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(Near) Synonyms and Concordances in Bible Translation

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INTRODUCTION

Pairs of (near) synonyms are an integral part of King James English: Holy Ghost/Holy Spirit, eternal/everlasting, harlot/whore, charity/love, celestial/heavenly, etc. Typically, one member of the pair is of French/Latin origin (eternal) and the other member is of Germanic origin (everlasting) and in King James language they are virtually interchangeable. I will examine how these pairs relate to their Greek source and how bible translations in other languages have treated them. In addition, I will look into how these pairs have been dealt with in foreign language translations of modern scriptures.

ETERNAL—EVERLASTING

In the King James New Testament, the phrase eternal life occurs 119 times, everlasting life occurs 23 times, life eternal occurs 11 times and life everlasting occurs 4 times (3 times in 1 John). Both the KJ and NKJ versions of the gospel of John have everlasting life 8 times and eternal life 9 times. I consider this convincing evidence that these are interchangeable variants in King James style. For example, in John 3:15, the KJ text reads: but have eternal life. In the very next verse it reads: but have everlasting life (3:16). John 17:2 reads: that he should give eternal life, and in the very next verse: And this is life eternal (17:3). Vocabulary selection and word order vary from verse to verse in the King James text even though the word order and the vocabulary items are identical in Greek (zoe’ e aio’ nios).

Another thing we think to admonish thee of, gentle Reader, that we have not tied ourselves to an uniformity of phrasing, or to an identity of words, as some peradventure would wish that we had done, because they observe, that some learned men somewhere have been as exact as they could that way. Truly, that we might not vary from the sense of that which we had translated before, if the word signified the same thing in both places, (for there be some words that be not of the same sense every where) we were especially careful, and made a conscience, according to our duty. But that we should express the same notion in the same particular word; as for example, if we translate the Hebrew or Greek word once by purpose, never to call it intent; if one where journeying, never travelling; if one where think, never suppose; if one where pain, never ache; if one where joy, never galdness, &c thus to mince the matter, we thought to savour more of curiosity than wisdom, and that rather it would breed scorn in the atheist, than bring profit to the godly reader. For is the kingdom God become words or syllables? Why should we be in bondage to them, if we may be free? use one precisely, when we may use another no less fit as commodiously?

The translators knew exactly what they were doing and why. The note in the column reads: “Reasons inducing us not to stand curiously upon identity of phrasing.” For them, translating concordantly savored “more of curiosity than wisdom” and would “breed scorn in the atheist.” They felt translators should not be bound by words or syllables, but rather by the sense and feel of the language. They could use a word “precisely,” and also use a synonym (“no less fit”) “commodiously.” If translators are aware of this fact of King James language which also occurs in modern scriptures they will be in a position to do a better job of translating modern scriptures into other languages.

English Bible, The Jerusalem Bible, Phillips Modern English, The Modern Language Bible, The Living Bible and The Amplified Bible have invariant eternal life throughout the gospel of John, although there is some slight variation in the word order (life eternal, following the order of the King James version, and occurring most often in John 4:36 and 12:25). The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures has everlasting life throughout. The New International Version has one example of everlasting life and 16 examples of eternal life. I believe that for modern biblical English, the most typical phrase is eternal life, the New World translation (everlasting life) being the exception. This pair of variants in the King James translation has essentially been done away with in modern bible translations, mostly in the direction of the exclusive use of eternal but once in the direction of the exclusive use of everlasting. [The only of these four phrases to occur (once) in the KJ Old Testament is everlasting life, Dan 12:2.]

Eight non-English bible translations (German: Luther 84 and Einheits-übersetzung 1981, Dutch: Statenbijbel 1951, Bijbel (Nederlands Bijelgenootschap) 1951, Spanish: Reina-Valera 1951 and Reina-Valera 1960, French: La Bible de Jerusalem 1973, Nouvelle Version Segond Revisée 1978) were examined. I checked all the references in John for ‘eternal life’ zoe aionios. Each language had only one equivalent: German ewig, Dutch eeuwig, Spanish eterno, French e’ternel. None employs variants in the manner of the King James text. The four variations in KJ language (life eternal, eternal life, everlasting life, life everlasting) are all rendered by a single uniform phrase in each of the foreign languages: German das ewige Leben, Dutch het eeuwige leven, Spanish (la) vida eterna, French la vie e’ternelle. Finnish uses iankaikkinen elämä for both ‘eternal life’ and ‘everlasting life’ (John 17:2-3). It is my opinion that this would also be the case in any modern language translation, because they typically follow the Greek manuscripts which have only one word and not two as in King James language.

Modern scriptures (Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price) use both eternal and everlasting in approximately the same fashion as in the King James text, except that postposed adjectives are limited to life eternal (four times in 1 Nephi 14:7, 2 Nephi 9:39, 33:4 and Moroni 7:41). The least common of the four variants (life everlasting, four times in NT) does not occur in modern scripture. Translations of modern scripture into a foreign language must decide whether to use one equivalent or two: to follow the King James pattern and find an equivalent for each, or to follow the Greek, modern English and modern languages and use one word for both? Let us examine the practice to the present.

If we look at the translations of the Book of Mormon into German we find the following: Excluding the exceptions noted below, all of the translations prior to 1980 had one equivalent (ewig) for both ‘everlasting’ and ’eternal’. The exceptions are two verses which contain both words in close proximity: Mosiah 5:15 that ye have everlasting salvation and eternal life and DC 76:44 everlasting punishment, which is endless punishment, which is eternal punishment. The first German edition of 1852 had immerwährendes Heil and ewiges Leben in Mosiah 5:15, but as far as I can tell, this distinction was limited to unusual verses and did not extend to any of the dozens of other verses with everlasting. Similarly, the verse in DC 76 shows both immerwährend and ewig beginning in 1950. (Earlier editions had used ewig dauern). The use of immerwährend for ‘everlasting,’ however, did not include any of the other verses in the Doctrine and Covenants. In the 1980 translation, ‘everlasting’ was translated with immerwährend and ‘eternal’ was translated with ewig. There are three exceptions: ‘everlasting God’ in 1 Nephi 11:32, 2 Nephi 2:30, 4:35 is translated ewiger Gott. This early insight concerning the incompatibility of immerwährend and Gott and the difference in the “near” synonyms was forgotten in Helaman 12:8 and Moroni 10:28 where it now has been translated concordantly but incommodiously: immerwährender Gott.

Modern scriptures in Dutch, French, Spanish and Finnish ordinarily make no distinction between ‘eternal’ and ‘everlasting,’ but simply have one for both: Dutch eeuwig, French eternel, Spanish eterno, Finnish iankaikkinen. As in German, all of these languages (except French in Mosiah 5:15) do distinguish in verses containing both words in English.
Mosiah 5:15: Spanish salvacion sin fin y vida eterno, Dutch eeuwigdurende zaligheid en het eeuwige leven, Finnish ikuinen pelastus ja iankaikkinen elämä. From 1852 up to the present day, French has had only one adjective for both 'eternal' and 'everlasting': salut et de la vie éternelle.

DC 76:44: Spanish siplicio sempiterno, suplicio sin fin, suplicio eterno, French chařtiment perpetuel, chařtiment sans fin, chařtiment e'ternel, Dutch eeuwigdurende straf, eindeloze straf, eeuwige straf, Finnish ikuinen rangaistus, loputon rangaistus, iankaikkinen rangaistus.

A clue as to usage in traditional biblical German could have been found in 2 Nephi 19:6 since it corresponds to Isaiah 9:5(6). For the equivalent of 'everlasting Father' of the KJ text, German bible translations use ewig or a derivative: Rev Elb Vater der Ewigkeit, Luther 84 Ewig-Vater, EÜ Vater in Ewigkeit, BihD ewiger Vater. The word immer­während had no real place in biblical German and only a very precarious one in modern (Mormon) scriptures.

The seed of a concordant distinction between 'everlasting' and 'eternal' lay dormant for decades in an unusual verse or two here and there, until the modern age of concordances and computers. Nowadays, if the translator is so inclined, he has the tools at his fingertips to employ an 'identity of phrasing' unheard of and unwanted in the days of the King James translators. This misunder­standing of the variants in King James English has lead to a proliferation of (near) synonymys in the German translation of modern scriptures and a conflict with German biblical tradition.

**HARLOT—WHORE**

The word harlot (ME harlot ‘vagabond’ OF (h)arlot Sp arlote It ‘hedgepriest’) occurs a total of 65 times in the standard works and is over­represented by 22% in the OT. The word whore occurs a total of 27 times and is overrepresented by 8% in the Book of Mormon. In the New Testament, the Greek word porne is rendered ‘harlot’ 8 times and ‘whore’ 4 times.

The Hebrew word zah-nah’ (Strong’s root index 2181) is rendered in a wide variety of ways in the Old Testament:
- go a whoring* 19
- play the harlot* 18
- commit whoredom(s) 15
- commit fornication 3
- play the whore* 2
- fall to whoredom 1
- harlot 21
- whore 8
- whorish 3
- whore 8

*phrase does not occur in NT

These data offer ample evidence that harlot and whore are interchangeable and that overall harlot is more frequent than whore. We find the figurative meaning of Rev 17:5 ‘the Mother of Harlots’ in the KJ translation, Phillips, RSV, NAS and Modern Language. Equally frequent is ‘Mother of Prostitutes’ which occurs in more “modern” translations: Living Bible, GN, NIV, Jer and Amplified Bible. Only NEB has ‘mother of whores’.

From the available concordances of recent English translations, I have gathered the following data (includes all forms in both OT and NT):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NIV</th>
<th>NKJ</th>
<th>GN</th>
<th>KJ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>harlot(s)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whore(s)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prostitute(s)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The New King James has abandoned the word whore and now has harlot exclusively. For the most part, NIV has the modern word prostitute and retains a few examples of harlot (OT only), but does not use the word whore at all. GN does not use the word harlot at all and retains a few instances of whore (OT only), but mostly uses the modern word prostitute. We can safely assume, that NKJ (a revision of KJ) has abandoned the harlot/whore variation found in the original King James text. The other two each have the modern word prostitute and one other choice: NIV has (the obsolete) harlot, GN ignores harlot in favor of whore, but none of them interchange harlot and whore as in KJ. This can be taken as evidence that translators of these editions did not try to distinguish between them or employ
them the way KJ translators did.

The foreign language bibles show a somewhat more varied picture. Three have a single equivalent for both KJ ‘whore’ and ‘harlot’: Dutch hoere, Spanish ramera, Finnish portto. French has prostitut'e, except in Rev 17:5 where some bibles have prostitut'es and others have impudiques. German has predominantly Hure in Rev 17:5 but Dirne in Luke 15:30.

The translations of modern scriptures show the following: Dutch consistently has hoere, Spanish consistently has ramera, French consistently has prostitut'e and Finnish consistently has portto. The German translation of 1980 distinguishes consistently according to the English: Dirne for ‘harlot’ and Hure for ‘whore’. Though German Hure is the cognate of English whore, I believe that Dirne corresponds more closely in meaning to ‘whore’ and Hure more closely in meaning to ‘harlot’.

CHARITY—LOVE

I would like now to demonstrate that the word charity is not in general use in modern New Testament English in the sense of ‘love in its perfection,’ that is, ‘divine, Christian love’. To see where it appears in modern biblical English, I examined the concordances of the following four translations available to me: New International Version (NIV), New King James Version (NKJ), the Good News Bible (GN) and the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (NW). The word charity does not appear at all in the concordances of NIV, NW or NKJ. In GN, the phrase works of charity occurs twice (Acts 10:4, 31). NKJ does have five examples of the phrase charitable deed(s). Both of these phrases convey the meaning ‘of a kindly and sympathetic disposition to aid the needy or suffering’ and not that of ‘love in its perfection’. I also looked through 1 Corinthians 13 in the following translations of the New Testament: Revised Standard Version, New American Standard Bible, The New English Bible, The Jerusalem Bible, Phillips Modern English NT, The Modern Language Bible, The Living Bible and The Amplified Bible. I did not find the word charity in chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians in any of these eight translations of the New Testament. Based on this evidence, I believe we are justified in concluding that the word charity is not in general use in modern biblical English.

The word charity does not occur in the KJ Old Testament. It occurs 28 times in the New Testament, 27 times in the Book of Mormon and 11 times in the Doctrine and Covenants for a total of 66 times.

Let us turn for a moment to the well-known phrase from the King James bible (1 Cor 13:13): faith, hope, charity (there is no conjunction in Greek). This triplet belongs to the central core of conservative biblical phraseology and appears eight times in the standard works: 1 Cor 13:13 (without and); Alma 7:24, Ether 12:28, Moroni 7:1, DC 6:19, 12:8, 18:19 (all with and); Moroni 8:14 (in a grammatically negative context which requires nor rather than and). This phrase would sound unusual to Mormon ears if it were rendered in the modern form faith, hope and love found in the modern translations noted above. (Half of the English translations have the conjunction and and half do not.) In the same way, it would sound very unusual to German ears to hear the phrase in any form (Glaube, Hoffnung, Nächstenliebe) other than that made popular by Luther. His phrasing (Glaube, Hoffnung, Liebe) appears in all four modern German translations. (Rev Elb, Lu and EÜ have no conjunction as in the Greek, GN has modernized with and.) Joseph Smith chose to use the same phrase as in the King James version.

Let us look a little more closely at some of the verses that contain both of the words charity and love.

2 Nephi 26:30 ... a commandment that all men should have charity, which charity is love.

Moroni 7:46 if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail—47 But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso shall be found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him.

Moroni 8:17 I am filled with charity, which is everlasting love; wherefore, I love little children with a perfect love;

DC 4:5 And faith, hope, charity and love, with an eye single to the glory of God.

I believe it is fair to interpret the joining of the two elements in the phrase charity and love into the well-
known triplet faith, hope, charity in this verse in DC 4 to mean that charity and love belong together and form a single concept, although I must admit that there is nothing in the wording that requires this interpretation.

Let me make some further explanation drawn from the other verses. For me, the phrasing in the other three verses contains explanatory material intended to tell us what is meant by the word charity. Two of them have the relative which and the other has the equational meaning of be. It is as though it were felt that the word charity could be misunderstood and so additional clarification was added. I think this interpretation fits the text of these verses and the general use of the word charity in modern biblical English.

Lewis, The English Bible from KJV to NIV, p. 47-49 notes that there is no logical justification for the KJ translators to choose a limited number of verses (such as those in 1 Corinthians 13) and render the Greek agape in these verses as ‘charity’ (based on the Vulgate charitas), when in all except 26 of the total of 312 occurrences of the word agape (92% of the time) it is rendered with the much more common word ‘love’. All the verses with the word charity occur after 1 Cor 7 and are the work of a single company of KJ translators. To repeat, the King James version uses love 92% of the time and charity 8% of the time for the single Greek word agape. The Book of Mormon also uses these two words in about the same way as the King James version.

In 1 Cor 13, the foreign language bibles show a picture which differs somewhat from that of the previous pairs of (near) synonyms. The two Germanic languages have a single equivalent: German Liebe, Dutch liefde. Finnish has only raukkus. The two Romance languages used the cognate of charity in older bibles (Spanish caridad, French charite’), but replaced it with amor (Spanish) or amour (French) in later revisions.

In the introduction to the latest revision of the Segond translation in French, the editors have included the following:

The translation of Louis Segond has been preserved in each instance where it corresponds to the original text and to modern French usage. Changes have been made in two instances: where the knowledge of the original text allows a better translation and where the evolution of the French language makes a new formulation indispensable (Nouvelle version Segond révise’e, 1978, vii)

Since nothing has changed in the manuscript evidence as to the original Greek word agape, I infer that French charite’ had sufficiently changed its meaning over the years to warrant a change to amour. I believe the same to be true for Spanish caridad which has now been replaced by amor in 1 Cor 13. I would think this signals a general move away from the limited meaning associated with cognates of Latin charitas.

The problem that faces the translator of the Book of Mormon is whether to select an equivalent for each member of the pair according to the English or to use only one for both terms.

Translations of modern scriptures into Romance languages like Spanish and French which have cognates for ‘charity’ as well as a more common word for ‘love’ can simply follow the pattern of English and use caridad (Sp) or charite’ (Fr) for English ‘charity’ and amor (Sp) or amour (Fr) for English ‘love’, particularly in verses where they appear side by side (DC 4:5. etc).

Germanic languages which do not have cognates for ‘charity’ are forced to choose other words or compound words to convey the meaning. The 1876 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants 4:5 simply has Glaube, Hoffnung und Liebe in agreement with the wellknown Luther formulation of Paul. Could it be that this early translator had recognized the problem and resolved it without undue complication? Was he merely simplistic or lazy? Beginning with the translation of 1903 and continuing up to 1980, the translations had another member: Glaube, Hoffnung, Barmherzigkeit und Liebe. The inclusion of Barmherzigkeit ‘mercy, compassion, charity’ approximates the meaning but in German it is unnecessary and distracts from the traditional phrasing. Once having discovered a suitable equivalent for a (near) synonym, translators are motived by the tendency to be more accurate and more concordant and dot the landscape with the new word for every instance of ‘charity’. In the 1908 edition, the Dutch translation uses liefdadigheid, which I believe is pretty close to German
**Barmherzigkeit.** The 1985 translation into German has one equivalent for each (**Nächstenliebe** instead of **Barmherzigkeit** for ‘charity’ and **Liebe** for ‘love’). The new formulation in German (one word a derivative of the other) seems to highlight the redundancy of the English: **Glaube, Hoffnung, Nächstenliebe und Liebe.** Not only did the translation introduce a new word for ‘charity’ in this verse but it extends its use to include every instance of the word, is in my opinion a mistake of catastrophic proportions. The Dutch translation (1981) now also uses new words **mensinmin** (DC 4:5) and **naastenliefde** (DC 12:8) in the problematical verses, either in an attempt to follow the distinction in English or perhaps to imitate the German (both translations were supervised by the European translation office).

In DC 4:5, Finnish has **Kristuksen rakkaus** for ‘charity’ and **rakkaus** for ‘love.’ Similar circumlocutions are used in other verses containing both words (2 Nephi 26:30, Moroni 7:46, 8:17).

The decision to omit one member of the pair (German 1876 DC 4:5 **Glaube, Hoffnung und Liebe**) or use a suitable equivalent only in a minimum number of unusual verses (German translations between 1903 and 1980 **Glaube, Hoffnung, Barmherzigkeit und Liebe**) is much to be preferred over blistering the landscape with a variety of unnecessary synonyms (**immerwährend, Nächstenliebe**, etc.) that do not fit well into the German or other foreign language bible tradition.

**CELESTIAL-HEAVENLY/TERRESTRIAL-EARTHLY**

These pairs are much less prominent in scriptural texts than the others treated above. There are only two instances of **celestial** and **terrestrial** (twice each in 1 Cor 15:40). The other translations of the Greek word **epouranios** in the KJ New Testament are ‘heavenly’ (16 times), ‘in heaven’ (once in Phillipians 2:10) and ‘high’ (once in Ephesians 6:12). NIV, GN and NW have all replaced **celestial** with **heavenly** in the two verses in 1 Corinthians. NIV has the word **celestial** (beings) twice (2 Peter 2:10, Jude 8) and in NW, it appears once in brackets in James 1:17 ‘Father of the [celestial] lights’. It seems no other modern translation needs the word **celestial**. In 1 Cor 15:40, only KJ, NKJ and RSV have the pair **celestial/terrestrial**. The other nine translations have **heavenly/earthly** or a circumlocation.

Foreign language translations of the bible are divided into two groups according to their treatment of these (near) synonyms: the Germanic and the Romance translations. The German, Dutch and Finnish have indigenous language equivalents for ‘celestial’ and ‘terrestrial’: German **himmlisch/irdisch**, Dutch **hemelse/aardse**, Finnish **taivaallinen/maailinen**. (Of course, none has the word **telestial.**) The German translation of modern scriptures retained the Germanic forms until the 18th edition (no date, but sometime after 1950), when forms based on English were introduced **celestial/terrestrial/telestial**. Dutch has them in the 1908 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants: **celestial/terrestrial/telestial**.

Finnish has introduced new formations based on English in DC 76 (only foreign words are spelled with c): **celestin/terrestren/telesinen**.

Among the Romance languages, Spanish already has equivalents very close to English: **celeste/terrestre**. The D&C of 1948 has **celestial/terrestre/telestial**, that is, **celeste** was modified somewhat, **terrestre** was retained and **telestial** was created to complete the trilogy based on English. French bibles have **ce’leste/terrestre**. The French D&C of 1908 has **ce’leste/terrestre/te’leste** without having to modify either of the previous adjectives and being able to create another French looking parallel for ‘telestial’. A cursory examination of some other Germanic and Romance language translations shows the same general tendency.

The translations of the D&C in these languages have Germanic equivalents in the early period but later switch to adjectives based on English. The first example of ‘terrestrial’ in German was spelled **terrestial** (without an r), which I cannot find in any other source. Bibles in Romance languages have words cognate with the English, although their endings may be modified slightly (Cf. French and Spanish). At least one of the driving forces behind these changes in modern scriptures is the need for the third member of the triplet **celestial, terrestrial, telestial**. **Telestial** does not occur at all in the concordances of KJ, NKJ, NIV, GN, NW, and as far as I know it occurs only in the Doctrine and Covenants.
There seems to little resistance to the spread of forms based on English, especially because of the special circumstances surrounding telestial. German translations up to 1950 had a Germanic trilogy: himmlisch/irdisch/unterirdisch, which may have turned out to be quite adequate though unpopular in light of the general tendency to use latinized forms based on the English.

In summary, I have tried to show that:

1. The King James text frequently uses (near) synonyms interchangeably.

2. Translations of the Greek New Testament into other languages do not use (near) synonyms as in the KJ Version and generally have only one equivalent for the original Greek word.

3. The word charity has almost completely disappeared from modern biblical English, because its meaning has shifted in the direction of 'a kindly and sympathetic disposition to aid the suffering and needy'. I suspect that the same development is happening in Spanish (caridad) and French (charité'), although more study is needed to be certain.

4. Modern (LDS) scriptures use many of the (near) synonyms in about the same way as the King James text.

5. Changes in the meaning of the word charity have been made evident in modern scriptures by additional explanatory wording.

6. Foreign language translations of modern scriptures would do well to follow the example of their own biblical tradition and use one equivalent for both rather than follow the English concordantly and proliferate synonyms.

7. Earlier translators seem to have understood the problem and resorted to synonyms only when it became necessary because of the proximity of the (near) synonyms within the same verse.

8. The availability of concordances and computers has a tendency to lead translators into believing that the translation is somehow better if they translate concordantly, even though King James translators and others consciously resist this notion.

9. Translators of modern scriptures into foreign languages should be made aware of the nature of (near) synonyms in King James English and be instructed not to search for an equivalent for each.

10. The dissemination of the message of the restoration is not enhanced by proliferating (near) synonyms based entirely on English. They only serve to differentiate linguistically between biblical tradition and modern scripture.

Recommendation: King James (near) synonyms in modern scripture should be recognized for what they are and translators should distinguish between them only where proximity and context require it. To use the computer and computer generated concordances merely to insure a misguided uniformity of phrasing is a very low level goal. In my opinion, the most worthwhile function of modern electronic(ally generated) tools is to provide complete and accurate data about the use of words in the source language (in this case, King James English) and the target language before making decisions about which equivalents are to be used in a foreign language translation. This practice will increase the likelihood that the translation will be concordant in a much more profound sense.