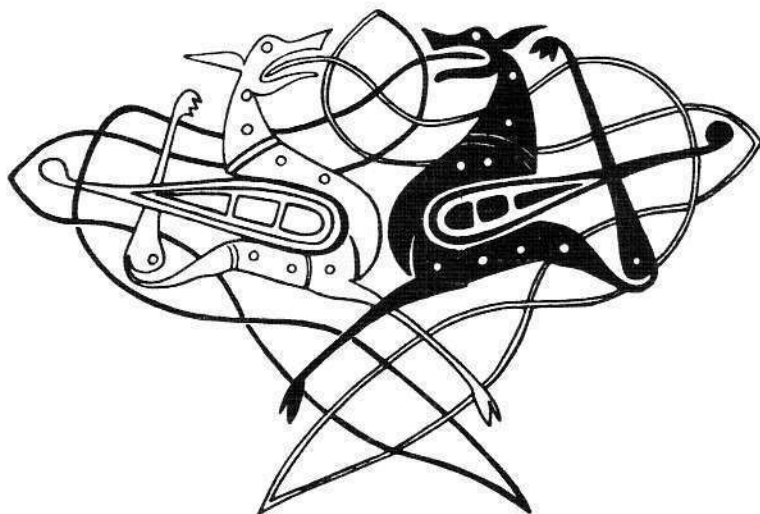


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## TRANSLATION OR DIALECTAL ADJUSTMENT?

*1. Introduction*

As is generally recognized, the striking level of linguistic standardization apparent in most of the 30,000-odd lines of surviving Old English poetry is a reflection of the provenance of the four main manuscripts that contain them<sup>1</sup> rather than an indication of true dialectal homogeneity. Certain texts show evidence of dialectal adjustment, and it is clear that the surviving manuscripts were sometimes copied from texts in other dialects, or had passed through the hands of scribes with varying dialectal backgrounds. Klaeber (1950:lxix) characterises the extant text of *Beowulf* as displaying 'on the whole West Saxon forms of language, late West Saxon ones predominating, with an admixture of non-West Saxon, notably Anglican, elements'. He assumes that the text was copied a number of times, and that 'scribes of heterogeneous dialectal habits and different individual peculiarities had a share in that work' (lxxxviii-ix); he finds evidence of early and late West Saxon, Northumbrian, Mercian, Kentish and Old Saxon influence, but makes a final decision in favour of Anglian origin on the evidence of 'groups of Anglian forms and certain cases of faulty substitution' (lxxxix). Whether or not we can speak of a conscious centripetal tendency towards standardization in this chain of transmission, it is clear that each scribe would tend to normalise what were for him unusual dialectal forms, not only when intentionally respelling but also unintentionally, when for instance writing his manuscript from dictation.

In this paper I shall be examining examples of textual transmission entailing language shifts of varying degrees, ranging from relatively minor dialectal shifts to movements between distinct although closely related national languages. In spite of their differences, I shall argue that it is unrealistic to subclassify them, and that it makes much more sense to regard these activities as continuous

within a spectrum. I feel that the terminological distinction that we make between translation and manuscript copying serves to suppress some important generalisations, and that it should be possible to formulate systematic statements which can be applied to a coherent spectrum of textual transmission.

## 2. *Genesis B*

In 1875 the German scholar Edward Sievers pointed to unmistakable evidence of underlying continental Saxon forms in a section of the Anglo-Saxon poem *Genesis* (Sievers 1875), and suggested that this part of the Anglo-Saxon poem, which has since been known as *Genesis B*, was a translation from a lost continental Saxon original.

Sievers' work in this field is paralleled by Klaeber's. Both find linguistic evidence in their texts for the existence of earlier versions in different varieties of language: Klaeber for dialects within the British Isles, Sievers for a language on the Continent. Sievers' is the more striking, however, since his conclusions were dramatically confirmed some twenty years later when a fragment of an Old Saxon *Genesis*, corresponding to 27 lines of the Old English poem, was discovered in 1894 in the Vatican library.<sup>2</sup> It is clearly a version of the same text, with almost word-for-word correspondence with the Old English.

Ever since, *Genesis B* has been referred to as a 'translation' from the Old Saxon original. A representative example is Capek (1971), who produces evidence to support the thesis that the translator of *Genesis B* was a Continental Saxon. Citing a number of syntactic aberrations in the OE text which point to Saxon interference, he asks

who would be more likely to make such slips, an Anglo-Saxon translating out of a closely-related dialect into his own, or a Continental Saxon translating out of his own into a closely-related dialect which he knew imperfectly? Certainly the latter is the more attractive alternative (91-92).

While the question of the translator's nationality is not central to the point I wish to make in this paper, Capek's own reservations are instructive:

The number of extant OE texts is small, the number of OS texts very small indeed, and perhaps, were the respective corpora larger, what I have cited here as features of syntax which are irregular in OE might be explained otherwise. (93)

He suggests, however, that 'larger corpora would support rather than modify a conclusion ... in favour of a Continental Saxon translator' (93), in that they would continue to emphasize the aberrant quality of the syntax of *Genesis B*.

While this delightful area of speculation, the lost poetry of Anglo-Saxon England, is hardly avoidable in discussions of OE textuality, we should perhaps objectify it a little by better defining the extended corpora that we dream of. The extant OE literary norm is confined to a remarkably narrow range of dialects; if we look to lost poetry within this norm we might well accept Capek's conclusion, for *Genesis B* will probably remain textually aberrant. If, however, we conjure up a wider range of insular dialects we may find that our present appraisal of *Genesis B* is a result of the artificial dialectal purity of the extant corpus rather than any particular characteristic of *Genesis B*.

I shall borrow one of Capek's examples to illustrate my point. He notes that *on þissum fæstum clomme* 'in this tight fetter' in verse 408a, the OE text follows OS in using the strong form of the adjective after *þis*; normally we would expect *on þissum fæstan clomme* with the adjective weak. Now while this may well point to an OS origin, there is insufficient evidence that the form would be felt to be alien by an Anglo-Saxon. Capek quotes Holthausen (1921: §352b) to the effect that weak and strong forms of adjectives are used *indiscriminately* in this position; but in fact this can only mean that no significant difference of usage or meaning can be discerned in the OS texts, which is hardly surprising, given the diminutive size of the corpus.

As it happens, exactly the same situation occurs in modern Icelandic, where there appears to be a free option concerning weak or

strong adjectives in various positions including collocations with *þessi* 'this'. Thus in Icelandic one can say *á þessum bjarta morgni* or *á þessum björtum morgni* 'on this bright morning'. The usage is not indiscriminate, however, but rather involves a clear, if subtle, difference of signification: in the first the adjective is used restrictively, with an unmarked identifying function, while in the second it is non-restrictive and interpretive, foregrounding the brightness of the morning. The form with the strong adjective has a distinctly literary flavour and is probably not active in the speech of most Icelanders.<sup>3</sup>

The difference between these two usages is thus one of stylistics rather than semantics. Its functional load is minimal and not easily deduced from context; if Icelandic were not a living language we would probably describe it as a 'rare optional form'. This means that if the same situation, or something comparable, were to hold for OS and OE, the stylistic significance would probably go undetected. Thus there is a distinct possibility we should regard on *þissum fæstum clomme* as an example of stylistic rather than dialectal variation between two poetic conventions, and one which would not have struck Anglo-Saxon readers as an alien device.<sup>4</sup> When dealing with the subtleties of stylistics and poetic language we can rarely make watertight judgements of acceptability without access to native competence. In this case, the only indication of the editorial acceptability of *Genesis B* that we can take for granted is its inclusion in a native insular manuscript.

I suggest that it is inconsistent to refer to these two examples of textual transmission, *Genesis B* and *Beowulf*, as if they were two entirely different processes, *Genesis B* a translation and *Beowulf* an example of transmission with dialectal adjustment. There are of course differences, but they are hardly qualitative. It is not necessarily valid to assume that dialects separated by the North Sea are likely to be more diverse than dialects within the British Isles. Nielsen (1989:116-120) gives modern examples of a lack of isoglosses (which delineate boundaries of dialectal features) coinciding with the sea-straits of southern Scandinavia and large waterways such as the Rhine, and points out that such waterways have in the past facilitated rather than hindered communication. It is reasonable to

suppose that communications between the continental and insular Saxons, two seafaring peoples sharing a common stretch of relatively sheltered waters, might well have been better than overland communications between kingdoms separated by the forests and marshes of early England.

On examination, we find that the extent of linguistic shift between the Old Saxon and Old English versions of *Genesis B* is closely comparable with shifts found in insular transmission. To begin with, there is very high word-for-word correspondence between the two texts. The main gaps in this correspondence seem to be due to differences in metrical style within the common Germanic alliterative framework in which both Old Saxon and Old English texts are composed; this difference induces the Old English scribe to condense the text in places, omitting short structural phrases typical of the Old Saxon. I have intentionally chosen the following extract to illustrate a stretch of material with a high level of correspondence. The texts are given interlinearly, with the OS text above. Adam is addressing Eve:

Hu sculun uuit nu libbian, efto hu sculun uuit an thesum 805  
liatha uesan,

Hu sculon wit nu libban oððe on þys lande wesan,  
*How shall we now live or [OE omits:how shall we]  
in this country be,*

nu hier huuilum uuind kumit uuestan efto ostan, 806  
gif her wind cymð, westan oððe eastan,  
*when here [OE omits: sometimes] wind comes  
from west or east,*

suðan efto nordan; gisuuerek upp dribit, 807  
suðan oððe norðan? Gesweorc up færeð,  
*south or north; clouds mount up,*

kumit haglas skion himile bitengi, 808  
cymeð hægles scur hefone getenge,  
*comes hail's shower attached to heaven,*

ferið ford an gimang, that is firinum kald. 809  
færeð forst on gemang, se byð fyrnum ceald.  
*fares forth in profusion [OE: fares frost among the  
multitude, i.e. the people], that is cold to men. (805-809)<sup>5</sup>*

Apart from the two insignificant omissions in 805 and 806, the Old English extract given here is an almost verbatim rendering of the original. There are some minor word changes, notably *liatha* = *land* (805), *dribit* = *færed* (807) and *ford* = *frost* (809), and we shall return to these discrepancies in a moment. For the most part, however, a formulation of the linguistic shift between the two texts would involve no more than a relatively simple and mechanical analysis of the surface (phonemic/graphemic) forms, and have very little to say about the semiotic considerations which lie at the heart of traditional translation theory, the Ciceronian distinction between word-for-word and sense-for-sense translation. Clearly, too, it would hardly extend to those aspects of translation technique whose inaccessibility is bemoaned by George Steiner:

We have in front of us an original text and one or more putative translations. Our analysis and judgement work from the outside, they come after the fact. We know next to nothing of the genetic process which has gone into the translator's practice ... We cannot dissect, or only rarely.  
Steiner 1975:273-274

In the case of *Genesis B* this difficulty is central to our investigation: our knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the production of the Old English recension as we have it is virtually nil. We do not know how familiar the *Genesis* scribe was with the continental Saxon dialect, however cogent we may find Capek's argument. We do not know whether he was translating from memory or making a simultaneous translation from dictation; nor, for that matter, how the Old Saxon text would sound if it were dictated aloud by an Anglo-Saxon. One scenario is however highly improbable, and yet it is the only one to which the term 'translation' as we usually understand it can properly be applied. This is the assumption that the scribe was working systematically and conscientiously in the way we expect translators to work, weighing his words and searching for the best rendition in his own tongue, and that the word-for-word nature of his rendition was the fortuitous result of this painstaking process.

It would seem that our use of the terms 'translation' for the *Genesis* recension, and 'dialectal adjustment' for insular examples of

textual transmission, is prompted by other considerations. Scholars of Sievers' time were deeply aware of national identity, and the possibility of a continental Saxon source for an Anglo-Saxon poem, not to mention the subsequent dramatic proof, had national and political overtones which were a far remove from the nascent national identities of continental and insular Saxons in the Middle Ages. In the same way we must be careful not to allow the shape of our own political and linguistic boundaries to colour our understanding of the medieval context.

### 3. *Genesis B and Hauströkkrið*

A fairly close modern parallel is the case of modern Icelandic and Faroese. These two languages appear from their written forms to be close dialects, roughly speaking as close as Old Saxon and Old English. Icelanders and Faroese can read each others' languages fairly easily, thanks largely to the fact that the spelling adopted for Faroese at the end of the last century was modelled largely on Icelandic. On the other hand there are extensive phonetic differences between the two languages, and Icelanders and Faroese who have not been exposed to each others' spoken languages find them almost completely unintelligible on first contact. But when a Faroese text is read aloud with an Icelandic pronunciation it is understandable in the main to Icelanders, and the same is true of a Faroese reading of an Icelandic text. Of course, much of the vocabulary and turn of phrase will sound strange or (what is much the same) hilarious to the listeners; but we should not assume that the ridiculous element would obtain in a tenth-century scriptorium where wide dialectal variety was the norm rather than the exception.

Given, then, the similar relationships between Faroese and Icelandic on the one hand and Old Saxon and Old English on the other, we should not be surprised to find modern poetic translations between Faroese and Icelandic which display features apparent in the *Genesis* fragment. Here is an example from Martin Næs's (1983) Faroese translation of the Icelandic Snorri Hjartarson's Nordic Lit-



erary Award book of poems *Hauströkkrið yfir mér* (1979; literally: 'Autumn Dusk Over Me'). The Icelandic is given first:

Sólgullin lauf á ljóra horfa  
í litla krá, fyrrum sat ég hér  
ungur að reynslu - Árin herfa  
akrana sána, nú bíð ég rór.

(Hjartarson 1979:16)

Sólgylt leyv á ljóara hyggja  
í litla krógv, fyrr sat eg her  
ungur og óroyndur - Árini harva  
sáddu akrarnar, nú bíði eg í frið.

(Næs 1983:16)

*Sun-golden leaves at a window look  
in at a little alehouse; in past days I sat here  
young in experience [Faroese: young and unexperienced]  
- The years harrow  
the sown acres; now I wait tranquilly.*

These texts correspond in much the same way as in the *Genesis* extract. Ignoring, as we must do in the case of *Genesis*, the differences in pronunciation, we find a background of word-to-word correspondence where the significant changes seem to be orthographical, giving pairs such as *krá* = *krógv*, *herfa* = *harva*, of the same order as pairs such as *gisuerek* = *gesweorc* in *Genesis* 807. There is even a discrepancy in the use of weak/strong adjectives in the correspondence *akrana sána* = *sáddu akrarnar* 'the sown acres' (line 4), where the unusual ('stylistic') strong adjective in spite of the suffixed definite article in the original is - unlike Capek's example discussed above - not echoed by the Faroese, which does not allow the strong form in this construction.

Occasionally, however, just as in the *Genesis* example, there are more radical changes. Thus *dribit* = *fareð* (*Genesis* 807) is paralled by *rór* = *í frið* (*Hauströkkrið* 4). It is interesting that in both these cases the lexical change is not occasioned simply by a lack of lexical correspondence in the target language: the OS *dribit* (literally 'drives') has a valid OE reflex *drifð*, while the Icelandic *rór* 'calm' occurs in Faroese as *rógvur*. In the latter case we have access to

native Faroese speakers who can tell us that *rógvur* is an unusual word which would strike a false note in the translation.<sup>6</sup> But there are no native speakers alive to comment on whether *drifð* would be an acceptable reading in the *Genesis B* example or whether it would be semantically unsuitable, implying, say, an image of propulsion too forceful for clouds.

In *Genesis B*, however, there is another possible factor, introducing a complication which does not exist in the modern Faroese/Icelandic example. There is no indication - in fact it is surely rather unlikely - that the *Genesis* scribe was copying from the same manuscript that was discovered in the Vatican in 1894. Thus there is a question of textual variation: it could well be that the translator's OS source had a form such as *ferit* instead of *dribit* in line 807, in which case the extant OE reading *fareð* would correspond exactly. Let us hold this possibility in abeyance for the moment.

If we turn to other examples of discrepancy in *Hauströkkrið*, an interesting characteristic comes to light. The Faroese *hyggja* 'look' is the most straightforward translation for the Icelandic *horfa* 'look'. Although not cognate<sup>7</sup> there is a slight but persistent similarity between the two words: they are both disyllabic verbs beginning with the letter *h* and having the same infinitive inflection *-a*. In *Genesis*, *liatha* = *lande* (805) displays the same formal similarity, both words being disyllabic nouns beginning with *l*, having a stem vowel *a* and an inflectional vowel. *Liatha* is a minor crux: it is usually taken as a spelling variant of *lihta* 'light' (dative singular). The word occurs in the OS *Heliand* in the sense 'the light of heaven' (*lioht forletun* 'they forsook heaven', Hel. 2816), so that the OS text perhaps means 'and how shall we remain here in heaven?' This usage seems to have been unknown to the OE scribe. Possibly he assumed that the phrase *an thesum liatha* in his source was a misreading for something like *an thesum liudium* 'among these people', giving in OE *on pyssum leodum* 'among these people', which by a normal extension of meaning in Old English can have the force of 'in this country'. Whatever the reason for the discrepancy, my point for the moment is that the quantitative phonemic/graphemic shift is the same as in the Faroese example, *hyggja* = *horfa*.

Similarity of form is even more striking in the case of the pair *ford* = *forst* 'forth' = 'frost' in *Genesis* 809. Again, the discrepancy may be due to variant readings in the scribe's exemplar, but in this case a clear motive can also be adduced from the text. The immediately following OS phrase *an gimang* could well have presented problems to the OE scribe. It is an intensive adverbial phrase in OS meaning something like 'in great profusion' (cf. *slogun crud an gemang* 'sprang up masses of weeds', *Heliand* 2409). The OE *on gemang* has a different meaning, implying crowds of people (cf. *modig on gemonge* 'brave in the throng', *Beowulf* 1643). Thus the scribe was quite likely to have read the phrase *on gemang* to mean 'among the people' instead of 'in great profusion', and would fail to connect it with the 'showers of hail' in the previous line, which 'fare forth in profusion'. Instead he would assume a different interpretation involving people, and would moreover find support for this interpretation in the following half-line: 'that is cold to men'. This could well prompt him to edit, or perhaps misread, *ferið ford* 'fares forth' as *ferið forst* 'fares frost', and so create an image of 'frost visiting the people'.

These two 'translations', *Genesis B* and *Hauströkkrið*, are widely separated in time and culture, and have totally different verse form and subject matter. Their similarities lie in the closeness of the languages concerned, and both display occasional gaps in lexical correspondence filled by non-cognate words with a tendency towards formal similarity with their sources. At first sight, however, this formal correspondence is complicated in the case of *Genesis B* by the possibility of textual variants. This is a complication we should examine further.

#### 4. *Genesis B*, *Hauströkkrið* and *Caedmon*

Two short Old English poems have survived both in their original Northumbrian versions and in their more familiar West Saxon recensions. They are known as *Cædmon's Hymn* (9 lines) and *Bede's Death Song* (5 lines). Here is *Cædmon's Hymn*, with interlinear

Northumbrian and West Saxon texts, the Northumbrian above (the poem was originally composed in Northumbrian and the oldest manuscripts are Northumbrian<sup>8</sup>):

Nu scylun hergan hefaenricaes uard, 1  
 Nu sculon herigean heofonrices weard,  
*Now shall [we] praise Heaven's ward*

metudæs maecti end his modgidanc, 2  
 meotodes meahte and his modgeþanc,  
*the Lord's might and his mind-thought*

uerc uuldurfadur, sue he uundra gihuaes, 3  
 weorc wuldorfæder, swa he wundra gehwæs,  
*wonder-father's works, as he each wonder,*

eci dryctin, or astelidæ. 4  
 ece drihten, or onstealde.  
*everlasting lord, originally established.*

He aerist scop aelda barnum 5  
 He ærest sceop ylða bearnum  
*He first created for the children of men*

heben til hrofe, haleg scepen; 6  
 heofon to hrofe, halig scyppend;  
*heaven for a roof, holy creator;*

þa middungeard moncynnæs uard, 7  
 þa middangeard, moncynnes weard,  
*then middle-earth, mankind's ward*

eci dryctin, æfter tiadæ 8  
 ece drihten, æfter teode  
*everlasting lord; afterwards adorned*

firim foldu, frea allmectig. 9  
 firum foldan, frea ælmihtig.  
*for men the earth, lord almighty.*

At first sight this seems to be an example of straightforward textual transmission with dialectal adjustment, consisting almost entirely

of systematic phonemic/graphemic changes. The only morphemic change is a minor one: in line 4 *astelidæ = onstealde* have slightly different prefixes, providing a parallel to *bitengi = getenge* in *Genesis* 808. Apart from this, there would appear to be no lexical discrepancies in the recension.

However, if we consider the question of textual variation, which as we saw was a potentially concomitant factor in *Genesis B*, a different picture emerges. In *Hauströkkrið* the two texts concerned are adjacent links in the chain, i.e. there are no intermediate texts and no variant readings. In *Genesis B* there is a likelihood (but not a certainty) of intermediate texts and discontinuous variant readings. With *Cædmon's Hymn*, however, the question of variant reading comes to the fore, since the Northumbrian version survives in four manuscripts and the West Saxon in thirteen. Together with *Bede's Death Song* (which survives in at least 30 copies), *Cædmon's Hymn* provides us with a rare opportunity for studying variant readings in Old English, while nearly all other Old English poetry survives in a single copy, or exceptionally in two.<sup>9</sup>

The Northumbrian and West Saxon versions quoted above are arranged to give maximum correspondence; if, however, we substitute some of the variant readings, a rather different picture emerges. Thus *aelda barnum = ylða bearnum* 'children (dative) of men' (line 4) appears in some versions of both dialects as *eorðu barnum = eorðan bearnum* 'children of the earth'. If it had so happened that only one Northumbrian and one West Saxon manuscript had survived, we might have had the correspondence *aelda = eorðan* 'of men = of earth', which is exactly the same level of discrepancy as *liatha = lande* in *Genesis* 805, i.e. a non-cognate pair with a strong similarity of form. Again, some of the West Saxon versions appear to stem from a single version made by a scribe who had not understood *tiadæ* 'established, created' (line 8), which is orthographically rather different from the West Saxon form of the same word, *teode*. He seems to have mistaken the word for a version of *tida* 'times' and emended the half line to *æfter tida*, meaning something like 'in later times'. This discrepancy, if it were the only surviving reading, would closely parallel *forð = forst* 'forth = frost' in *Genesis* 809.

### 5. *A continuum of textual transmission?*

It seems then that we can make the following generalisations about the apparently different modes of textual transmission we have been discussing. Firstly, comparison of two texts in any of one these chains of transmission reveals a groundwork of common structure in the form of morpheme-for-morpheme correspondence with systematic phonemic/graphemic shifts. Secondly, this groundwork is occasionally broken by small changes in morphemic sequence, usually confined to single phrases; and occasionally morphemes or strings of morphemes may be added to or missing from the recension. Finally, there is a fairly even scatter of morphemic non-cognate correspondence typically confined to single morphemes or whole words, and characterised by a tendency towards formal similarity - in other words the transferred form 'echoes' the original.

It seems reasonable, then, to postulate a cline in the degree of similarity of surface form over any two stages of transmission, roughly corresponding to the degree of consanguinity of the languages concerned. Furthermore, it seems intuitively likely that the level of non-cognate echoic phenomena is in some way related to this cline. And yet it is difficult to avoid the feeling that there are clear qualitative differences between some of the different types of transmission, and it is not easy to equate, say, Næs's Faroese translation with routine manuscript copying of the Middle Ages, without significant reservation. Let us look at some points which seem to counter-indicate the idea of a continuum.

When an isolated lack of formal correspondence occurs in close recension, this is often the result of factors which can be adduced from the surrounding text and what we know of the semantic content of the lexical items concerned. However this is by no means always the case. In the medieval texts there is also the complication of variant readings, so that we cannot tell whether the changes as we see them occurred at the moment of translation or are a result of the translator using a different source text from the one we have. At first sight this seems to weaken our analysis.

I suggest however that this complication is an artefact of the classification which assumes a distinction between translation and

other more routine modes of textual transmission. The point about the disparities in, say, *Genesis B* is that whether they occurred at the time the recension was made or earlier, they occur *at some time in the process of transmission*. We may perhaps draw a distinction between *immediate* textual changes, i.e. those occurring at one step between adjacent surviving texts, and *discontinuous* ones, where lost recensions appear to have existed between surviving texts so that we cannot tell at what stages the emendation or misreading occurred.

Such a distinction would, however, cut across any distinction between 'copying' and 'translation proper', for both immediate and discontinuous textual changes occur in both cases. For instance a translator may have made an intermediate draft which s/he later reworked without consulting the original. The concept of 'adjacent' texts in a chain of transmission is by no means cut and dried: a host of more or less ephemeral textual fragments may actually have quickened between two otherwise 'adjacent' versions. In any case the translation/recension is necessarily an intertextual phenomenon reflecting material from a variety of sources of which the text to be translated is merely the dominant one. In the same way variant readings in medieval textual transmission could surely also occur as spin-offs from conscious or half-conscious editorial processes. Thus although we can say with some certainty that editorial considerations are a dominant factor in a modern translation such as *Hauströkkrið*, they cannot be ruled out in any of the other texts. In fact, if we could extend our data to include oral re-creation at a pre-literary stage an important factor for change there would certainly be conscious editorial technique. (It is worth noting at this point that the distinction is also independent of any question of probity: unwitting misreadings and conscious emendations are both by definition immediate.)

Another objection might be that I have chosen the passages from *Genesis B* and *Hauströkkrið* to offer as close a parallel to the Caedmon fragment as possible, and that other passages from these texts show much wider differences. This is of course true, for the full text of the *Genesis* fragment has occasional complete hemistiches of non-correspondence, while Næs's Faroese translations of Hjartarson's poems, although often fairly close, are on the whole freer and

more creative than the passage I have quoted. But although it is not my intention to equate the degrees of linguistic shift evinced respectively by *Genesis* and Næs's translation, I think I can safely locate them both fairly close together on a scale of transmission types which assumes that the degree of non-correspondence in each pair of texts is indicative of the degree of closeness of the languages concerned. The struggle between close and free translation, Walter Benjamin's *althergebrachten Begriffe* of translation theory, can perhaps be stated in this way: the transmitted text will echo the source as closely as necessity allows, and the extent and nature of this necessity is the variable which controls the degree of linguistic shift in all types of textual transmission. The extracts in this paper were chosen to illustrate the affinities between the texts concerned, and to demonstrate that, in this respect at least, there is clear qualitative affinity between manuscript copying and translation between unrelated languages.

### 6. Modern polarization

Today, national fragmentation and linguistic polarization are so characteristic of our *Weltanschauung* that we fail, in the main, to notice them.<sup>10</sup> The essentially arbitrary nature of many of the established norms of spelling, syntax and accidence of modern standard dialects is often the result of an uneasy compromise between different dialects at the time when the concept of a 'correct standard' based on a written dialect was evolving. For instance the Norwegian *nynorsk*, a standard written dialect pioneered by Ivar Aasen (1864) uses the common Scandinavian form *barn* meaning 'child', although this form of the word hardly ever appeared in the spoken dialects upon which *nynorsk* was based.<sup>11</sup>

The sociolinguistic situation in modern Scandinavia offers in fact telling illustrations of the unnaturalness of this polarity. The three mainland Nordic languages of today, Danish, Norwegian and Swedish, are probably no further removed from each other than the early English dialects. Yet the polarization of these three groups of dialects into at least five national standard dialects (Norway has at



least two, and Finland-Swedish is quite distinct from the Swedish of Sweden), each with its own particular and often arbitrary rules of spelling, syntax and accidence, meticulously although rather inefficiently transmitted through the educational systems, results in a vast and ponderous machinery of systematic translation. And indeed the speakers themselves, increasingly exposed to the polarizing effects of their own media, are largely unable to cope with strange dialects, which they perceive as other 'languages'. The dialectal tolerance to which medieval sources bear ample witness would seem to them a state of Babel. Thus manufacturers of competitive consumer goods aimed at the Scandinavian market today have to make sure that nobody feels they are being neglected. Here is the blurb, in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish, on a single packet of disposable razors - in English it would read 'Disposable razor with double blade':

Engangsbarbermaskine med dobbeltblad  
 Engangshøvel med dobeltblad  
 Engångshyvel med tandemblad

This is on a close par with the varying texts of *Cædmon's Hymn*, and would probably strike a tenth century scribe as an incomprehensible waste of precious ink.

The modern European rarely encounters a written text in a non-standard dialect. Orthography is prescriptive and those who fail to follow spelling norms find themselves at a social disadvantage. Standardized spelling involves the adoption of one dialect as a national standard; this dialect becomes dominant in society, and other dialects tend to be seen as sub-standard. This suppression of literary dialectal variety entails a discontinuation of the medieval process of textual transmission involving dialectal adjustment and forces a polarization of the concept of textual transmission into two categories: literal copying (ideally without mistakes) on the one hand, and translation (ideally without surface interference) on the other.

### 7. A fragmented continuum

A certain insight may be gained by postulating a continuum of different degrees of linguistic shift in textual transmission starting from verbatim copying within the same dialect at one end - the 'close' end - of the scale, and ranging through progressively more diverse forms of language. All other things being equal, we might expect the frequency of echoic phenomena of the kind exemplified by *ford = forst* in *Genesis B* or *Næs's horfa = hyggja* to decrease as we move away from the 'close' end.

Rather than a cline, however, the continuum has all the characteristics of a spectrum: the progression is complex and involves recurring bands of phenomena. The dialectal adjustment of medieval textual transmission is not a simple systematic change, for even in examples of close dialects certain features occur which are characteristic of textual movements between less similar forms of language. Although further discussion of these matters falls outside the scope of this paper, similar - and in places identical - echoic or 'homophonic' phenomena come to mind in translations such as the Zukofskys' *Catullus* (see for instance Hooley 1986), Ezra Pound's *Seafarer*, or Halldóra Björnsson's Icelandic rendering of *Beowulf* (Björnsson 1983; cf. Knútsson Ridgewell 1984).

For the moment, however, the point to be made is that a spectrum is no less a spectrum for there being gaps in it. The extent and position of these gaps will depend on the configuration of languages in any set of data under analysis. The gaps in the medieval spectrum, for instance, were very different from those we know today: there was a blank at the extreme 'close' end of the scale where complete fidelity could seldom be achieved by the human copyist, and where full allographic correspondence was later to be filled with the advent of printing, later still to be narrowed to photographic and now digital electronic precision. Today, on the other hand, our spectrum is largely empty in the band which used to be filled by the dialectal range of the medieval copyists; only where closely related national standards occur, as in Scandinavia, do we find 'translations' which hover on dialectal adjustment.

These discontinuities in the spectrum may be so extensive that phenomena occurring on either side may aptly be described in in-

compatible terms; in other words they may be seen as qualitatively distinct sets of phenomena best described by separate models or abstractions. But while analysis of this sort is often justified, a mode of analysis which takes account of the underlying continuity of the data is also clearly called for. As it is, traditional translation models such as the classic Nida-Taber model (Nida and Taber 1969, 484) fail spectacularly to account for a range of echoic transference phenomena which occur widely in varying types of translation, and there is a clear need for a methodological framework within which to discuss translations between close linguistic varieties.

*Heimspékideild / Faculty of Arts*  
*University of Iceland*  
*IS-101 Reykjavík*

### Notes

1. The standard edition is *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, hereafter abbreviated as ASPR.
2. A fuller account of Sievers' findings, of earlier comments on unusual language in *Genesis*, and of the Vatican discovery, are to be found in Capek (1971).
3. The use of strong adjectives where one would expect weak is noted but hardly discussed in the best-known Icelandic grammars of this century. Thus Noreen (1923:288): '...sonst kommt fast überall die starke flexion zur anwendung'. Both Kress (1963:102) and Einarsson (1949:116) mention only the use of weak adjectives with nouns with the suffixed definite article: Kress says that this occurs 'in beschreibende Funktion' while Einarsson calls this usage 'vivid literary style'. Smári (1920:65-66) speaks of weak adjectives following *þessi* 'in exclamations and similar expressions' (*í upphrópunum og líkum orðatil-tækjum*) such as *í þessari blessaðri tíð* 'in this blessed weather'; this example shows that by 'similar expressions' he appears to be referring to the appositive use mentioned by Árnason below. Smári is the first to distinguish between the appositive strong adjective (*viðurlag*) and the attributive weak one (*einkunn*), but he does not mention the appositive adjective occurring in the typical attributive position in front of

the noun, for his example is *að eiga við þennan mann einhentan* 'to come to grips with this man [who is] one-handed'. Árnason (1980:1:44) adopts Smári's terminology and gives examples of appositive strong adjectives preceding the noun with a suffixed definite article (*Gulur billinn valt ofan í skurð* 'The yellow car [the car, yellow as it was] turned over into a ditch'), but does not mention the phenomenon following demonstratives. This paucity of discussion reflects the slightness of the functional load of the construction.

4. I ignore here, as does Capek (91, endnote 24) the question of scribal confusion of the endings *-um* and *-an*. I feel however that Capek is underplaying the issue by referring to it as a 'spelling confusion', for it is clearly indicative of the onset of a genuine linguistic merger. This may in fact be the real reason for the form at *Genesis* 408a; if so, it would invalidate Capek's analysis at this point. My comments still stand however as a general principle.
5. Both texts are quoted here from ASPR I, 27 and 171.
6. See, for instance, Young and Clewer (1985), where *rógvur* is marked as a rare word.
7. Icelandic also has the verb *hyggja* but has retained the original Old Norse meaning 'think'.
8. ASPR VI, xciv and 105-6.
9. The rather special case of the runic text on the Ruthwell Cross, which corresponds to some 14 lines of the text of the *Dream of the Rood* in the Vercelli Book (ASPR II), does not show variant readings of the type we are discussing. Both texts are given in Dickens and Ross (1934).
10. cf. the discussion in Chomsky (1977:190-191).
11. See Haugen (1965). For *barn* in the Norwegian dialects see Christiansen (1946:174-175)

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