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unfoldingWord® Translation Notes

Song of Solomon

Introduction to the Song of Songs

Part 1: General Introduction

Outline of the Song of Songs

The bride longs for the bridegroom to arrive (1:1–2:7)
The bridegroom praises the woman he loves (2:8–3:5)
The bridegroom arrives and praises the bride (3:6–5:1)
The bride longs for the bridegroom (5:2–6:9)
The bridegroom praises the beauty of his bride (6:1–8:4)
Final thoughts about love between a man and a woman (8:5–14)

What is the Song of Songs about?

The Song of Songs is a poem or a series of poems that celebrate love and intimacy between a man and a woman. Jews traditionally have interpreted the book as a picture of God's love for his people Israel. In the same way, many Christians interpret it as a picture of love between Christ and his bride, the church of all believers.

Who wrote the Song of Songs?

The first verse of the book ("The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's") gives the idea that King Solomon of Israel wrote it. However, people have interpreted this verse in different ways, so not everyone is persuaded that Solomon wrote it.

How should the title of this book be translated?

This book is traditionally titled "Song of Songs," which means the very best song, or "Song of Solomon." It may also be called "Songs of Love," "Great Poems of Love," or "The Love Songs of Solomon." (See: **How to Translate Names** (p.163))

Part 2: Important Religious and Cultural Concepts

What place do the descriptions of sexual behavior have in the Song of Songs?

The Song of Songs approves of sexual behavior expressing love between a husband his wife.

Part 3: Important Translation Issues

How many characters are in the Song of Songs?

The two main characters in this book are the man and the woman, who love each other. The woman also speaks to a group of women called the "daughters of Jerusalem," and these women make comments. However, it is possible that the group of women is not real and the woman is only imagining them.

Some interpreters believe there may be more characters than these, but this is not certain. The ULT and UST versions recognize only the man, the woman, and the group of women.

What are the lines about people speaking?

The Song of Songs is a poem that shows the thoughts and words of a man, a woman, and the woman's friends. Throughout the poem, the author does not identify the speakers and their audience. So to help readers understand the poem, some translations attempt to identify the speaker and the audience. It is not always certain who the speaker is, so sometimes translations disagree about who is speaking.

Before each speech, the ULT identifies the speaker and the audience like this: "The woman speaking to the other women," "The woman speaking to the man," "The man speaking to the woman," or "The woman speaking to herself." Translators are encouraged to include these ways of identifying the speaker and the audience, and to format them differently from the scripture text. The translators should also include a note explaining that these explanations are not actually part of the scripture.

How should one translate the Song of Songs if the readers will view certain terms as coarse, vulgar, or improper?

Readers might consider many images or forms appearing in the Song of Songs as improper when translated. The translator should try to avoid offensive language if possible, by using expressions that will not cause offense. (See: **Euphemism (p.158)**)

How do I translate metaphors and similes in this book?

There are many metaphors and similes in this book. These figures of speech are often unclear. If they have sexual meanings, figures of speech describing feelings or emotions are often used to avoid offense by hiding their meaning. However, since their meanings are often unclear, ambiguity in translation is encouraged. You can translate the words as they are written in order to avoid committing to a specific meaning. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

Song of Solomon 1

Song of Songs 1 General Notes

Special concepts in this chapter

Kisses

The kisses in this chapter are a type of kiss that was only done between a husband and a wife. It is an intimate kiss. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.144)**)

Love and affection

This chapter is centered on the feelings of love, affection, and attraction. Different cultural standards may make translation difficult and the translator may use euphemisms to avoid offending people. (See: **Euphemism (p.158)**)

Important figures of speech in this chapter

Metaphors

In the ancient Near East, it was common to describe a woman using metaphors involving animals. In many cultures today, this can be considered offensive. Different metaphors of beauty are used in different cultures. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

“I am dark”

In the ancient Near East, rich people usually had lighter skin because they did not need to work outside in the sun. This young woman had to work out in the sun, and her skin became darker than it was when she was younger.

Song of Solomon 1:1

General Information:

General Information:

See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/writing-poetry\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#) (See: **Poetry (p.189)**)

The Song of Songs

Alternate translation: "The Best Song" or "The Most Excellent Song"

which is Solomon's

Possible meanings are "which is about Solomon" or "which Solomon composed."

Song of Solomon 1:2

General Information:

General Information:

The first part of the book begins with this verse.

your love is better than wine

Alternate translation: "I enjoy having you near me more than I enjoy drinking wine"

Song of Solomon 1:3

Your anointing oils

Alternate translation: "The oils that you put on your body"

have a delightful fragrance

Alternate translation: "smell wonderful"

your name is like flowing perfume

Perfume has a good smell that spreads as the air moves. The name is either a metonym for: (1) the person's reputation, what other people think of him. Here the speaker says that people always think that the hearer is a good person, or (2) the person himself. (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-simile\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

Song of Solomon 1:4

with you

"The word "you" refers to the man and so is singular. (See: **Forms of You (p.162)**) (See: **Forms of You (p.162)**)

Take

"Pull" or "Drag." Here the woman described as being like a captive who is willing to follow her captor. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

we will run

The word "we" refers to the young woman together with the man. (See: **Exclusive and Inclusive 'We' (p.160)**) (See: **Exclusive and Inclusive 'We' (p.160)**)

We are glad & We rejoice & let us celebrate

The woman speaks of herself as if she were more than one person. Many versions change the pronoun to "I" as the UST does. Other versions present these as the words of the woman's friends speaking about either the woman or the man. (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-pronouns\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-exclusive\]\]](#)) (See: **Pronouns (p.192)**)

about you

Alternate translation: "because of you"

let us celebrate

Alternate translation: "let us praise"

It is natural for the other women to adore you

Alternate translation: "Women who adore you are doing as they should do"

Song of Solomon 1:5

I am dark but lovely

Alternate translation: "My skin is dark, but I am still beautiful" or "Even though my skin is dark, I am beautiful"

dark like the tents of Kedar

The nomadic tribes in Kedar used black goat skins to build their homes. The woman is comparing her skin to these tents. (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

lovely like the curtains of Solomon

Solomon produced beautiful curtains either for his own palace or for the Temple. She says that her skin is beautiful. (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

Song of Solomon 1:6

scorched

This exaggeration for “burned” or “made black” refers to the sun changing her skin from light to dark. (See: **Hyperbole (p.167)**) (See: **Hyperbole (p.167)**)

My mother’s sons

“My half-brothers.” These brothers probably had the same mother as the woman but not the same father.

made me keeper of the vineyards

Alternate translation: “made me take care of the vineyards”

but my own vineyard I have not kept

The woman compares herself to a vineyard. Alternate translation: “but I have not been able to take care of myself” (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

Song of Solomon 1:7

my soul loves

The soul is a metonym for the person. Alternate translation: "I love" (See: **Metonymy (p.182)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.182)**)

feed your flock

Alternate translation: "graze your flocks"

rest your flock

Alternate translation: "have your flock lie down"

Why should I be like someone who wanders beside the flocks of your companions?

The woman asks this question to emphasize that she has a closer relationship to the man than other women do. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "Tell me so that I will not need to wander around among the flocks of your companions when I am looking for you." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.194)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.194)**)

who wanders

"who goes all around." She does not want to have to look for the man. Perhaps she is afraid other men will think she is a prostitute looking for business. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

your companions

Alternate translation: "your friends" or "your co-workers"

Song of Solomon 1:8

most beautiful among women

Alternate translation: "you who are the most beautiful of all women"

follow the tracks of my flock

Alternate translation: "follow along behind the flock"

tracks

marks of the hooves of the flock on the ground

pasture your young goats

Alternate translation: "graze your young goats" or "let your young goats eat"

Song of Solomon 1:9

I compare you, my love, to a mare among Pharaoh's chariot horses

The Jews of those days considered horses beautiful, and the Pharaoh's horses would have been the most beautiful he could find. The man considers the young woman beautiful. Alternate translation: "My love, you are as beautiful as any of Pharaoh's chariot horses" (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

my love

Alternate translation: "you whom I love"

Pharaoh's chariot horses

Alternate translation: "the horses that pull Pharaoh's chariots"

Song of Solomon 1:10

Your cheeks are beautiful with ornaments

These ornaments could be: (1) jewels hanging from a band around the head or (2) earrings or (3) a metaphor for her long hair. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

Song of Solomon 1:11

We will make

The man speaks as if he were many people. Some versions change this to singular "I." Other versions take these to be the words of the woman's friends. (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-pronouns\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-exclusive\]\]](#)) (See: **Pronouns (p.192)**)

with silver studs

Alternate translation: "with spots of silver"

Song of Solomon 1:12

lay on his couch

“sat eating his special meal.” This probably refers to one of the couches on which people would lie around a table at a banquet. You could translate using the common word for what people do with their bodies when they eat special meals.

nard

an oil that people got from the expensive nard or spikenard (valerian plant with small pink or white flowers) and used to make their skin soft and to have a pleasant odor.

emitted its fragrance

Alternate translation: “gave off its good smell”

Song of Solomon 1:13

My beloved is to me like a bag of myrrh & breasts

Women would place a small bag or pouch of myrrh on a necklace so it would lie between their breasts and they could enjoy its pleasant fragrance. This woman enjoys having her beloved close to her. She adds "to me" to show that she does not expect anyone else to enjoy her beloved in this way. Alternate translation: "I enjoy my beloved as much as I enjoy having a bag of myrrh ... breasts" (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

My beloved

This phrase refers to the man whom the woman loves. In some languages it may be more natural for her to refer to him as "my lover." Alternate translation: "My dear one" or "My lover"

lying between my breasts

If this phrase would offend your readers, you could use a euphemism. Alternate translation: "close to me" (See: **Euphemism (p.158)**) (See: **Euphemism (p.158)**)

Song of Solomon 1:14

My beloved is to me like a cluster of henna flowers

Henna flowers have a fragrance that people enjoy. The woman enjoys her beloved. She adds "to me" to show that she does not expect anyone else to enjoy her beloved in this way. Alternate translation: "I enjoy my beloved as much as I enjoy the smell of clusters of henna flowers" (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

henna flowers

flowers from a small desert tree that people used as a perfume

Song of Solomon 1:15

Listen, you

Alternate translation: "Pay attention, because what I am about to say is both true and important: you"

my love

"you whom I love." See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:9](#)

your eyes are doves

This could mean: (1) the Israelites considered doves to be gentle and soft birds, and the man considers the woman's eyes beautiful because the way the woman looks at him makes him think she is gentle. Alternate translation: "you are very gentle" or (2) the man is speaking of the woman's white eyeballs or the shape of her eyes as being like the shape of a dove. (See: **Metonymy (p.182)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.182)**)

Song of Solomon 1:16

Listen, you

Alternate translation: "Pay attention, because what I am about to say is both true and important: you"

handsome

Use the word in your language that describes a good-looking man.

my beloved

This phrase refers to the man whom the woman loves. In some languages it may be more natural for her to refer to him as "my lover." See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:13](#). Alternate translation: "my dear one" or "my lover"

lush plants are our bed

This speaks of the lush plants as if they were a bed. Alternate translation: "lush plants are what we lie down on to sleep" (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

The lush plants

plants that are green, moist, and grow abundantly

Song of Solomon 1:17

The beams of our house are cedars; our rafters are firs

The woman describes the forest as though it were a house in which they were lying down. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

beams & rafters

This could mean: (1) “beams” refers to large logs used to support everything above the walls and “rafters” refers to the large pieces of wood to which the roof is attached or (2) “beams” refers to the rafters and “rafters” refers to the strips attached to the beams, onto which the builders attached the roofing materials.

cedars & firs

Cedars were large and strong trees. The word translated “firs” is a general term for trees like cedars but smaller. If cedar and fir trees are unknown in your area, you could use general terms for the tallest and strongest trees. (See: **Translate Unknowns (p.202)**) (See: **Translate Unknowns (p.202)**)

Song of Solomon 2

Song of Songs 2 General Notes

Important figures of speech in this chapter

Metaphor

Women are compared to flowers in this chapter. This metaphor may describe a woman's beauty and delicacy. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

Euphemisms

It is possible that some of the metaphors used in this chapter are actually euphemisms. These euphemisms would refer to sex or the physical love between a husband and a wife. (See: **Euphemism (p.158)**)

Song of Solomon 2:1

General Information:

General Information:

See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/writing-poetry\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#) (See: **Poetry (p.189)**)

I am a meadow flower of Sharon

The woman speaks as if she were one of many flowers in a land known for beautiful flowers. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

Sharon

the name of a land that is flat, has no trees, and grows many different kinds of grasses and flowers

lily of the valleys

The woman speaks as if she were one of many flowers in a land known for beautiful flowers. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

lily

a sweet smelling flower that grows in places where there is much water. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 2:1-2](#).

valleys

flat areas between mountains and near water

Song of Solomon 2:2

As a lily among thorns & young women

A flower is much more beautiful than a thorn bush. The man thinks the woman is much more beautiful than the other women. (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

my love

“you whom I love.” See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:9](#).

the young women

Alternate translation: “the other young women”

Song of Solomon 2:3

As an apricot tree & the young men

People enjoy the fruit of an apricot tree, but the trees of the forest do not bear fruit. The woman enjoys being with the man, but not with the other young men. (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

apricot tree

a tree that produces a small yellow fruit that is very sweet. If your readers will not know what this is, you could use the word for another fruit tree or the general word "fruit tree."

the forest

The Hebrew word here refers to land where trees grow for which people have no use.

my beloved

This phrase refers to the man whom the woman loves. In some languages it may be more natural for her to refer to him as "my lover." See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:13](#). Alternate translation: "my dear one" or "my lover"

I sit down under his shadow with great delight

The woman finds great joy and comfort in being so near to the man. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

his fruit is sweet to my taste

The woman enjoys eating sweet fruit, and she enjoys being near to the man. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

Song of Solomon 2:4

the house of wine

This could mean: (1) the very large room where the king would serve many people large meals with wine or (2) a small booth in a vineyard where the man and woman could be alone together.

his banner over me was love

This could mean: (1) the banner is a metonym for a military escort. And, the military escort is a metaphor that represents the man's love which gives courage to the woman who was nervous to enter the large room where the king served many people. Alternate translation: "but his loving protection guided me and gave me courage" or (2) the woman knew that the man wanted to make love to her from the way he looked at her. Alternate translation: "he looked at me lovingly" or "when he looked at me, I knew he wanted to make love to me" or (3) they made love. Alternate translation: "he lovingly covered me" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.182)**)

Song of Solomon 2:5

Revive me

Alternate translation: "Return my strength" or "Give me energy"

with raisin cakes

"by giving me raisin cakes to eat." Raisin cakes were cakes made of dried grapes pressed together.

refresh me with apricots

Alternate translation: "support me by giving me apricots" or "help me by giving me apricots"

for I am weak with love

The woman speaks of feeling weak because her love is so strong as if love were a kind of sickness. Alternate translation: "because my love is so strong that I feel feeble" (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

Song of Solomon 2:6

left hand & right hand

Alternate translation: "left arm ... right arm"

embraces me

Alternate translation: "holds me"

Song of Solomon 2:7

daughters of Jerusalem

“young women of Jerusalem.” These young women could not hear her and were not present, but the woman speaks as if they were present and could hear her. (See: **Apostrophe (p.142)**) (See: **Apostrophe (p.142)**)

by the gazelles and the does of the fields

Although the daughters of Jerusalem could not hear her, the woman speaks to them as if they could hear saying that the gazelles and the does will punish them they break their promise. (See: **Apostrophe (p.142)**) (See: **Apostrophe (p.142)**)

the gazelles

These are animals that look like deer and move quickly.

does

female deer

of the fields

“that live in the countryside.” This was land that has not been farmed.

will not awaken or arouse love until she pleases

Here “love” is spoken of as if it were a person asleep that does not want to be awakened. This is a metaphor that represents the man and woman who do not want to be disturbed until they are finished making love. Alternate translation: “will not disturb us until we have finished making love” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-personification\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Personification (p.187)**)

will not awaken or arouse

If your language has only one word for waking people out of sleep, you could combine these words. Alternate translation: “will not awaken” (See: **Doublet (p.154)**) (See: **Doublet (p.154)**)

Song of Solomon 2:8

General Information:

General Information:

The second part of the book begins here. It is not clear whether the woman is speaking to herself or to the daughters of Jerusalem.

Listen

This could mean: (1) "Listen carefully to what I am about to say." You could use a word in your language that tells the hearer to listen carefully, or (2) "Listen so you can hear him coming."

my beloved

This phrase refers to the man whom the woman loves. In some languages it may be more natural for her to refer to him as "my lover." See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:13](#). Alternate translation: "my dear one" or "my lover"

leaping & jumping

The woman shows that she is excited to see the man come by using as few words as possible to describe what he is doing. Your language may have a different way of showing that the speaker is excited about what is happening.

leaping over the mountains, jumping over the hills

"leaping on the mountains, running quickly on the hills." The woman speaks of the man as if he were "a gazelle or a young stag" (verse 9) coming quickly toward her over rough ground. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p. 176)**)

Song of Solomon 2:9

gazing & peering

The woman shows that she is excited to see the man come by using as few words as possible to describe what he is doing. Your language may have a different way of showing that the speaker is excited about what is happening.

like a gazelle or a young stag

Gazelles and young stags move quickly over rough ground. The woman imagines the man coming as fast as he can to be with her. You could translate using animals in your language that people think of as fast. (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

a gazelle

This is an animal that looks like a deer and moves quickly. Translate as the singular of “the gazelles” as in [Song of Songs 2:7](#).

a young stag

Alternate translation: “a young male deer”

look

“listen carefully” or “what I am about to say is important.” You could use a word in your language that tells the hearer to listen carefully.

behind our wall

“on the other side of our wall.” The woman is in a house and the man is outside the house.

our wall

The word “our” refers to the woman and the other people in the house with her. If she is speaking to herself, it is inclusive, but if she is speaking to the daughters of Jerusalem, whether she is referring to herself and her companions or to herself only in plural, as in “We are glad ... We rejoice ... let us celebrate” ([Song of Songs 1:4](#)), it is exclusive. (See: **Exclusive and Inclusive ‘We’ (p.160)**) (See: **Exclusive and Inclusive ‘We’ (p.160)**)

gazing through the window

Alternate translation: “he stares in through the windows”

peering through the lattice

Alternate translation: “he peeks through the lattice”

lattice

a cover for a window or some other entrance that someone has made by weaving long strips of wood together. Lattices have holes that people can look through.

Song of Solomon 2:10

My beloved

This phrase refers to the man whom the woman loves. In some languages it may be more natural for her to refer to him as “my lover.” See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:13](#). Alternate translation: “My dear one” or “My lover”

Arise, my love

Alternate translation: “Get out of bed, my love”

my love

“you whom I love.” See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:9](#)

Song of Solomon 2:11

Look

“Listen carefully” or “What I am about to say is important.” You could use a word in your language that tells the hearer to listen carefully.

the winter is past; the rain is over and gone

In winter it is too cold and wet to make love outside, but the cold, wet time has passed.

the winter is past

Winter is the cold time of year when plants do not grow and people prefer to stay inside their houses. You could use the term in your language for that time of year.

the rain is over and gone

In Israel it only rains during the winter. The rain here is cold and unpleasant, not the refreshing rain of the hot season.

Song of Solomon 2:12

The flowers have appeared

Alternate translation: "People can see flowers"

in the land

Alternate translation: "all over this land"

for pruning

for cutting off branches from a plant so that it will produce more fruit or look better

the singing of birds

Alternate translation: "for birds to sing"

the sound of the doves is heard

This can be translated in active form. Alternate translation: "people can hear the sound of doves" or "the doves are cooing" (See: **Active or Passive (p.139)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.139)**)

Song of Solomon 2:13

The fig tree ripens her green figs

The tree is spoken of as if it were actively causing its fruit to ripen. This is a collective singular and can be translated as a plural. Alternate translation: "The figs on the trees are becoming ripe" (See: **Personification (p.187)**) (See: **Personification (p.187)**)

vines are in blossom

Alternate translation: "vines are flowering" or "vines have flowers"

they give off

The word "they" refers to the blossoms on the vines.

their fragrance

Alternate translation: "their sweet smell"

my love

"you whom I love." See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:9](#)

Song of Solomon 2:14

General Information:

General Information:

The man is speaking.

My dove

The Israelites considered doves beautiful birds with pleasant voices. The man thinks the woman's face and voice are beautiful. If calling a woman a "dove" would be offensive, you could leave out the metaphor. Alternate translation: "My beautiful woman" (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

the clefts

large cracks in the side of mountain rocks large enough for people to hide in

the mountain crags

Alternate translation: "the steep rocks on the sides of the mountains"

your face

Some versions translate this as "your appearance" or "your form" or "what you look like."

Song of Solomon 2:15

Catch

This is plural, as if the woman is speaking to more than one man, but most versions translate who she is speaking to as the man, so you could translate this as singular. (See: **Forms of You (p.162)**) (See: **Forms of You (p.162)**)

the foxes

These animals look like small dogs and were often used in love poetry to represent eager young men who would spoil a young woman. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

for us & our vineyard

The words **us** and **our** could possibly be: (1) exclusive, referring to the woman herself, as in [Song of Songs 1:4](#), or (2) inclusive, referring to the woman and the man, or (3) exclusive, referring to the woman and the rest of her family. (See: **Exclusive and Inclusive 'We' (p.160)**) (See: **Exclusive and Inclusive 'We' (p.160)**)

foxes

Another possible meaning is "jackals." A jackal is a type of thin wild dog with long legs.

the little foxes that spoil

Foxes spoil or destroy vineyards by digging holes and eating vines and grapes. This could be a metaphor for young men who spoil young women. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

in blossom

This implies that the vineyard is healthy and the grapes have appeared, but they are not ready for harvest. This could be a metaphor for a young lady ready for marriage and bearing children. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 2:13](#). (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

Song of Solomon 2:16

My beloved is mine

Alternate translation: "My beloved belongs to me"

I am his

Alternate translation: "I belong to him"

he grazes

"feeds" or "eats grass." The woman speaks of the man as if he were "a gazelle or a young stag" (verse 17) that eats plants among the lilies. Grazing is probably a metaphor for lovemaking ([Song of Songs 2:1-2](#)). (See: **Metaphor (p. 176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

lilies

sweet-smelling flowers that grow in places where there is much water. Translate as the plural of "lily" in [Song of Songs 2:1](#).

Song of Solomon 2:17

my beloved

This phrase refers to the man whom the woman loves. In some languages it may be more natural for her to refer to him as “my lover.” See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:13](#). Alternate translation: “my dear one” or “my lover”

dawn

the part of the day when the sun is rising

the shadows flee away

The woman describes the shadows as though they were running away from the light of the sun. Alternate translation: “the shadows disappear” (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

like a gazelle or a young stag

See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 2:9](#).

gazelle

an animal that looks like a deer and moves quickly. Translate as the singular of “gazelles” as in [Song of Songs 2:7](#).

stag

an adult male deer

rugged mountains

Alternate translation: “rocky mountains” or “rough mountains”

Song of Solomon 3

Song of Songs 3 General Notes

Special concepts in this chapter

Longing

This chapter describes a feeling of longing, or the waiting in anticipation of the one you love. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.144)**)

Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

Metaphors

In the ancient Near East, it was common to describe a woman using metaphors involving animals. In many cultures today, this can be considered offensive. Different metaphors of beauty are used in different cultures. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

Song of Solomon 3:1

I was longing for him & could not find him

Alternate translation: "I had a strong desire to be with him ... loves, but he was not there"

him whom my soul loves

The soul is a metonym for the whole person. Here it makes a stronger statement of the woman's love for the man than "my beloved" ([Song of Songs 1:14](#)). (See: **Metonymy (p.182)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.182)**)

Song of Solomon 3:2

go through the city

Alternate translation: "walk through the city"

through the streets and squares

The word "squares" indicates the center area of a town where streets or roads come together. It is often an area where people sell items, a market, and a place where people come together to talk.

will search

Alternate translation: "will to look for"

Song of Solomon 3:3

watchmen

men who have the job of keeping guard of the town at night to keep the people safe

as they were making their rounds in the city

Alternate translation: "who were walking around the city on the walls"

him whom my soul loves

The soul is a metonym for the whole person. Here it makes a stronger statement of the woman's love for the man than "my beloved" ([Song of Songs 1:14](#)). See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 3:1](#). (See: **Metonymy (p.182)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.182)**)

Song of Solomon 3:4

the bedroom

Alternate translation: "the room for sleeping"

the one who had conceived me

This is a metonym for her mother. (See: **Metonymy (p.182)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.182)**)

Song of Solomon 3:5

General Information:

General Information:

Translate this verse as in [Song of Songs 2:7](#).

daughters of Jerusalem

“young women of Jerusalem.” These young women could not hear her and were not present, but the woman speaks as if they were present and could hear her. (See: **Apostrophe (p.142)**) (See: **Apostrophe (p.142)**)

by the gazelles and the does of the fields

Although the daughters of Jerusalem are not there to hear her, the woman is telling them that the gazelles and the does will punish them they break their promise. (See: **Apostrophe (p.142)**) (See: **Apostrophe (p.142)**)

the gazelles

animals that look like deer and move quickly.

does

female deer

of the fields

“that live in the countryside.” This refers to land that has not been farmed.

will not awaken or arouse love until she pleases

Here “love” is spoken of as if it were a person asleep that does not want to be awakened. This is a metaphor that represents the man and woman who do not want to be disturbed until they are finished making love. Alternate translation: “will not disturb us until we have finished making love” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-personification\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Personification (p.187)**)

will not awaken or arouse

If your language has only one word for waking people out of sleep, you could combine these words. Alternate translation: “will not awaken” (See: **Doublet (p.154)**) (See: **Doublet (p.154)**)

Song of Solomon 3:6

General Information:

General Information:

The third part of the book begins here. It begins with a description of sixty men carrying Solomon's bed up from the wilderness to Jerusalem.

What is that coming up from the wilderness

The group of people is traveling from the wilderness to Jerusalem. They must go up in order to reach Jerusalem because the wilderness is low in the Jordan valley and Jerusalem is high in the mountains.

What is that

Many versions translate this "Who is that."

like a column of smoke

The dust looked like smoke from far away because the people raised much dust in the air as they traveled. (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

perfumed with myrrh and frankincense

Alternate translation: "with the sweet smell of myrrh and frankincense"

with all the powders sold by merchants

The words "perfumed with" are understood from the previous phrase. They can be repeated here. Alternate translation: "perfumed with all the powders sold by merchants" or "and with the sweet smell of all the powders that merchants sell" (See: **Ellipsis (p.156)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.156)**)

powders

a fine dust made by crushing something solid

Song of Solomon 3:7

Look

“Listen carefully” or “What I am about to say is important.” You could use a word in your language that tells the hearer to listen carefully. The speaker now discovers the answer to the question in verse 6.

it is the bed

This refers to a bed with a cover that can be carried from one place to another.

sixty warriors surround it, sixty soldiers of Israel

These two phrases refer to the same sixty people. The second phrase clarifies that the “warriors” are “soldiers of Israel.” (See: **Doublet (p.154)**) (See: **Doublet (p.154)**)

warriors

men who fight

Song of Solomon 3:8

A description of the bed itself begins in verse 9. You could use words in your language that show that this is background information. (See: **Background Information (p.147)**) (See: **Background Information (p.147)**)

are experienced in warfare

Alternate translation: "can fight battles well"

armed against

Alternate translation: "so that he can fight against"

terrors of the night

Here, "terrors" is a metonym for evil people who frighten others by attacking them. If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **terrors**, you can express the same idea with a verbal form. Alternate translation: "evil people who attack others at night" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-abstractnouns\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.137)**)

Song of Solomon 3:9

sedan chair

This is a chair or couch for important people to sit or lie on. It rests on long poles that people can use to carry it

Song of Solomon 3:10

The description of the bed itself that began in [Song of Songs 3:9](#) continues. (See: **Background Information (p. 147)**) (See: **Background Information (p.147)**)

Its posts

The word “its” refers to King Solomon’s sedan chair.

posts

The word “posts” here refers to pieces either made of silver or made of wood covered with silver that hold up the tent of cloth around his chair.

Its interior was

Alternate translation: “The inside of it was”

with love

This could mean: (1) “with love,” indicating that the women made the sedan beautiful in a special way to show their love for Solomon, or (2) “with leather.”

Song of Solomon 3:11

daughters of Zion

Alternate translation: “you young women who live in Zion”

gaze on King Solomon

“look at King Solomon.” The word “gaze” refers to look at someone or something for a long time, usually with strong emotional feeling.

bearing the crown

Alternate translation: “wearing the crown”

the day of the joy of his heart

The word “heart” is a metonym for the person. Alternate translation: “the day on which he truly rejoiced” or “the happiest day of his life” (See: **Metonymy (p.182)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.182)**)

Song of Solomon 4

Song of Songs 4 General Notes

Special concepts in this chapter

Beauty

The woman is described as the epitome of beauty in ancient Israel. Not all cultures share the same the same standards of beauty.

Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

Metaphors

In the ancient Near East, it was common to describe a woman using metaphors involving animals. In many cultures today, this can be considered offensive. Different metaphors of beauty are used in different cultures. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

“My sister, my bride”

The woman described is not the sister of her husband. They are not related. Instead, this is a reference to a woman who is a fellow Israelite.

Song of Solomon 4:1

General Information:

General Information:

See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/writing-poetry\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#) (See: **Poetry (p.189)**)

Your eyes are doves

One possibility is that the man is speaking of the woman's white eyeballs or the shape of her eyes, the shape of a dove. Another possibility is that the Israelites considered doves to be gentle and soft birds, and the man considers the woman's eyes beautiful because the way the woman looks at him makes him think she is gentle. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:15](#). Alternate translation: "You are very gentle" (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

my love

"you whom I love." See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:9](#).

Your hair is like a flock of goats going down from Mount Gilead

Goats in Israel were usually dark in color. The woman's hair was probably dark. You may need to specify that the goats were dark or even use another simile that the reader will understand that refers to something dark and beautiful. People thought of Mount Gilead as beautiful and fertile. The speaker considered the woman beautiful and ready to become the mother of his children. If you remove the simile of the goats, you may have to remove the simile of the mountain as well. Alternate translation: "Your hair is as dark as storm clouds above a fertile land" (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

Song of Solomon 4:2

Your teeth are like a flock of newly shorn ewes

After sheep have their wool cut off, they are washed and their skin looks very white. The woman's teeth are white. (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

a flock of newly shorn ewes

This can be translated in active form. Alternate translation: "a flock of ewes whose wool people have cut off" (See: **Active or Passive (p.139)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.139)**)

coming up from the washing place

The ewes are coming up out of the water. Alternate translation: "that are coming up out of the water after people have washed them" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.144)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.144)**)

Each one has a twin

Sheep usually give birth to two lambs at one time. These twin lambs usually look like one another. Each of the woman's teeth has a matching tooth on the other side of her mouth. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

none among them is bereaved

Each of the woman's teeth has a matching tooth on the other side of her mouth. She has not lost any of her teeth.

bereaved

lost a loved one who has died

Song of Solomon 4:3

are like a thread of scarlet

Scarlet is a beautiful red color, and scarlet thread was very expensive. The woman's lips were red. Alternate translation: "are a deep red like scarlet thread" or "are red and very beautiful" (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

scarlet

a dark red color that is very similar to the color of blood

is lovely

Alternate translation: "is beautiful"

are like pomegranate halves

Pomegranates are smooth, round, and rich red. The man thinks the woman's cheeks are beautiful and show that she is healthy. Alternate translation: "are red and round like two halves of a pomegranate" or "are red and full and healthy" (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

behind your veil

See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 4:1](#).

Song of Solomon 4:4

Your neck is like the tower of David

No one knows if this was a real tower. A tower is a tall, slender building, and saying that David built it implies that it was beautiful. The man considered the woman's neck long and slender and so beautiful. Alternate translation: "Your neck is long and beautiful like the tower of David" (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

of David

Alternate translation: "that David built"

built in rows of stone

Women had necklaces that covered their entire necks with rows of decorations. The man compares these rows of decorations with the rows of stone on the tower. Alternate translation: "that has many rows of stone" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

with a thousand shields

The man compares the decorations of the woman's necklace with shields hanging on the tower. The necklace probably went around her neck many times. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

a thousand shields

"1,000 shields." (See: **Numbers (p.184)**) (See: **Numbers (p.184)**)

all the shields of soldiers

Alternate translation: "all of the shields belong to mighty warriors"

Song of Solomon 4:5

two breasts

If the word “two” seems unnecessary and so out of place, you could omit it.

like two fawns, twins of a gazelle

The man implies that the woman’s breasts are matching, soft, and perhaps small. (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

twins

the babies of a mother who gave birth to two babies at one time

gazelle

an animal that looks like a deer and moves quickly. Translate as the singular of “gazelles” as in [Song of Songs 2:7](#).

grazing among the lilies

“eating plants among the lilies.” While it is clear that the man “grazing among the lilies” is a metaphor for making love ([Song of Songs 2:16](#)), it is not clear what these words refer to. It is best to translate them literally.

lilies

sweet-smelling flowers that grow in places where there is much water. Translate as the plural of “lily” in [Song of Songs 2:1](#).

Song of Solomon 4:6

Until the dawn arrives and the shadows flee away

Translate similar wording in this line as you did the line in [Song of Songs 2:17](#).

I will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense

The “mountain of myrrh” and “hill of frankincense” are metaphors for the woman’s breasts ([Song of Songs 1:13](#)). Alternate translation: “I will lie close to your breasts, which are like mountains that smell like myrrh and frankincense” or “I will lie close to your breasts, which smell very sweet” or “I will go to the sweet-smelling mountains” (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

the mountain of myrrh

Alternate translation: “the mountain made of myrrh” or “the mountain that has myrrh growing on it”

the hill of frankincense

Alternate translation: “the hill where there are clouds of smoke from burning frankincense in the air”

Song of Solomon 4:7

You are beautiful in every way

Alternate translation: "Every part of you is beautiful" or "All of you is beautiful"

my love

"you whom I love." See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:9](#).

there is no blemish in you

Alternate translation: "you have no blemish"

Song of Solomon 4:8

from Lebanon

Alternate translation: “away from Lebanon”

my bride

This Hebrew word can refer to a woman who is married or to one whom a man has arranged to become his son's wife. If your language has a polite word that a man would use to his wife and that has not been used yet in this book, you could use it here. Otherwise you could use any polite term a man would use with his wife.

Amana

the name of a mountain north of Israel (See: **How to Translate Names (p.163)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.163)**)

Senir

the name of a mountain near Amana and Hermon. Some people think that this refers to the same mountain as Hermon. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.163)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.163)**)

dens

places where lions and leopards live, like caves or holes in the ground

Song of Solomon 4:9

You have stolen my heart

This idiom could mean: (1) "My heart now belongs completely to you" or (2) "I strongly desire to make love to you" (See: **Idiom (p.174)**) (See: **Idiom (p.174)**)

my sister

This is an idiom of affection. They are not actually brother and sister. Alternate translation: "my dear" or "my darling" (See: **Idiom (p.174)**) (See: **Idiom (p.174)**)

my bride

This Hebrew word can refer to a woman who is married or to one whom a man has arranged to become his son's wife. If your language has a polite word that a man would use to his wife and that has not been used yet in this book, you could use it here. Otherwise you could use any polite term a man would use with his wife. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 4:8](#).

heart, with just one look at me, with just one jewel

"heart. All you have to do is look at me once or show me just one jewel." Both the woman's eyes and her jewelry attract the man to her.

necklace

This necklace probably went around her neck many times ([Song of Songs 4:4](#)).

Song of Solomon 4:10

How beautiful is your love

Alternate translation: "Your love is wonderful"

my sister

This is an idiom of affection. They are not actually brother and sister. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 4:9](#). Alternate translation: "my dear" or "my darling" (See: **Idiom (p.174)**) (See: **Idiom (p.174)**)

my bride

This Hebrew word can refer to a woman who is married or to one whom a man has arranged to become his son's wife. If your language has a polite word that a man would use to his wife and that has not been used yet in this book, you could use it here. Otherwise you could use any polite term a man would use with his wife. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 4:9](#).

How much better is your love than wine

"Your love is much better than wine." See how you translated a similar phrase in [Song of Songs 1:2](#).

the fragrance of your perfume than any spice

The verb may be supplied from the previous phrase. Alternate translation: "how much better is the fragrance of your perfume than the fragrance of any spice" (See: **Ellipsis (p.156)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.156)**)

fragrance & perfume

See how you translated these words in [Song of Songs 1:3](#).

spice

dried plants or seeds that have a good smell or taste

Song of Solomon 4:11

Your lips & drip honey

Possible meanings are that honey is a metaphor for (1) the sweet taste of the woman's kisses or (2) the woman's words. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

honey and milk are under your tongue

Because "milk and honey" is a common phrase in the Bible, you should translate literally. Possible meanings are that honey is a metaphor for: (1) the sweet taste of the woman's kisses or (2) the woman's words. Milk is a metaphor for luxury, owning many things that help people enjoy life. When the woman kisses the man, he enjoys life. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon

"the smell of your clothes is like the smell of Lebanon." Many cedar trees grew in Lebanon. Cedar trees smell very good, so Lebanon would have smelled sweet and fresh.

Song of Solomon 4:12

My sister

This is an idiom of affection. They are not actually brother and sister. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 4:9](#). Alternate translation: “My dear” or “My darling” (See: **Idiom (p.174)**) (See: **Idiom (p.174)**)

my bride

This Hebrew word can refer to a woman who is married or to one whom a man has arranged to become his son's wife. If your language has a polite word that a man would use to his wife and that has not been used yet in this book, you could use it here. Otherwise you could use any polite term a man would use with his wife. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 4:9](#).

is a garden locked up

“is a garden that no one can enter.” The garden is a metaphor for the woman, and the lock is a metaphor for her still being a virgin. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

a spring that is sealed

“a spring with a cover on it.” The spring or well is a metaphor for the woman, and the cover is a metaphor for her being a virgin. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

Song of Solomon 4:13

Your branches

branches or channels of rivers, a clear euphemism for the female body part. If any reference to this would be offensive, translate it as a synecdoche for the whole person. Alternate translation: “You” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-euphemism\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-synecdoche\]\]](#)) (See: **Euphemism (p.158)**)

a grove

a place where many trees grow together

with choice fruits

Alternate translation: “with the best kinds of fruits”

nard plants

plants that give oil that people used to make their skin soft and to have a pleasant odor. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:14](#).

henna

small desert trees that people used as a perfume. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:14](#).

Song of Solomon 4:14

saffron

a spice that comes from the dried parts from the yellow thread in the center of a certain flower

calamus

a reed with a pleasant smell that people used to make anointing oil.

cinnamon

a spice made from the bark of a tree that people used for cooking

myrrh

See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:13](#).

aloes

a type of large plant that had a very sweet smell

all the finest spices

Alternate translation: "all the best spices"

Song of Solomon 4:15

You are a garden spring

“You are a spring in a garden.” A garden spring gives sweet, clean water that people enjoy drinking. The man enjoys being close to the woman. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

fresh water

water that is good to drink

streams flowing down from Lebanon

Because Lebanon had mountains covered with trees, the streams from Lebanon were clean and cool.

Song of Solomon 4:16

Awake, north wind; come, south wind; blow

The woman speaks to the north wind and the south wind as though they were people. Alternate translation: "I wish the north wind and south wind would come and blow" (See: **Personification (p.187)**) (See: **Personification (p.187)**)

Awake, north wind

Alternate translation: "North wind, start blowing"

blow on my garden

The garden is a metaphor for her body, which she has covered with sweet-smelling oils ([Song of Songs 4:14](#)). (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

may give off their fragrance

Alternate translation: "may send out their good smells"

May my beloved & choice fruit

The woman is inviting the man to make love to her. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

my beloved

This phrase refers to the man whom the woman loves. In some languages it may be more natural for her to refer to him as "my lover." See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:13](#). Alternate translation: "my dear one" or "my lover"

choice fruit

Alternate translation: "wonderful fruit"

Song of Solomon 5

Song of Songs 5 General Notes

Structure and formatting

Verses 2-7 describe a dream the woman had.

Special concepts in this chapter

Beauty

The woman is described as the epitome of beauty in ancient Israel. Not all cultures share the same standards of beauty.

Important figures of speech in this chapter

Metaphors

In the ancient Near East, it was common to describe a woman using metaphors involving animals. In many cultures today, this can be considered offensive. Different metaphors of beauty are used in different cultures. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

“My sister, my bride”

The woman described is not the sister of her husband. They are not related. Instead, this is a reference to a woman who is a fellow Israelite.

Song of Solomon 5:1

General Information:

General Information:

See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/writing-poetry\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#) (See: **Poetry (p.189)**)

I have come

It is clearly the woman's lover who is speaking.

have come into my garden

The word "garden" is a metaphor for the woman. The man is finally able to fully enjoy the woman as they make love. (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-euphemism\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

my sister

This is an idiom of affection. They are not actually brother and sister. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 4:9](#). Alternate translation: "my dear" or "my darling" (See: **Idiom (p.174)**) (See: **Idiom (p.174)**)

my bride

This Hebrew word can refer to a woman who is married or to one whom a man has arranged to become his son's wife. If your language has a polite word that a man would use to his wife and that has not been used yet in this book, you could use it here. Otherwise you could use any polite term a man would use with his wife. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 4:9](#).

myrrh & spice & honeycomb & honey & wine & milk

These are all metaphors for the man enjoying the woman's body ([Song of Songs 1:13](#), [Song of Songs 2:4](#), [Song of Songs 4:11](#), and [Song of Songs 4:14](#)). (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

spice

plants that have a strong smell or taste

Eat & drink & be drunk with love

Eating and drinking are metaphors for making love. Alternate translation: "Make love ... make love ... make love until you are fully satisfied" (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

Song of Solomon 5:2

General Information:

General Information:

The fourth part of the book begins here. The young woman uses euphemisms to describe her dream so that it can be interpreted in two different ways: (1) the woman describes a dream about a night when the man came to visit her at her house; and (2) the woman describes a dream about starting to sleep with the man. (See: **Euphemism (p.158)**) (See: **Euphemism (p.158)**)

but my heart was awake

The heart is the center of thought and feeling. Alternate translation: “but I could think clearly” or “but I knew what I was feeling” (See: **Idiom (p.174)**) (See: **Idiom (p.174)**)

my beloved

This phrase refers to the man whom the woman loves. In some languages it may be more natural for her to refer to him as “my lover.” See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:13](#). Alternate translation: “my dear one” or “my lover”

Open to me

This could mean: (1) literal, “Open the door for me,” or (2) metaphorical, “Let me make love to you.” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-explicit\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.144)**)

my sister

This is an idiom of affection. They are not actually brother and sister. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 4:9](#). Alternate translation: “my dear” or “my darling” (See: **Idiom (p.174)**) (See: **Idiom (p.174)**)

my love

“you whom I love.” See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:9](#).

my dove

See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 2:14](#).

undefiled one

Alternate translation: “my perfect one” or “my faithful one” or “my innocent one”

dew

drops of water or mist that form as the night becomes cool

my hair with the night's dampness

The words "is wet" are understood from the previous phrase. They can be repeated here. Alternate translation: "my hair is wet with the night's dampness" (See: **Ellipsis (p.156)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.156)**)

Song of Solomon 5:3

“I have taken off my robe & dirty?”

This is what the woman thought to herself when she heard the man speak. ([Song of Songs 5:2](#)). This could be translated with the woman saying that this is what she was thinking, or the woman could just explain the situation and her thoughts as in the UST. Alternate translation: “I thought to myself, ‘I have taken off my robe ... dirty?’” or “I had taken off my robe and I did not want to put it on again. I had washed my feet and I did not want to get them dirty.” (See: **Direct and Indirect Quotations (p.152)**) (See: **Direct and Indirect Quotations (p.152)**)

robe

thin linen clothing that people wore on their skin

must I put it on again?

If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “I do not want to put it on again.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.194)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.194)**)

I have washed my feet

While the word “feet” can be a euphemism for private parts, this probably refers to literal feet. The woman seems more likely to want to make love than to want to refrain from lovemaking because she has just bathed. (See: **Euphemism (p.158)**) (See: **Euphemism (p.158)**)

must I get them dirty?

If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “I do not want to get them dirty.”

Song of Solomon 5:4

My beloved put in his hand through the opening of the door latch

Possible interpretations are: (1) literal, the lover reaches into the house through a hole in the door in order to open the door or (2) euphemistic, they have begun to make love. (See: **Euphemism (p.158)**) (See: **Euphemism (p.158)**)

My beloved

This phrase refers to the man whom the woman loves. In some languages it may be more natural for her to refer to him as “my lover.” See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:13](#). Alternate translation: “My dear one” or “My lover”

door latch

Alternate translation: “door lock”

Song of Solomon 5:5

I got up to open the door for my beloved

This could mean: (1) literal, the young woman got out of bed in order to let the man into the house, or (2) metaphorical. Alternate translation: "I prepared myself to make love with my beloved" (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

my hands & my fingers & door handle

While these may be euphemisms for the woman's and man's bodies, it is best to translate literally. (See: **Euphemism (p.158)**) (See: **Euphemism (p.158)**)

with moist myrrh

Alternate translation: "with liquid myrrh"

Song of Solomon 5:6

my beloved

See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:13](#).

My heart sank

The heart is a metaphor for the person, and sinking, going down, is a metaphor for becoming weak or sad.
Alternate translation: "I was very sad" (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

Song of Solomon 5:7

The watchmen

men who have the job of keeping guard of the town at night to keep the people safe. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 3:3](#).

as they were making their rounds in the city

“who were walking around the city on the walls.” See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 3:3](#).

found me

found the woman

struck me

Alternate translation: “beat me” or “hit me”

wounded me

Alternate translation: “injured me”

the guards on the walls

Alternate translation: “the men who guard the walls”

cloak

a garment that people wore over the other clothing on their upper body when they went outdoors in public

Song of Solomon 5:8

I want you to swear

See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 2:7](#).

daughters of Jerusalem

“young women of Jerusalem.” These young women could not hear her and were not present, but the woman speaks as if they were present and could hear her. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 2:7](#). (See: **Apostrophe (p.142)**) (See: **Apostrophe (p.142)**)

my beloved—What will you make known to him?—that I am

The woman uses a question to introduce what she wants the daughters of Jerusalem to tell her beloved. Alternate translation: “my beloved, this is what I want you to say to him: tell him that” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.194)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.194)**)

sick from love

She loves the man so strongly that she feels sick. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

Song of Solomon 5:9

your beloved

This phrase refers to the man whom the woman loves. In some languages it may be more natural for the other women to refer to him as “your lover.” See how you translated “my beloved” in [Song of Songs 1:13](#). Alternate translation: “your dear one” or “your lover”

most beautiful among women

“you who are the most beautiful of all women.” See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:8](#).

Why is your beloved better

Alternate translation: “What makes your beloved better”

that you ask us to take an oath like this

Alternate translation: “and causes you to have us take this oath”

an oath like this

the oath in [Song of Songs 5:8](#)

Song of Solomon 5:10

My beloved

This phrase refers to the man whom the woman loves. In some languages it may be more natural for her to refer to him as “my lover.” See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:13](#). Alternate translation: “My dear one” or “My lover”

is radiant and ruddy

This phrase refers to his complexion. Alternate translation: “has radiant and ruddy skin” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.144)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.144)**)

radiant

“is completely healthy” or “is pure.” The man has skin that does not have any problems.

ruddy

a healthy color of the skin that is brownish red

outstanding among ten thousand

“the best of 10,000.” Alternate translation: “better than anyone else” or “no one else is like him.” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/translate-numbers\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

Song of Solomon 5:11

His head is the purest gold

The man's head is as precious to the woman as the purest gold. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

a raven

a bird with very black feathers (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

Song of Solomon 5:12

His eyes are like doves

Translate “eyes are like doves” as in [Song of Songs 1:15](#). This could mean: (1) the Israelites considered doves to be gentle and soft birds, and the woman considers the man’s eyes beautiful because the way the man looks at her makes her think he is gentle. Alternate translation: “His eyes are gentle like doves” or (2) the woman is speaking of the man’s white eyeballs or the shape of his eyes, the shape of a dove. (See: **Metonymy (p.182)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.182)**)

doves beside streams of water

Birds that the Israelites considered gentle sitting beside a gently flowing stream are a metaphor for a gentle person. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

streams of water

Alternate translation: “gently flowing water”

bathed in milk

Milk is a metaphor for the whiteness of the doves. Alternate translation: (1) “doves that are white like milk” or (2) milk is a metaphor for the white part of the man’s eyes. Alternate translation: “his pupils are like doves bathing in white milk” (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

mounted like jewels

His eyes are beautiful. Jewels that a craftsman has carefully put in place are beautiful. (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

Song of Solomon 5:13

His cheeks & aromatic scents

This explains that his cheeks are like beds of spices because they both give off wonderful smells. (See: **Simile (p. 197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

beds of spices

gardens or parts of gardens where people grow spices. Spices give people pleasure. The man's body gives the woman pleasure. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

yielding aromatic scents

Alternate translation: "that give off wonderful smells."

His lips are lilies

The woman probably compares his lips with lilies because they are beautiful and smell wonderful. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

lilies

See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 2:16](#).

dripping liquid myrrh

"that drip with the best myrrh." His lips are moist and have a wonderful smell like myrrh. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

Song of Solomon 5:14

His arms are rounded gold set with jewels

“His arms are cylinders of gold that have jewels all over them.” The woman uses this image to say that his arms are beautiful and precious. The first readers would have understood this as a metaphor for the male body part ([Song of Songs 5:3](#)), but this would be difficult to bring out in translation. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

his abdomen is ivory covered with sapphires

“his belly is smooth ivory that has sapphires all over it.” The woman uses this image to say that his belly is beautiful and precious. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

ivory

the white tusk or tooth of an animal that is similar to bone. People use ivory to make smooth and shiny pieces of art.

sapphires

valuable stones that are either: (1) blue or (2) clear and either blue or golden

Song of Solomon 5:15

His legs are pillars of marble, set on bases of pure gold

Marble and gold are strong and beautiful. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

marble

a very strong stone that has many different colors and that people polish to make very smooth

his appearance is like Lebanon

“he looks like Lebanon.” Lebanon was a very beautiful area with many mountains and cedar trees. (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

Song of Solomon 5:16

His mouth is most sweet

The mouth is a metonym for either: (1) the man's sweet kisses or (2) the sweet words that he says. (See: **Metonymy** (p.182)) (See: **Metonymy** (p.182))

he is completely lovely

Alternate translation: "every part of him is lovely" or "all of him is lovely"

This is my beloved, and this is my friend

The word "This" refers to the man that the woman has just finished describing. Alternate translation: "That is what the one I love is like, and that is what my friend is like"

my beloved

This phrase refers to the man whom the woman loves. In some languages it may be more natural for her to refer to him as "my lover." See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:13](#). Alternate translation: "my dear one" or "my lover"

daughters of Jerusalem

"young women of Jerusalem." These young women could not hear her and were not present, but the woman speaks as if they were present and could hear her. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 2:7](#). (See: **Apostrophe** (p.142)) (See: **Apostrophe** (p.142))

Song of Solomon 6

Song of Songs 6 General Notes

Special concepts in this chapter

Beauty

The woman is described as the epitome of beauty in ancient Israel. Not all cultures share the same standards of beauty.

Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

Metaphors

In the ancient Near East, it was common to describe a woman using metaphors involving animals. In many cultures today, this can be considered offensive. Different metaphors of beauty are used in different cultures. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

Song of Solomon 6:1

General Information:

General Information:

See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/writing-poetry\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#). The fifth part of the book begins here. (See: **Poetry (p.189)**)

In what direction has your beloved gone

Alternate translation: "Which way did your beloved go"

your beloved

This phrase refers to the man whom the woman loves. In some languages it may be more natural for the other women to refer to him as "your lover." See how you translated "my beloved" in [Song of Songs 1:13](#). Alternate translation: "your dear one" or "your lover" or "the man you love"

most beautiful among women

"you who are the most beautiful of all women." See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:8](#).

gone, so that we may seek him with you?

The words "tell us" are understood from the context. They can be stated clearly Alternate translation: "gone? Tell us, so that we can look for him with you." (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.144)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.144)**)

Song of Solomon 6:2

My beloved has gone down to his garden

The word “garden” is a metaphor for the woman. The man is finally able to fully enjoy the woman as they make love. See the explanation of this metaphor in [Song of Songs 5:1](#). (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-euphemism\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

beds of spices

gardens or parts of gardens where people grow spices. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 5:13](#). (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

to graze in the garden and to gather lilies

These words are metaphors for the man enjoying her body. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

graze

“feeds” or “eats grass.” The woman speaks of the man as if he were “a gazelle or a young stag” ([Song of Songs 2:17](#)) that eats plants among the lilies. Grazing is probably a metaphor for lovemaking ([Song of Songs 2:1-2](#)). See how you translated “he grazes” in [Song of Songs 2:16](#). (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

to gather lilies

Alternate translation: “to pick lilies”

lilies

sweet-smelling flowers that grow in places where there is much water. Translate as the plural of “lily” in [Song of Songs 2:1](#).

Song of Solomon 6:3

my beloved

This phrase refers to the man whom the woman loves. In some languages it may be more natural for her to refer to him as “my lover.” See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:13](#). Alternate translation: “my dear one” or “my lover”

I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine

See how you translated the similar phrase “My beloved is mine, and I am his” in [Song of Songs 2:16](#).

he grazes among the lilies with pleasure

See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 2:16](#).

Song of Solomon 6:4

General Information:

General Information:

Here begins Part Five of the book

as beautiful as Tirzah, my love, as lovely as Jerusalem

These cities were famous for being beautiful and pleasant to be in. The man thinks the woman is beautiful, and he takes pleasure in being with her. (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

my love

“you whom I love.” See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:9](#).

lovely

See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:5](#).

as awe-inspiring as an army with its banners

The beauty of the woman is so powerful that it makes the man feel helpless, as if an army were approaching him.

Song of Solomon 6:5

overwhelm me

“terrify me.” The eyes of the woman are so beautiful that it makes the man feel weak and afraid because he cannot resist their power.

Your hair & from the slopes of Gilead

Translate “Your hair ... from Mount Gilead” as in [Song of Songs 4:1](#).

Song of Solomon 6:6

Your teeth are like a flock of ewes

After sheep have their wool cut off, they are washed and their skin looks very white. The woman's teeth are white. See how "Your teeth are like a flock of newly shorn ewes" is translated in [Song of Songs 4:2](#). (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

coming up from the washing place

The ewes are coming up out of the water. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 4:2](#). Alternate translation: "that are coming up out of the water after people have washed them" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.144)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.144)**)

Each one has a twin

Sheep usually give birth to two lambs at one time. These twin lamb usually look like one another. Each of the woman's teeth has a matching tooth on the other side of her mouth. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 4:2](#). (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

none among them is bereaved

Each of the woman's teeth has a matching tooth on the other side of her mouth. She has not lost any of her teeth. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 4:2](#).

bereaved

lost a loved one who has died. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 4:2](#).

Song of Solomon 6:7

are like pomegranate halves

Pomegranates are smooth, round, and rich red. The man thinks the woman's cheeks are beautiful and show that she is healthy. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 4:3](#). Alternate translation: "are red and round like two halves of a pomegranate" or "are red and full and healthy" (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

behind your veil

See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 4:1](#).

Song of Solomon 6:8

There are sixty queens, eighty concubines & young women without number

These numbers are to be large, then larger, and then beyond counting. Alternate translation: "There are 60 queens, 80 concubines ... more young women than anyone could count" or "There are many queens, even more concubines, and more young women than anyone could count" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/translate-numbers\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-idiom\]\]](#)) (See: **Numbers (p.184)**)

Song of Solomon 6:9

My dove

The Israelites considered doves beautiful birds with pleasant voices. The man thinks the woman's face and voice are beautiful. If calling a woman a "dove" would be offensive, you could leave out the metaphor. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 2:14](#). Alternate translation: "You beautiful woman" (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

my undefiled

"my perfect one" or "my faithful one" or "my innocent one." See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 5:2](#).

the only daughter of her mother

This is an exaggeration. Alternate translation: "her mother's special daughter" or "completely different from her mother's other daughters" (See: **Hyperbole (p.167)**) (See: **Hyperbole (p.167)**)

the woman who bore her

"the woman who gave birth to her." This phrase refers to her mother.

young women & queens & concubines

the women spoken of in [Song of Songs 6:8](#).

called her blessed

Alternate translation: "said that things had gone especially well for her"

Song of Solomon 6:10

General Information:

General Information:

The ULT understands this to be what the queens and the concubines said about the woman. However, some versions understand these to be the words of the man.

Who is this who appears like the dawn & banners?

They are using this question to say that they think the young woman is amazing. Alternate translation: "This is an amazing woman! She comes into view like the dawn ... banners!" (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.194)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.194)**)

who appears like the dawn

The dawn is beautiful. The woman is beautiful. Alternate translation: "who comes into view like the dawn" (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

as awe-inspiring as an army with its banners

The beauty of the woman is so powerful that it makes the other women feel helpless, as if an army were approaching them. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 6:4](#). (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

Song of Solomon 6:11

General Information:

General Information:

The man finishes speaking to himself. Looking to see if plants had matured is probably a metaphor for enjoying the sight of the woman's body. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

grove

See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 4:13](#).

young growth

Alternate translation: "young plants" or "new shoots"

had budded

"had grown their buds." Buds are the small round parts of plants which open up into flowers.

were in bloom

Alternate translation: "were opening their flowers"

Song of Solomon 6:12

I was so happy that I felt I was riding in the chariot of a prince

The man uses this image to express how happy he is. (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

Song of Solomon 6:13

General Information:

General Information:

This is 7:1, the first verse of chapter seven, in some versions. The ULT understands this to be the friends and the woman talking to each other. Some versions understand this to be the man speaking to the woman.

Turn back & gaze on you

Possible meanings here are: (1) the friends are speaking to the woman or (2) the man is referring to himself in plural. (See: **Pronouns (p.192)**) (See: **Pronouns (p.192)**)

Turn back, turn back

“Come back, come back.” This is repeated for emphasis.

we may gaze

Some versions understand the plural to refer to the man speaking of himself. Alternate translation: “I may gaze” (See: **Pronouns (p.192)**) (See: **Pronouns (p.192)**)

gaze

look intently for a long time

Why do you gaze on the perfect woman & armies

Possible meanings here are: (1) the woman refers to herself as another person and is speaking to the friends or (2) the woman is speaking to the man as if he were many men. (See: **Pronouns (p.192)**) (See: **Pronouns (p.192)**)

as if on the dance between two armies

Alternate translation: “as if she were dancing between two armies”

Song of Solomon 7

Song of Songs 7 General Notes

Special concepts in this chapter

Beauty

The woman is described as the epitome of beauty in ancient Israel. Not all cultures share the same the same standards of beauty.

Important figures of speech in this chapter

Similes

There are many similes in this chapter. Their purpose is to describe the beauty of the woman. (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

Song of Solomon 7:1

General Information:

General Information:

This is 7:2, the second verse of chapter seven, in some versions.

How beautiful your feet appear in your sandals

It may be that the woman is dancing ([Song of Songs 6:13](#)). Alternate translation: “Your feet are so very beautiful in your sandals as you dance” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.144)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.144)**)

prince’s daughter

Another possible interpretation is “you who have a noble character.”

The curves of your thighs are like jewels

The shape of the woman’s thighs remind the speaker of a beautiful precious stone that a skilled workman has carved. Alternate translation: “The curves of your thighs are beautiful like the beautiful curves of jewel that a skilled craftsman has made” (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

your thighs

The word “thighs” refers to the hips of a woman and the part of her legs that is above her knee.

the work of the hands of a master craftsman

The hands are a synecdoche for the person. Alternate translation: “the work of a master craftsman” or “something that a master craftsman has made” (See: **Synecdoche (p.200)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.200)**)

Song of Solomon 7:2

Your navel is like a round bowl

A bowl is round. The woman's navel is round. (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

navel

the spot on the stomach left from the cord that attaches a baby to its mother

may it never lack mixed wine

People used large bowls to mix wine with water or spices at feasts. Drinking wine is a metaphor for enjoying beauty. The litotes can be translated as a positive. Alternate translation: "may it always contain mixed wine" or "may I always enjoy its beauty" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-litotes\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

Your belly is like a mound of wheat encircled with lilies

The Israelites thought mounds of wheat and lilies were pleasant to look at. Much wheat was a sign that there would be much food to eat. They threshed wheat in high, dry places, and lilies grow in low, wet places, so this simile combines beautiful sights that people would not usually see at the same time. (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

Your belly is like a mound of wheat

People thought that the color of wheat was the most beautiful color of skin and that round piles of wheat were beautiful. Alternate translation: "Your belly has a beautiful color and is round like a pile of wheat" (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

a mound of wheat

This is a pile of the grains of wheat after people remove the parts of it that they do not use.

encircled with lilies

Alternate translation: "with lilies all around it"

lilies

sweet-smelling flowers that grow in places where there is much water. Translate as the plural of "lily" in [Song of Songs 2:1](#).

Song of Solomon 7:3

two breasts

If the word “two” seems unnecessary and so out of place, you could omit it. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 4:5](#).

like two fawns, twins of a gazelle

The man implies that the woman’s breasts are matching, soft, and perhaps small. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 4:5](#). (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

twins

the babies of a mother who gave birth to two babies at one time. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 4:5](#).

gazelle

an animal that looks like a deer and moves quickly. Translate as the singular of “gazelles” as in [Song of Songs 2:7](#).

Song of Solomon 7:4

Your neck is like a tower of ivory

A tower is long and straight. Ivory is white. The woman's neck is long and straight, and her skin is light in color. (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

a tower of ivory

Alternate translation: "a tower that people have decorated with ivory"

ivory

the white tusk or tooth of an animal that is similar to bone. People use ivory to make art and to make things look beautiful.

your eyes are the pools in Heshbon

The woman's eyes are spoken of as if they are clear pools of water. Pools of water are clear and sparkle in the sunlight and so are pleasant to look at. The woman's eyes are clear and sparkle and so are pleasant to look at. This can be stated as a simile. Alternate translation: "your eyes are as clear as the pools in Heshbon" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-simile\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

Heshbon

This is the name of a city east of the Jordan River (See: **How to Translate Names (p.163)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.163)**)

Bath Rabbim

This is the name of a city. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.163)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.163)**)

nose is like the tower in Lebanon

A tower is tall and straight, and her nose is tall and straight. (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

that looks toward Damascus

The tower looking is a metonym for people on the tower looking. Alternate translation: "that allows people to look toward Damascus" (See: **Metonymy (p.182)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.182)**)

Song of Solomon 7:5

Your head is on you like Carmel

Mount Carmel is higher than everything else around it. The man wants to look at the woman's head more than at anything else. Alternate translation: "Your head is on you like a crown, higher than anything else" (See: **Simile (p. 197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

dark purple

Other possible translations are: (1) "dark black" or (2) "dark red."

The king is held captive by its tresses

This can be translated in active form. Alternate translation: "Your hair that hangs down is so beautiful that the king is not able to stop admiring it" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

tresses

the clusters of hair that hang down from a woman's head

Song of Solomon 7:6

my love, with delights

Alternate translation: "my love. You delight me"

Song of Solomon 7:7

General Information:

General Information:

The man describes what he would like to do with the woman .

Your height is like that of a date palm tree

"You stand up like a date palm tree." Date palm trees are tall and straight, and their branches are only at the top, with the fruit under the branches. (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

date palm tree

a tall, straight tree that produces a sweet, brown, and sticky fruit that grows in groups

your breasts like clusters of fruit

The dates on a palm tree grow soft and round in large bunches that hang from the tree just below the branches, which are all at the top. The woman's breasts are soft and round and are just lower than her arms. (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

Song of Solomon 7:8

I said

“I thought” or “I said to myself.” The man said this silently.

I want to climb & its branches

The man wants to embrace the woman. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

May your breasts be like clusters of grapes

The man wants to touch her breasts. Clusters of grapes are round and soft. (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

may the fragrance of your nose be like apricots

The word “nose” is a metonym for the breath coming out of the nose. Alternate translation: “may the breath coming from your nose smell sweet like apricots” (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

apricots

sweet yellow fruit

Song of Solomon 7:9

May your palate be like the best wine

The palate is a metonym for the lips. Wine tastes good. The man wants to kiss the woman's lips. (See: [[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy]] and [[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-simile]]) (See: **Metonymy (p.182)**)

flowing smoothly for my beloved

“that flows smoothly for the one I love.” The man enjoys the smooth kisses of the woman.

gliding over the lips of those who sleep

Alternate translation: “that flows over our lips as we sleep”

Song of Solomon 7:10

I am my beloved's

See how you translated a similar phrase in [Song of Songs 6:3](#).

my beloved's

This phrase refers to the man whom the woman loves. In some languages it may be more natural for her to refer to him as "my lover." See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:13](#). Alternate translation: "my dear one's" or "my lover's"

he desires me

Alternate translation: "he wants to make love to me" or "he wants me"

Song of Solomon 7:11

spend the night in the villages

Though the words here translated “spends the night” and “villages” appear together in [Song of Songs 1:13-14](#) as “spends the night” and “henna flowers,” and the context both here and there is lovemaking, the ULT chooses this reading because the immediate metaphor is of the man and woman sleeping in the village, rising in the morning, and going out into the vineyards. The word for “henna plants” and the word for “villages” sound exactly the same.

Song of Solomon 7:12

rise early

Alternate translation: "get up early" or "wake up early"

have budded

Alternate translation: "have begun to bloom"

blossoms

flowers when they are open

are in flower

Alternate translation: "have flowers open on the plant"

I will give you my love

Alternate translation: "I will make love with you"

Song of Solomon 7:13

mandrakes

This is the name of plants that give off a strong but pleasant scent. The scent is slightly intoxicating and stimulating, which increases the desire to make love. (See: **Translate Unknowns (p.202)**) (See: **Translate Unknowns (p.202)**)

give off their fragrance

Alternate translation: “produce their scent” or “smell very nice”

at the door

The doors belong to their house. Alternate translation: “above the entrances of our house” or “by the doors of our house” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.144)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.144)**)

are all sorts of choice fruits, new and old

Alternate translation: “is every kind of the best fruit, both old fruit and new fruit”

stored up for you

Alternate translation: “saved so I can give to you”

my beloved

This phrase refers to the man whom the woman loves. In some languages it may be more natural for her to refer to him as “my lover.” See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:13](#). Alternate translation: “my dear one” or “my lover”

Song of Solomon 8

Song of Songs 8 General Notes

Special concepts in this chapter

Kisses

The kisses in this chapter are a type of kiss that was only done between a husband a wife. It is an intimate kiss.
(See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.144)**)

Passion

The chapter describes the passion that can exist between a husband a wife. This is the feeling of strong or uncontrollable desire for another person.

Song of Solomon 8:1

General Information:

General Information:

See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/writing-poetry\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#) (See: **Poetry (p.189)**)

you were like my brother

A woman could show affection for her brother in public. This woman wanted to be able to show affection for the man in public. (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

you outside

Alternate translation: "you in public"

I could kiss you

A woman would probably kiss her brother on his cheek order to greet him.

would despise me

Alternate translation: "would think that I am a bad person"

Song of Solomon 8:2

she who taught me

taught her how to make love (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.144)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.144)**)

I would give you spiced wine to drink and some of the juice of my pomegranates

The woman uses these images to say that she will give herself to the man and make love with him. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

spiced wine

“wine with spices” or “wine that has spices in it.” This represents the intoxicating power of lovemaking. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

Song of Solomon 8:3

His left hand & embraces me

See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 2:6](#).

left hand & right hand

Alternate translation: "left arm ... right arm"

embraces me

Alternate translation: "holds me"

Song of Solomon 8:4

I want you to swear

See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 2:7](#)

daughters of Jerusalem

“young women of Jerusalem.” These young women could not hear her and were not present, but the woman speaks as if they were present and could hear her. See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 2:7](#). (See: **Apostrophe (p.142)**) (See: **Apostrophe (p.142)**)

that you will & until it pleases

See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 2:7](#).

Song of Solomon 8:5

General Information:

General Information:

The fifth part of the book begins here.

Who is this who is coming up

They are using this question to say that they think the young woman is amazing. A similar phrase was translated in [Song of Songs 6:10](#). Alternate translation: "Look at this amazing woman as she comes up" (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.194)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.194)**)

I awakened you

Alternate translation: "I woke you up" or "I aroused you"

the apricot tree

a tree that produces a small yellow fruit that is very sweet. If your readers will not know what this is, you could use the word for another fruit tree or the general word "fruit tree." See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 2:3](#).

there

under the apricot tree

she delivered you

Alternate translation: "she bore you"

Song of Solomon 8:6

Set me as a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm

This could mean: (1) because seals were very important, people always kept them around their neck or on their hand. The woman wants to be with the man constantly like a seal, or (2) a seal shows who owns the thing that has the seal on it, and the woman wants herself as the seal on the man's heart and arm to show that all of his thoughts, emotions, and actions belong to her. (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-simile\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

for love is as strong as death

Death is very strong because it overcomes even the most powerful people of the world. (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

as unrelenting as Sheol

"as tough as Sheol." Sheol never allows people to come back to life after they have already died. Love is as persistent as Sheol because it never changes. (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

its flames burst out & any other fire

Love is very powerful like fire. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

burst out

Alternate translation: "burn suddenly"

Song of Solomon 8:7

Surging waters cannot quench love

Love is so strong that it is like a fire that is so hot that it cannot be put out even with an ocean full of water. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

Surging waters

Alternate translation: "Oceans of water" or "Huge amounts of water"

cannot quench

Alternate translation: "cannot extinguish" or "cannot put out"

nor can floods sweep it away

Love never changes and always stays the same so it is like something that not even a powerful flood can move. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

floods

In Israel, water from the rain flows into deep and narrow valleys. This creates a flood of water so powerful that it can move huge boulders and trees.

sweep it away

Alternate translation: "carry it away" or "wash it away"

If a man gave & the offer would utterly be despised

This is something that could possibly happen. Alternate translation: "Even if a man ... he would be utterly despised" (See: **Hypothetical Situations (p.171)**) (See: **Hypothetical Situations (p.171)**)

gave

offered to give

all the possessions in his house

Alternate translation: "everything he owns"

for love

Alternate translation: "in order to get love" or "in order to buy love"

the offer would utterly be despised

This can be translated in active form. Alternate translation: “people would completely despise him” or “people would harshly ridicule him” (See: **Active or Passive (p.139)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.139)**)

Song of Solomon 8:8

little sister

Alternate translation: "young sister"

What can we do & in marriage?

The speaker uses this question to introduce what he wants to say. Alternate translation: "This is what we will do ... in marriage." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.194)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.194)**)

she will be promised in marriage

This can be translated in active form. Alternate translation: "a man comes and wants to marry her" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-idiom\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive\]\]](#)) (See: **Idiom (p.174)**)

Song of Solomon 8:9

General Information:

General Information:

The young woman's brothers continue to speak among themselves.

If she is a wall & If she is a door

The little sister ([Song of Songs 8:8](#)) has very small breasts that either have not grown or are very small. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

we will build on her a tower of silver & we will adorn her with boards of cedar

The brothers decide to decorate the little sister with silver and cedar, symbols of riches, so that she will be more likely to attract a good husband. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

will adorn her

Alternate translation: "will decorate her"

Song of Solomon 8:10

I was a wall

The wall is a metaphor for a woman with small breasts. (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

my breasts are now like fortress towers

Fortress towers are tall. (See: **Simile (p.197)**) (See: **Simile (p.197)**)

I am in his eyes as one

Here eyes are a metonym for judgment or value. Alternate translation: “I am in his judgment as one” or “he thinks of me as one” (See: **Metonymy (p.182)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.182)**)

brings peace

You may need to make explicit to whom the woman brings peace. Alternate translation: “brings him peace” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.144)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.144)**)

peace

Alternate translation: “well-being”

Song of Solomon 8:11

General Information:

General Information:

Possible interpretations: (1) The woman contrasts the way she wants to give herself to the man, who will give her his love, to the way Solomon leases out his vineyard to those who will give him money. (2) The man contrasts the woman, whom he will not give to another man, to Solomon's vineyard, which he gave to other men.

Baal Hamon

This is the name of a town in the northern part of Israel. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.163)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.163)**)

gave the vineyard

leased, agreed to let other people pay him so they could grow grapes in the vineyard

to those who would maintain it

Alternate translation: "to people who would take care of it"

Each one was to bring a thousand shekels of silver for its fruit

It may be helpful to state that this payment was for the fruit of the vineyard. Alternate translation: "Each man was supposed to give Solomon a thousand shekels as payment for the fruit of the vineyard" (See: **Ellipsis (p.156)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.156)**)

to bring a thousand shekels of silver

"to bring 1,000 shekels of silver." (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/translate-bmoney\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/translate-numbers\]\]](#)) (See: **Biblical Money (p.150)**)

shekels

Alternate translation: "coins"

Solomon

Some versions understand the woman to be speaking directly to Solomon. Others understand her to be speaking in an apostrophe to her friends, to the man, or to herself. (See: **Apostrophe (p.142)**) (See: **Apostrophe (p.142)**)

Song of Solomon 8:12

My vineyard, my very own

The woman refers to herself as a vineyard, as in [Song of Songs 1:6](#). Here she emphasizes that she and no one else will decide what she does with the “vineyard.” (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)

is before me

This is an idiom that means that a person has the right to do what they want with something. Alternate translation: “is at my disposal” or “is mine to do with as I desire” (See: **Idiom (p.174)**) (See: **Idiom (p.174)**)

the thousand shekels are for you, Solomon

The woman knows that Solomon has leased out the vineyard so he can get money, but she does not want money.

the two hundred shekels

The speaker has not mentioned these before, but the hearer would understand that she is speaking of the money that those who worked the vineyard would have left for their own after they paid Solomon.

Song of Solomon 8:13

You who live

The man is speaking to the woman, so “you” and “live” are feminine singular. (See: **Forms of You (p.162)**) (See: **Forms of You (p.162)**)

listening for your voice

The voice is a metonym for what the person says. If your language has a word for thinking only of what one is listening for, you could use it here. Alternate translation: “waiting to hear you start speaking” or “waiting to hear what you have to say” (See: **Metonymy (p.182)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.182)**)

let me hear it

Alternate translation: “let me hear your voice.”

Song of Solomon 8:14

my beloved

This phrase refers to the man whom the woman loves. In some languages it may be more natural for her to refer to him as “my lover.” See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 1:13](#). Alternate translation: “my dear one” or “my lover”

like a gazelle or a young stag

See how you translated this in [Song of Songs 2:9](#).

gazelle

a type of slender deer-like animal with long curved horns

stag

an adult male deer

the mountains of spices

“the mountains that have spices all over them.” The woman uses this metaphor to invite the man to make love to her. See how the man uses the metaphor of a mountain of myrrh and a hill of frankincense in [Song of Songs 4:6](#). (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.176)**)



unfoldingWord® Translation Academy

Version 36

Abstract Nouns

Description

Abstract nouns are nouns that refer to attitudes, qualities, events, or situations. These are things that cannot be seen or touched in a physical sense, such as happiness, weight, unity, friendship, health, and reason. This is a translation issue because some languages may express a certain idea with an abstract noun, while others would need a different way to express it.

This page answers the question: *What are abstract nouns and how do I deal with them in my translation?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Parts of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Sentence Structure ([UTA PDF](#))

Remember that nouns are words that refer to a person, place, thing, or idea. Abstract nouns are the nouns that refer to ideas. These can be attitudes, qualities, events, situations, or even relationships between those ideas. These are things that cannot be seen or touched in a physical sense, such as joy, peace, creation, goodness, contentment, justice, truth, freedom, vengeance, slowness, length, weight, and many, many more.

Some languages, such as Biblical Greek and English, use abstract nouns a lot. They provide a way of giving names to actions or qualities. With names, people who speak these languages can talk about the concepts as though they were things. For example, in languages that use abstract nouns, people can say, "I believe in the forgiveness of sin."

But some languages do not use abstract nouns very much. In these languages, speakers may not have the two abstract nouns "forgiveness" and "sin," but they would express the same meaning in other ways. For example, they would express, "I believe that God is willing to forgive people after they have sinned," by using verb phrases instead of nouns for those ideas.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

The Bible that you translate from may use abstract nouns to express certain ideas. Your language might not use abstract nouns for some of those ideas. Instead, it might use phrases to express those ideas. Those phrases will use other kinds of words such as adjectives, verbs, or adverbs to express the meaning of the abstract noun. For example, "What is its **weight**?" could be expressed as "How much does it **weigh**?" or "How **heavy** is it?"

Examples From the Bible

From **childhood** you have known the sacred writings ... (2 Timothy 3:15a ULT)

The abstract noun "childhood" refers to when someone was a child.

But **godliness** with **contentment** is great **gain**. (1 Timothy 6:6 ULT)

The abstract nouns "godliness" and "contentment" refer to being godly and content. The abstract noun "gain" refers to something that benefits or helps someone.

Today **salvation** has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. (Luke 19:9 ULT)

The abstract noun "salvation" here refers to being saved.

The Lord does not move slowly concerning his promises, as some consider **slowness** to be (2 Peter 3:9a ULT)

The abstract noun "slowness" refers to the lack of speed with which something is done.

He will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the **purposes** of the heart. (1 Corinthians 4:5b ULT)

The abstract noun “purposes” refers to the things that people want to do and the reasons they want to do them.

Translation Strategies

If an abstract noun would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here is another option:

(1) Reword the sentence with a phrase that expresses the meaning of the abstract noun. Instead of a noun, the new phrase will use a verb, an adverb, or an adjective to express the idea of the abstract noun.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Reword the sentence with a phrase that expresses the meaning of the abstract noun. Instead of a noun, the new phrase will use a verb, an adverb, or an adjective to express the idea of the abstract noun. Alternative translations are indented below the Scripture example.

... from **childhood** you have known the sacred writings ... (2 Timothy 3:15a ULT)

Ever since **you were a child** you have known the sacred writings.

But **godliness** with **contentment** is great **gain**. (1 Timothy 6:6 ULT)

But **being godly** and **content** is very **beneficial**. But we **benefit** greatly when we **are godly** and **content**. But we **benefit** greatly when we **honor and obey God** and when we are **happy with what we have**.

Today **salvation** has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. (Luke 19:9 ULT)

Today the people in this house **have been saved** ... Today God **has saved** the people in this house ...

The Lord does not move slowly concerning his promises, as some consider **slowness** to be. (2 Peter 3:9a ULT)

The Lord does not move slowly concerning his promises, as some consider **moving slowly** to be.

He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the **purposes** of the heart. (1 Corinthians 4:5b ULT)

He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal **the things that people want to do and the reasons that they want to do them**.

”

Referenced in: [Song of Solomon 3:8](#)

Active or Passive

Some languages use both active and passive sentences. In active sentences, the subject does the action. In passive sentences, the subject is the one that receives the action. Here are some examples with their subjects bolded:

- Active: **My father** built the house in 2010.
- Passive: **The house** was built in 2010.

Translators whose languages do not use passive sentences will need to know how they can translate passive sentences that they find in the Bible. Other translators will need to decide when to use a passive sentence and when to use the active form.

This page answers the question: *What do active and passive mean, and how do I translate passive sentences?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Sentence Structure ([UTA PDF](#))

Verbs ([UTA PDF](#))

Description

Some languages have both active and passive forms of sentences.

- In the active form, the subject does the action and is always mentioned.
- In the passive form, the action is done to the subject, and the one who does the action is not always mentioned.

In the examples of active and passive sentences below, we have bolded the subject.

- active: **My father** built the house in 2010.
- passive: **The house** was built by my father in 2010.
- passive: **The house** was built in 2010. (This does not tell who did the action.)

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

All languages use active forms. Some languages use passive forms, and some do not. Some languages use passive forms only for certain purposes, and the passive form is not used for the same purposes in all of the languages that use it.

Purposes for the Passive

- The speaker is talking about the person or thing the action was done to, not about the person who did the action.
- The speaker does not want to tell who did the action.
- The speaker does not know who did the action.

Translation Principles Regarding the Passive

- Translators whose language does not use passive forms will need to find another way to express the idea.
- Translators whose language has passive forms will need to understand why the passive is used in a particular sentence in the Bible and decide whether or not to use a passive form for that purpose in his translation of the sentence.

Examples From the Bible

Then their shooters shot at your soldiers from off the wall, and some of the king's servants **were killed**, and your servant Uriah the Hittite **was killed** too. (2 Samuel 11:24 ULT)

This means that the enemy's shooters shot and killed some of the king's servants, including Uriah. The point is what happened to the king's servants and Uriah, not who shot them. The purpose of the passive form here is to keep the focus on the king's servants and Uriah.

When the men of the city arose early in the morning, and see, the altar of Baal **was torn down**.
(Judges 6:28a ULT)

The men of the town saw what had happened to the altar of Baal, but they did not know who broke it down. The purpose of the passive form here is to communicate this event from the perspective of the men of the town.

It would be better for him if a millstone **were put** around his neck and he **were thrown** into the sea. (Luke 17:2a ULT)

This describes a situation in which a person ends up in the sea with a millstone around his neck. The purpose of the passive form here is to keep the focus on what happens to this person. Who does these things to the person is not important.

Translation Strategies

If your language would use a passive form for the same purpose as in the passage that you are translating, then use a passive form. If you decide that it is better to translate without a passive form, here are some strategies that you might consider.

- (1) Use the same verb in an active sentence and tell who or what did the action. If you do this, try to keep the focus on the person receiving the action.
- (2) Use the same verb in an active sentence, and do not tell who or what did the action. Instead, use a generic expression like "they" or "people" or "someone."
- (3) Use a different verb.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use the same verb in an active sentence and tell who did the action. If you do this, try to keep the focus on the person receiving the action.

A loaf of bread **was given** him every day from the street of the bakers. (Jeremiah 37:21b ULT)

The king's servants gave Jeremiah a loaf of bread every day from the street of the bakers.

- (2) Use the same verb in an active sentence, and do not tell who did the action. Instead, use a generic expression like "they" or "people" or "someone."

It would be better for him if a millstone **were put** around his neck and he **were thrown** into the sea. (Luke 17:2a ULT)

It would be better for him if **they were to put** a millstone around his neck and **throw** him into the sea.

It would be better for him if **someone were to put** a heavy stone around his neck and **throw** him into the sea.

- (3) Use a different verb in an active sentence.

A loaf of bread **was given** him every day from the street of the bakers. (Jeremiah 37:21 ULT)

He **received** a loaf of bread every day from the street of the bakers.

[Abstract Nouns \(UTA PDF\)](#)

[Word Order \(UTA PDF\)](#)

Referenced in: [Song of Solomon 2:12](#); [Song of Solomon 4:2](#); [Song of Solomon 8:7](#)

Apostrophe

Description

An apostrophe is a figure of speech in which a speaker turns his attention away from his listeners and speaks to someone or something that he knows cannot hear him. He does this to tell his listeners his message or feelings about that person or thing in a very strong way.

This page answers the question: *What is the figure of speech called an apostrophe?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Many languages do not use apostrophe, and readers could be confused by it. They may wonder who the speaker is talking to, or think that the speaker is crazy to talk to things or people who cannot hear.

Examples from the Bible

Mountains of Gilboa, let there not be dew or rain on you. (2 Samuel 1:21a ULT)

King Saul was killed on Mount Gilboa, and David sang a sad song about it. By telling these mountains that he wanted them to have no dew or rain, he showed how sad he was.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those sent to you. (Luke 13:34a ULT)

Jesus was expressing his feelings for the people of Jerusalem in front of his disciples and a group of Pharisees. By speaking directly to Jerusalem as though its people could hear him, Jesus showed how deeply he cared about them.

He cried against the altar by the word of Yahweh: "**Altar, altar!** This is what Yahweh says, 'See, ... on you they will burn human bones.'" (1 Kings 13:2 ULT)

The man of God spoke as if the altar could hear him, but he really wanted the king, who was standing there, to hear him.

Translation Strategies

If apostrophe would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. But if this way of speaking would be confusing to your people, let the speaker continue speaking to the people that are listening to him as he tells **them** his message or feelings about the people or thing that cannot hear him. See the example below.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

He cried against the altar by the word of Yahweh: "**Altar, altar!** This is what Yahweh says, 'See, ... on you they will burn human bones.'" (1 Kings 13:2 ULT)

He said this about the altar: "This is what Yahweh says **about this altar**. 'See, ... they will burn people's bones on **it**.'"

Mountains of Gilboa, let there not be dew or rain on **you**. (2 Samuel 1:21a ULT)

As for these mountains of Gilboa, let there not be dew or rain on **them**.

"

Referenced in: [Song of Solomon 2:7](#); [Song of Solomon 3:5](#); [Song of Solomon 5:8](#); [Song of Solomon 5:16](#); [Song of Solomon 8:4](#); [Song of Solomon 8:11](#)

Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Assumed knowledge is whatever a speaker assumes his audience knows before he speaks and gives them some kind of information. The speaker does not give the audience this information because he believes that they already know it.

This page answers the question: *How can I be sure that my translation communicates the assumed knowledge and implicit information along with the explicit information of the original message?*

When the speaker does give the audience information, he can do so in two ways. The speaker gives explicit information in what he states directly. Implicit Information is what the speaker does not state directly because he expects his audience to be able to learn it from other things he says.

Description

When someone speaks or writes, he has something specific that he wants people to know or do or think about. He normally states this directly. This is explicit information.

The speaker assumes that his audience already knows certain things that they will need to think about in order to understand this information. Normally he does not tell people these things, because they already know them. This is called assumed knowledge.

The speaker does not always directly state everything that he expects his audience to learn from what he says. Implicit information is information that he expects people to learn from what he says even though he does not state it directly.

Often, the audience understands this implicit information by combining what they already know (assumed knowledge) with the explicit information that the speaker tells them directly.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

All three kinds of information are part of the speaker's message. If one of these kinds of information is missing, then the audience will not understand the message. Because the target translation is in a language that is very different from the biblical languages and is made for an audience that lives in a very different time and place than the people in the Bible, many times the assumed knowledge or the implicit information is missing from the message. In other words, modern readers do not know everything that the original speakers and hearers in the Bible knew. When these things are important for understanding the message, it is helpful if you include this information in the text or in a footnote.

Examples From the Bible

Then a scribe came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus said to him, "Foxes **have holes**, and the birds of the sky **have nests**, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matthew 8:19-20 ULT)

Jesus did not say what foxes and birds use holes and nests for, because he assumed that the scribe would have known that foxes sleep in holes in the ground and birds sleep in their nests. This is **assumed knowledge**.

Jesus did not directly say here "I am the Son of Man" but, if the scribe did not already know it, then that fact would be **implicit information** that he could learn because Jesus referred to himself that way. Also, Jesus did not state explicitly that he travelled a lot and did not have a house that he slept in every night. That is **implicit information** that the scribe could learn when Jesus said that he had nowhere to lay his head.

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the mighty deeds had been done in **Tyre and Sidon** which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But

I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the **day of judgment** than for you.
(Matthew 11:21-22 ULT)

Jesus assumed that the people he was speaking to knew that Tyre and Sidon were very wicked, and that the day of judgment is a time when God will judge every person. Jesus also knew that the people he was talking to believed that they were good and did not need to repent. Jesus did not need to tell them these things. This is all **assumed knowledge**.

An important piece of **implicit information** here is that the people he was speaking to would be judged more severely than the people of Tyre and Sidon would be judged **because** they did not repent.

Why do your disciples violate the traditions of the elders? For **they do not wash their hands when they eat bread**. (Matthew 15:2 ULT)

One of the traditions of the elders was a ceremony in which people would wash their hands in order to be ritually clean before eating. People thought that in order to be righteous, they had to follow all the traditions of the elders. This was **assumed knowledge** that the Pharisees who were speaking to Jesus expected him to know. By saying this, they were accusing his disciples of not following the traditions, and thus not being righteous. This is **implicit information** that they wanted him to understand from what they said.

Translation Strategies

If readers have enough assumed knowledge to be able to understand the message, along with any important implicit information that goes with the explicit information, then it is good to leave that knowledge unstated and leave the implicit information implicit. If the readers do not understand the message because one of these is missing for them, then follow these strategies:

- (1) If readers cannot understand the message because they do not have certain assumed knowledge, then provide that knowledge as explicit information.
- (2) If readers cannot understand the message because they do not know certain implicit information, then state that information clearly, but try to do it in a way that does not imply that the information was new to the original audience.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If readers cannot understand the message because they do not have certain assumed knowledge, then provide that knowledge as explicit information.

Jesus said to him, "Foxes **have holes**, and the birds of the sky **have nests**, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matthew 8:20 ULT)

The assumed knowledge was that the foxes slept in their holes and birds slept in their nests.

Jesus said to him, "Foxes **have holes to live in**, and the birds of the sky **have nests to live in**, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head and sleep."

It will be more tolerable for **Tyre and Sidon** at the day of judgment than for you (Matthew 11:22 ULT)

The assumed knowledge was that the people of Tyre and Sidon were very, very wicked. This can be stated explicitly.
>

At the day of judgment, it will be more tolerable for **those cities of Tyre and Sidon, whose people were very wicked**, than it will be for you. or At

the day of judgment, It will be more tolerable for those **wicked cities, Tyre and Sidon**, than for you.

Why do your disciples violate the traditions of the elders? For **they do not wash their hands** when they eat bread. (Matthew 15:2 ULT)

The assumed knowledge was that one of the traditions of the elders was a ceremony in which people would wash their hands in order to be ritually clean before eating, which they must do to be righteous. It was not to remove germs from their hands to avoid sickness, as a modern reader might think.

Why do your disciples violate the traditions of the elders? For **they do not go through the ceremonial handwashing ritual of righteousness** when they eat bread.

(2) If readers cannot understand the message because they do not know certain implicit information, then state that information clearly, but try to do it in a way that does not imply that the information was new to the original audience.

Then a scribe came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matthew 8:19-20 ULT)

The implicit information is that Jesus himself is the Son of Man. Other implicit information is that if the scribe wanted to follow Jesus, then, like Jesus, he would have to live without a house.

Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but **I, the Son of Man**, have **no home to rest in. If you want to follow me, you will live as I live.**"

It will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you (Matthew 11:22 ULT)

The implicit information is that God would not only judge the people; he would punish them. This can be made explicit.

At the day of judgment, God will **punish Tyre and Sidon**, cities whose people were very wicked, **less severely than he will punish you.**
or:

At the day of judgment, God will **punish you more severely** than Tyre and Sidon, cities whose people were very wicked.

Modern readers may not know some of the things that the people in the Bible and the people who first read it knew. This can make it hard for them to understand what a speaker or writer says, and to learn things that the speaker left implicit. Translators may need to state some things explicitly in the translation that the original speaker or writer left unstated or implicit.

Next we recommend you learn about:

Making Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information Explicit ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Song of Songs 1 General Notes](#); [Song of Songs 3 General Notes](#); [Song of Solomon 4:2](#); [Song of Solomon 5:2](#); [Song of Solomon 5:10](#); [Song of Solomon 6:1](#); [Song of Solomon 6:6](#); [Song of Solomon 7:1](#); [Song of Solomon 7:13](#); [Song of Songs 8 General Notes](#); [Song of Solomon 8:2](#); [Song of Solomon 8:10](#)

Background Information

Description

When people tell a story, they normally tell the events in the order that they happened. This sequence of events makes up the storyline. The storyline is full of action verbs that move the story along in time. But sometimes a writer may take a break from the storyline and give some information to help his listeners understand the story better. This type of information is called background information. The background information might be about things that happened before the events he has already told about, or it might explain something in the story, or it might be about something that would happen much later in the story.

This page answers the question: *What is background information, and how can I show that some information is background information?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Order of Events ([UTA PDF](#))

Writing Styles ([UTA PDF](#))

Example — The bolded phrases in the story below are all background information.

Peter and John went on a hunting trip because **their village was going to have a feast the next day. Peter was the best hunter in the village. He once killed three wild pigs in one day!** They walked for hours through low bushes until they heard a wild pig. The pig ran, but they managed to shoot the pig and kill it. Then they tied up its legs with some rope **they had brought with them** and carried it home on a pole. When they brought it to the village, Peter's cousin saw the pig and realized that it was his own pig. Peter had mistakenly killed his cousin's pig.

Background information often tells about something that had happened earlier or something that would happen much later. Examples of these are: "their village was going to have a feast the next day," "He once killed three wild pigs in one day," and "that they had brought with them."

Often background information uses "be" verbs like "was" and "were," rather than action verbs. Examples of these are "their village was going to have a feast the next day," and "Peter **was** the best hunter in the village."

Background information can also be marked with words that tell the reader that this information is not part of the event line of the story. In this story, some of these words are "because," "once," and "had."

A writer may use background information:

- to help their listeners be interested in the story
- to help their listeners understand something in the story
- to help the listeners understand why something is important in the story
- to tell the setting of a story
 - > * Setting includes:
 - > * where the story takes place
 - > * when the story takes place
 - > * who is present when the story begins
 - > * what is happening when the story begins

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- Languages have different ways of marking background information and storyline information.
- You (the translator) need to know the order of the events in the Bible, which information is background information, and which is storyline information.
- You will need to translate the story in a way that marks the background information in a way that your own readers will understand the order of events, which information is background information, and which is storyline information.

Examples From the Bible

Hagar gave birth to Abram's son, and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram **was 86 years old** when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. (Genesis 16:15-16 ULT)

The first sentence tells about two events. Hagar gave birth and Abraham named his son. The second sentence is background information about how old Abram was when those things happened.

And Jesus himself **was beginning about 30 years old**. He **was the son** (as it was assumed) of Joseph, of Heli, (Luke 3:23 ULT)

The verses before this tell about when Jesus was baptized. This sentence introduces background information about Jesus' age and ancestors. The story resumes in chapter 4 where it tells about Jesus going to the wilderness.

Then **it happened on a Sabbath** that he **was going through the grain fields**, and his disciples **were picking and eating the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands**. But some of the Pharisees said ... (Luke 6:1-2a ULT)

These verses give the setting of the story. The events took place in a grain field on the Sabbath day. Jesus, his disciples, and some Pharisees were there, and Jesus' disciples were picking heads of grain and eating them. The main action in the story starts with the phrase, "But some of the Pharisees said"

Translation Strategies

To keep translations clear and natural you will need to study how people tell stories in your language. Observe how your language marks background information. You may need to write down some stories in order to study this. Observe what kinds of verbs your language uses for background information and what kinds of words or other markers signal that something is background information. Do these same things when you translate, so that your translation is clear and natural and people can understand it easily.

- (1) Use your language's way of showing that certain information is background information.
- (2) Reorder the information so that earlier events are mentioned first. (This is not always possible when the background information is very long.)

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use your language's way of showing that certain information is background information. The examples below explain how this was done in the ULT English translations.

And Jesus himself **was** beginning about 30 years old. He **was** the son (as it was assumed) of Joseph, of Heli. (Luke 3:23 ULT)

As here, English sometimes uses the word "and" to show that there is some kind of change in the story. The verb "was" shows that it is background information.

Therefore, also exhorting many other things, he preached the good news to the people. But Herod the tetrarch, having been rebuked by him concerning Herodias, the wife of his brother, and **concerning all the evil things that Herod had done**, added even this to them all: He locked John up in prison. (Luke 3:18-20 ULT)

The bolded phrase happened before John rebuked Herod. In English, the helping verb "had" in "had done" shows that Herod did those things before John rebuked him.

- (2) Reorder the information so that earlier events are mentioned first.

Hagar gave birth to Abram's son, and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael.
Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. (Genesis 16:16 ULT)

"**When Abram was 86 years old**, Hagar gave birth to his son, and Abram named his son Ishmael."

Therefore, also exhorting many other things, he preached the good news to the people. But Herod the tetrarch, having been rebuked by him concerning Herodias, the wife of his brother, and **concerning all the evil things that Herod had done**, added even this to them all: He locked John up in prison. (Luke 3:18-20 ULT)

The translation below reorders John's rebuke and Herod's actions.

"Now Herod the tetrarch married his brother's wife, Herodias, and **he did many other evil things**, so John rebuked him. But then Herod did another very evil thing. He had John locked up in prison."

Next we recommend you learn about:

Connecting Words and Phrases ([UTA PDF](#))

Introduction of a New Event ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Song of Solomon 3:8](#); [Song of Solomon 3:10](#)

Biblical Money

Description

This page answers the question: *How can I translate the values of money in the Bible?*

In early Old Testament times, people weighed their metals, such as silver and gold, and would pay a certain weight of that metal in order to buy things. Later, people started to make coins that each contained a standard amount of a certain metal. The daric is one such coin. In New Testament times, people used silver and copper coins.

The two tables below show some of the most well-known units of money found in the Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT). The table for Old Testament units shows what kind of metal was used and how much it weighed. The table for New Testament units shows what kind of metal was used and how much it was worth in terms of a day's wage.

Unit in OT	Metal	Weight
daric	gold coin	8.4 grams
shekel	various metals	11 grams
talent	various metals	33 kilograms

Unit in NT	Metal	Day's Wage
denarius/denarii	silver coin	1 day
drachma	silver coin	1 day
mite	copper coin	1/64 day
shekel	silver coin	4 days
talent	silver	6,000 days

Translation Principle

Do not use modern money values since these change from year to year. Using them will cause the Bible translation to become outdated and inaccurate.

Translation Strategies

The value of most money in the Old Testament was based on its weight. So when translating these weights in the Old Testament, see [Biblical Weight](#). The strategies below are for translating the value of money in the New Testament.

- (1) Use the Bible term and spell it in a way that is similar to the way it sounds. (See [Copy or Borrow Words](#).)
- (2) Describe the value of the money in terms of what kind of metal it was made of and how many coins were used.
- (3) Describe the value of the money in terms of what people in Bible times could earn in one day of work.
- (4) Use the biblical term and give the equivalent amount in the text or a footnote.

(5) Use the biblical term and explain it in a footnote.

Translation Strategies Applied

The translations strategies are all applied to Luke 7:41 below.

▮ The one owed 500 denarii, and the other, 50. (Luke 7:41b ULT)

Use the Bible term and spell it in a way that is similar to the way it sounds. (See [Copy or Borrow Words.](#))

▮ "The one owed **500 denali**, and the other, **50**."

Describe the value of the money in terms of what kind of metal it was made of and how many pieces or coins were used.

▮ "The one owed **500 silver coins**, and the other, **50**."

(3) Describe the value of the money in terms of what people in Bible times could earn in one day of work.

▮ "The one owed **500 days' wages**, and the other, **50**."

(4) Use the Bible term and give the equivalent amount in the text or a footnote.

▮ "The one owed **500 denarii** 1, and the other owed **50 denarii**. 2"

The footnotes would look like:

▮ [1] 500 days' wages [2] 50 days' wages

(5) Use the Bible term and explain it in a footnote.

▮ "The one owed **500 denarii**,¹ and the other, **50**." (Luke 7:41 ULT)

▮ ^[1] A denarius was the amount of silver that people could earn in one day of work.

Next we recommend you learn about:

[Copy or Borrow Words \(UTA PDF\)](#)

[Translate Unknowns \(UTA PDF\)](#)

Referenced in: [Song of Solomon 8:11](#)

Direct and Indirect Quotations

Description

There are two kinds of quotations: direct quotations and indirect quotations.

A direct quotation occurs when someone reports what another person said from the viewpoint of that original speaker. People usually expect that this kind of quotation will represent the original speaker's exact words. In the example below, John would have said "I" when referring to himself, so the narrator, who is reporting John's words, uses the word "I" in the quotation to refer to John. To show that these are John's exact words, many languages put the words between quotation marks: "".

- John said, "I do not know at what time I will arrive."

An indirect quotation occurs when a speaker reports what someone else said, but in this case, the speaker is reporting it from his own point of view instead and not from the original person's point of view. This kind of quotation usually contains changes in pronouns, and it often includes changes in time, in word choices, and in length. In the example below, the narrator refers to John as "he" in the quotation and uses the word "would" to replace the future tense, indicated by "will."

- John said that he did not know at what time he would arrive.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

In some languages, reported speech can be expressed by either direct or indirect quotations. In other languages, it is more natural to use one than the other. There may be a certain meaning implied by using one rather than the other. So for each quotation, translators need to decide whether it is best to translate it as a direct quotation or as an indirect quotation.

Examples From the Bible

The verses in the examples below contain both direct and indirect quotations. In the explanation below the verse, we have marked in bold the words that are quoted.

And he commanded him to tell no one, but, "Go, show yourself to the priest and offer a sacrifice for your cleansing, according to what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them."
(Luke 5:14 ULT)

- Indirect quote: He commanded him **to tell no one**,
- Direct quote: but told him, "**Go, show yourself to the priest ...**"

And being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, he answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with careful observation. Neither will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is among you." (Luke 17:20-21 ULT)

- Indirect quote: Being asked by the Pharisees **when the kingdom of God was coming**,
- Direct quote: he answered them and said, "**The kingdom of God is not coming with careful observation. Neither will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is among you.**"
- Direct quotes: Neither will they say, '**Look, here it is!**' or, '**There it is!**'

This page answers the question: *What are direct and indirect quotations?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Pronouns ([UTA PDF](#))

Verbs ([UTA PDF](#))

Quotations and Quote Margins ([UTA PDF](#))

Translation Strategies

If the kind of quote used in the source text would work well in your language, consider using it. If the kind of quote used in that context is not natural for your language, follow these strategies.

- (1) If a direct quote would not work well in your language, change it to an indirect quote.
- (2) If an indirect quote would not work well in your language, change it to a direct quote.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If a direct quote would not work well in your language, change it to an indirect quote.

And he commanded him to tell no one, but, **“Go, show yourself to the priest and offer a sacrifice for your cleansing, according to what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.”** (Luke 5:14 ULT)

He commanded him to tell no one, but **to go and show himself to the priest and offer a sacrifice for his cleansing according to what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.**

- (2) If an indirect quote would not work well in your language, change it to a direct quote.

And he commanded him **to tell no one**, but, “Go, show yourself to the priest and offer a sacrifice for your cleansing, according to what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.” (Luke 5:14 ULT)

He commanded him, **“Tell no one.** But go and show yourself to the priest and offer a sacrifice for your cleansing according to what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.”

You may also want to watch the video at https://ufw.io/figs_quotations.

Next we recommend you learn about:

Quotes within Quotes ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Song of Solomon 5:3](#)

Doublet

Description

We are using the word “doublet” to refer to two words or phrases that are used together and either mean the same thing or mean very close to the same thing. Often they are joined with the word “and.” Unlike [Hendiadys](#), in which one of the words modifies the other, in a doublet the two words or phrases are equal and are used to emphasize or intensify the one idea that is expressed by the two words or phrases.

This page answers the question: *What are doublets and how can I translate them?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

A very similar issue is the repetition of the same word or phrase for emphasis, usually with no other words between them. Because these figures of speech are so similar and have the same effect, we will treat them here together.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

In some languages people do not use doublets. Or they may use doublets, but only in certain situations, so a doublet might not make sense in their language in some verses. People might think that the verse is describing two ideas or actions, when it is only describing one. In this case, translators may need to find some other way to express the meaning expressed by the doublet.

Examples From the Bible

He has one people **scattered** and **dispersed** among the peoples (Esther 3:8 ULT)

The bolded words mean the same thing. Together they mean the people were spread out.

He attacked two men **more righteous** and **better** than himself. (1 Kings 2:32b ULT)

This means that they were “much more righteous” than he was.

You have decided to prepare **false** and **deceptive** words. (Daniel 2:9b ULT)

This means that they had decided to lie, which is another way of saying that they intended to deceive people.

... like of a lamb **without blemish** and **without spot**. (1 Peter 1:19b ULT)

This means that he was like a lamb that did not have any defect—not even one.

Then they approached {and} woke him up, saying, “**Master! Master!** We are perishing!” (Luke 8:24 ULT)

The repetition of “Master” means that the disciples called to Jesus urgently and continually.

Translation Strategies

If a doublet would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, consider these strategies.

(1) Translate only one of the words or phrases.

(2) If the doublet is used to intensify the meaning, translate one of the words or phrases and add a word that intensifies it such as “very” or “great” or “many.”

(3) If the doublet is used to intensify or emphasize the meaning, use one of your language's ways of doing that.

Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Translate only one of the words.

You have decided to prepare **false** and **deceptive** words. (Daniel 2:9b ULT)

"You have decided to prepare **false** things to say."

(2) If the doublet is used to intensify the meaning, translate one of the words and add a word that intensifies it such as "very" or "great" or "many."

He has one people **scattered** and **dispersed** among the peoples (Esther 3:8 ULT)

"He has one people **very spread out**."

(3) If the doublet is used to intensify or emphasize the meaning, use one of your language's ways of doing that.

... like a lamb **without blemish** and **without spot**. (1 Peter 1:19b ULT)

- English can emphasize this with "any" and "at all."

"... like a lamb **without any blemish at all**."

Then they approached {and} woke him up, saying, "**Master! Master!** We are perishing!" (Luke 8:24 ULT)

Then they approached {and} woke him up, **urgently shouting, "Master!**
We are perishing!"

"

Referenced in: [Song of Solomon 2:7](#); [Song of Solomon 3:5](#); [Song of Solomon 3:7](#)

Ellipsis

Description

An ellipsis^[1] occurs when a speaker or writer leaves out one or more words that normally should be in the sentence. The speaker or writer does this because he knows that the hearer or reader will understand the meaning of the sentence and supply the words in his mind when he hears or reads the words that are there. For example:

So the wicked will not stand in the judgment, **nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous**.
(Psalm 1:5 ULT)

There is ellipsis in the second part because “nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous” is not a complete sentence. The speaker assumes that the hearer will understand what it is that sinners will not do in the assembly of the righteous by filling in the action from the previous clause. With the action filled in, the complete sentence would read:

So the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor **will** sinners **stand** in the assembly of the righteous.

Two Types of Ellipsis

A Relative Ellipsis happens when the reader has to supply the omitted word or words from the context. Usually the word is in the previous sentence, as in the example above.

An Absolute Ellipsis happens when the omitted word or words are not in the context, but the phrases are common enough in the language that the reader is expected to supply what is missing from this common usage or from the nature of the situation.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Readers who see incomplete sentences or phrases may not know that there is information missing that the writer expects them to fill in. Or readers may understand that there is information missing, but they may not know what information is missing because they do not know the original biblical language, culture, or situation as the original readers did. In this case, they may fill in the wrong information. Or readers may misunderstand the ellipsis if they do not use ellipsis in the same way in their language.

Examples From the Bible

Relative Ellipsis

He makes Lebanon skip like a calf **and Sirion like a young ox**. (Psalm 29:6 ULT)

The writer wants his words to be few and to make good poetry. The full sentence with the information filled in would be:

He makes Lebanon skip like a calf and **he makes** Sirion **skip** like a young ox.

Watch carefully, therefore, how you walk—**not as unwise but as wise**. (Ephesians 5:15b ULT)

The information that the reader must understand in the second parts of these sentences can be filled in from the first parts:

This page answers the question: *What is ellipsis ?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Sentence Structure ([UTA PDF](#))

Watch carefully, therefore, how you walk—**walk** not as unwise but **walk** as wise,

Absolute Ellipsis

Then when he had come near, he asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And so he said, “Lord, **that I might recover my sight.**” (Luke 18:40b-41 ULT)

It seems that the man answered in an incomplete sentence because he wanted to be polite and not directly ask Jesus for healing. He knew that Jesus would understand that the only way he could receive his sight would be for Jesus to heal him. The complete sentence would be:

“Lord, **I want you to heal me so** that I might receive my sight.”

To Titus, a true son in our common faith. Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. (Titus 1:4 ULT)

The writer assumes that the reader will recognize this common form of a blessing or wish, so he does not need to include the full sentence, which would be:

To Titus, a true son in our common faith. **May you receive** grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

Translation Strategies

If ellipsis would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here is another option:

(1) Add the missing words to the incomplete phrase or sentence.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Add the missing words to the incomplete phrase or sentence.

So the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor **sinners in the assembly** of the righteous. (Psalm 1:5 ULT)

So the wicked will not stand in the judgment, and **sinners will not stand in the assembly** of the righteous.

Then when he had come near, he asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And so he said, “Lord, **that I might recover my sight.**” (Luke 18:40b-41 ULT)

Then when the man was near, Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, **I want you to heal me** that I might receive my sight.”

He makes Lebanon skip like a calf **and Sirion like a young ox.** (Psalm 29:6 ULT)

He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and **he makes** Sirion **skip** like a young ox.

”

Referenced in: [Song of Solomon 3:6](#); [Song of Solomon 4:10](#); [Song of Solomon 5:2](#); [Song of Solomon 8:11](#)

Euphemism

Description

A euphemism is a mild or polite way of referring to something that is unpleasant, embarrassing, or socially unacceptable, such as death or activities usually done in private.

This page answers the question: *What is a euphemism?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

... they found Saul and his sons **fallen** on Mount Gilboa.
(1 Chronicles 10:8b ULT)

This means that Saul and his sons “were dead.” It is a euphemism because the important thing was not that Saul and his sons had fallen but that they were dead. Sometimes people do not like to speak directly about death because it is unpleasant.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Different languages use different euphemisms. If the target language does not use the same euphemism as in the source language, readers may not understand what it means and they may think that the writer means only what the words literally say.

Examples From the Bible

... where there was a cave. Saul went inside to **cover his feet**. (1 Samuel 24:3b ULT)

The original hearers would have understood that Saul went into the cave to use it as a toilet, but the writer wanted to avoid offending or distracting them, so **he did not say specifically** what Saul did or what he left in the cave.

But Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I have not **known a man?**” (Luke 1:34 ULT)

In order **to be polite**, Mary uses a euphemism to say that she has never had sexual intercourse with a man.

Translation Strategies

If euphemism would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here are other options:

- (1) Use a euphemism from your own culture.
- (2) State the information plainly without a euphemism if it would not be offensive.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use a euphemism from your own culture.

... where there was a cave. Saul went inside to **cover his feet**. (1 Samuel 24:3b ULT) — Some languages might use euphemisms like these:

“... where there was a cave. Saul went into the cave to **dig a hole**”

“... where there was a cave. Saul went into the cave to **have some time alone**”

But Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I have not **known a man?**” (Luke 1:34 ULT)

But Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I have not **slept with a man?**"

(2) State the information plainly without a euphemism if it would not be offensive.

They found Saul and his sons **fallen** on Mount Gilboa. (1 Chronicles 10:8b ULT)

"They found Saul and his sons **dead** on Mount Gilboa."

"

Referenced in: [Introduction to the Song of Songs](#); [Song of Songs 1 General Notes](#); [Song of Solomon 1:13](#); [Song of Songs 2 General Notes](#); [Song of Solomon 4:13](#); [Song of Solomon 5:2](#); [Song of Solomon 5:3](#); [Song of Solomon 5:4](#); [Song of Solomon 5:5](#)

Exclusive and Inclusive 'We'

Description

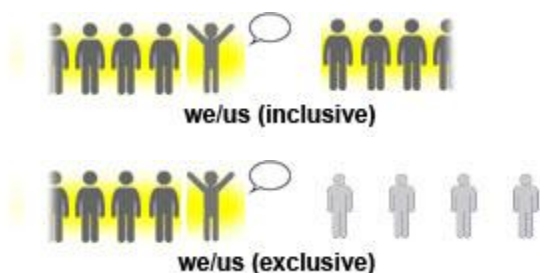
Some languages have more than one form of "we": an inclusive form that means "I and you" and an exclusive form that means "I and someone else but not you." The exclusive form excludes the person being spoken to. The inclusive form includes the person being spoken to and possibly others. This is also true for "us," "our," "ours," and "ourselves." Some languages have inclusive forms and exclusive forms for each of these. Translators whose language has separate exclusive and inclusive forms for these words will need to understand what the speaker meant so that they can decide which form to use.

This page answers the question: *What are the exclusive and inclusive forms of "we"?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[Pronouns \(UTA PDF\)](#)

See the pictures. The people on the right are the people that the speaker is talking to. The yellow highlight shows who the inclusive "we" and the exclusive "we" refer to.



Reason This Is a Translation Issue

The Bible was first written in the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages. Like English, these languages do not have separate exclusive and inclusive forms for "we." If your language has separate exclusive and inclusive forms of "we," then you will need to understand what the speaker meant so that you can decide which form of "we" to use.

Examples From the Bible

Exclusive

They said, "There are not more than five loaves of bread and two fish with us—unless **we** go and buy food for all these people." (Luke 9:13 ULT)

In the second clause, the disciples are talking about some of them going to buy food. They were speaking to Jesus, but Jesus was not going to buy food. So languages that have inclusive and exclusive forms of "we" would use the **exclusive** form there.

We have seen it, and **we** bear witness to it. **We** are announcing to you the eternal life, which was with the Father, and which has been made known to **us**. (1 John 1:2 ULT)

John is telling people who have not seen Jesus what he and the other apostles have seen. So languages that have inclusive and exclusive forms of "we" and "us" would use the **exclusive** forms in this verse.

Inclusive

The shepherds said one to each other, "Let **us** now go to Bethlehem, and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to **us**." (Luke 2:15b ULT)

The shepherds were speaking to one another. When they said "us," they were including the people they were speaking to, so languages that have inclusive and exclusive forms of "we" and "us" would use the **inclusive** form in this verse.

Now it happened that on one of those days, he indeed got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let **us** go over to the other side of the lake." So they set sail. (Luke 8:22 ULT)

When Jesus said "us," he was referring to himself and to the disciples he was speaking to, so languages that have inclusive and exclusive forms of "we" and "us" would use the **inclusive** form in this verse.

Next we recommend you learn about:

When Masculine Words Include Women ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Song of Solomon 1:4](#); [Song of Solomon 2:9](#); [Song of Solomon 2:15](#)

Forms of You

Singular, Dual, and Plural

Some languages have more than one word for “you” based on how many people the word “you” refers to. The **singular** form refers to one person, and the **plural** form refers to more than one person. Some languages also have a **dual** form which refers to two people, and some languages have other forms that refer to three or four people.

This page answers the question: *What are the different forms of you?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Forms of ‘You’ — Singular ([UTA PDF](#))

Forms of ‘You’ — Dual/Plural ([UTA PDF](#))

You may also want to watch the video at https://ufw.io/figs_younum.

Sometimes in the Bible a speaker uses a singular form of “you” even though he is speaking to a crowd.

- [Singular Pronouns that Refer to Groups](#)

Formal and Informal

Some languages have more than one form of “you” based on the relationship between the speaker and the person he is talking to. People use the **formal** form of “you” when speaking to someone who is older, or has higher authority, or is someone they do not know very well. People use the **informal** form when speaking to someone who is not older, or does not have higher authority, or is a family member or close friend.

You may also want to watch the video at https://ufw.io/figs_youform.

For help with translating these, we suggest you read:

- [Forms of “You” — Formal or Informal](#)

”

Referenced in: [Song of Solomon 1:4](#); [Song of Solomon 2:15](#); [Song of Solomon 8:13](#)

How to Translate Names

Description

The Bible contains the names of many people, groups of people, and places. Some of these names may sound strange and be hard to say. Sometimes readers may not know what a name refers to, and sometimes they may need to understand what a name means. This page will help you see how you can translate these names and how you can help people understand what they need to know about them.

This page answers the question: *How can I translate names that are new to my culture?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Translate Unknowns ([UTA PDF](#))

Meaning of names

Most names in the Bible have meaning. Most of the time, names in the Bible are used simply to identify the people and places they refer to, but sometimes the meaning of a name is especially important.

For this **Melchizedek**, king of Salem, priest of God Most High, was the one who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him. (Hebrews 7:1 ULT)

Here the writer uses the name “Melchizedek” primarily to refer to a man who had that name, and the title “king of Salem” tells us that he ruled over a certain city.

His name first indeed means “king of righteousness,” and then also “king of Salem,” that is, “king of peace.” (Hebrews 7:2b ULT)

Here the writer explains the meanings of Melchizedek’s name and title because those things tell us more about the person. Other times, the writer does not explain the meaning of a name because he expects the reader to already know the meaning. If the meaning of the name is important to understand the passage, you can include the meaning in the text or in a footnote.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- Readers may not know some of the names in the Bible. They may not know whether a name refers to a person or place or something else.
- Readers may need to understand the meaning of a name in order to understand the passage.
- Some names may have different sounds or combinations of sounds that are not used in your language or are unpleasant to say in your language. For strategies to address this problem, see [Borrow Words](#).
- Some people and places in the Bible have two names. Readers may not realize that two names refer to the same person or place.

Examples From the Bible

Then you crossed over the **Jordan** and came to **Jericho**, and the men of Jericho, and the **Amorites** ... fought against you, but I gave them into your hand. (Joshua 24:11 ULT)

Readers might not know that “Jordan” is the name of a river, “Jericho” is the name of a city, and “Amorites” is the name of a group of people.

She said, “Do I really continue to see, even after he has seen me?” Therefore, the well was called **Beer Lahai Roi**. (Genesis 16:13b-14a ULT)

Readers may not understand the second sentence if they do not know that “Beer Lahai Roi” means “Well of the Living One who sees me.”

And she called his name **Moses** and she said, “For out of the water I drew him.” (Exodus 2:10b ULT)

Readers may not understand why she said this if they do not know that the name Moses sounds like the Hebrew words “pull out.”

Saul was in agreement with his execution. (Acts 8:1a ULT)

But when the apostles, Barnabas and **Paul**, heard of it, they tore their clothing. (Acts 14:14a ULT)

Readers may not know that the names Saul and Paul refer to the same person.

Translation Strategies

- (1) If readers cannot easily understand from the context what kind of a thing a name refers to, you can add a word to clarify it.
- (2) If readers need to understand the meaning of a name in order to understand what is said about it, copy the name and tell about its meaning either in the text or in a footnote.
- (3) Or if readers need to understand the meaning of a name in order to understand what is said about it, and that name is used only once, translate the meaning of the name instead of copying the name.
- (4) If a person or place has two different names, use one name most of the time and the other name only when the text tells about the person or place having more than one name or when it says something about why the person or place was given that name. Write a footnote when the source text uses the name that is used less frequently.
- (5) Or if a person or place has two different names, then use whatever name is given in the source text, and add a footnote that gives the other name.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If readers cannot easily understand from the context what kind of a thing a name refers to, you can add a word to clarify it.

Then you crossed over the **Jordan** and came to **Jericho**, and the men of Jericho, and the **Amorites** ... fought against you, but I gave them into your hand. (Joshua 24:11 ULT)

You went over the **Jordan River** and came to the **city of Jericho**. The men of Jericho fought against you, along with **the tribe of the Amorites**.

At that hour, certain Pharisees approached, saying to him, “Leave and go away from here, because **Herod** wants to kill you.” (Luke 13:31 ULT)

At that hour, certain Pharisees approached, saying to him, “Go and leave here, because **King Herod** wants to kill you.”

- (2) If readers need to understand the meaning of a name in order to understand what is said about it, copy the name and tell about its meaning either in the text or in a footnote.

And she called his name **Moses** and she said, “For out of the water I drew him.” (Exodus 2:10b ULT)

She called his name **Moses (which sounds like ‘drawn out’)**, and she said,
“For out of the water I drew him.”

(3) Or if readers need to understand the meaning of a name in order to understand what is said about it, and that name is used only once, translate the meaning of the name instead of copying the name.

She said, “Do I really continue to see, even after he has seen me?” Therefore, the well was called **Beer Lahai Roi**. (Genesis 16:13b-14a ULT)

She said, “Do I really continue to see, even after he has seen me?”
Therefore, the well was called **Well of the Living One who sees me**.

(4) If a person or place has two different names, use one name most of the time and the other name only when the text tells about the person or place having more than one name or when it says something about why the person or place was given that name. Write a footnote when the source text uses the name that is used less frequently. For example, Paul is called “Saul” before Acts 13 and “Paul” after Acts 13. You could translate his name as “Paul” all of the time, except in Acts 13:9 where it talks about him having both names.

... a young man named **Saul**. (Acts 7:58b ULT)

... a young man named **Paul** ¹

The footnote would look like:

^[1] Most versions say “Saul” here, but most of the time in the Bible he is called “Paul.”

Then later in the story, you could translate this way:

But **Saul**, who is also called **Paul**, was filled with the Holy Spirit; (Acts 13:9)

But **Saul**, who is also called **Paul**, was filled with the Holy Spirit;

(5) Or if a person or place has two names, use whatever name is given in the source text, and add a footnote that gives the other name. For example, you could write “Saul” where the source text has “Saul” and “Paul” where the source text has “Paul.”

a young man named **Saul** (Acts 7:58 ULT)

a young man named **Saul**

The footnote would look like:

^[1] This is the same man who is called Paul beginning in Acts 13.

Then later in the story, you could translate this way:

But **Saul**, who is also called **Paul**, was filled with the Holy Spirit; (Acts 13:9)

But **Saul**, who is also called **Paul**, was filled with the Holy Spirit;

Then after the story has explained the name change, you could translate this way.

It came about in Iconium that **Paul** and Barnabas entered together into the synagogue (Acts 14:1 ULT)

It came about in Iconium that **Paul**¹ and Barnabas entered together into the synagogue

The footnote would look like:

[1] This is the same man who was called Saul before Acts 13.

Next we recommend you learn about:

Copy or Borrow Words ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Introduction to the Song of Songs](#); [Song of Solomon 4:8](#); [Song of Solomon 7:4](#); [Song of Solomon 8:11](#)

Hyperbole

Description

A speaker or writer can use exactly the same words to say something that he means as completely true, or as generally true, or as a hyperbole. This is why it can be hard to decide how to understand a statement. For example, the sentence below could mean three different things.

It rains here every night.

The speaker means this as literally true if he means that it really does rain here every night.

The speaker means this as a **generalization** if he means that it rains here most nights.

The speaker means this as a **hyperbole** if he wants to say that it rains more than it actually does, usually in order to express a strong attitude toward the amount or frequency of rain, such as being annoyed or being happy about it.

This page answers the question: *What are hyperboles? What are generalizations? How can I translate them?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Hyperbole

In hyperbole, a figure of speech that uses exaggeration, a speaker deliberately describes something with an extreme or even unreal statement, usually to show his strong feeling or opinion about it. He expects people to understand that he is exaggerating.

They will not leave **stone upon stone in you**. (Luke 19:44b ULT)

This is an exaggeration. It means that the enemies will completely destroy Jerusalem.

Moses was educated in **all the wisdom of the Egyptians**. (Acts 7:22a ULT)

This hyperbole means that he had learned everything an Egyptian education could offer.

Generalization

This is a statement that is true most of the time or in most situations that it could apply to.

The one who ignores instruction **will have poverty and shame**, but **honor will come** to him who learns from correction. (Proverbs 13:18)

These generalizations tell about what normally happens to people who ignore instruction and what normally happens to people who learn from correction. There may be some exceptions to these statements, but they are generally true.

And when you pray, do not make useless repetitions as **the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words**. (Matthew 6:7)

This generalization tells about what Gentiles were known for doing. Many Gentiles did this. It does not matter if a few did not. The point was that the hearers should not join in this well-known practice.

Even though a hyperbole or a generalization may have a strong-sounding word like "all," "always," "none," or "never," it does not necessarily mean **exactly** "all," "always," "none," or "never." It simply means "most," "most of the time," "hardly any," or "rarely."

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Readers need to be able to understand whether or not a statement is literally true.

If readers realize that a statement is not literally true, they need to be able to understand whether it is a hyperbole, a generalization, or a lie. (Though the Bible is completely true, it tells about people who did not always tell the truth.)

Examples From the Bible

Examples of Hyperbole

If your hand causes you to stumble, **cut it off**. It is better for you to enter into life maimed ... (Mark 9:43a ULT)

When Jesus said to cut off your hand, he meant that we should **do whatever extreme things** we need to do in order not to sin. He used this hyperbole to show how extremely important it is to try to stop sinning.

The Philistines gathered together to fight against Israel with 3,000 chariots, 6,000 men to drive the chariots, and troops **as numerous as the sand on the seashore**. (1 Samuel 13:5a ULT)

The bolded phrase is an exaggeration for the purpose of expressing the emotion that the Philistine army was overwhelming in number. It means that there were **many, many** soldiers in the Philistine army.

But as his anointing teaches you **everything** and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, remain in him. (1 John 2:27b ULT)

This is a hyperbole. It expresses the assurance that God's Spirit teaches us about **all things that we need to know**. God's Spirit does not teach us about everything that it is possible to know.

When they found him, they also said to him, "**Everyone** is looking for you." (Mark 1:37 ULT)

The disciples probably did not mean that everyone in the city was looking for Jesus, but that **many people** were looking for him, or that all of Jesus' closest friends there were looking for him. This is an exaggeration for the purpose of expressing the emotion that they and many others were worried about him.

Examples of Generalization

Can **any good thing** come out of Nazareth? (John 1:46b ULT)

This rhetorical question is meant to express the generalization that there is nothing good in Nazareth. The people there had a reputation for being uneducated and not strictly religious. Of course, there were exceptions.

One of them, of their own prophets, has said, "**Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy bellies**." (Titus 1:12 ULT)

This is a generalization that means that Cretans had a reputation to be like this because, in general, this is how Cretans behaved. It is possible that there were exceptions.

A lazy hand causes a person to be poor, but the hand of the diligent person gains riches. (Proverbs 10:4 ULT)

This is generally true, and it reflects the experience of most people. It is possible that there are exceptions in some circumstances.

Caution

- Do not assume that something is an exaggeration just because it seems to be impossible. God does miraculous things.

They saw Jesus **walking on the sea** and coming near the boat. (John 6:19b ULT)

This is not hyperbole. Jesus really walked on the water. It is a literal statement.

- Do not assume that the word “all” is always a generalization that means “most.”

> Yahweh is righteous in **all** his ways
> and gracious in **all** he does. (Psalms 145:17 ULT)

Yahweh is always righteous. This is a completely true statement.

Translation Strategies

If the hyperbole or generalization would be natural and people would understand it and not think that it is a lie, consider using it. If not, here are other options.

- (1) Express the meaning without the exaggeration.
- (2) For a generalization, show that it is a generalization by using a phrase like “in general” or “in most cases.”
- (3) For a hyperbole or a generalization, add a word like “many” or “almost” to show that the hyperbole or generalization is not meant to be exact.
- (4) For a hyperbole or a generalization that has a word like “all,” “always,” “none,” or “never,” consider deleting that word.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Express the meaning without the exaggeration.

The Philistines gathered together to fight against Israel: 3,000 chariots, 6,000 men to drive the chariots, and troops **as numerous as the sand on the seashore**. (1 Samuel 13:5a ULT)

The Philistines gathered together to fight against Israel: 3,000 chariots, 6,000 men to drive the chariots, and **a great number of troops**.

- (2) For a generalization, show that it is a generalization by using a phrase like “in general” or “in most cases.”

The one who ignores instruction will have poverty and shame. (Proverbs 13:18a ULT)

In general, the one who ignores instruction will have poverty and shame

When you pray, do not make useless repetitions as the **Gentiles do**, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. (Matthew 6:7 ULT)

And when you pray, do not make useless repetitions as the Gentiles **generally** do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.

- (3) For a hyperbole or a generalization, add a word like “many” or “almost” to show that the hyperbole or generalization is not meant to be exact.

The **whole** country of Judea and **all** the people of Jerusalem went out to him. (Mark 1:5a ULT)

Almost all the country of Judea and **almost all** the people of Jerusalem went out to him.
or:

Many of the country of Judea and **many** of the people of Jerusalem went out to him.

(4) For a hyperbole or a generalization that has a word like "all," "always," "none," or "never," consider deleting that word.

The **whole** country of Judea and **all** the people of Jerusalem went out to him. (Mark 1:5a ULT)

The country of Judea and the people of Jerusalem went out to him.

"

Referenced in: [Song of Solomon 1:6](#); [Song of Solomon 6:9](#)

Hypothetical Situations

Consider these phrases: “If the sun stopped shining ...” “What if the sun stopped shining ...” “Suppose the sun stopped shining ...” and “If only the sun had not stopped shining.” We use such expressions to set up hypothetical situations, imagining what might have happened or what could happen in the future but probably will not. We also use them to express regret or wishes. Hypothetical expressions occur often in the Bible. You (the translator) need to translate them in a way that people will know that the event did not actually happen and so that they will understand why the event was imagined.

This page answers the question: *What is a hypothetical situation?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Writing Styles ([UTA PDF](#))

Description

Hypothetical situations are situations that are not real. They can be in the past, present, or future. Hypothetical situations in the past and present have not happened, are not happening now, and ones in the future are not expected to happen.

People sometimes tell about conditions and what would happen if those conditions were met, but they know that these things have not happened or probably will not happen. (The conditions comprise a phrase that starts with “if.”)

- If he had lived to be 100 years old, he would have seen his grandson’s grandson. (But he did not.)
- If he lived to be 100 years old, he would still be alive today. (But he is not.)
- If he lives to be 100 years old, he will see his grandson’s grandson. (But he probably will not.)

People sometimes express wishes about things that have not happened or that are not expected to happen.

- I wish he had come.
- I wish he were here.
- I wish he would come.

People sometimes express regrets about things that have not happened or that are not expected to happen.

- If only he had come.
- If only he were here.
- If only he would come.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

- Translators need to recognize the different kinds of hypothetical situations in the Bible and understand that they are unreal.
- Translators need to know their own language’s ways of talking about different kinds of hypothetical situations.

Examples From the Bible

Hypothetical Situations in the Past

“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! **If the mighty deeds had been done** in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, **they would have repented** long ago in sackcloth and ashes.” (Matthew 11:21 ULT)

Here in Matthew 11:21, Jesus said that **if** the people living in the ancient cities of Tyre and Sidon had been able to see the miracles that he performed, they would have repented long ago. The people of Tyre and Sidon did not actually see his miracles, and they did not repent. He said this to rebuke the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida who had seen his miracles and yet did not repent.

Martha then said to Jesus, “Lord, **if you had been here, my brother would not have died.**” (John 11:21 ULT)

Martha said this to express her wish that Jesus would have come sooner so that her brother would not have died. But Jesus did not come sooner and her brother did die.

Hypothetical Situations in the Present

And no man puts new wine into old wineskins. **But if he did do that, the new wine would burst the wineskins, and it would be spilled out, and the wineskins would be destroyed.** (Luke 5:37 ULT)

Jesus told about what would happen if a person were to put new wine into old wineskins. But no one would do that. He used this imaginary situation as an example to show that there are times when it is unwise to mix new things with old things. He did this so that people could understand why his disciples were not fasting as people traditionally did.

Jesus said to them, “What man would there be among you, who, **if he had just one sheep, and if this sheep fell into a deep hole on the Sabbath, would not grasp hold of it and lift it out?**” (Matthew 12:11 ULT)

Jesus asked the religious leaders what they would do on the Sabbath if one of their sheep fell into a hole. He was not saying that their sheep would fall into a hole. He used this imaginary situation to show them that they were wrong to judge him for healing people on the Sabbath.

Hypothetical Situation in the Future

Unless those days are shortened, no flesh would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, those days will be shortened. (Matthew 24:22 ULT)

Jesus was talking about a future time when very bad things would happen. He told what would happen if those days of trouble were to last a long time. He did this to show how bad those days will be—so bad that if they lasted a long time, no one would be saved. But then he clarified that God will shorten those days of trouble so that the elect (those he has chosen) will be saved.

Expressing Emotion About a Hypothetical Situation

People sometimes talk about hypothetical situations in order to express regrets and wishes. Regrets are about the past and wishes are about the present and future.

The Israelites said to them, “**If only we had died by Yahweh’s hand in the land of Egypt when we were sitting by the pots of meat and were eating bread to the full.** For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill our whole community with hunger.” (Exodus 16:3 ULT)

Here the Israelites were afraid that they would have to suffer and die of hunger in the wilderness, and so they wished that they had stayed in Egypt and died there with full stomachs. They were complaining, expressing regret that this had not happened.

I know what you have done, and that you are neither cold nor hot. **I wish that you were either cold or hot!** (Revelation 3:15 ULT)

Jesus wished that the people were either hot or cold, but they are neither. He was rebuking them, expressing anger at this.

Translation Strategies

Find out how people speaking your language show:

- that something could have happened, but did not.
- that something could be true now, but is not.
- that something could happen in the future, but will not unless something changes.
- that they wish for something, but it does not happen.
- that they regret that something did not happen.

Use your language's ways of showing these kinds of things.

You may also want to watch the video at https://ufw.io/figs_hypo.

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Referenced in: [Song of Solomon 8:7](#)

Idiom

An idiom is a figure of speech made up of a group of words that, as a whole, has a meaning that is different from what one would understand from the meanings of the individual words. Someone from outside of the culture usually cannot understand an idiom without someone inside the culture explaining its true meaning. Every language uses idioms. Some English examples are:

- You are pulling my leg. (This means, “You are teasing me by telling me something that is not true.”)
- Do not push the envelope. (This means, “Do not take a matter to its extreme.”)
- This house is under water. (This means, “The debt owed for this house is greater than its actual value.”)
- We are painting the town red. (This means, “We are going around town tonight celebrating very intensely.”)

This page answers the question: *What are idioms and how can I translate them?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Description

An idiom is a phrase that has a special meaning to the people of the language or culture who use it. Its meaning is different than what a person would understand from the meanings of the individual words that form the phrase.

He **set his face** to go to Jerusalem. (Luke 9:51b ULT)

The words “set his face” is an idiom that means “decided.”

Sometimes people may be able to understand an idiom from another culture, but it might sound like a strange way to express the meaning.

I am not worthy that you would **come under my roof**. (Luke 7:6b ULT)

The phrase “come under my roof” is an idiom that means “enter my house.”

Put these words **into your ears**. (Luke 9:44a ULT)

This idiom means “Listen carefully and remember what I say.”

Purpose: An idiom is probably created in a culture somewhat by accident when someone describes something in an unusual way. But, when that unusual way communicates the message powerfully and people understand it clearly, other people start to use it. After a while, it becomes a normal way of talking in that language.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- People can easily misunderstand idioms in the original languages of the Bible if they do not know the cultures that produced the Bible.
- People can easily misunderstand idioms that are in the source language Bibles if they do not know the cultures that made those translations.
- It is useless to translate idioms literally (according to the meaning of each word) when the target language audience will not understand what they mean.

Examples From the Bible

Then all Israel came to David at Hebron and said, “Look, we are your **flesh and bone**.” (1 Chronicles 11:1 ULT)

This means, “We and you belong to the same race, the same family.”

■ The children of Israel went out **with a high hand**. (Exodus 14:8b ASV)

This means, "The Israelites went out defiantly."

■ the one who **lifts up my head** (Psalm 3:3b ULT)

This means, "the one who helps me."

Translation Strategies

If the idiom would be clearly understood in your language, consider using it. If not, here are some other options.

- (1) Translate the meaning plainly without using an idiom.
- (2) Use a different idiom that people use in your own language that has the same meaning.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Translate the meaning plainly without using an idiom.

■ Then all Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "Look, we are your **flesh and bone**." (1 Chronicles 11:1 ULT)

■ Look, we all **belong to the same nation**.

■ Then he **set his face** to go to Jerusalem. (Luke 9:51b ULT)

■ He started to travel to Jerusalem, **determined to reach it**.

■ I am not worthy that you would come **under my roof**. (Luke 7:6b ULT)

■ I am not worthy that you should enter **my house**.

- (2) Use an idiom that people use in your own language that has the same meaning.

■ Put these words **into your ears**. (Luke 9:44a ULT)

■ **Be all ears** when I say these words to you.

■ My **eyes grow dim** from grief. (Psalm 6:7a ULT)

■ I am crying my **eyes out**

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Referenced in: [Song of Solomon 4:9](#); [Song of Solomon 4:10](#); [Song of Solomon 4:12](#); [Song of Solomon 5:1](#); [Song of Solomon 5:2](#); [Song of Solomon 8:8](#); [Song of Solomon 8:12](#)

Metaphor

Description

A metaphor is a figure of speech in which someone speaks of one thing as if it were a different thing because he wants people to think about how those two things are alike.

For example, someone might say, “The girl I love is a red rose.”

A girl and a rose are very different things, but the speaker considers that they are alike in some way. The hearer’s task is to understand in what way they are alike.

This page answers the question: *What is a metaphor and how can I translate a Bible passage that has one?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Simile ([UTA PDF](#))

The Parts of a Metaphor

The example above shows us that a metaphor has three parts. In this metaphor, the speaker is talking about “the girl I love.” This is the **Topic**. The speaker wants the hearer to think about what is similar between her and “a red rose.” The red rose is the **Image** to which he compares the girl. Most probably, he wants the hearer to consider that they are both beautiful. This is the **Idea** that the girl and the rose both share, and so we may also call it the **Point of Comparison**.

Every metaphor has three parts:

- The **Topic**, the item being immediately discussed by the writer/speaker.
- The **Image**, the physical item (object, event, action, etc.) which the speaker uses to describe the topic.
- The **Idea**, the abstract concept or quality that the physical **Image** brings to the mind of the hearer when he thinks of how the **Image** and the **Topic** are similar. Often, the **Idea** of a metaphor is not explicitly stated in the Bible, but it is only implied from the context. The hearer or reader usually needs to think of the **Idea** himself.

Using these terms, we can say that a metaphor is a figure of speech that uses a physical **Image** to apply an abstract **Idea** to the speaker’s **Topic**.

Usually, a writer or speaker uses a metaphor in order to express something about a **Topic**, with at least one **Point of Comparison (Idea)** between the **Topic** and the **Image**. Often in metaphors, the **Topic** and the **Image** are explicitly stated, but the **Idea** is only implied. The writer/speaker often uses a metaphor in order to invite the readers/listeners to think about the similarity between the **Topic** and the **Image** and to figure out for themselves the **Idea** that is being communicated.

Speakers often use metaphors in order to strengthen their message, to make their language more vivid, to express their feelings better, to say something that is hard to say in any other way, or to help people remember their message.

Sometimes speakers use metaphors that are very common in their language. However, sometimes speakers use metaphors that are uncommon, and even some metaphors that are unique. When a metaphor has become very common in a language, often it becomes a “passive” metaphor, in contrast to uncommon metaphors, which we describe as being “active.” Passive metaphors and active metaphors each present a different kind of translation problem, which we will discuss below.

Passive Metaphors

A passive metaphor is a metaphor that has been used so much in the language that its speakers no longer regard it as one concept standing for another. Linguists often call these “dead metaphors.” Passive metaphors are extremely common. Examples in English include the terms “table **leg**,” “family **tree**,” “book **leaf**” (meaning a page in

a book), or the word “crane” (meaning a large machine for lifting heavy loads). English speakers simply think of these words as having more than one meaning. Examples of passive metaphors in Biblical Hebrew include using the word “hand” to represent “power,” using the word “face” to represent “presence,” and speaking of emotions or moral qualities as if they were “clothing.”

Patterned Pairs of Concepts Acting as Metaphors

Many ways of metaphorical speaking depend on pairs of concepts, where one underlying concept frequently stands for a different underlying concept. For example, in English, the direction “up” (the Image) often represents the concepts of “more” or “better” (the Idea). Because of this pair of underlying concepts, we can make sentences such as “The price of gasoline is going **up**,” “A **highly** intelligent man,” and also the opposite kind of idea: “The temperature is going **down**,” and “I am feeling very **low**.”

Patterned pairs of concepts are constantly used for metaphorical purposes in the world’s languages because they serve as convenient ways to organize thought. In general, people like to speak of abstract qualities (such as power, presence, emotions, and moral qualities) as if they were body parts, or as if they were objects that could be seen or held, or as if they were events that could be watched as they happened.

When these metaphors are used in normal ways, it is rare that the speaker and audience regard them as figurative speech. Examples of metaphors in English that go unrecognized are:

- “Turn the heat **up**.” More is spoken of as up.
- “Let us **go ahead** with our debate.” Doing what was planned is spoken of as walking or advancing.
- “You **defend** your theory well.” Argument is spoken of as war.
- “A **flow** of words.” Words are spoken of as liquids.

English speakers do not view these as metaphorical expressions or figures of speech, so it would be wrong to translate them into other languages in a way that would lead people to pay special attention to them as figurative speech. For a description of important patterns of this kind of metaphor in biblical languages, please see [Biblical Imagery — Common Patterns](#) and the pages it will direct you to.

When translating something that is a passive metaphor into another language, do not treat it as a metaphor. Instead, just use the best expression for that thing or concept in the target language.

Active Metaphors

These are metaphors that people recognize as one concept standing for another concept, or one thing for another thing. Metaphors make people think about how the one thing is like the other thing, because in most ways the two things are very different. People also easily recognize these metaphors as giving strength and unusual qualities to the message. For this reason, people pay attention to these metaphors. For example,

But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.
(Malachi 4:2a ULT)

Here, God speaks about his salvation as if it were the sun rising in order to shine its rays on the people whom he loves. He also speaks of the sun’s rays as if they were wings. Also, he speaks of these wings as if they were bringing medicine that would heal his people. Here is another example:

And he said to them, “Go and tell that fox ...” (Luke 13:32a ULT)

Here, “that fox” refers to King Herod. The people listening to Jesus certainly understood that Jesus was intending for them to apply certain characteristics of a fox to Herod. They probably understood that Jesus intended to communicate that Herod was evil, either in a cunning way or as someone who was destructive, murderous, or who took things that did not belong to him, or all of these.

Active metaphors require the translator’s special care to make a correct translation. To do so, you need to understand the parts of a metaphor and how they work together to produce meaning.

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to me will not be hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” (John 6:35 ULT)

In this metaphor, Jesus called himself the bread of life. The **Topic** is “I” (meaning Jesus himself) and the **Image** is “bread.” Bread was the primary food that people ate in that place and time. The similarity between bread and Jesus is that people need both to live. Just as people need to eat food in order to have physical life, people need to trust in Jesus in order to have eternal life. The **Idea** of the metaphor is “life.” In this case, Jesus stated the central Idea of the metaphor, but often the Idea is only implied.

Purposes of Metaphor

- One purpose of metaphor is to teach people about something that they do not know (the **Topic**) by showing that it is like something that they already do know (the **Image**).
- Another purpose is to emphasize that something (the **Topic**) has a particular quality (the **Idea**) or to show that it has that quality in an extreme way.
- Another purpose is to lead people to feel the same way about the **Topic** as they would feel about the **Image**.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- People may not recognize that something is a metaphor. In other words, they may mistake a metaphor for a literal statement, and thus, misunderstand it.
- People may not be familiar with the thing that is used as an image, and so, not be able to understand the metaphor.
- If the topic is not stated, people may not know what the topic is.
- People may not know the points of comparison that the speaker wants them to understand. If they fail to think of these points of comparison, they will not understand the metaphor.
- People may think that they understand the metaphor, but they do not. This can happen when they apply points of comparison from their own culture, rather than from the biblical culture.

Translation Principles

- Make the meaning of a metaphor as clear to the target audience as it was to the original audience.
- Do not make the meaning of a metaphor more clear to the target audience than you think it was to the original audience.

Examples From the Bible

Listen to this word, **you cows of Bashan**, (Amos 4:1q ULT)

In this metaphor Amos speaks to the upper-class women of Samaria (“you,” the Topic) as if they were cows (the Image). Amos does not say what similarity(s) he intends between these women and cows. He wants the reader to think of them, and he fully expects that readers from his culture will easily do so. From the context, we can see that he means that the women are like cows in that they are fat and interested only in feeding themselves. If we were to apply similarities from a different culture, such as that cows are sacred and should be worshiped, we would get the wrong meaning from this verse.

NOTE: Amos does not actually mean that the women are cows. He speaks to them as human beings.

Yet, Yahweh, you are our father; **we are the clay. You are our potter**; and we all are the work of your hand. (Isaiah 64:8 ULT)

The example above has two related metaphors. The Topic(s) are “we” and “you,” and the Image(s) are “clay” and “potter.” The similarity between a potter and God is the fact that both make what they wish out of their material.

The potter makes what he wishes out of the clay, and God makes what he wishes out of his people. The Idea being expressed by the comparison between the potter's clay and "us" is that **neither the clay nor God's people have a right to complain about what they are becoming.**

Jesus said to them, "Take heed and beware of **the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**"
The disciples reasoned among themselves and said, "It is because we did not take bread."
(Matthew 16:6-7 ULT)

Jesus used a metaphor here, but his disciples did not realize it. When he said "yeast," they thought he was talking about bread, but "yeast" was the Image in his metaphor, and the Topic was the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Since the disciples (the original audience) did not understand what Jesus meant, it would not be good to state clearly here what Jesus meant.

Translation Strategies

If people would understand the metaphor in the same way that the original readers would have understood it, go ahead and use it. Be sure to test the translation to make sure that people do understand it in the right way.

If people do not or would not understand it, here are some other strategies.

- (1) If the metaphor is a common expression in the source language or expresses a patterned pair of concepts in a biblical language (that is, it is a passive metaphor), then express the **Idea** in the simplest way preferred by your language.
- (2) If the metaphor seems to be an active metaphor, you can translate it literally **if you think that the target language also uses this metaphor in the same way to mean the same thing as in the Bible**. If you do this, be sure to test it to make sure that the language community understands it correctly.
- (3) If the target audience does not realize that it is a metaphor, then change the metaphor to a simile. Some languages do this by adding words such as "like" or "as." See [Simile](#).
- (4) If the target audience would not know the **Image**, see [Translate Unknowns](#) for ideas on how to translate that image.
- (5) If the target audience would not use that **Image** for that meaning, use an image from your own culture instead. Be sure that it is an image that could have been possible in Bible times.
- (6) If the target audience would not know what the **Topic** is, then state the topic clearly. (However, do not do this if the original audience did not know what the Topic was.)
- (7) If the target audience would not know the intended similarity (the **Idea**) between the topic and the image, then state it clearly.
- (8) If none of these strategies is satisfactory, then simply state the **Idea** plainly without using a metaphor.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If the metaphor is a common expression in the source language or expresses a patterned pair of concepts in a biblical language (that is, a passive metaphor), then express the Idea in the simplest way preferred by your language.

Then, see, one of the leaders of the synagogue, named Jairus, came, and when he saw him, **fell at his feet.** (Mark 5:22 ULT)

Then one of the leaders of the synagogue, named Jairus, came, and when he saw him, **immediately bowed down in front of him.**

(2) If the metaphor seems to be an active metaphor, you can translate it literally **if you think that the target language also uses this metaphor in the same way to mean the same thing as in the Bible.** If you do this, be sure to test it to make sure that the language community understands it correctly.

But Jesus said to them, “He wrote this commandment to you because of your **hardness of heart.**” (Mark 10:5 ULT)

It was because of your **hard hearts** that he wrote you this law.

We made no change to this one, but it must be tested to make sure that the target audience correctly understands this metaphor.

(3) If the target audience does not realize that it is a metaphor, then change the metaphor to a simile. Some languages do this by adding words such as “like” or “as.”

Yet, Yahweh, you are our father; we **are the clay.** You **are our potter;** and we all are the work of your hand. (Isaiah 64:8 ULT)

And yet, Yahweh, you are our father; we are **like** clay. You are **like** a potter; and we all are the work of your hand.

(4) If the target audience would not know the **Image**, see [Translate Unknowns](#) for ideas on how to translate that image.

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you **to kick against a goad.** (Acts 26:14b ULT)

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you **to kick against a pointed stick.**

(5) If the target audience would not use that **Image** for that meaning, use an image from your own culture instead. Be sure that it is an image that could have been possible in Bible times.

Yet, Yahweh, you are our father; we are the **clay.** You are our **potter;** and we all are the work of your hand. (Isaiah 64:8 ULT)

“And yet, Yahweh, you are our father; we are the **wood.** You are our **carver;** and we all are the work of your hand.”

“And yet, Yahweh, you are our father; we are the **string.** You are the **weaver;** and we all are the work of your hand.”

(6) If the target audience would not know what the **Topic** is, then state the topic clearly. (However, do not do this if the original audience did not know what the topic was.)

Yahweh lives; may **my rock** be praised. May the God of my salvation be exalted. (Psalm 18:46 ULT)

Yahweh lives; **He is my rock.** May he be praised. May the God of my salvation be exalted.

(7) If the target audience would not know the intended similarity between the Topic and the Image, then state it clearly.

Yahweh lives; may **my rock** be praised. May the God of my salvation be exalted. (Psalm 18:46 ULT)

Yahweh lives; may he be praised because he is the rock **under which I can hide from my enemies**. May the God of my salvation be exalted.

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you **to kick against a goad**. (Acts 26:14 ULT)

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? You **fight against me and hurt yourself like an ox that kicks against its owner's pointed stick**.

(8) If none of these strategies are satisfactory, then simply state the idea plainly without using a metaphor.

I will make you to become **fishers of men**. (Mark 1:17b ULT)

I will make you to become **people who gather men**.
Now you gather fish. I will make you **gather people**.

To learn more about specific metaphors, see [Biblical Imagery — Common Patterns](#).

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Referenced in: [Introduction to the Song of Songs](#); [Song of Songs 1 General Notes](#); [Song of Solomon 1:4](#); [Song of Solomon 1:6](#); [Song of Solomon 1:7](#); [Song of Solomon 1:10](#); [Song of Solomon 1:16](#); [Song of Solomon 1:17](#); [Song of Songs 2 General Notes](#); [Song of Solomon 2:1](#); [Song of Solomon 2:3](#); [Song of Solomon 2:5](#); [Song of Solomon 2:8](#); [Song of Solomon 2:14](#); [Song of Solomon 2:15](#); [Song of Solomon 2:16](#); [Song of Solomon 2:17](#); [Song of Songs 3 General Notes](#); [Song of Songs 4 General Notes](#); [Song of Solomon 4:1](#); [Song of Solomon 4:2](#); [Song of Solomon 4:4](#); [Song of Solomon 4:6](#); [Song of Solomon 4:11](#); [Song of Solomon 4:12](#); [Song of Solomon 4:15](#); [Song of Solomon 4:16](#); [Song of Songs 5 General Notes](#); [Song of Solomon 5:1](#); [Song of Solomon 5:5](#); [Song of Solomon 5:6](#); [Song of Solomon 5:8](#); [Song of Solomon 5:10](#); [Song of Solomon 5:11](#); [Song of Solomon 5:12](#); [Song of Solomon 5:13](#); [Song of Solomon 5:14](#); [Song of Solomon 5:15](#); [Song of Songs 6 General Notes](#); [Song of Solomon 6:2](#); [Song of Solomon 6:6](#); [Song of Solomon 6:9](#); [Song of Solomon 6:11](#); [Song of Solomon 7:2](#); [Song of Solomon 7:4](#); [Song of Solomon 7:5](#); [Song of Solomon 7:8](#); [Song of Solomon 8:2](#); [Song of Solomon 8:6](#); [Song of Solomon 8:7](#); [Song of Solomon 8:9](#); [Song of Solomon 8:10](#); [Song of Solomon 8:12](#); [Song of Solomon 8:14](#)

Metonymy

Description

Metonymy is a figure of speech in which an item (either physical or abstract) is called not by its own name, but by the name of something closely associated with it. A metonym is a word or phrase used as a substitute for something that it is associated with.

This page answers the question: *What is a metonymy?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

... and **the blood** of Jesus his Son cleanses us from every sin. (1 John 1:7b ULT)

The blood represents Christ's death.

And he took **the cup** in the same way after supper, saying, "**This cup** is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." (Luke 22:20 ULT)

The cup represents the wine that is in the cup.

Metonymy can be used

- as a shorter way of referring to something
- to make an abstract idea more meaningful by referring to it with the name of a physical object associated with it

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

The Bible uses metonymy very often. Speakers of some languages are not familiar with metonymy and they may not recognize it when they read it in the Bible. If they do not recognize the metonymy, they will not understand the passage or, worse yet, they will get a wrong understanding of the passage. Whenever a metonym is used, people need to be able to understand what it represents.

Examples From the Bible

The Lord God will give to him **the throne** of his father David. (Luke 1:32b ULT)

A throne represents the authority of a king. "Throne" is a metonym for "kingly authority," "kingship," or "reign." This means that God would make him become a king who would follow King David.

Then immediately his **mouth** was opened (Luke 1:64a ULT)

The mouth here represents the power to speak. This means that he was able to talk again.

Who warned you to flee from **the wrath** that is coming? (Luke 3:7b ULT)

The word "wrath" or "anger" is a metonym for "punishment." God was extremely angry with the people and, as a result, he would punish them.

Translation Strategies

If people would easily understand the metonym, consider using it. Otherwise, here are some options.

- (1) Use the metonym along with the name of the thing it represents.
- (2) Use only the name of the thing the metonym represents.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use the metonym along with the name of the thing it represents.

And he took the cup in the same way after the supper, saying, “**This cup** is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.” (Luke 22:20 ULT)

He took the cup in the same way after supper, saying, “**The wine in this cup** is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”

This verse also contains a second metonym: The cup, (representing the wine it contains) also represents the new covenant made with the blood Christ shed for us.

- (2) Use the name of the thing the metonym represents.

The Lord God will give him **the throne** of his father David. (Luke 1:32b ULT)

“The Lord God will give him **the kingly authority** of his father, David.”

or:

“The Lord God will **make him king** like his ancestor, King David.”

Who warned you to flee from **the wrath** that is coming? (Luke 3:7b ULT)

“Who warned you to flee from God’s coming **punishment**?”

To learn about some common metonymies, see [Biblical Imagery — Common Metonymies](#).

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Referenced in: [Song of Solomon 1:7](#); [Song of Solomon 1:15](#); [Song of Solomon 2:4](#); [Song of Solomon 3:1](#); [Song of Solomon 3:3](#); [Song of Solomon 3:4](#); [Song of Solomon 3:11](#); [Song of Solomon 5:12](#); [Song of Solomon 5:16](#); [Song of Solomon 7:4](#); [Song of Solomon 7:9](#); [Song of Solomon 8:10](#); [Song of Solomon 8:13](#)

Numbers

Description

There are many numbers in the Bible. They can be written as words ("five") or as numerals ("5"). Some numbers are very large, such as "two hundred" (200), "twenty-two thousand" (22,000), or "one hundred million" (100,000,000). Some languages do not have words for all of these numbers. Translators need to decide how to translate numbers and whether to write them as words or numerals.

This page answers the question: *How do I translate numbers?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Translate Unknowns ([UTA PDF](#))

Some numbers are exact and others are rounded.

Abram was **86** years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. (Genesis 16:16 ULT)

Eighty-six (86) is an exact number.

That day about **3,000** of the people died. (Exodus 32:28b ULT)

Here the number three thousand (3,000) is a round number. It may have been a little more than that or a little less than that. The word "about" shows that it is not an exact number.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Some languages do not have words for some of these numbers.

Translation Principles

- Exact numbers should be translated as closely and specifically as they can be.
- Rounded numbers can be translated more generally.

Examples From the Bible

When Jared had lived **162** years, he became the father of Enoch. After he became the father of Enoch, Jared lived **800** years. He became the father of more sons and daughters. Jared lived **962** years, and then he died. (Genesis 5:18-20 ULT)

The numbers 162, 800, and 962 are exact numbers and should be translated with something as close to those numbers as possible.

Our sister, may you be the mother of **thousands of ten thousands**. (Genesis 24:60b ULT)

This is a rounded number. It does not say exactly how many descendants she should have, but it was a huge number of them.

Translation Strategies

- (1) Write numbers using numerals.
- (2) Write numbers using your language's words or the Gateway Language words for those numbers.
- (3) Write numbers using words, and put the numerals in parentheses after them.

(4) Combine words for large numbers.

(5) Use a very general expression for very large rounded numbers and write the numeral in parentheses afterward.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

We will use the following verse in our examples:

Now, see, at great effort I have prepared for Yahweh's house **100,000** talents of gold, **1,000,000** talents of silver, and bronze and iron in large quantities. (1 Chronicles 22:14a ULT)

(1) Write numbers using numerals.

I have prepared for Yahweh's house **100,000** talents of gold, **1,000,000** talents of silver, and bronze and iron in large quantities.

(2) Write numbers using your language's words or the Gateway Language words for those numbers.

I have prepared for Yahweh's house **one hundred thousand** talents of gold, **one million** talents of silver, and bronze and iron in large quantities.

(3) Write numbers using words, and put the numerals in parenthesis after them.

I have prepared for Yahweh's house one **hundred thousand (100,000)** talents of gold, **one million (1,000,000)** talents of silver, and bronze and iron in large quantities.

(4) Combine words for large numbers.

I have prepared for Yahweh's house **one hundred thousand** talents of gold, **a thousand thousand** talents of silver, and bronze and iron in large quantities.

(5) Use a very general expression for very large rounded numbers and write the numeral in parentheses afterward.

I have prepared for Yahweh's house **a great amount of gold (100,000 talents), ten times that amount of silver (1,000,000 talents)**, and bronze and iron in large quantities.

Consistency

Be consistent in your translations. Decide how the numbers will be translated, using numbers or numerals. There are different ways of being consistent.

- Use words to represent numbers all of the time. (You might have very long words.)
- Use numerals to represent numbers all of the time.
- Use words to represent the numbers that your language has words for and use numerals for the numbers that your language does not have words for.
- Use words for low numbers and numerals for high numbers.
- Use words for numbers that require few words and numerals for numbers that require more than a few words.
- Use words to represent numbers, and write the numerals in parentheses after them.

Consistency in the ULT and UST

The *unfoldingWord® Literal Text* (ULT) and the *unfoldingWord® Simplified Text* (UST) use words for the numbers one through ten and use numerals for all numbers above ten.

When Adam had lived **130** years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and he called his name Seth. After Adam became the father of Seth, he lived **800** years. He became the father of more sons and daughters. Adam lived **930** years, and then he died. (Genesis 5:3-5 ULT)

Next we recommend you learn about:

Ordinal Numbers ([UTA PDF](#))

Fractions ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Song of Solomon 4:4](#); [Song of Solomon 6:8](#)

Personification

Description

Personification is a figure of speech in which someone speaks of something as if it could do things that animals or people can do. People often do this because it makes it easier to talk about things that we cannot see:

Such as wisdom:

Does not Wisdom call out? (Proverbs 8:1a ULT)

Or sin:

Sin crouches at the door. (Genesis 4:7b ULT)

People also use personification because it is sometimes easier to talk about people's relationships with non-human things such as wealth as if they were relationships between people.

You cannot serve God and wealth. (Matthew 6:24b ULT)

In each case, the purpose of the personification is to highlight a certain characteristic of the non-human thing. As in metaphor, the reader needs to think of the way that the thing is like a certain kind of person.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- Some languages do not use personification.
- Some languages use personification only in certain situations.

Examples From the Bible

You cannot **serve** God and wealth. (Matthew 6:24b ULT)

Jesus speaks of wealth as if it were a master whom people might serve. Loving money and basing one's decisions on it is like serving it as a slave would serve his master.

Does not Wisdom **call** out? Does not Understanding **raise her voice**? (Proverbs 8:1 ULT)

The author speaks of wisdom and understanding as if they were woman who calls out to teach people. This means that they are not something hidden, but something obvious that people should pay attention to.

Translation Strategies

If the personification would be understood clearly, consider using it. If it would not be understood, here are some other ways for translating it.

- (1) Add words or phrases to make the human (or animal) characteristic clear.
- (2) In addition to Strategy (1), use words such as "like" or "as" to show that the sentence is not to be understood literally.
- (3) Find a way to translate it without the personification.

This page answers the question: *What is personification?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Add words or phrases to make the human (or animal) characteristic clear.

Sin crouches at the door. (Genesis 4:7b ULT) — God speaks of sin as if it were a wild animal that is waiting for the chance to attack. This shows how dangerous sin is. An additional phrase can be added to make this danger clear.

Sin is at your door, **waiting to attack you**.

(2) In addition to Strategy (1), use words such as “like” or “as” to show that the sentence is not to be understood literally.

Sin crouches at the door. (Genesis 4:7b ULT) — This can be translated with the word “as.”

Sin is crouching at the door, **just as a wild animal does as it waits to attack a person..**

(3) Find a way to translate it without the personification.

Even the **winds and the sea obey him**. (Matthew 8:27b ULT) — The men speak of the “wind and the sea” as if they are able to hear and obey Jesus, just as people can. This could also be translated without the idea of obedience by speaking of Jesus controlling them.

He even **controls the winds and the sea**.

NOTE: We have broadened our definition of “personification” to include “zoomorphism” (speaking of other things as if they had animal characteristics) and “anthropomorphism” (speaking of non-human things as if they had human characteristics) because the translation strategies for them are the same.

Next we recommend you learn about:

Apostrophe ([UTA PDF](#))

Biblical Imagery — Common Patterns ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Song of Solomon 2:7](#); [Song of Solomon 2:13](#); [Song of Solomon 3:5](#); [Song of Solomon 4:16](#)

Poetry

Description

Poetry is one of the ways that people use the words and sounds of their language to make their speech and writing more beautiful and to express strong emotion. Through poetry, people can communicate deeper emotion than they can through simple non-poetic forms. Poetry gives more weight and elegance to statements of truth, such as proverbs, and is also easier to remember than ordinary speech.

This page answers the question: *What is poetry and how do I translate it into my language?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Writing Styles ([UTA PDF](#))

In poetry we commonly find:

- many figures of speech such as [Apostrophe](#)
- arrangements of clauses into particular patterns such as:
 - parallel lines (See [Parallelism](#))
 - acrostics (beginning lines with successive letters of the alphabet)
 - chiasms (in which the first line relates to the last line, the second to the next-to-last line, etc.):
 - > You should not give what is holy to the dogs,
 - >
 - >> and should not throw your pearls in front of the pigs.
 - >>
 - >> Otherwise they will trample them under their feet,
 - >
 - > and having turned, they might tear you to pieces. (Matt 7:6 ULT)

- repetition of some or all of a line:

Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his hosts. Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars. (Psalm 148:2-3 ULT)

- lines of similar length:

Listen to my call to you,
Yahweh; think about my groanings.
Listen to the sound of my call, my King and my God,
for it is to you that I pray. (Psalm 5:1-2 ULT)

- the same sound used at the end or at the beginning of two or more lines:

“Twinkle, twinkle little **star**. How I wonder what you **are**.” (from an English rhyme)

- the same sound repeated many times:

“Peter, Peter, pumpkin eater” (from an English rhyme)

We also find:

- old words and expressions
- dramatic imagery
- different use of grammar — including:
 - incomplete sentences
 - lack of connective words

Some places to look for poetry in your language

Songs, particularly old songs or songs used in children's games
Religious ceremony or chants of priests or witch doctors
Prayers, blessings, and curses
Old legends

Elegant or fancy speech

Elegant or fancy speech is similar to poetry in that it uses beautiful language, but it does not use all of the language's features of poetry, and it does not use them as much as poetry does. Popular speakers in the language often use elegant speech, and this is probably the easiest source of text to study to find out what makes speech elegant in your language.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue:

- Different languages use poetry for different things. If a poetic form would not communicate the same meaning in your language, you may need to write it without the poetry.
- Different languages use different poetic devices. A poetic device that conveys elegance or emotion in a biblical language may be confusing or misunderstood in another language.
- In some languages, using poetry for a particular part of the Bible would make it much more powerful.

Examples From the Bible

The Bible uses poetry for songs, teaching, and prophecy. Almost all of the books of the Old Testament have poetry in them and many of the books are completely made up of poetry.

... for you saw my affliction; you knew the distress of my soul. (Psalm 31:7b ULT)

This example of [Parallelism](#) has two lines that mean the same thing.

Yahweh, judge the nations; vindicate me, Yahweh, because I am righteous and innocent, Most High. (Psalm 7:8 ULT)

This example of parallelism shows the contrast between what David wants God to do to him and what he wants God to do to the unrighteous nations. (See [Parallelism](#).)

Keep your servant also from arrogant sins; let them not rule over me. (Psalm 19:13a ULT)

This example of personification speaks of sins as if they could rule over a person. (See [Personification](#).)

Oh, give thanks to Yahweh; for he is good,
for his covenant faithfulness endures forever.

Oh, give thanks to the God of gods,
for his covenant faithfulness endures forever.

Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords,
for his covenant faithfulness endures forever.

(Psalm 136:1-3 ULT)

This example repeats the phrases “give thanks” and “his covenant faithfulness endures forever.”

Translation Strategies

If the style of poetry that is used in the source text would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here are some other ways of translating it.

- (1) Translate the poetry using one of your styles of poetry.
- (2) Translate the poetry using your style of elegant speech.
- (3) Translate the poetry using your style of ordinary speech.

If you use poetry it may be more beautiful.

If you use ordinary speech it may be more clear.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the advice of the wicked, or stand in the pathway with sinners, or sit in the assembly of mockers. But his delight is in the law of Yahweh, and on his law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2 ULT)

The following are examples of how people might translate Psalm 1:1-2.

- (1) Translate the poetry using one of your styles of poetry. (The style in this example has words that sound similar at the end of each line.)

“Happy is the person not encouraged **to sin**, Disrespect for God he will not **begin**, To those who laugh at God he is **no kin**. God is his constant **delight**, He does what God says **is right**, He thinks of it all day **and night**.”

- (2) Translate the poetry using your style of elegant speech.

This is the kind of person who is truly blessed: the one who does not follow the advice of wicked people nor stop along the road to speak with sinners nor join the gathering of those who mock God. Rather, he takes great joy in Yahweh’s law, and he meditates on it day and night.

- (3) Translate the poetry using your style of ordinary speech.

The people who do not listen to the advice of bad people are really happy. They do not spend time with people who continually do evil things or join with those who do not respect God. Instead, they love to obey Yahweh’s law, and they think about it all the time.

Next we recommend you learn about:

Symbolic Language (UTA PDF)

Referenced in: [Song of Solomon 1:1](#); [Song of Solomon 2:1](#); [Song of Solomon 4:1](#); [Song of Solomon 5:1](#); [Song of Solomon 6:1](#); [Song of Solomon 8:1](#)

Pronouns

Description

Pronouns are words that people might use instead of using a noun when referring to someone or something. Some examples are "I," "you," "he," "it," "this," "that," "himself," "someone," and others. The personal pronoun is the most common type of pronoun.

This page answers the question: *What are pronouns, and what kinds of pronouns are in some languages?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Parts of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Personal Pronouns

Personal pronouns refer to people or things and show whether the speaker is referring to himself, the person he is speaking to, or someone or something else. The following are kinds of information that personal pronouns may provide. Other types of pronouns may give some of this information, as well.

Person

- First Person — The speaker and possibly others (I, me, we, us)
 - [Exclusive and Inclusive "We"](#)
- Second Person — The person or people that the speaker is talking to and possibly others (you)
 - [Forms of You](#)
- Third Person — Someone or something other than the speaker and those he is talking to (he, she, it, they)

Number

- Singular — one (I, you, he, she, it)
- Plural — more than one (we, you, they)
 - [Singular Pronouns that Refer to Groups](#)
- Dual — two (Some languages have pronouns specifically for two people or two things.)

Gender

- Masculine — he
- Feminine — she
- Neuter — it

Relationship to other words in the sentence

- Subject of the verb: I, you, he, she, it, we, they
- Object of the verb or preposition: me, you, him, her, it, us, them
- Possessor with a noun: my, your, his, her, its, our, their
- Possessor without a noun: mine, yours, his, hers, its, ours, theirs

Other Types of pronouns

Reflexive Pronouns refer to another noun or pronoun in the same sentence: myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, ourselves, yourselves, themselves.

- John saw **himself** in the mirror. The word "himself" refers to John.

Interrogative Pronouns are used to make a question that needs more than just a yes or no for an answer: what, which, who, whom, whose.

- **Who** built the house?

Relative Pronouns mark a relative clause. The relative pronouns, who, whom, whose, which and that give more information about a noun in the main part of the sentence. Sometimes, the relative adverbs when and where can also be used as relative pronouns.

- I saw the house **that John built**. The clause “that John built” tells which house I saw.
- I saw the man **who built the house**. The clause “who built the house” tells which man I saw.

Demonstrative Pronouns are used to draw attention to someone or something and to show distance from the speaker or something else. The demonstrative pronouns are: this, these, that, and those.

- Have you seen **this** here?
- Who is **that** over there?

Indefinite pronouns are used when no particular noun is being referred to. The indefinite pronouns are: any, anyone, someone, anything, something, and some. Sometimes a personal pronoun is used in a generic way to do this: you, they, he or it.

- He does not want to talk to **anyone**.
- **Someone** fixed it, but I do not know who.
- **They** say that **you** should not wake a sleeping dog.

In the last example, “they” and “you” just refer to people in general.

”

Referenced in: [Song of Solomon 1:4](#); [Song of Solomon 1:11](#); [Song of Solomon 6:13](#)

Rhetorical Question

A rhetorical question is a question that a speaker asks when he is more interested in expressing his attitude about something than in getting information about it. Speakers use rhetorical questions to express deep emotion or to encourage hearers to think deeply about something. The Bible contains many rhetorical questions, often to express surprise, to rebuke or scold the hearer, or to teach. Speakers of some languages use rhetorical questions for other purposes as well.

This page answers the question: *What are rhetorical questions and how can I translate them?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Sentence Types ([UTA PDF](#))

Description

A rhetorical question is a question that strongly expresses the speaker's attitude toward something. Often the speaker is not looking for information at all. Or, if he is asking for information, it is not usually the information that the question appears to ask for. The speaker is more interested in expressing his attitude than in getting information.

But those who stood by said, **"Are you insulting the high priest of God?"**(Acts 23:4 ULT)

The people who asked Paul this question were not asking if he was insulting God's high priest. Rather, they used this question to accuse Paul of insulting the high priest.

The Bible contains many rhetorical questions. These rhetorical questions might be used for the purposes: of expressing attitudes or feelings, rebuking people, teaching something by reminding people of something they know and encouraging them to apply it to something new, or introducing something they want to talk about.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- Some languages do not use rhetorical questions; for them a question is always a request for information.
- Some languages use rhetorical questions, but for purposes that are different or more limited than in the Bible.
- Because of these differences between languages, some readers might misunderstand the purpose of a rhetorical question in the Bible.

Examples From the Bible

Do you not still rule the kingdom of Israel? (1 Kings 21:7b ULT)

Jezebel used the question above to remind King Ahab of something he already knew: he still ruled the kingdom of Israel. The rhetorical question made her point more strongly than if she had merely stated it, because it forced Ahab to admit the point himself. She did this in order to rebuke him for being unwilling to take over a poor man's property. She was implying that, since he was the king of Israel, he had the power to take the man's property.

Will a virgin forget her jewelry, a bride her veils? Yet my people have forgotten me for days without number! (Jeremiah 2:32 ULT)

God used the question above to remind his people of something they already knew: a young woman would never forget her jewelry or a bride forget her veils. He then rebuked his people for forgetting him who is so much greater than those things.

Why did I not die when I came out from the womb? (Job 3:11a ULT)

Job used the question above to show deep emotion. This rhetorical question expresses how sad he was that he did not die as soon as he was born. He wished that he had not lived.

And how has this happened to me that the mother of my Lord would come to me? (Luke 1:43 ULT)

Elizabeth used the question above to show how surprised and happy she was that the mother of her Lord came to her.

Or what man is there among you, of whom his son will ask for a loaf of bread, but he will give him a stone? (Matthew 7:9 ULT)

Jesus used the question above to remind the people of something they already knew: a good father would never give his son something bad to eat. By introducing this point, Jesus could go on to teach them about God with his next rhetorical question:

Therefore, if you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him? (Matthew 7:11 ULT)

Jesus used this question to teach the people in an emphatic way that God gives good things to those who ask him.

What is the kingdom of God like, and what can I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed that a man took and threw into his garden ... (Luke 13:18b-19a ULT)

Jesus used the question above to introduce what he was going to talk about. He was about to compare the kingdom of God to something. In this case, he compared the kingdom of God to a mustard seed.

Translation Strategies

In order to translate a rhetorical question accurately, first be sure that the question you are translating truly is a rhetorical question and is not an information question. Ask yourself, "Does the person asking the question already know the answer to the question?" If so, it is a rhetorical question. Or, if no one answers the question, did the person who asked it expect to receive an answer? If not, it is a rhetorical question.

When you are sure that the question is rhetorical, then be sure that you understand the purpose for the rhetorical question. Is it to encourage or rebuke or shame the hearer? Is it to bring up a new topic? Is it to do something else?

When you know the purpose of the rhetorical question, then think of the most natural way to express that purpose in the target language. It might be as a question, or a statement, or an exclamation.

If using the rhetorical question would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider doing so. If not, here are other options:

- (1) Add the answer after the question.
- (2) Change the rhetorical question to a statement or exclamation.
- (3) Change the rhetorical question to a statement, and then follow it with a short question.
- (4) Change the form of the question so that it communicates in your language what the original speaker communicated in his.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Add the answer after the question.

Will a virgin forget her jewelry, a bride her veils? Yet my people have forgotten me for days without number! (Jeremiah 2:32 ULT)

Will a virgin forget her jewelry, a bride her veils? **Of course not!** Yet my people have forgotten me for days without number!

Or what man is there among you, of whom his son will ask for a loaf of bread, but he will give him a stone? (Matthew 7:9 ULT)

Or what man is there among you, of whom his son will ask for a loaf of bread, but he will give him a stone? **None of you would do that!**

(2) Change the rhetorical question to a statement or exclamation.

What is the kingdom of God like, and what can I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed. (Luke 13:18-19a ULT)

This is what the kingdom of God is like. It is like a mustard seed ...

Are you insulting the high priest of God? (Acts 23:4b ULT) (Acts 23:4 ULT)

You should not insult God's high priest!

Why did I not die when I came out from the womb? (Job 3:11a ULT)

I wish I had died when I came out from the womb!

And how has this happened to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? (Luke 1:43 ULT)

How wonderful it is that the mother of my Lord has come to me!

(3) Change the rhetorical question to a statement, and then follow it with a short question.

Do you not still rule the kingdom of Israel? (1 Kings 21:7b ULT)

You still rule the kingdom of Israel, **do you not?**

(4) Change the form of the question so that it communicates in your language what the original speaker communicated in his.

Or what man is there among you, of whom his son will ask for a loaf of bread, but he will give him a stone? (Matthew 7:9 ULT)

If your son asks you for a loaf of bread, **would you give him a stone?**

Will a virgin forget her jewelry, a bride her veils? Yet my people have forgotten me for days without number! (Jeremiah 2:32 ULT)

What virgin would forget her jewelry, and what bride would forget her veils? Yet my people have forgotten me for days without number

"

Referenced in: [Song of Solomon 1:7](#); [Song of Solomon 5:3](#); [Song of Solomon 5:8](#); [Song of Solomon 6:10](#); [Song of Solomon 8:5](#); [Song of Solomon 8:8](#)

Simile

Description

A simile is a comparison of two things that are not normally thought to be similar. The simile focuses on a particular trait the two items have in common, and it includes the words “like,” “as,” or “than.”

This page answers the question: *What is a simile?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were troubled and discouraged, **like sheep not having a shepherd**. (Matthew 9:36)

Jesus compared the crowds of people to sheep without a shepherd. Sheep grow frightened when they do not have a good shepherd to lead them in safe places. The crowds were like that because they did not have good religious leaders.

See, I send you out **as sheep in the midst of wolves**, so be as wise **as the serpents** and harmless **as the doves**. (Matthew 10:16 ULT)

Jesus compared his disciples to sheep and their enemies to wolves. Wolves attack sheep; Jesus' enemies would attack his disciples.

For the word of God is living and active and sharper **than any two-edged sword**. (Hebrews 4:12a ULT)

God's word is compared to a two-edged sword. A two-edged sword is a weapon that can easily cut through a person's flesh. God's word is very effective in showing what is in a person's heart and thoughts.

Purposes of Simile

- A simile can teach about something that is unknown by showing how it is similar to something that is known.
- A simile can emphasize a particular trait, sometimes in a way that gets people's attention.
- Similes help form a picture in the mind or help the reader experience what he is reading about more fully.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- People may not know how the two items are similar.
- People may not be familiar with both of the items being compared.

Examples From the Bible

Suffer hardship with me, **as a good soldier** of Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 2:3 ULT)

In this simile, Paul compares suffering with what soldiers endure, and he encourages Timothy to follow their example.

Just as the lightning flashing from a place under the sky shines to another place under the sky, so will the Son of Man be. (Luke 17:24b ULT)

This verse does not tell how the Son of Man will be like the lightning. But in context we can understand from the verses before it that just as lightning flashes suddenly and everyone can see it, the Son of Man will come suddenly and everyone will be able to see him. No one will have to be told about it.

Translation Strategies

If people would understand the correct meaning of a simile, consider using it. If they would not, here are some strategies you can use:

- (1) If people do not know how the two items are alike, tell how they are alike. However, do not do this if the meaning was not clear to the original audience.
- (2) If people are not familiar with the item that something is compared to, use an item from your own culture. Be sure that it is one that could have been used in the cultures of the Bible. If you use this strategy, you may want to put the original item in a footnote.
- (3) Simply describe the item without comparing it to another.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If people do not know how the two items are alike, tell how they are alike. However, do not do this if the meaning was not clear to the original audience.

See, I send you out **as sheep in the midst of wolves**. (Matthew 10:16a ULT) — This compares the danger that Jesus' disciples would be in with the danger that sheep are in when they are surrounded by wolves.

See, I send **you out among wicked people** and you will be in danger from them **as sheep are in danger when they are among wolves**.

For the word of God is living and active and sharper **than any two-edged sword**. (Hebrews 4:12a ULT)

For the word of God is living and active and **more powerful than a very sharp two-edged sword**.

- (2) If people are not familiar with the item that something is compared to, use an item from your own culture. Be sure that it is one that could have been used in the cultures of the Bible. If you use this strategy, you may want to put the original item in a footnote.

See, I send you out **as sheep in the midst of wolves**, (Matthew 10:16a ULT) — If people do not know what sheep and wolves are, or that wolves kill and eat sheep, you could use some other animal that kills another.

See, I send you out **as chickens in the midst of wild dogs**.

How often did I long to gather your children together, just **as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings**, but you were not willing! (Matthew 23:37b ULT)

How often I wanted to gather your children together, **as a mother closely watches over her infants**, but you refused!

If you have faith **as a grain of mustard** ... (Matthew 17:20)

If you have faith even as small **as a tiny seed**,

- (3) Simply describe the item without comparing it to another.

See, I send you out **as sheep in the midst of wolves**. (Matthew 10:16a ULT)

See, I send you out among **people who will want to harm you**.

How often did I long to gather your children together, just **as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings**, but you were not willing! (Matthew 23:37b ULT)

How often I wanted to **protect you**, but you refused!

Next we recommend you learn about:

Metaphor ([UTA PDF](#))

Biblical Imagery — Common Patterns ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: Song of Solomon 1:3; Song of Solomon 1:5; Song of Solomon 1:9; Song of Solomon 1:13; Song of Solomon 1:14; Song of Solomon 2:2; Song of Solomon 2:3; Song of Solomon 2:9; Song of Solomon 3:6; Song of Solomon 4:1; Song of Solomon 4:2; Song of Solomon 4:3; Song of Solomon 4:4; Song of Solomon 4:5; Song of Solomon 5:11; Song of Solomon 5:12; Song of Solomon 5:13; Song of Solomon 5:15; Song of Solomon 6:4; Song of Solomon 6:6; Song of Solomon 6:7; Song of Solomon 6:10; Song of Solomon 6:12; Song of Songs 7 General Notes; Song of Solomon 7:1; Song of Solomon 7:2; Song of Solomon 7:3; Song of Solomon 7:4; Song of Solomon 7:5; Song of Solomon 7:7; Song of Solomon 7:8; Song of Solomon 8:1; Song of Solomon 8:6; Song of Solomon 8:10

Synecdoche

Description

Synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a speaker uses a part of something to refer to the whole thing, or uses the whole to refer to a part.

■ **My soul** magnifies the Lord. (Luke 1:46b ULT)

Mary was very happy about what the Lord was doing, so she said “my soul,” which means the inner, emotional part of herself, to refer to her whole self.

■ So **the Pharisees** said to him, “Look, why are they doing that which is not lawful?” (Mark 2:24a ULT)

The Pharisees who were standing there did not all say the same words at the same time. Instead, it is more likely that one man representing the group said those words.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- Some readers may not recognize the synecdoche and thus misunderstand the words as a literal statement.
- Some readers may realize that they are not to understand the words literally, but they may not know what the meaning is.

Example From the Bible

■ Then I looked on all the deeds that **my hands** had accomplished. (Ecclesiastes 2:11a ULT)

“My hands” is a synecdoche for the whole person because clearly the arms and the rest of the body and the mind were also involved in the person’s accomplishments. The hands are chosen to represent the person because they are the parts of the body most directly involved in the work.

Translation Strategies

If the synecdoche would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here is another option:

(1) State specifically what the synecdoche refers to.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) State specifically what the synecdoche refers to.

■ “**My soul** magnifies the Lord.” (Luke 1:46b ULT)

■ “**I** magnify the Lord.”

So **the Pharisees** said to him ... (Mark 2:24a ULT)

■ **A representative of the Pharisees** said to him ...

Then I looked on all the deeds that **my hands** had accomplished. (Ecclesiastes 2:11a ULT)

■ I looked on all the deeds that **I** had accomplished

This page answers the question: *What is a synecdoche, and how can I translate such a thing into my language?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Metonymy ([UTA PDF](#))

Biblical Imagery — Common Metonymies ([UTA PDF](#))

Next we recommend you learn about:

Metonymy ([UTA PDF](#))

Biblical Imagery — Common Metonymies ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Song of Solomon 7:1](#)

Translate Unknowns

While working to translate the Bible, you (the translator) might find yourself asking: “How do I translate words like lion, fig tree, mountain, priest, or temple when people in my culture have never seen these things and we do not have a word for them?”

This page answers the question: *How can I translate ideas that my readers are not familiar with?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[Sentence Structure \(UTA PDF\)](#)

Description

Unknowns are things that occur in the source text that are not known to the people of your culture. The unfoldingWord® Translation Words pages and the unfoldingWord® Translation Notes will help you understand what they are. After you understand them, you will need to find ways to refer to those things so that people who read your translation will understand what they are.

They said to him, “We have nothing here except five loaves of **bread** and two fish.” (Matthew 14:17 ULT)

Bread is a particular food made by mixing finely crushed grains with oil, and then cooking the mixture so that it is dry. (Grains are the seeds of a kind of grass.) In some cultures people do not have bread and do not know what it is.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

- Readers may not know some of the things that are in the Bible because those things are not part of their own culture.
- Readers may have difficulty understanding a text if they do not know some of the things that are mentioned in it.

Translation Principles

- Use words that are already part of your language if possible.
- Keep expressions short if possible.
- Represent God's commands and historical facts accurately.

Examples From the Bible

So I will turn Jerusalem into piles of ruins, a hideout for **jackals**. (Jeremiah 9:11a ULT)

Jackals are wild animals like dogs that live in only a few parts of the world. So they are not known in many places.

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous **wolves**. (Matthew 7:15 ULT)

If wolves do not live where the translation will be read, the readers may not understand that they are fierce, wild animals like dogs that attack and eat sheep.

They offered him wine mixed with **myrrh**, but he did not drink it. (Mark 15:23 ULT)

People may not know what myrrh is and that it was used as a medicine.

... to him who made **great lights** ... (Psalm 136:7a ULT)

Some languages have terms for things that give light, like the sun and fire, but they have no general term for lights.

Your sins ... will be white like **snow**. (Isaiah 1:18b ULT)

People in many parts of the world have not seen snow, but they may have seen it in pictures.

Translation Strategies

Here are ways you might translate a term that is not known in your language:

- (1) Use a phrase that describes what the unknown item is, or what is important about the unknown item for the verse being translated.
- (2) Substitute something similar from your language if doing so does not falsely represent a historical fact.
- (3) Copy the word from another language, and add a general word or descriptive phrase to help people understand it.
- (4) Use a word that is more general in meaning.
- (5) Use a word or phrase that is more specific in meaning.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use a phrase that describes what the unknown item is, or what is important about the unknown item for the verse being translated.

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but are inwardly they are **ravenous wolves**. (Matthew 7:15 ULT)

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but **inwardly they are very hungry and dangerous animals**.

"Ravenous wolves" is part of a metaphor here, so the reader needs to know that they are very dangerous to sheep in order to understand this metaphor. (If sheep are also unknown, then you will need to also use one of the translation strategies to translate sheep, or change the metaphor to something else, using a translation strategy for metaphors. See [Translating Metaphors](#).)

"We have nothing here except five **loaves of bread** and two fish." (Matthew 14:17 ULT)

We have nothing here except five **loaves of baked grain seeds** and two fish.

- (2) Substitute something similar from your language if doing so does not falsely represent a historical fact.

Your sins ... will be white like **snow**. (Isaiah 1:18b ULT) This verse is not about snow. It uses snow in a figure of speech to help people understand how white something will be.

Your sins ... will be white like **milk**.

Your sins ... will be white like **the moon**.

- (3) Copy the word from another language, and add a general word or descriptive phrase to help people understand it.

Then they tried to give Jesus wine that was mixed with **myrrh**. But he refused to drink it. (Mark 15:23 ULT) — People may understand better what myrrh is if it is used with the general word "medicine."

Then they tried to give Jesus wine that was mixed with **a medicine called myrrh**. But he refused to drink it.

"We have nothing here except five **loaves of bread** and two fish." (Matthew 14:17 ULT) —
People may understand better what bread is if it is used with a phrase that tells what it is made of (seeds) and how it is prepared (crushed and baked).

We have nothing here except five loaves of **baked crushed seed bread** and two fish.

(4) Use a word that is more general in meaning.

I will turn Jerusalem into piles of ruins, a hideout for **jackals** (Jeremiah 9:11a ULT)

I will turn Jerusalem into piles of ruins, a hideout for **wild dogs**

"We have nothing here except five **loaves of bread** and two fish." (Matthew 14:17 ULT)

We have nothing here except five **loaves of baked food** and two fish.

(5) Use a word or phrase that is more specific in meaning.

... to him who made **great lights** ... (Psalm 136:7a ULT)

to him who made **the sun and the moon**

Next we recommend you learn about:

Copy or Borrow Words ([UTA PDF](#))

How to Translate Names ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Song of Solomon 1:17](#); [Song of Solomon 7:13](#)

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