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Abstract The early twentieth century found the Japanese language in a state of flux—colloquial Japanese was very slowly beginning to replace classical written Japanese, whose grammar had remained relatively intact for centuries. At this time of change Elder Alma O. Taylor began his 1909 translation of the Book of Mormon. He choose initially to render the text into the colloquial style; however, prodded by his Japanese reviewers, Taylor quickly realized that no publicly praiseworthy translation could be made in colloquial Japanese. The choice to translate the Book of Mormon in the classical language, as well as to have successful Japanese author, Choko Ikuta, review and edit the translation, allowed the 1909 text to accurately portray doctrine as well as to be considered a major literary achievement.

PROCLAIMING THE WAY IN JAPANESE:

THE 1909 TRANSLATION
OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

Shinji Takagi

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*The first Japanese version of the Book of Mormon
was published in 1909. In celebration of the
100th anniversary of this event, we honor those
who were involved in that significant effort.*



Cover of 1909 Japanese Book of Mormon. Courtesy of the Family and Church History Department Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

INTRODUCTION

THE YEAR 2009 MARKS THE CENTENNIAL of the publication of the first Japanese translation of the Book of Mormon, which took place in October 1909. Several authors have discussed how Alma O. Taylor,¹ with the assistance of Fred A. Caine, initiated, continued, and finished the work of translation between July 1904 and March 1908.² As interesting as these details may be, a historical evaluation of the 1909 translation can only be based on the merits of the translation itself. Thus, I begin where the previous authors have left off by discussing, among other aspects, the style, quality, and accuracy of the translation.³

In making this evaluation, I approach the Book of Mormon strictly as a book of scripture and primarily focus on how important ideas (with potential doctrinal implications or impact on religious behavior) are expressed and preserved in Japanese. This is not a linguistic exercise. I do not, for example, discuss the semantic or syntactic issues of correspondence in meaning between words, whether sentence structure (e.g., passive or active voice construction, word order, and the like) is preserved or changed, or how sentence length compares between the source and target languages.⁴

Nor do I attempt to frame my discussion in terms of modern translation theory.⁵ In a fundamental sense, translation encompasses all forms of communication between two individuals. In written communication, for example, one first translates thought into coded graphic marks; the other person then translates those marks back into a mental text.⁶ But the written text may not convey the same message to the reader because words could carry different shades of meaning even in the same language, depending on the historical and cultural experience of the individual. Modern translation theory has thus become a discourse on language, mind, culture, and semiotics. At least for now, meandering into these territories does not seem helpful to my task.

Admittedly, the assessment of the 1909 translation ultimately involves my own judgment. In order to introduce objectivity into this subjective exercise, I appeal to two widely accepted rules of good translation to frame my discussion: (1) the translated text must sound *natural* in the target language (called “transparency,” or idiomatic translation, in the literature); and (2) it must be *faithful* to the original (“fidelity,” or faithful translation). These sometimes conflicting requirements of transparency and

fidelity have been debated for over two millennia in the theory and practice of interlingual translation, at least since Cicero and Horace in the first century BC.⁷

The ultimate quality that interlingual translation strives to achieve is *equivalence*. Broadly, there are two approaches.⁸ First, literal translation attempts to transform the original text into the target language word for word. In practice, this is not fully possible because the rules of grammar and syntax differ between languages, so that *literal* translation may more appropriately be called *literalist* translation. For example, the Japanese idiomatic sentence describing a person whose physical predisposition does not easily permit partaking of very hot substance (“*boku wa nekojita da*”) may be translated into English word for word as “I am a cat tongue.” This of course is nonsensical. We must at least render it as “I have a cat tongue” or better still “I have a tongue overly sensitive to heat.” Second, free translation renders the original text sense by sense, for example, by rendering the above sentence as “I cannot eat or drink very hot things” or “I easily burn my mouth.” There is no single correct translation. The art of translation is to determine the optimal mix of transparency and fidelity to achieve reasonable equivalence.

Practical applications are subtle, however. For example, one author suggests translating the English sentence “His rudeness was more than her sensitivity could tolerate” into Japanese as “*kare no burei na gendō wa sensai na kanojo ni wa totemo taerarenai mono de atta*,” a literal retranslation of which might be “His rude language and conduct was something the sensitive woman could not tolerate.” The author further notes the occasional need to change words or parts of speech, suggesting that the English sentence “The nature of history would alter” be translated as “*rekishi ga henshitsu suru de arō*” (history would change in character), where *henshitsu* is a verb that can mean “to change in quality.” These examples show that good literary writing in Japanese generally avoids use of abstract nouns, especially as subjects, to sound natural.⁹

Elaborating on the concept of fidelity, another author notes that the German sentence “*Dein Zagen zögert den Tod heran*” (from *Faust* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe) has alternatively been translated by three competent translators into English in the following ways: “Thy irresolution lingers death

hitherwards”; “Thy shrinking slowly hastens the blows”; and “My shrinking only brings Death more near.”¹⁰ If fidelity allows such variations between German and English, two relatively close languages, one would expect scope for even greater variations between English and Japanese. Fidelity, however, does mean that the translator must refrain from “showing his own self” in the work (except perhaps in the translation of poetry), that he should say neither more nor less than the original, and that his role is not to provide commentary or explanation.¹¹

In the realm of religious translation, there may be another aspect to the concept of fidelity. When words of authority are involved, translation may need to be more *literal* or *literalist* even at the risk of making the translated text sound unnatural. In fact, it appears that Joseph Smith took such an approach to translating the original Book of Mormon plates. Sidney Sperry characterized the English of the Book of Mormon as “translation English,” “that type of English that would be produced by a translator who frequently follows the original too closely, the syntax of which is thus made plain in the English



Alma O. Taylor. Courtesy of the Family and Church History Department Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

dress.” He then cites as examples “hear the words of me” (Jacob 5:2) for “hear my words”; and “stealing away the hearts of the people” (Mosiah 27:9) for “deceiving the people.”¹² Royal Skousen, noting that many of the changes made in succeeding editions of the Book of Mormon had been to “remove grammatical uses that are nonstandard in modern English,” concluded that Joseph Smith made a literal translation of a non-English text.¹³ It is possible that, in the trade-off involving religious translation, greater weight needs to be given to fidelity, even to the point of being as literal as reasonably possible.¹⁴

In what follows, I will proceed with my assessment of the 1909 Japanese translation of the Book of Mormon in the following sequence. I first discuss the question Alma Taylor faced as to whether the translation should use a style based on the grammar of contemporary spoken Japanese or that based on the grammar of classical Japanese, which was more widely used at the time. I then examine the work of revision, emphasizing how native reviewers, including able literary critic and writer Choko Ikuta, perfected Taylor’s draft translation. In the next two sections I identify several recurring patterns of departure from literalism, which make the translation sound natural, graceful, forceful, or complete in Japanese. Subsequently I review examples of notable words and expressions that give a special flavor to the 1909 translation, and finally I address the ultimate question of accuracy before concluding.

THE CHOICE OF STYLE

It was important for Taylor’s translation to be reviewed by “some native scholar” because he knew “[his] Japanese was all too imperfect to produce a translation worthy of the approval and respectful consideration of the public.”¹⁵ The search for a reviewer began in earnest in June 1907 even before the work of translation was fully complete. Up to this time, Taylor had assumed that his translation would be corrected, revised, and perfected by a native reviewer in the style he had used—the style of the colloquial language he had learned to speak. As he soon learned, written Japanese was at the time in the process of significant change, and the choice of style in which to render the translation was no simple matter.

The style in which educated people wrote Japanese from around the eighth century through the

early twentieth century is called *bungotai* (lit. “written language style”). Although *bungotai* in turn encompasses several distinct literary traditions, it shares a common set of grammatical rules established during the Heian period (794–1192), when Japanese literature flourished, and great works,

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including the *Tale of Genji*, were created. Because the language of the Heian period was a great literary language, it should come as no surprise that the grammar (and to some extent the vocabulary) of the period became the standard of written Japanese over subsequent generations.

In the thirteenth century, the spoken language began to undergo transformation as the central players in Japanese society changed from the court nobles to the samurai warriors. The character of warrior life dictated the nature of the changes that took place—toward simplification. Spoken Japanese lost two vowels and a number of auxiliary verbs (which in Japanese define the functions of both verbs and adjectives in a sentence); the rules of verb conjugations also changed. Coupled with significant vocabulary changes, the difference between spoken and written Japanese by the middle of the nineteenth century was so great that an illiterate person would have hardly understood a sentence if it was read to him.

The significant divergence between spoken and written language became a major public issue at the beginning of the Meiji period (1868–1912), when the government set out to transform Japan into a modern nation. Some felt that *bungotai* was not an appropriate literary style for a modern state as the conventions were far too removed from the experience of ordinary people and hence too difficult for them to master.¹⁶ Modernization requires a literate population because a new way of organizing society can only be facilitated through education. Universal education was instituted quickly, but the question remained as to the “language” of instruction, and out of this grew a national movement to “unify spoken and written language” (*gembunitchi* in Japanese).

The need some felt to unify spoken and written language as the prerequisite for a modern state was not unique to Japan but was shared by other countries, including China. Even European countries had confronted the same issue several centuries earlier. It was only in the fourteenth century that major literary works finally began to appear in the vernacular (as opposed to Latin), such as Dante’s *Divina Commedia* and Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. Establishing the grammar of spoken language as the basis for writing requires the genius of a greater writer. Writing, even in the colloquial style, entails greater elements of formality; it requires a great writer to develop rules of good writing. When Taylor completed the translation of the Book of Mormon, such rules were finally being established in Japanese, thanks to the efforts of modern writers, who all sought a language closer to their usual mode of communication.¹⁷

The question Taylor had to deal with was similar to what the Protestant missionaries had faced some 30 years earlier. In translating the Bible into Japanese, most foreign representatives of the Protestant missions felt that the translation should be rendered in contemporary style in order to make it accessible to a wide audience. On the other hand, their Japanese collaborators considered that the dignity of Chinese-heavy classical style would be more appropriate for an authoritative religious text. In the end, the latter position prevailed, in part because the rules of good writing in the colloquial style were not yet developed. The first joint Protestant translations of the New Testament (published in 1880) and the Old Testament (in 1888) were rendered in classi-

cal style, though as a concession to foreign missionaries the use of Chinese was light.¹⁸

The situation in the 1900s, however, was different in two respects. First, following the publication of the Protestant translation of the Bible, the *gembunitchi* movement actually waned. This was due, in part, to the establishment of universal education, which raised the literacy level of the public. As a result, some newspapers, which had earlier used conversational style, reverted to classical style.¹⁹ Instead, classical style developed into a modern style of its own called *futsūbun* (lit. “ordinary or common writing”). *Futsūbun*, while still based on classical grammar, used the colloquial vocabulary and accommodated elements of Western languages in translation style.²⁰ After about 1897 it was in wide use in newspapers, textbooks, and government business.

Second, the *gembunitchi* movement received a renewed momentum at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1904 the national government adopted the policy of introducing contemporary style material in language textbooks. Certain features of spoken Japanese, which make it sound repetitious and monotonous when committed to writing, needed to be overcome in the contemporary style. The modern novelists introduced new auxiliary verbs to accommodate variation, crispness, occasional change in tone, and room for the individuality of the writer to play out. Thus, Taylor in fact faced a viable choice—between the classical style of *futsūbun* variety and the contemporary style just being established.²¹

Taylor records that many of the Japanese he sought advice from insisted that the “pure literary style” should be used. But he continued to believe that contemporary style was the most appropriate for the Book of Mormon:

My writings have all been in what is called “gembunitchi.” . . . This being nearer the form of every day speech, I had decided that, for general interpretation by all classes, “gembunitchi” was the proper style for the Book of Mormon translation. Nor was this decision made without investigation, consultation and earnest reflection. I sought to adopt the style best calculated to serve the purposes of the Lord. And again, “gembunitchi” was in the line of my studies in Japanese, and I felt I would do better in it than in any other style.

Determined that the style should remain contemporary, Taylor started to “secure the services of a good critic” in that style.²²

THE WORK OF REVISION

Taylor first approached Kinzo Hirai since their “experiences with this gentleman in the past had proved his integrity and ability.”²³ Hirai was a language scholar who had attended the World’s Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893, as a representative of Japanese Buddhism.²⁴ His speech at the convention was reprinted in the 29 June 1901 issue

of the *Deseret Evening News*; Taylor must have been impressed with Hirai’s criticism of the hypocrisy of Christianity as seen in the actions of the Western powers toward Japan. He took a copy of the newspaper with him to Japan and contacted Hirai after his arrival. In April 1903, the missionaries were able to secure the use of a meeting place to hold their first public meeting in Japan through the help offered by Hirai.

The Deseret Evening News, 29 June 1901.



Hirai himself could not help with the translation, but he introduced Taylor to his associate Zenshiro Noguchi, who lived in Kobe some 400 miles southwest of Tokyo. Not much biographical information is available on Noguchi. Taylor's correspondence only suggests that he was the son of a Buddhist monk, traveled to the United States and India when he was young, and did some writing. It appears that Noguchi was then a salaried worker in Kobe. His association with Kinzo Hirai went back at least to 1893 when Noguchi accompanied the Japanese Buddhist delegation to Chicago as an interpreter.²⁵ Taylor visited Noguchi in Kobe in July 1907 and left him with a copy of the translated first chapter of 1 Nephi, requesting that the translation be corrected in contemporary style.

Taylor then visited Sendai, some 200 miles north of Tokyo, to see Genta Suzuki, a Methodist and a friend to Mormon missionaries. Suzuki (1865–1945) had studied at Central College (now Central Methodist University) in Fayette, Missouri, where he received a bachelor of arts degree in 1894.²⁶ After returning to Japan, he became an English teacher at Kwansei Gakuin, a Methodist academy in Kobe, and in April 1899 accepted the invitation of his brother-in-law to become the chief editor of the regionally influential *Kahoku Shinpō* in his hometown. Suzuki was responsible for English-language columns and wrote occasional articles on international affairs. He had also published translations of English-language novels.²⁷ Again, Taylor left him with a sample copy of his translation, with the same request he had made of Noguchi.

It was with great surprise that Taylor received the corrected translations from both of these individuals, only to discover that part of the style was changed from contemporary to classical, despite the fact that they had agreed with Taylor that the contemporary style would be the best. They said “all efforts at putting force and dignity into the translation as it stood in ‘gembunitchi’ had proved unsuccessful.” Taylor recognized how difficult it was to write in contemporary style in a manner that deserved “public praise” because the rules of writing were less definite than for classical style. “Consultation, prayer, inquiry and thought anew” on the choice of style helped determine the change.²⁸

With a decision to adopt classical style, Taylor had no need to look for a critic outside of Tokyo. He thus signed a contract with Hirogoro Hirai, Kinzo

Hirai's brother and a teacher at Waseda University. The contract, signed on 2 September 1907, stated that Hirai would devote all his time to the “criticism” of Taylor's Japanese translation of the Book of Mormon for 125 yen (\$62.50 at the gold parity) per month. In March 1908, however, when Hirai had completed the work through the third chapter of 3 Nephi, a presumed scandal involving Hirai was reported in the press.²⁹ Though Taylor became persuaded that the accusation was groundless and Hirai not guilty, his investigation of the matter revealed that Hirai had not severed his relationship with Waseda University, as prescribed in the contract, but he had “played sick to them,” which “made him a liar to me.”³⁰ The contract was revoked on 31 March 1908.

Anxious to get “one of the best writers in Japan,” Taylor approached two gifted authors of national fame: Yujiro (or Shoyo) Tsubouchi and Kinnosuke (or Soseki) Natsume.³¹ Both declined the request, but Natsume recommended Hiroharu Ikuta, “a recent graduate of the Imperial University and author of several books which had been well received in literary circles.”³² Hiroharu (Koji) Ikuta (1882–1936), better known in Japan by his pen name Choko Ikuta, was a prolific literary critic, novelist, playwright, and translator of pre-World War II Japan. He became active in literary circles while attending school and, according to the *Nihon Kindai Bungaku Daijiten* (Dictionary of Modern Japanese Literature), he became acquainted with Natsume in the winter of 1905.³³ In November 1907 he published a book entitled *Bungaku Nyūmon* (An Introduction to Literature) with a foreword by Natsume; in March 1908 he published an article on Natsume in the monthly *Chūō Kōron* (the Central



Choko Ikuta and his wife Fujio. Courtesy of Natsuki Ikuta.

Review). In terms of literary skill, he was more than qualified to act as a reviewer for Taylor's translation.

Ikuta was qualified in two other important respects. First, he was thoroughly familiar with the language of the Bible. Ikuta had been an avid reader of the Bible while attending secondary school in Osaka. In the fall of 1898, he became affiliated with the Universalists, though his interest in Christianity began to wane as he developed interest in European philosophies and social ideas (he died a Buddhist). Second, Ikuta was an accomplished translator of Western literary and philosophical works. Early in his career, he produced the first Japanese translation of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, which he published in January 1911 (his translation work, from May 1909 through 1910, partly overlapped with the work of revising Taylor's translation).

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Ikuta held a special feeling for the language of the Bible in classical style. In the preface to his second translation of *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, first published in 1921, Ikuta noted that classical style was the only way to express the simplicity and clarity, and the grace and dignity, of the original work in the German language. In the preface to the 1935 reprint Ikuta added that, in translating *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, he had used the style of the Meiji translation of the Bible, just as Nietzsche was reported to have used the style of the German translation of the Bible by Martin Luther.³⁴

Finding Ikuta willing to undertake the assignment, Taylor left him with "two volumes of the manuscript as already corrected by Mr. Hirai" and requested him to make any necessary corrections. Ikuta's ability and reputation are well indicated by the following reaction of three literary experts,

including Shoyo Tsubouchi, whom Taylor asked to comment on the corrections Ikuta had made without revealing their connection:

The opinions of all three were that the changes, in most cases, were improvements. Then in a manner not calculated to betray myself, I asked about Mr. Ikuta, his ability and reputation. The answers were all complimentary to him. . . . I then asked if they thought that Mr. Ikuta was capable of producing a better work than the translation they had just been reading. The reply was that the translation as it was didn't need to be changed, but that a man of Mr. Ikuta's ability might be able to improve it just a little.³⁵

On 29 July 1908, Ikuta signed the contract to devote at least five hours a day to the work except Sundays. He then worked on rendering Taylor's translation into classical Japanese, from August through early April of the following year, at the rate of 100 yen (\$50 at the gold parity) per month. Ikuta both reworked the revision made by Hirai and worked on the rest of the book on his own. Thinking it wise that two reviewers look at each portion of his translation, Taylor then requested Kosaburo (or Matahei) Kawai, a noted writer and poet better known in Japan by his pen name Suimei, to read over the portion Ikuta had revised alone, from the fourth chapter of 3 Nephi to the end of the book. Kawai completed his work in a little over a month, from early May to early June 1909, likely producing only a few substantive changes.³⁶

THE LITERARY VALUE

The 1909 Japanese translation of the Book of Mormon is a great literary achievement. The beauty and grace of the language used, for example, in translating Mosiah 3:19 (that begins with "For the natural man is an enemy to God . . .") must be evident to many who are able to read it, perhaps much more so than the two subsequent translations published by the Church in 1957 and 1995. The final language of the 1909 translation must heavily reflect the hand of Choko Ikuta, who was the only person to render Taylor's entire original translation into classical Japanese.³⁷ Of course, the work of translation was a collective effort, making it difficult to ascribe too much of the final product to any single individual. Taylor records that no change was made that he did

not approve. Certainly, Taylor and Caine did not stand idly by while Ikuta perfected the language. A handwritten note prepared by one of them reads:

Beginning with chapter 28 of II Nephi, . . . I note that the use of difficult words increases very materially. I shall be entirely disappointed if after the hard labor of both of us, the translation is marked with so many hard words that it will be hard for the ordinary people to understand it. I do therefore hope that the necessity to use difficult words in some places in order to express the true meaning will not be a justification for the use of difficult words and phrases where there is no absolute necessity for them.³⁸

The missionaries must have prevailed over Ikuta's propensity for using difficult and lofty words. The final language was much friendlier to the average reader than Ikuta perhaps would have produced on his own.

There are a number of isolated instances of beauty and grace, such as Mosiah 3:19 noted above. But identifying such individual instances would be a highly subjective and random exercise. After all, how a particular phrase, sentence, or sequence of sentences sounds may well be a matter of personal taste or preference. In order to be as objective as possible in my assessment, therefore, I will identify below recurring uses of certain literary expressions, devices, or principles in characterizing the overall literary value of the 1909 translation.

Smoothing out awkward expressions. The use of refined language contributes to the literary quality of the 1909 translation, which gives little indication that it is translation Japanese. The following example illustrates how a seemingly awkward expression in the English original was made smooth in Japanese:

The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father; And no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard Jesus speak. (3 Nephi 17:16–17)

1909 Japanese translation: warera no mi mata kikishi iesu ga tenpu ni inori tamaeru tokoro no kotoba wa, me ni imada kore wo mizu, mimi ni imada kore wo kikazu, kuchi ni ii uru mono mo

naku, fude nite shirushi uru mono mo naku, mata ningen no kokoro no sōzō shi gataki hodo fushigi nishite katsu ōinari.

Literal English equivalent:³⁹ (the words we saw and heard Jesus [use to] pray to Heavenly Father are so marvelous and so great that the eye has not yet seen, the ear has not yet heard, there is none who can utter with his mouth, there is none who can record with a pen, and the hearts of men cannot conceive them.)

The smoothness of the translation, however, comes with the loss of Hebraic syntax evident in the English translation (e.g., 1 Nephi 1:16; 1 Nephi 22:26; Mosiah 3:1–3; Mosiah 3:18–19; Mosiah 5:10–12; Mosiah 15:2–4; Alma 13:19).⁴⁰ Of course, it is simply not possible to preserve the exact Semitic order of words and phrases in Japanese, but another factor influencing the outcome is the tendency to use varied translations for parallel expressions in the 1909 translation (e.g., use of two separate words to translate “remember” in Mosiah 5:11–12).

THE SMOOTHNESS OF THE TRANSLATION, HOWEVER, COMES WITH THE LOSS OF HEBRAIC SYNTAX EVIDENT IN THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION. OF COURSE, IT IS SIMPLY NOT POSSIBLE TO PRESERVE THE EXACT SEMITIC ORDER OF WORDS AND PHRASES IN JAPANESE.

Deletions and additions. To make the translation sound less awkward, the following phrases were not translated at all: “either on the one hand or on the other” (1 Nephi 14:7); “And so it is on the other hand” (Alma 41:6)—translated simply as “but”; “yea, the word came unto them that it must be fulfilled” (3 Nephi 1:25); and “being on a parallel” (3 Nephi 26:5). On the other hand, some words and phrases were added, presumably to make the translation sound complete. For example, after rendering 1 Nephi 18:2 (which describes how Nephi constructed a ship), the 1909 translation adds an

entire sentence: “Ware wa tenshu no oshie tamaishi hōhō nite fune wo tsukurishi yue, sono fune wa hito no tsukuru mono ni kotonarishi nari” (Because I built the ship according to the method that the Lord had taught me, the ship was different from what men would build). The translation of 4 Nephi 1:14 (which notes that “many of that generation” had passed away) is followed by the addition of a clause that does not exist in the original: “sono kōnin mo taterare tariki” ([but] their successors were also put in place). An even greater departure from literalism is found in Mormon 5:14–15, where the translation of three ideas placed in a complex manner is facilitated by using numbers “daiichi wa” (first), “daini wa” (second), and “daisan wa” (third).

Specific and concrete language. The language of the translation reflects the consistent application of a certain set of rules. An obvious pattern is to use specific or concrete language. Anybody who is familiar with the English original is immediately struck with the tendency to replace an expression involving the English preposition *of* with a verb or verbal expression in Japanese. Thus, the “covenant people of the Lord” (1 Nephi 15:14) is translated as “tenshu no seiyaku wo ukeshi tami” (the people who received the covenant of the Lord). The conversion is not mechanical but involves serious thinking. Thus, the “true fold of God” (1 Nephi 15:15) is “makoto no kami ni shitagau mure” (the flock that follows the true God), and not the “true flock that follows God.” Likewise, the “revelations of God” when “looked unto” (Mormon 8:33) are “kami no atae tamaishi keishi” (the revelations that God gave) in the past tense, while those revelations when denied (Mormon 9:7) become “kami yori sazukaru keishi” (the revelations you receive from God) in the present.

Active or direct style. Use of active or direct style is a rule of good writing in any language and also a feature of the 1909 translation even when it does not correspond to the English original. For example, for “the blindness of their minds, and the stiffness of their necks” (Jarom 1:3), the translation is “kokoro kuraku, jji tsuyoki” (their hearts are dark, and their pride is strong). For “the blood of Christ atoneth for their sins” (Mosiah 3:16), we have “kirisuto wa onchi nite sono tsumi wo aganai tamau nari” (Christ atones for their sins by his blood). A related feature is the choice of simpler construction. Thus, “out of obscurity and out of darkness” (1 Nephi 22:12) is simplified as “kakuretaru kuraki kyōgai

yori” (out of a hidden and dark state). The following is a more compelling example:

Ye shall have mercy restored unto you again; ye shall have justice restored unto you again; ye shall have a righteous judgment restored unto you again; and ye shall have good rewarded unto you again (Alma 41:14)

Sono mukui wo uku beshi. Sunawachi airen to seigi to tadashiki saiban to zen to wa nanji ni kaifuku seraru beshi

(Ye shall be rewarded, that is, ye shall have mercy, justice, a righteous judgment, and good restored unto you)

In this and other similar examples (e.g., 3 Nephi 19:34; Ether 6:10), the construction is made so smooth in Japanese that any trace of the original Semitic language is lost.

Literary expressions. A number of literary or expressive phrases are found throughout the translation. For example, “had become . . . grossly wicked” (Helaman 6:2) and “began to grow exceedingly wicked” (6:16) are translated respectively as “hanahadashiki jaaku ni nagaretari” (lapsed into gross wickedness) and “hanahada jaaku ni katamukeri” (degenerated greatly into wickedness). To introduce symmetry in expression between speaking and writing, “no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man” (3 Nephi 17:17) becomes “kuchi ni ii uru mono mo naku, fude nite shirushi uru mono mo naku” (there is none who can utter with a mouth, neither is there anyone who can record with a pen). It is not simply “a dew before the sun” (Mormon 4:18) that is swept off but “asahi ni terasaruru tsuyu” (a dew lighted up by the morning sun). A “God of truth” (Ether 3:12) is really “makoto no michitaru kami” (a God full of truth).

Contrasting words and negative expressions. Occasional use of contrasting words is another literary device. Thus, *asahimo* (a flaxen string) is used to translate the “flaxen cord” the devil uses to lead the people, but *nawa* (ropes) is the cords he uses to bind them (2 Nephi 26:22). If it is an “infant” that dies but does not perish, the counterpart who drinks damnation must be *otona* (an adult), though “men” is the original word (Mosiah 3:18). Use of negative expressions (including double negatives) to affirm positive ideas is a characteristic of classical Japanese. For example, “one eternal round” (1 Nephi 10:19) is translated as “eien ni kotonaru koto nashi”

(not variable for ever); and “all things are given them which are expedient unto man” (2 Nephi 2:27) becomes “ōyoso sono tame to naru mono wa hitotsu toshite ataerarezaru koto nashi” (there is not a thing that is beneficial unto them that is not given). To “be remembered” (Moroni 6:4) is “wasurete naozari ni suru koto naku” (not to be forgotten nor neglected).

THE MANNER OF TRANSLATION

Supplementing words, paraphrasing, and attempting to interpret or explain (even when not absolutely necessary to produce a good idiomatic translation) are among the departures from literalism that characterize the 1909 translation. These features may well have reflected Taylor’s desire to make the translation as understandable as possible to all classes of people. In one instance, Taylor asked the First Presidency if he could translate the expression “the Spirit of Christ” as *seirei* (the Holy Ghost), saying that the original term might suggest Christ’s own spirit to the Japanese. The First Presidency counseled Taylor against it, arguing that the “same difficulty in grasping the meaning of these terms” would be met with by readers of the scriptures in any language:

Religion, art and science each coin new words or give a peculiar shade of meaning to familiar words, and gradually these get established in the language. The same is the case with words used in the Japanese Bible. It may be hard for those who have not studied that sacred volume to comprehend the writer’s meaning, but repeated readings of such terms will gradually make the meaning as clear to the Japanese mind as they are to one who understands English but has not made the scriptures his study.⁴¹

The First Presidency, however, approved certain explanatory words to be inserted in brackets in order to make the meaning “clearer to the reader” (for example, “Jesus” following “the Son of Man” or the “Lamb”; “three” before the words “beloved disciples” in Mormon 8:10; and “the emblem of” before “the flesh and blood” in Moroni 4:1).⁴²

Supplementing words and phrases. In some cases, adding words or phrases may be absolutely necessary to express the meaning of a foreign sentence correctly in Japanese. In other cases, it

may be helpful to the reader but not necessary for communicating the meaning. For example, the translation renders “to stir them up in the ways of remembrance” (1 Nephi 2:24) as “tenshu wo omoi okosashimen tame” (to make them remember the Lord). Likewise, “the life of my servant shall be in my hand” (3 Nephi 21:10) is rendered as “sono hitori naru waga shimobe no inochi wa waga te no uchi ni mamoraru beki” (the life of my servant shall be protected in my hand).

Most cases of adding words and phrases appear to be meant only for literary purposes. For example, “May God raise you from death by the power of the resurrection, and also from everlasting death by the power of the atonement” (2 Nephi 10:25) is translated as “kami ga fukkatsu no chikara wo mote nanjira wo haka no ichiji no shi yori yomigaerese, zaikadaishoku no chikara wo mote nanjira wo eien no shi yori yomigaerese tamau” (May God raise you from the temporary death of the grave by the power of the resurrection, and raise you from everlasting death by the power of the atonement). Here, “haka no ichiji no” (temporary . . . of the grave) is added to the first occurrence of the word “death” in contrast to “everlasting death.”

In some cases, the translators exercised outright poetic license, perhaps to be complete. For example, “[they] scourged his skin with faggots” (Mosiah 17:13) is translated as “takigi wo moyashite shi ni itarashimuru made sono hada wo yaki keru” ([they] put fire on faggots and burnt his skin unto death). Likewise, “[Alma] could not rest, and he also went forth” (Alma 43:1) is rendered as “yasumu koto wo ezareba, mata michi wo noben tame ide yuku” ([Alma] could not rest, and he also went out to preach the word). Finally, “they who were baptized in the name of Jesus were called the church of Christ” (3 Nephi 26:21) becomes “iesu no mina ni yorite shinrei wo ukeshi monodomo no dantai wa kirisuto no kyōkai to yobarenu” (the group of people who were baptized in the name of Jesus was called the church of Christ).

Paraphrasing. Paraphrasing is another device that could be necessary in some cases to convey the meaning correctly; in other cases, it is used only for literary purposes. For example, “come to the knowledge of the true Messiah” (1 Ne 10:14) is translated as “shin no messha wo mitomuru ni itaru” (come to acknowledge the true Messiah), and “this corruption” (2 Nephi 9:7) as “kono kutsuru mi” (this

body that will corrupt). Likewise, “{all men shall}⁴³ have passed from this first death unto life” (2 Nephi 9:15) is rendered as “kono daiichi no shi yori fukukatsu sureba” (have been resurrected from this first death); and “the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father” (Mosiah 15:7) becomes “ko no mune wa sudeni chichi no mune ni mattaku fukushi tareba nari” (the will of the Son has already been totally subjected to the will of the Father). Paraphrasing often involves the replacement of abstract nouns, as in some of these examples.



SUPPLEMENTING WORDS,
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ARE AMONG THE DEPARTURES FROM
LITERALISM THAT CHARACTERIZE
THE 1909 TRANSLATION.



Interpretation. Translation by necessity involves interpretation. But the need for interpretation is even greater for the Book of Mormon because the meanings of some passages are not straightforward, especially when they involve deep religious messages or novel ideas. For example, if one is to translate “through the fulness of the Gentiles” (1 Nephi 15:13) word for word into Japanese, one would have “ihōjin no kanzen naru koto ni yori” (by the completeness of the Gentiles), which makes absolutely no sense. The 1909 translation tries to interpret the passage by rendering it as “ihōjin ga kanzen naru fukuin wo ukuru ni yori” (as the Gentiles accept the perfect gospel). Likewise, “the severity of the Lord” (Omni 1:22) is translated interpretively as “sono kibishiki onbatsu” (his severe punishment); “repenting nigh unto death” (Mosiah 27:28) as “shisen bakari no itami mote kuiaratame” (repenting with the pain that nearly caused him to die); “a more excellent way” (Ether 12:11) as “mōse no rippō

ni masareru michi” (a way that is superior to the law of Moses); and “in plain humility” (Ether 12:39) as “yono tsune no furi to ware to onaji kotoba to wo mote” (in ordinary manner and with the same language as mine). The following involves a more delicate act of interpretation:

I [come . . . to] do the will, both of the Father and of the Son—of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh (3 Nephi 1:14)

Ware wa waga reikon no kankei ni yori chichi no mune wo okonai, waga nikutai no kankei ni yori ko no mune wo okonau
(I do the will of the Father on account of the spirit, and do the will of the Son on account of the flesh)

In this example, interpretation seems to define the meaning more precisely.

Explanatory. There are instances where the interpretation becomes explanatory. For example, the 1909 translation renders “nor repent of the thing which thou hast done” (Mosiah 4:22) as “sono zaisan wo oshimite hodokosazaru tsumi wo mo kuiaratamezu” (not repent of the sin of being unwilling to part with your possessions and not imparting them); and “look to God and live” (Alma 37:47) as “kami ni tayorite eien no seimei wo ukeyo” (rely upon God and receive eternal life). Likewise, “the law is fulfilled” (3 Nephi 12:19) is translated as “furuki rippō wa mohaya sono mokuteki wo tasshite kōyō naki mono to nari tareba” (the old law has now fulfilled its purpose and become of no effect); “ye shall not resist evil” (3 Nephi 12:39) as “aku wo motte aku wo fusegu koto nakare” (ye shall not resist evil with evil); and “this is the law and the prophets” (3 Nephi 15:10) as “waga meirei wo mamoru wa, sunawachi rippō to yogenshara no kotoba ni kanau koto nari” (to keep my commandments complies with the law and the words of the prophets). These cases could give the impression that the translation is like commentary on a passage of scripture (though only to someone familiar with the English original).

NOTABLE WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS

The choice of certain words and phrases gives a distinctive flavor to the 1909 translation. There are of course countless such examples. I will here

focus on just three—namely, the frequent use of the Japanese word for “the way,” how the English word “soul” is translated, and the translation for “the Lord.”

The way. The Japanese word *michi* (*dào* in Chinese) is one of the favorite, multipurpose words of the 1909 translation. Though it literally means “way,” “road,” or “path,” the word is rich in a variety of meanings, such as “means,” “process,” “vocation,” “logic,” “reason,” “sense,” and “religious teaching.” *Michi* is most frequently used to translate the term “word” as in “the word of God” or “the word of the Lord,” whereas *kotoba* would have been a more literal translation. Thus, “the word of God” that missionaries were preaching in Alma 23:1 is translated as “kami no michi” (the way of God), as was “the word” the people were ready to hear in Alma 32:6.

The use of *michi* for “word” in part follows the Chinese translation of John 1:1 where *dào* was used for the Greek word *logos* (the 1880 Japanese translation of the Bible also used the Chinese character *dào* for *logos*, but made it read *kotoba* thereby giving a dual meaning). Curiously, however, the 1909 translation of the Book of Mormon more frequently uses *mikotoba* (the holy word) when “the word of God” in the original is used in the sense of *logos*.⁴⁴ Thus, “the rod of iron” (1 Nephi 11:25) is “kami no mikotoba” (the holy word of God), and “the word of God,” which is quick and powerful (Helaman 3:29), is also translated as “kami no mikotoba” (see also 4 Nephi 1:30).

Michi is also the principal word used to translate expressions such as “the plan of salvation” and “the plan of redemption.” Thus “the great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8) is translated as “hito ni kōfuku wo esasen to suru ōinaru michi” (the great way of having men obtain happiness). Likewise, for “the great and eternal plan of deliverance from death” (2 Nephi 11:5), we have “hitobito wo shi yori aganai sukuu tokoshie no ōinaru michi” (the eternal and great way of redeeming and saving people from death). *Michi* is used even when a counterpart does not appear in the original. Thus, the sentence “[Nephi and Lehi] began to grow up unto the Lord” (Helaman 3:21) is translated as “seichō shi yuku mama ni tenshu wo osore kashikommu michi wo manaberu” ([they] learned the way of fearing and respecting the Lord as they grew up). And “that thing which they do believe” with steadfastness







(Helaman 15:10) is translated simply as “sono shinzuru michi” (the way of their belief).

Soul. A revelation to Joseph Smith gave a special meaning to the word “soul” as a compound made up of the body and the spirit (Doctrine and Covenants 88:15), but this is not always the sense in which the word is used in the Book of Mormon. The Hebrew counterpart *nephesh* appears over 780 times in the Old Testament and has been variously translated as “soul,” “self,” “life,” “creature,” “person,” “appetite,” “mind,” “living being,” “desire,” “emotion,” or “passion.” Some biblical commentaries suggest that *nephesh* can be translated as “self” or even more simply as “I” or “me.”⁴⁵ Newer English translations tend to translate *nephesh* much less frequently as “soul.” For example, the New Revised Standard Version (1989) has “I loath my life” for the verse translated in the King James Version as “My soul is weary of my life” (Job 10:1).

IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THE CHOICE OF *TENSHU* IN THE 1909 BOOK OF MORMON TRANSLATION APPLIES NOT TO “GOD” BUT TO “THE LORD.” GESSEL DISCUSSES HOW TAYLOR CAME TO BELIEVE THAT *TENSHU* WOULD MORE CLOSELY CARRY THE MEANING OF THE SCRIPTURAL WORD “LORD” THAN THE SIMPLE *SHU*, WHICH IS USED IN REFERRING TO EARTHLY LORDS.”

As might be expected, in the 1909 translation, the English word “soul” is translated variously as *kokoro* (heart) (e.g., 1 Nephi 1:15), *reikon* (spirit) (e.g., 1 Nephi 15:31; Alma 40:18), and *hito* (man or person) (e.g., 2 Nephi 9:13; Alma 39:17). Sometimes, it is not translated at all. For instance, the sentence “the final state of the souls of men is to dwell in the kingdom of God” (1 Nephi 15:35) is translated as “hito wa tsui ni kami no mikuni ni sumu” (men will eventually live in the kingdom of God). Likewise,

CHINESE-CHARACTER NAMES FOR GOD

CA. 600 BC	CURRENT JAPANESE (KANJI) SCRIPTS	
		<p><i>tiānzhǔ, tenshu.</i> The first character means “heaven.” The character below, meaning “master” or “lord,” adds an additional stroke to the image for <i>king</i>, making it a great king.</p>
		<p><i>shēn, kami.</i> The character means “spirit,” “god,” or “supernatural being.” The left-hand element may refer to displaying an offering on an altar.</p>
		<p><i>shàngdì, jōtei.</i> The first character means “top,” “superior,” or “highest,” while the second means “ruler” or “emperor.” This term may be the oldest Chinese name of deity in continual use that has survived to our day. Emperors sacrificed to tablets bearing this name, but no images of this deity were ever made.</p>

“the enemy of my soul” (2 Nephi 4:28) is simply “waga teki” (my enemy), and “the welfare of your souls” (Jacob 2:3) is “nanjira no tokoshie no kōfuku” (your eternal happiness). Only rarely is “soul” translated according to the definition given in the Doctrine and Covenants (Mosiah 2:21; Helaman 8:28), as seems appropriate under the circumstances.

The Lord. “The Lord” is typically rendered in the 1909 translation as *tenshu*, a new word that the Western missionaries working in China had created by combining two Chinese characters meaning “heaven” and “lord.” This Chinese word (*tiānzhǔ* in pinyin) was one of several words used to translate God (or its Latin equivalent *Deus*), and was sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church in the early eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century, however, some Protestant missionaries began to use two existing words, *shēn* (*kami* in Japanese) and *shàngdì* (*jōtei* in Japanese).⁴⁶ Though they never reached agreement, the American Bible Society published a Chinese translation of the Bible in the mid-nineteenth century, with *shēn* (*kami*) for God. These

developments explain why in Japan the Catholics and the Protestants adopted two different words for God (but *shàngdì* was never adopted in Japanese).⁴⁷



It should be noted that the choice of *tenshu* in the 1909 Book of Mormon translation applies not to “God” but to “the Lord.” Gessel discusses how Taylor came to believe that *tenshu* would more closely carry the meaning of the scriptural word “Lord” “than the simple *shu*, which is used in referring to earthly lords.”⁴⁸ In the 1909 translation of the Book of Mormon, however, there is a fine distinction between *tenshu* and *shu*: the former is used more generally with reference to the Lord, while the latter is sometimes used when the Lord speaks or appears to an individual (e.g., 3 Nephi 1:12).

In preserving Taylor’s choice of the word *tenshu* for “the Lord,” Ikuta must have been familiar with the controversy among the Protestants in Japan over the biblical choice of the word *kami* for God. From the latter part of the nineteenth century, some Protestant missionaries even began to insist that *tenshu*, used in the Roman Catholic Church, was a better

term for “God” because the connotations of *kami* (a polytheistic spiritual entity residing in a particular location) were so ingrained in the language of Shinto that the use of the term was preventing the Japanese from coming to a proper understanding of God. Some influential Protestant publications called for a new translation of the Bible, in part to do away with the word *kami* for “God.”⁴⁹

THE QUESTION OF ACCURACY

Accuracy has been a buzzword for linguistic and theological purity in most analyses of biblical translation.⁵⁰ In the realm of religion, inaccurate translation not only fails to achieve a satisfactory degree of equivalence but also could give a wrong idea and potentially jeopardize the reader. By the ultimate standard of accuracy, the 1909 translation earns high marks in my assessment. Even in a number of passages where the current 1995 translation is in my view incorrect, imperfect, or questionable (e.g., 2 Nephi 2:10; Mosiah 1:2; Alma 36:9; Alma 43:46; Alma 60:10; Helaman 4:26; Helaman 16:12;


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3 Nephi 29:9; Moroni 1:3),⁵¹ the 1909 translation renders them correctly and skillfully (though the reverse could also be true in other passages—see below). But accuracy can be a relative concept, espe-

cially in translation, where there is a whole spectrum of correctness or incorrectness.

Though problems of accuracy are few, I attempt below to identify three types of imperfections in the 1909 translation, which I call (1) debatable translations; (2) questionable translations; and (3) outright mistranslations.

Debatable translation involves imperfect equivalence when near perfect equivalence is technically feasible. These cases generally entail the use of a particular word for the original when a better word is available. For example, in Mosiah 7:31, the 1909 translation adopts the word *maneku* (to bring about) for “reap” (used in contrast to “sow”) when a closely corresponding word is available in Japanese (*karu*). In some cases, the original words are not translated at all even though they have good Japanese counterparts, for example, the “end” in the “end of its creation” (2 Nephi 2:12) or the “nature” in the “nature of that righteousness” (Helaman 13:38).

Questionable translation entails a greater deviation from the original than debatable translation, but it retains more ambiguity than outright mistranslation to allow disagreement. I have been able to identify 22 such cases in the 1909 translation (though the list may not be exhaustive). Many of them are passages that are very difficult to interpret, but the problem would not have existed if the translation had been more literal, leaving the interpretation of a difficult or ambiguous passage to the reader. The following two examples should suffice to make my point:⁵²

[God] shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain (2 Nephi 2:2)
 Kami wa nanji no nameshi kannan shinku yori
 nanji no rieki wo shōzeshime tamawan
 (God shall cause thy gain to come out of the afflictions you experience)

{And others will he pacify, and} lull them away into carnal security (2 Nephi 28:21)
 kore wo azamukite nikuyoku ni fukerashimuru
 (deceive them and cause them to indulge in carnal desires)

On the other hand, the following passage is not so difficult, but it appears that interpretation was carried too far:

{If their works are evil} they shall be restored unto them for evil (Alma 41:4)

Sono okonai wa so ga akunin naru wo shōsu
beshi
(Their works will testify that they are evil
people)

Other cases of questionable translation entail the choice of words that give a different shade of meaning than that suggested by the original. These are questionable only because they have doctrinal implications or potential impact on religious behavior; otherwise, they could be brushed off as an inevitable but inconsequential outcome of translation. For example, the 1909 translation renders “turn away {from your sins}” (2 Nephi 9:45) as *kui-aratamete* (repent of); “are reconciled {unto God}” (2 Nephi 10:24) as *shitagai taru* (follow); “feasting upon {the word of Christ}” (2 Nephi 31:20) as *ajiwai* (taste); “{faith is} dormant” (Alma 32:34) as *muyō* (useless); and “lay hold upon {the word of God}” (Helaman 3:29) as *uke ireru* (accept).

Some cases border on mistranslation. For example:

It is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do (2 Nephi 25:23)

Hito wa ikabakari tsutome hagemu tomo, sono sukuwaruru wa hitoeni kami no megumi ni yoru

(No matter how hard man may work, it is solely dependent upon God’s grace that man is saved)

{I trust that} . . . ye look forward for the remission of your sins, with an everlasting faith, which is to come (Alma 7:6)

Eien usezaru shinkō mote kitaru beki koto wo shinji nagara tsumi no yurushi wo ubeki toki wo yoki suru

(Ye look forward to the time when ye receive the remission of your sins with a faith in things to come that does not perish forever)

There was a punishment affixed, and a just law given, which brought remorse of conscience unto man (Alma 42:18)

Yo no hajime ni wa batsu sadamerare, tadashiki rippō taterareshi ga, kono rippō no tame hito wa hajimete ryōshin ni togamerarete kuyuru ni itareri

(A punishment was affixed and a just law given at the beginning of the world. Because of this law, man for the first time felt the pangs of conscience unto repentance)



Title page of the Japanese edition of the Book of Mormon, 1909. Courtesy of the Family and Church History Department Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The inadequacy of translation in a few passages has only been highlighted recently in light of new research on the Book of Mormon, concerning the “brightness” of possibly wooden swords (Alma 24:12 and other similar verses).⁵³ The remaining cases involve inappropriate words (i.e., 2 Nephi 2:22; Alma 13:3; Alma 31:35; Helaman 10:7),⁵⁴ failure to translate the English preposition “in” properly (i.e., Helaman 13:38; Moroni 9:25),⁵⁵ or simple interpretational errors (i.e., 3 Nephi 26:9; Ether 1:35).⁵⁶

Outright mistranslations are rare; I have been able to identify only nine. Four involve interpretational errors and are not serious. Two of them (2 Nephi 26:11; Ether 2:15) translate “always” as *eikyū* or *eien ni* (forever) when rendering the idea that the Spirit “will not always strive with man.” The substitution of “forever” for “always” seems to give too much focus on the eternal consequence

of our actions, as opposed to the need to keep our actions righteous here and now. The translation of Helaman 14:9 “[Prepare] the way of the Lord” as “tenshu no kudari tamau michi” (the way through which the Lord will descend [from heaven]) is insightful but seems too restrictive. Surely, preparing the way of the Lord also includes the spiritual and mental preparation of the individual. Finally, whereas the original in Mormon 9:32 asserts that the record is written in “reformed Egyptian” characters, “according to our knowledge,” the translation gives “warera wa warera no iwayuru hentai ejiputo moji wo manabishi tokoro no chishiki nite kono kiroku wo tsukurinu” (we made this record according to our knowledge of [or our knowledge obtained from learning] so-called reformed Egyptian characters).

The other cases are more substantive because they misinterpret the intended words of the prophets. Three of the cases involve failing to translate the conjunction “if” in the sense of “whether” (2 Nephi 33:11; Ether 4:10; Ether 5:6). For example:

And if they are not the words of Christ, judge ye
(2 Nephi 33:11)

Nanjira kore wo kirisuto no mikotoba ni arazu
to omou tomo
(Even if you may think that they are not the
words of Christ)

In these cases, the reader who reads the Japanese translation would fail to respond to the challenge of a prophet to judge the validity of his words or authority. The remaining two cases (2 Nephi 25:12; Mosiah 15:3) are even more serious as they involve possible doctrinal misrepresentations, as indicated below:

The Only Begotten of the Father, yea, even the
Father of heaven and of earth (2 Nephi 25:12)
Tenchi no chichi no umi tamau hitorigo
(The Only Child begotten of the Father of
heaven and earth)

The translation leaves no room for understanding that the “Father of heaven and of earth” could refer to Christ, and not to his father.

The Father, because he was conceived by the
power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh
(Mosiah 15:3)
Kami no michikara nite sono reikon no umare
tamaishi kankei ni yori chichi nari. Nikutai wo

mochi tamau kankei ni yori ko nari
(The Father, because his spirit was conceived by
the power of God, and the Son, because he has
a body)

As serious as these errors may be, these are the only cases I have found of outright mistranslation that I believe involve possible doctrinal misrepresentation. The 1909 translation is substantially accurate and should convey broadly the same information to religious seekers as would the English original.

CONCLUSION

The 1909 Japanese translation of the Book of Mormon is a great literary achievement. Commentary by some previous authors may have created the false sense that the translation was somehow rendered in an archaic language few understood. This is far from the case. It was a modern translation in every sense of the word by the standards of the early twentieth century. Though it was rendered in classical style, its classical style was of the *futsūbun* variety, which had been developed to accommodate the needs of an increasingly modernizing society and was at the time widely used.

In terms of the beauty and force of the language, the 1909 translation far surpasses the 1957 and 1995 translations (though perhaps not in terms of fidelity). The language in part reflects the skill with which Choko Ikuta perfected Taylor’s draft translation. The 1909 translation consistently uses specific and concrete language and an active and direct style, and employs a number of literary expressions and devices. To sound more natural, it supplements words and phrases as well as paraphrasing the original expressions even when not required to produce good idiomatic translation. These characteristics may also have reflected Taylor’s desire to make the language as accessible as possible to the average reader. For the most part the translation is accurate, but the characteristic departure from literalism is a possible weakness that needs to be recognized as a work of religious translation.

I have paid relatively little attention to the choice of theological words, a topic that Gessel discusses in depth.⁵⁷ This reflects my view that the choice of words to express foreign concepts is not fundamental to the process of interlingual transla-

tion. If, for example, there is no equivalent word in Japanese for a certain concept, all we have to do is to create one (as was frequently done during the nineteenth century). This is a question of definition. If there are religious words the average Japanese reader is not familiar with, it is a question of education. Substantially the same issues of definition and education exist when an English-speaking teacher of a technical subject explains new concepts to an English-speaking novice.⁵⁸ The assignment of words is essentially a simple case of literal information transfer, conceptually the most straightforward aspect of translation.⁵⁹

Selecting Japanese words for religious and philosophical terms was not central to Taylor's translation work in any case. The task of assigning existing words or inventing new words for most abstract Western concepts had largely been completed by the turn of the twentieth century. The first joint Protestant translation of the Bible, published in the 1880s, had also established the Japanese

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words for most fundamental Christian words.⁶⁰ The Church had also published a number of pamphlets in the 1900s in which the Japanese words for some uniquely Mormon terms were identified.

It is difficult to assess the choice of classical style. Should the Church have waited until the written colloquial style was firmly established before attempting to translate the Book of Mormon? If so, how long? Until the early 1920s when the print media fully embraced contemporary style, or until after the end of World War II when official government documents began to be expressed in contemporary style?⁶¹ One thing is clear. Writing in contemporary style with grace and dignity would

have been a difficult task even in the 1950s. The public outcry over the colloquial style translations of the New Testament (published in 1954) and the Old Testament (in 1955) was so great⁶² that Tatsui Sato, in making the second Japanese translation of the Book of Mormon for the Church, gave up the idea of rendering it entirely in contemporary style.⁶³ In fact, the Church waited until 1995 to make a full colloquial style translation available to contemporary Japanese readers who might have limited familiarity with classical grammar.

In view of all this, Taylor's ultimate choice of classical style for the 1909 translation may well have been the right one. As a result, a writer of Choko Ikuta's ability could apply his literary skills in perfecting the translation. Even after the Japan Mission closed in 1924, the translation was used among the Hawaiians of Japanese ancestry, thus paving the way for the resumption of missionary work at the conclusion of World War II.⁶⁴ Though Ikuta may have had the final touch, Taylor, with the assistance of Caine, produced the initial translation and was fully involved in every step of the finalization process, thus earning the Church the ownership of the work that it deserves. Because of these individuals' efforts, Japanese-speaking members of the Church can enjoy the privilege of reading the Book of Mormon from time to time in the language of the *Tale of Genji*, though with a modern vocabulary. Indeed, the way was proclaimed in the language of Japanese poetry—the beautiful language of their ancestors.⁶⁵ ■

Notes

1. Alma O. Taylor was one of the first missionaries to arrive in Japan in August 1901 and served as president of the Japan Mission from July 1905 until late 1909. For the opening of the Japan Mission, see Shinji Takagi, "Mormons in the Press: Reactions to the 1901 Opening of the Japan Mission," in *Taking the Gospel to the Japanese, 1901 to 2001*, ed. Reid L. Neilson and Van C. Gessel (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2006), 179–220.
2. An overview is provided in Murray L. Nichols, "History of the Japan Mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1901–1924" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1957). See also Van C. Gessel, "Languages of the Lord: The Japanese Translations of the Book of Mormon," and Sarah Cox Smith, "Translator or Translated? The Portrayal of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Print in Meiji Japan," in Neilson and Gessel, *Taking the Gospel to the Japanese*, 127–45, 233–61.
3. Technical notes: I use the 1979 LDS edition of the Book of Mormon as the source text to assess the 1909 Japanese translation (though the translators apparently used the "sixth electrotype edition published at Liverpool"). See Alma O. Taylor, letter addressed to Anthon Lund, 15 November 1904. Alma O. Taylor Papers, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter Church History Library). I generally follow the Hepburn system to Romanize Japanese words but, consistent with official Japanese government practice,

- do not apply the Hepburn convention of using diacritical marks to indicate long vowels in personal and geographical names.
4. Such a linguistic assessment of the 1957 Japanese translation of the Book of Mormon is offered by Jiro Numano, "The Japanese Translation of the Book of Mormon: A Study in the Theory and Practice of Translation" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1976).
 5. Critical reviews of modern translation theory are offered by George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975); and Willis Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).
 6. Barnstone, *Poetics of Translation*, 20.
 7. Steiner, *After Babel*, 236.
 8. Barnstone, *Poetics of Translation*, 23, 39.
 9. These examples come from Yoshifumi Saito, *Honyaku no Sahō* (The Art of Translation: An Introduction to Literary Translation) (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2007), 17, 24, and 34.
 10. This example comes from Toyochiro Nogami, *Honyaku Ron* (Theory of Translation) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1932), 7–8. The book was published as part of a multivolume compendium of scholarly works on Japanese and Western literature in the celebrated *Iwanami Kōza* series.
 11. Nogami, *Honyaku Ron*, 4–5.
 12. Sidney B. Sperry, "The Book of Mormon as Translation English," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4/1 (1995): 214–15, 216.
 13. Royal Skousen, "The Original Language of the Book of Mormon: Upstate New York Dialect, King James English, or Hebrew?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/1 (1994): 28–38, quotation on 29.
 14. This is the position the Church took in 1991 when it initiated the work of translating the Book of Mormon into contemporary Japanese.
 15. Alma O. Taylor, "The History of the Japanese Translation of the Book of Mormon," not dated. L. Tom Perry Special Collections and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
 16. Nanette Twine, *Language and the Modern State: The Reform of Written Japanese* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 8.
 17. There were three main schools whose writers contributed to the development of colloquial-style writing. Psychological realism attempted an "impartial description of man and his environment"; the *shaseibun* school attempted to "portray places, people, and events in the objective manner of an artist"; and the Naturalist school believed that the only subject novelists could write on "with total lack of fabrication was themselves." See Twine, *Language and the Modern State*, 25, 155–56.
 18. Norihisa Suzuki, *Seisho no Nihongo* (The Japanese of the Bible) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2006), 99–100.
 19. Masahide Yamamoto, *Gembunitchi no Rekishi Kōsatsu* (A Historical Consideration of *Gembunitchi*) (Tokyo: Ōfusha, 1971), 46–49.
 20. Masahide Yamamoto, *Kindai Buntai Hassei no Shiteki Kenkyū* (A Historical Study of the Emergence of Modern Writing Style) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1965), 2–7.
 21. While 78 percent of novels were written in contemporary style in 1905, the percentage rose to 91 percent in 1906 and 98 percent in 1907, and to 100 percent in 1908. Outside the field of literature, the proportion of *futsūbun* remained high, as much as 54 percent in a representative magazine in 1907, though it declined to less than 10 percent in 1917. Yamamoto, *Kindai Buntai Hassei no Shiteki Kenkyū*, 51. See also Twine, *Language and the Modern State*, 188–93.
 22. Taylor, "The History."
 23. Taylor, "The History." Taylor spelled Hirai's given name Kinza, as did Hirai himself. This follows the historical convention of using phonetic Japanese letters on the basis of how words were presumably pronounced during the Heian period. Consistency in the use of phonetic Japanese letters requires that the name be spelled Kinzo in this paper.
 24. John H. Barrows, ed., *The World's Parliament of Religions*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Parliament, 1893).
 25. Barrows, *World's Parliament of Religions*, 440–43.
 26. Joy Dodson, Missouri United Methodist Archives, Central Methodist College, e-mail addressed to author, 5 June 1998.
 27. Kahoku Shinpōsha, *Kahoku Shinpō no Hachijūnen* (Eighty Years of *Kahoku Shinpō*) (Sendai: Kahoku Shinpōsha, 1977), 30–31. See also Kazuo Ichiriki, letter addressed to author, 26 December 1997.
 28. Taylor, "The History."
 29. The 16 March 1908 issue of the *Yorozu Chōhō* reported under a prominent heading that a married teacher of English at Waseda University by the name of Hirogoro Hirai had fallen in love with and taken custody of a prostitute (thus liberating her from servitude in a brothel). A reporter from the *Miyako Shinbun* investigated this presumed incident, however, and demonstrated in a series of three articles beginning on 27 March 1908 that the accusation was groundless.
 30. Taylor, "The History."
 31. Shoyo Tsubouchi (1859–1935) and Soseki Natsume (1867–1916) were both major figures in the modernization of Japanese literature. Tsubouchi not only wrote plays and novels but also translated major Western literary works into Japanese, including the complete works of Shakespeare. Natsume, who began his career as a scholar of English literature, became one of the greatest novelists of modern Japan by writing several works of lasting influence, beginning with *I Am a Cat* (a satire on life in Meiji Japan seen through the eyes of a cat).
 32. Taylor, "The History."
 33. *Nihon Kindai Bungaku Daijiten* (Dictionary of Modern Japanese Literature), vol. 1 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1977), 79–80.
 34. Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, trans. Choko Ikuta (Tokyo: Nippon Hyōronsha, 1935), 1–6.
 35. Taylor, "The History."
 36. Taylor accommodated Kawai's suggestions during a single meeting held on 8 June 1909. See Taylor, "The History." Given Kawai's background, his knowledge of English was probably very limited.
 37. Although two individuals worked on each portion of the book, Ikuta's contribution stands out. He made a number of corrections on the work previously done by Hirai, which were in most cases judged by three literary experts to be improvements; the other critic who reviewed Ikuta's work (Kawai) made only a few corrections, judging from the fact that they were accommodated by Taylor in a single meeting.
 38. "Observations on Translation," not dated. Alma O. Taylor Papers, 1904–1935, MS. 4270, Church History Library.
 39. In this and subsequent examples, retranslations into English ("back-translation") are offered only as an aid to make my point to an English-speaking reader. In making these back-translations, I have tried to be literal in the sense of preserving word-for-word correspondence where feasible. These may not be the best translations. When equivalence is established, the source text is the best back-translation of the translated text.
 40. See, for example, John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 10/1 (1969): 69–84; Kevin L. Barney, "Poetic Diction and Parallel Word Pairs in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4/2 (1995): 15–81; and James T. Duke, "The Literary Structure and Doctrinal Significance of Alma 13:1–9," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/1 (1996): 103–18.
 41. First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, letter addressed to Alma O. Taylor, 4 January 1908, Alma O. Taylor Papers, 1904–35, Church History Library.
 42. First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, letter addressed to Alma O. Taylor, 3 March 1908, Alma O. Taylor Papers, Church History Library.
 43. Curly brackets indicate phrases that appear in the original text and are significant in giving meaning to the phrase but are not relevant to the translation.

44. See Leslie A. Taylor, "The Word of God," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/1 (2003): 52–63.
45. W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr., *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Nashville: Nelson, 1984), 388–89.
46. The first word refers to an invisible being or a spirit, while the second means the Ruler on High, the Supreme Ruler, or the Emperor. Suzuki, *Seisho no Nihongo*, 35–37.
47. Suzuki, *Seisho no Nihongo*, 6, 27–28, 39–40.
48. As quoted in Gessel, "Languages of the Lord," 252.
49. Suzuki, *Seisho no Nihongo*, 41, 115–16.
50. Barnstone, *Poetics of Translation*, 62–63.
51. The Church corrected at least three of the more obvious errors in 2009, but many others remain, in my view. The 2009 correction, however, introduced a grammatical error where none had existed previously (in Alma 42:25).
52. Other cases in this category are 2 Nephi 3:17 and Mosiah 2:34.
53. See Matthew Roper, "Eyewitness Descriptions of Mesoamerican Swords," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/1 (1996): 150–58. The way "brightness" is translated in these verses (*hikari wo hanatsu*—to emit light) leaves little alternative but to assume the swords to be metallic.
54. To transgress is translated as "*tsumi wo okasu* (to sin)" and "preparatory redemption" as "prepared redemption"; "souls are precious" is rendered as "*reikon* (spirits) are precious"; and to "have power among this people" is translated as "to have authority and power to work among this people."
55. Seeking happiness in doing iniquity is translated as "seeking happiness while doing iniquity," while being faithful in Christ is rendered as "being faithful to Christ."
56. To "try their faith" is translated as to "test whether their faith is strong"; "confounding the language of people" and "confounding the people" are translated synonymously (i.e., they cease to understand each other), but confounding a group of people can also mean scattering or dispersing them. See Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 172–73.
57. Gessel, "Languages of the Lord."
58. I make these claims on the basis of over 20 years' experience teaching economics, a technical discipline of Anglo-Saxon origin, to American and Japanese university students.
59. Barnstone, *Poetics of Translation*, 26.
60. Suzuki, Norihisa, *Seisho no Nihongo*, 94–95, 97.
61. Yamamoto, *Gembunitchi no Rekishi Kōsatsu*, 19, 37, 39–40, 57–58.
62. Suzuki, *Seisho no Nihongo*, 128–31.
63. He used a mixture of contemporary and classical style by retaining the former style for informal parts (such as narratives and sermons), while using the latter for supplications to and utterances of God. See Tatsui Sato, "Shinyaku Morumon Kei ni tsuite" (About the New Translation of the Book of Mormon), *Seito no Michi*, July 1957, 4–5. Numano, "The Japanese Translation," offers a linguistic assessment of the 1957 translation by Sato.
64. For the post-war resumption of missionary work in Japan, see Shinji Takagi, "The Eagle and the Scattered Flock: Church Beginnings in Occupied Japan, 1945–48," *Journal of Mormon History* 28/2 (2002): 104–38; and Shinji Takagi, "Riding on the Eagle's Wings: The Japanese Mission under American Occupation, 1948–52," *Journal of Mormon History* 29/1 (2003): 200–32.
65. Classical Japanese is still the principal medium of poetry, especially in *waka* and *haiku*. Even in the contemporary Church, hymns are sung in classical Japanese. In the current edition of the Japanese LDS hymnbook, all but five of the 200 hymns are written in classical style; of the five hymns that are written in contemporary style, four are children's songs.