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What do we actually translate in representing orality in oral Bible translation and performance?¹

ABSTRACT

The translational situation involved in oral Bible translation and performance is complex. Oral features may be translated using Peirce's semiotics as iconic (the sign bears a relationship of similarity to the signified), indexical (the sign bears a relationship of causality to the signified), and symbolic (the sign bears a conventional relationship to the signified). By using complexity theory, the practical implications of Peirce's Semiotics for oral Bible translation are explored. An oral translation of Lamentations 1 into Sesotho, based on an analysis of the oral features of a contemporary Sesotho lament, illustrates the theoretical issues.

1. INTRODUCTION

The translation of the biblical text for oral audiences has been described as translation from orality to orality (Maxey 2009). In other

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words, the oral features of the incipient (source) text are represented as oral features in the subsequent (target) text. In actual practice, however, the translational situation involved in oral Bible translation and performance is much more complex.²

First, the notions of oral and written are not mutually exclusive nor are they opposite poles along a continuum. In addition, they are not universal categories with universal or conventional features. Rather, oral and written are two modalities of language that are intertwined and culturally instantiated. The categories of oral and written, as well as the specific features of each modality, must be understood within a specific linguistic and cultural context.

Secondly, the Bible, as a written incipient text, exhibits a complex interface of oral and written features which can best be described using complexity theory.

Thirdly, the production of an oral Bible translation requires the translator to identify oral and written features and decide how to represent them in the translation. Attention to the semiotics of translation has practical implications for representing the incipient text of the Bible in meaningful ways in an oral translation.

We build upon our previous research on the semiotics and orality of Bible translation (Naudé 2010; Makutoane, Miller-Naudé & Naudé 2015; Naudé, Miller-Naudé & Makutoane 2017; Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2018; Naudé, Miller-Naudé & Obono 2023) to explore the practical implications of Peirce's semiotics for oral Bible translation within a complexity approach.

The article is organised as follows. Section 2 describes the relationship between complexity theory and Bible translation. Section 3 discusses the oral-aural-written-visual features and their interface in the incipient biblical text. Section 4 introduces Peirce's semiotics with respect to oral Bible translation. Section 5 provides a practical example of the semiotics of oral Bible translation – the oral translation of Lamentations 1 into Sesotho, based upon an analysis of the oral features of a contemporary Sesotho lament.

2. COMPLEXITY THEORY AND BIBLE TRANSLATION

Complexity theory has recently emerged as a new paradigm to study complex systems such as translation and religion. Complexity

² In both theory and practice, oral Bible translation and performative Bible translation are closely related. For simplicity, this article will primarily refer to oral Bible translation, although Bible translation performance is also relevant.

theory examines systems that are too multifaceted to be adequately conceptualised in terms of only one elementary concept or idea. What is required is an explanation that is a whole set of simultaneous, interacting understandings. The open interplay of multiple interacting elements such as cognition, consciousness, experience, human interaction, society, culture, history, etc. force the view that these systems are complex phenomena in which the effects of these components are interconnected. Complex phenomena are characterised by emergence. Emergence refers to properties that can only be studied at a different level without reducing them to one of a system's basic constituents. Emergence explains "the relationship between cultural phenomena as both 'emerging from' and 'non-reducible to'" (Marais 2014:54).

The recent work of Kobus Marais (2014; 2017; 2019; 2023a) explores translation as a complex, emergent phenomenon. Translation is a complex phenomenon in that it cannot be reduced to a single feature, strategy or approach. Translation is also emergent. Like literature, translation is based on language, and it cannot be conceptualised without recourse to language, but at the same time it cannot be reduced to language (Marais 2014:54). Based on his view of translation as a complex, emergent phenomenon, Marais proposes using the terms "incipient sign system(s)" and "subsequent sign system(s)" instead of the traditional terms "source text" and "target text". Marais' argument in using these terms is that translation is first and foremost a process in time. The terms "incipient" and "subsequent" perfectly explain the translations of sacred texts in the sense that it is impossible to know whether a text is the ultimate "source text" or the final "target text", but one can aptly characterise them as "incipient" and "subsequent". The translation of sacred writings provides a particularly fertile field for the exploration of translation as an emergent phenomenon, because the concept of an emergent, complex adaptive system characterises both sacred writings as incipient text(s) and sacred writings as subsequent text(s). Bible translation, as a complex system, relates to language as a complex system (see Miller-Naudé & Naudé 2020) as well as to religion, generally, as a complex system and specifically to the sociology of religion.

As a complex system, religion exhibits four aspects of complexity (Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2019). The individual, psychological factor forms the first dimension of religion as a complex phenomenon. An individual may be engaged in a community of believers or a religious organisation. The sociological factor forms the second dimension of religion as a complex phenomenon. The third dimension focuses on the chronological development of religions through time and their interactions with other

religions. The fourth dimension involves the oral-written interface which is realised in sacred writings (Naudé 2021). The words, texts, and language used in religious rituals, in the liturgy, and in individual and public worship are the result of complex processes of canonisation and translation. These writings are viewed as sacred and, even if they are translations, they quickly assume the status of incipient texts and are translated anew for believers from other language groups. For most religious communities, contact with sacred texts is entirely through translation, and their adherence to that religious tradition is itself often the result of translation.

3. ORAL-AURAL-WRITTEN-VISUAL FEATURES OF THE INCIPIENT SYSTEM

As noted in Section 2, the features of oral language and written language are culturally instantiated and must be identified within the incipient system (De Vries 2012). Because visibility is also part of the semiotic fabric of the incipient system, we will also draw attention to visual features and their representation in the subsequent system (Rhoads 2012).

The orality of the Bible took place within the oral-written interface of the literary cultures of the ancient Mediterranean (Carr 2005; 2011). Walton and Sandy (2013:18) have conceptualised this interface by contrasting *hearing-dominant cultures* with *text-dominant cultures*. Using the concept of hearing or text dominance, we have previously argued that the media history of the Bible can be conceptualised as follows (Makutoane, Miller-Naudé & Naudé 2015; Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2016):

Hearing-dominant

Oral/Aural-written communication/verbal interpretive culture

- i) Oral/Aural communication (the oral/aural Bible)
- ii) Handwritten manuscript communication (manuscript Bible)

Text-dominant

Print communication (printed Bible)/typographic interpretive culture.

Electronic/media communication (electronic Bible)/digital-media interpretive culture.

In ancient Israel, in the earliest stages, Scripture was probably conveyed and transmitted orally (Fowler 2009). However, as it was written, it still functioned within a hearing-dominant society – most individuals experienced Scripture orally rather than via written texts. Only with the advent of printing in roughly 1440 CE did text-dominant cultures come into existence.

Written texts are rhetorically and artistically constructed. The rhetorical techniques provide insight into the structure, style, and message of these texts. These rhetorical techniques relate to the oral performance of virtually all significant discourse in ancient biblical communities and are realised in various forms of verbal style for the purpose of message transmission, for example, participatory discourse and direct speech. Feelings and attitudes such as, for example, joy, anger, sorrow, shame, and sincerity are also conveyed rhetorically and through performance (Miller-Naudé & Naudé 2016).

Certain rhetorical and artistic constructions served as mnemonic marks. Memory interfaced with the creation of a text. An author would first generate a text or some portion thereof in the mind before recording it in writing. Various elocutionary devices serve to cement the essential content into a written text in such a way that it can be more readily preserved and remembered, as well as more easily proclaimed orally and understood aurally, that is, it can be performed. Their features are paratactic, rhythmic, additive, formulaic language, and antithetical thought patterns.

All the texts that have come down to us in the written canon of the Bible represent a body of texts that are inner-textually interdependent and that derive from an ideology-driven oral or scribal tradition of one form or another. They include multimodal indications of non-verbal techniques such as, for example, gestures, facial features, and body movements.

In a written translation, the multimodality factor concerns the semiotic interaction of the text with various metatextual or paratextual tools to convey different types of background information to a reader, for example footnotes, sectional headings, glossary entries, cross references, illustrations, etc. All these metatexts serve to enlighten readers and combat biblical illiteracy with respect to crucial presupposed aspects of the original context that cannot be communicated in a written translation.

4. PEIRCE'S SEMIOTICS AND TRANSLATION

Charles Sanders Peirce, the father of semiotics, identifies three possible relationships of the sign to its referent (Peirce 1955:99-119). First, the relationship may be that of an icon, in which the sign resembles its referent. The English word *swish* is an example of a word whose phonological shape mimics its meaning. The word is thus an iconic sign.

Secondly, the relationship of the sign to its referent may be that of an index, in which the sign points to its referent. Pronouns in a language are always indexical signs – the pronouns *I* or *you* point to persons within the

speech context, and their referents can only be determined with reference to the speaker.

Thirdly, the relationship of the sign to its referent may be that of a symbol, in which there is a conventional or arbitrary relationship between the sign and its referent. For example, the words *dog* in English, *kelev* in Hebrew, and *ntja* in Sesotho are each arbitrary and conventional signs in their respective languages for the same referent.

The concepts of icon, index, and symbol can be expanded to describe the relationship between the incipient text and the subsequent text (Naudé, Miller-Naudé & Obono 2023). Tokens of translation may involve an *iconic translation*, in which one or more aspects of the incipient text are mimetically represented. They may involve an *indexical translation*, in which the translation points to some aspect of the incipient text without representing it directly. They may involve a *symbolic translation*, in which an aspect of the incipient text is represented with a conventional or arbitrary pairing of form and meaning. As an example, consider the first Hebrew word of the lament in Lamentations 1 – *ʾēkā*. This word is used as an exclamation of grief, and it stands at the beginning of many laments. An *iconic* oral translation uses a comparable word in the subsequent culture which functions as an exclamation of grief in laments. An *indexical* oral translation would use some feature of the subsequent language, which points to or indicates a lament, such as a particular rhythmic style or performance style that indicates a lament. A *symbolic* oral translation would indicate the meaning and function of *ʾēkā* using the linguistic resources of the language.

5. ORAL TRANSLATION OF LAMENTATIONS 1 INTO SESOTHO

The authors illustrate their semiotic-complexity approach to oral Bible translation with a translation of selections from Lamentations 1 into Sesotho, a Nguni language of South Africa.

5.1 Analysis of oral features in the incipient text

The first step in an oral Bible translation is to thoroughly analyse the biblical incipient text to determine which oral-written features are present (Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2023; see also Miller-Naudé & Naudé 2022).

Lamentations 1 is a lament, a genre relating to oral performance within a particular sociological context. One prominent feature of laments in ancient Israel has been identified as the *qinah* metre, in which the first line

has a metre of 3 and the second line has a metre of 2. A particular rhythmic metre was probably present in these laments in ancient Israel, although the question of metre within Biblical Hebrew poetry generally is debatable.

Another prominent feature of Lamentations 1 is the fact that it is an acrostic composition, in which each successive verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Although it has been argued that the use of acrostics in poems is a literary device related to the scribal school texts, in which students practised writing the alphabet (e.g. Dobbs-Allsopp 2009), there is an oral aspect related to the learning of the alphabet through recitation. Similarly, the oral performance of a lament whose verses begin with successive letters of the alphabet means that the listener is invited to understand the lament as structured around the alphabet (this forms an important constraint as noted in Marais 2023b) – just as the alphabet comprises all of the letters for representing the language, so the lament comprises a comprehensive expression of grief. An alphabetic acrostic, then, provides a vivid example of a literary structure that is at the interface between oral and written (Miller-Naudé & Naudé 2024).

Aspects of participatory discourse are also found in Lamentations 1. The lament begins with a general description of the desolation of the city in verses 1-9a. In verse 9b, Jerusalem speaks to God. In verse 10b, God speaks. In verse 11b, Jerusalem again speaks to God. In verses 12-13, Jerusalem speaks to those passing by. In verses 14-19, there are three speeches of Jerusalem interspersed with third-person descriptions of the desolation. In verses 20-22, Jerusalem speaks again to God. We will see below that this seemingly simple oral structure poses particular problems for the translation into Sesotho.

Aspects of orature found in Lamentations 1 include the pervasive use of repetition. Repetition may occur between parallel lines as in verse 1. *Italic type* is used to indicate the first pair of repeated words; *bold type* indicates the second pair of repeated words:

1:1 Alas!

Lonely sits the city [which was] *great* (רַבָּתִי) with people!

She has become (הָיְתָה) like a widow.

Great (רַבָּתִי) among nations, the princess among states

has become (הָיְתָה) a slave.

The feminine form of the adjective רַבָּתִי (“great”) is repeated in alternative lines, as is the verb הָיְתָה (“she became”).

Repetition may also occur outside of the parallel poetic structure, as seen in the repetition of forms of the verb יָשַׁב ("sit") in verses 1 and 3:

1:1 Lonely *sits* (יֹשֶׁבֶת) the city [which was] great with people!

1:3 She *sat* (יָשְׁבָה) (*i.e.* settled) among the nations

The poet makes a word play between the sitting of Jerusalem as a woman in grief and the sitting or settlement of Jerusalem among the nations in exile. This feature is not readily apparent in English translations.

Repetition may also take the shape of the repetition of an infinitive absolute and a finite form of the verb, a syntactic construction that is prominent in direct speech in Hebrew and is expressive of intense emotion, as in verse 2: "*She bitterly weeps* (בָּכְוּ תִבְכֶּה) in the night (literally, to weep she weeps in the night).

An example of onomatopoeia is the verb אָנַח ("to sigh") which sounds like a person sighing. The verb occurs four times in this chapter and is attributed to "her priests" (verse 4), "her inhabitants" (verse 11), and the city itself (verses 8, 21).

An example of graphic imagery occurs in verse 4 to describe the depopulation of the conquered and devastated city:

1:4 The roads of Zion are mourning

Empty of festival pilgrims.

All her gates are desolate.

The imagery involves personification – the roads leading to Zion are mourning for lack of persons travelling on them and the gates through which religious pilgrims should be entering are desolate.

Temporal sequentiality is an oral feature, which does not play a large role in this lament. However, one instance occurs in verse 8, where a sequence of actions or events can be discerned: Jerusalem has sinned, she has become a mockery, she is despised by her admirers who see her disgrace, she sighs, she turns back:

1:8 Jerusalem has greatly sinned

Therefore, a mockery she has become

All who admired her despise her,

For they have seen her disgrace

She herself sighs

And turns back.

Emotional immediacy is found in five similar exclamations spoken by Lady Zion relating to visual perception. In verse 9, she asks the LORD to see her agony: “See (רָאָה), LORD, my agony that the enemy boasts!” Similarly, in verse 11, she asks “see, LORD, and *notice*” (רָאָה יְהוָה וְהִבִּיטָהּ) with the verb נָבַט (“notice, regard”) following the word רָאָה (“see”). In verse 12, the two verbs are reversed – “*Notice* and see” (הִבִּיטוּ וְרָאוּ) – and the commands are addressed to the people rather than to the deity, as is also the case in verse 18 “see my agony” (וְרָאוּ מַכְאֲבִי). In verse 20, she again asks God: “see, LORD, that I am in distress” (רָאָה יְהוָה כִּי־צָר־לִי).

There are a few indications of multi-modality in this chapter. In verse 8, Zion sighs and turns away. In verse 17, Zion spreads out her hands. These indications of non-verbal expressions and actions, which convey meaning, can often be mimetically incorporated into the oral translation.

A final mention must be made of the pervasive use of parallelism in biblical laments, a well-known and extensively studied feature of Hebrew parallelism. Parallelism is attested cross-culturally as an oral feature and the connection of parallelism to poetry and to representations of direct speech within narrative lend credence to the notion that it was also a feature of oral language in ancient Israel.

5.2 Analysis of oral features of the subsequent culture

This section provides an excerpt from a traditional lament in Sesotho, in order to briefly identify its oral features so that they can be incorporated into the oral translation of Lamentations 1. Nyirenda’s research (2024) in examining traditional Nsenga laments before producing an oral translation of Lamentations confirms that the oral laments of each subsequent culture must be carefully analysed before translation of the biblical text begins.

Italic type indicates words/phrases that are repeated; bold is used to differentiate additional words/phrases that are repeated in close proximity to italicised words/phrases. A square box encloses words/phrases that are related in the parallelism as synonymous or antonymic.

Kodi-Ya-Malla lebitsong la Sello Phokojwe/Lamentation in the name of Sello Phokojwe (1941-1992) (from Phume 1995:2-4).

1. Lapeng la Tlhakwaneng ho *tjhabile* lesele
In the family of Tlhakwaneng a **different** sun (day) *has risen*
2. Ke re lesele empa le tshwana le a mang
I say it was a **different** one but the same as others

3. Nnete hoba le tjhabile botjhabela
The truth is it has risen from the east
4. Le habile ho ya phirima bophirimela
It is heading to set in the west!
5. Hoseng ka *matjeke* ha kgaoha kgwele
in the very *early hours* of the morning the line broke
6. Tjhe, eseng ka *matjeke*
No, not in the *early hours* ...
19. Ngwana e motona ke *thaka ya ntatae*
The male child is *partner to his father*
20. Ke *thaka ya ntatae* hantle botsekeng
He is indeed *his father's partner*
21. Banna basadi ka bana ebang *dipaki*
Men women with children be *witnesses*
22. Bohle ebang nnete *dipaki*
All of you indeed be *witnesses*
23. Sello Phokojwe o robetse boroko
Sello Phokojwe slept a sleep
24. Sello Phokojwe o phomotse phomolo
Sello Phokojwe rested a rest
25. Sello o kgonne o sebeditse *dikgomo*
Sello achieved he worked for *cows*
26. *Kgomo* tsa bohadi ba MmaSello
Cow for MmaSello's dowry
28. Sello ngwana e motona *thaka ntatae*
Sello a male child, a *partner to his father*
29. O setse Tlhakwaneng, ke mjalefa
He is left in Tlhakwaneng, he is an heir
30. MmaSello ikgothatse
MmaSello comfort yourself!

The most conspicuous features of orality in this poem of lament are redundancy, parallelism, and rhythmic elements. All of these features are important for memorisation. Examples of repetition include the following:

- Lines 1 and 2 – lesele/a different one (day)
- Lines 1 and 3 – tjhabile/has risen
- Lines 5 and 6 – matjeke/early hours of the morning
- Lines 19 and 27 – Ngwana e motona/the male child
- Lines 19, 20, 27 – thaka ya ntatae/partner to his father
- Lines 21 and 22 – dipaki/witnesses
- Lines 25 and 26 – Dikgomo (kgomo)/cows (cow)

Many cases of repetition involve tail-head linkage between the end of one line and the beginning of the following line, as illustrated in lines 25 and 26 (see also *lesele* in lines 1 and 2). This is a particular feature of laments, which serves to draw out the lament and emphasise the sadness of the situation.

Repetition also occurs in the use of a noun and object from the same root:

- Line 23 robetse boroko/slept a sleep
- Line 24 phomotse phomolo/rested a rest

This construction is not used in ordinary language; rather, it is a feature of poetic language and especially of laments.

The repetitions overlap with the concept of parallelism and especially synonymous parallelism. These two features – redundancy and parallelism – serve to structure the poem and hold it intact.

Lines 3 and 4 illustrate the use of opposite word pairs – “rise”/“set” (italicised) and “east”/“west” (bold):

- Line 3 – Nnete hoba le *tjhabile* **botjhabela**/The truth is it has *risen* from the east
- Line 4 – Le habile ho ya *phirima* **bophirimela**/It is heading to *set* in the west!

These two lines also illustrate the use of rhythmic elements in parallel lines.

Poems in Sesotho which are called *Kodi-ya-malla* (“Lamentation”) centre on emotions and feelings. The oral features are not only for memorisation, but they also raise the emotions of the audience. The poet’s performance is also phatic and emotional, as indicated by emphatic statements such as *ke re* (“I say”) (line 2).

Laments in Sesotho culture are structured in a particular way, so that the individuals who are lamenting are immediately involved in the lament.

In addition, features such as parallelism, repetition, and especially tail-head repetition bring structure to the lament.

5.3 Oral translation in Sesotho

The oral translation of Lamentations 1 (excerpted below) is intended for use in a Sesotho congregation as part of an ongoing programme of Scripture engagement through Scripture performance. The various speaking roles have been divided between various groups in the congregation, with the minister usually playing the speaking role of the prophet and the congregation playing the role of personified Jerusalem. In the middle of the dialogues, there are moments of silence, which add to the seriousness of the lament and promote introspection by the congregation on the issues raised in the lament.

In the following transcription, grey highlighting indicates words/phrases that do not directly translate words in the incipient Hebrew text but have been added for the purposes of the oral translation. Italic type indicates words/phrases that are repeated; bold is used to differentiate additional words/phrases that are repeated in close proximity to italicised words/phrases. A square box encloses words/phrases that are related in the parallelism as synonymous or antonymic.

Moruti/Priest:

1. Jo, **Jerusalema!**
Alas, **Jerusalema!**

Jo, Jerusalema motse o neng o dula o *tletse batho kahohle!*
Alas, Jerusalem the city that used to be *full of people!*

empa kajeno o *bodutu* hakaakang?!
but today how *lonely* you are?!

O ne o le moholo hara ditjhaba **tša lefatshe**
you used to be the great among the nations **of the world,**

e, kajeno bona o fetohile mohlolohadi hara ditjhaba **tša lefatshe**
Yes, today, look, you have become a widow among the nations
of the world!

O ne o le *mofumahadi* hara ditjhaba
You were a *princess* among the nations,

empa kajeno bona, o fetohile *lekhabunyane* **feela**
but today, look, you have become **only** a *slave*.

Bontate/Fathers:

2. **Jerusalema o a Ila**
Jerusalem you are weeping,
O Ila sa mmokotsane bosiu
you are weeping bitterly,
keledi di keleketla marameng a hao
tears are flowing on your cheeks,
mme *ha ho le ya mong metswalleng ya hao*
and *there is no one from your friends,*
ya o tshedisang
that is comforting you
hobane *metswalle ya hao yohle e o ekile, e o ekile*
for *your friends have betrayed you, have betrayed you,*
mme e fetohile dira tsa hao
and have become your enemies.

Bomme/Mothers:

3. **Judah o isitswe kgolehong,**
Judah, you have been taken to captivity
Ka baka la ditlhoriso, le bokgoba/
due to persecutions and hard labour!
o phela kahara baditjahaba
You live among the nations,
mme ebile *o hloka le sona sebaka sa ho phomola*
and *you do not even have a place to rest!*
Bahlorisi ba hao bohle ba o tsomeditse
All your persecutors have overtaken you,
e, ba o tsomeditse nakong ya ditsietsi tsa hao
indeed they have overtaken you during the time of your troubles!

[Moment of silence]

Batjha/Youth:

4. **Tsela tse lebang ho wena Sione di bodutu hakaakang**
Roads that lead to you Zion, how lonely are they?

hoba ha ho ya tlang meketeng ya hao e halalelang
for there is no one coming to your holy feasts,

Ke re le dikgoro tsa hao tsohle ha di na batho
I say even all your gates do not have people,

Haele baporofeta ba hao bona ba fehelwa
As for your priests are groaning,

Barweetsana ba hao ba tshwenyehile
Your virgins are troubled.

Sione o tsietsing tse bohloko haholo
Zion you are in great troubles. ...

8. Jerusalema, Jerusalema, o sitilwe haholo
Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you have definitely sinned,

ka baka leo, o silafetse
for that reason you are is impure,

bohle ba neng ba o hlompha,
all those who respected you

jwale ke ba o nyedisang,
now are the ones who despise you,

ba o nyedisang hobane ba o bonetse
they despise you for they have seen your nakedness.

E, Jerusalema o qetwa ke mefehelo,
Indeed Jerusalem is bothered by her groans

o ile wa reteleha, wa ipata sefahleho.
you turned away, and hid her face.

Bomme/Mothers:

9. Ho ya kgwedding ha hao Jerusalema
By going to your month, Jerusalem,

ho kgomaretse,
it sticks

ho kgomaretse aparong tsa hao
it sticks to your clothes,

ha o a ka wa inahanela
you did not think

pheletso ya hao
about your future.

Ruri ho wa ha hao e bile ho makatsang,
Certainly your fall was a surprise!

ha ho a ba le ya mong
no one

ya o tshedisang.
comforted you.

Phutheho yohle/Congregation:

“Oho, Morena,
O Lord

ako bone matshwenyeho a ka,
just look at my distress

sera ke sena kajeno se a ithorisa
here is the enemy today (he) is praising (himself)!”

Batjha/Youth:

10. Sera se *nanabeditse*
The enemy has *stretched out*

letsoho la sona,
his hand

sa le *nanabetsa*,
he stretched it out

sa nka maruo wohle a hao;
and took all of your treasures.

Moruti/Priest:

Wena Jerusalema o bone
You Jerusalem saw

baditjhaba ba kena
the nations enter

ba kena ka Sehalalelong sa hao,
entering your Sanctuary

bona bao o neng o laele,
those ones you order

o itse ba se *kene*
to say they must not *enter*

phuthehong ya hao
your congregation

Bontate/Fathers:

11. Tjhaba sohle sa hao
All your people

se qetwa ke *mefehelo*,
are bothered by *groaning*

se *fehelwa*
they *groan*

ha se ntse se sikila bohobe;
as they search for bread

matlotlo a sona se a ananya dijo,
they trade (sell) their treasures for food

hore se nne se tsebe ho phela
so that they can survive

Phutheho yohle/Congregation:

“Oho, Morena, *ako tadime*,
O, Lord *look*

mme o be o *bone*
and see;

bona kamoo ke nyedisehang kateng
see how am I despised!”

12. “Lona bohle, bo-mofeta-ka-tsela
You all who pass by the road,

na hoo ha ho re letho ho lona?
does this say nothing to you?

Qamakang kahohle le ke le bone
Look everywhere and see:

Na *matshwenyeho*
 Whether is there any *distress*
 a tshwanang le a ka a teng
 like my present ones,
matshwenyeho ao
distress that
 ke otlilweng ka wona
 I was punished with,
 ao Morena a a theoletseng hodima ka
 that Lord has brought upon me,
 mohla tsatsi la kgalefo
 on the day when his anger
 e tlokomang ya hae?
 was fuming? ...

Moruti/Priest:

17. “Sione o phakaladitse matsoho a hao
 Zion you stretched your hands,
 empa ya ka o tshedisang
 but the comforter
 yena ha a yo
 is not there.
 Malebana le Jakobo
 For Jacob,
 Morena o entse taelo
 Lord has made an order:
 Hore dira tsa hae
 that his enemies
 di mo etsetse sakana-la-nkope
 will surround him.
 Jerusalema o fetohile manyala
 Jerusalem you have become a filthy thing,
 Jerusalema o silafetse
 Jerusalem you are unclean.”

Phutheho yohle/Congregation:

18. "Morena yena o lokile
Lord is good,

hobane ke fetohetse molao wa hae
for I have turned against his law.

Lona ditjhaba tsohle, mmameleng
You all the nation, listen!

Tadimang
look,

le bone matshwenyeho a ka
and see my distress!

Thwetsana ya ka
my young women

le tlhankana ya ka
and my young men,

kaofela ha bona
all of them

ba isitswe bothopuweng
have been exiled!

19. Ke ipileditse ho baratuwa ba ka
I called to my lovers,

empa ke bona ba ileng ba nkeka
but I have realised that they betrayed me.

Baprista le baetapele ba ka
Priests and my leaders

ba shwele
have died,

ba shweletse diterateng tsa motse
they have died on the streets of the city,

ba eshwa ba ntse ba sikila bohobe
they died while searching for bread,

hore ba tle ba tsebe ho iphedisa
in order for them to survive.

20. Oho, Morena, bona ke tsielehile
O Lord, look I am in trouble!

Moya wa ka o ferekane haholo
My spirit is in distress!

Pelo ya ka e tshwenyehile haholo
My heart is troubled,

hobane ke o fetohetse haholo
for I have really turned against you!

Diterateng sabole e a bolaya
In the streets the sword kills,

ka matlung ho nnga lefu feela
in the houses what smells is only death!

21. Batho ba utlwile mefehelo ya ka
People have heard my groaning,

empa ha ho na motho
but there is no one

ya ntshedisang
comforts me.

Dira tsa ka tsohle
All my enemies

di utlwile tsietsi ya ka
have heard about my trouble,

di nyakaladitswe
they are delighted

ke ketso ena ya hao
by such incident.

Potlakisa tsatsi
Bring the day in a fast way

le boletsweng ke wena
the one you announced,

hore dira tsa ka
that my enemies

di tle di tshwane le nna
will be like me.

22. Bokgopo ba dira tseo
The evildoing of those enemies
- bo pepesehe ho wena
be brought to you,
- le tsona *kotlo* ya tsona
and also their *punishment*
- di e fumane
be found,
- o di *otle*
punish them
- jwalokaha le nna o *nkotlile*
the way you have *punished* me,
- o *nkotla*
you *punish* me
- ka baka la dibe tsa ka tsohle
because of all my sins.
- Mefehelo ya ka e mengata haholo
My groaning is too much,
- pelo ya ka le yona e nyahame
and my heart also is disillusioned."

As indicated above, the biblical lament begins with *'ékâ*, an expression of grief. The Sesotho lament uses an iconic translation by employing the same kind of exclamative expression *jo*, which signals the beginning of the lament and is repeated twice in verse 1 for emphasis. We can contrast the ancient Septuagint translation which recognises that the poem is a lament but uses instead a symbolic translation to describe the fact that the following is a lament spoken by the prophet Jeremias over Jerusalem. The beginning of verse 1 in the Septuagint reads:

καὶ ἐγένετο μετὰ τὸ αἰχμαλωτισθῆναι τὸν Ἰσραὴλ καὶ Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἐρημωθῆναι ἐκάθισεν Ἰερεμίας κλαίων καὶ ἐθρήνησεν τὸν θρῆνον τοῦτον ἐπὶ Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ εἶπεν πῶς κάθισεν μόνη ἡ πόλις ἡ πεπληθυμμένη λαῶν ...

And it happened, after Israel was taken captive and Ierousalem was laid waste, Ieremias sat weeping and gave this lament over Ierousalem and said: How the city sat alone, she who was full of peoples! ...

The Septuagint renders the word *ʾēkā* with *πῶς* (“how”), which does not signal the beginning of a lament in Greek. For this reason, an introductory sentence was added by the Septuagint translators to provide a metatextual framing of the lament.

One important modification that has been made in the Sesotho oral translation shifts the description of the desolation of Jerusalem in verses 1-9a, 10a, and 11a from third person (as found in the Hebrew) to second person. The use of second person to address the individual who is mourning is an important feature of Sesotho laments, as illustrated in the traditional Sesotho lament in which Mma Sello, the widow of the deceased, is addressed. The Hebrew lament creates a deictic problem for the Sesotho hearer in that the person lamenting speaks but is not spoken to. By re-shaping the opening voices of the biblical lament from third person to second person, the Sesotho translation sounds like a proper lament and the immediacy of the lament is recreated for the hearers. The re-casting of the initial verses from third person to second person also means that it is necessary to add the vocative *Jerusalema* in verses 1 and 2, so that it is clear who is being addressed as the grieving party. This recasting to second person involves an indexical translation of the various Hebrew features that signal a lament. The second person shaping in Sesotho is indexical – it points to the fact that it is a lament, in the same way that *qinah* metre in Hebrew points to a lament. Furthermore, the addition of *ke re* (“I say”) in verse 4 is an important phatic and emotive feature of a lament, as illustrated in the traditional Sesotho lament in section 5.2 above (line 2).

The oral Sesotho translation iconically represents the repetition of the Hebrew incipient text. However, it is important to recall that repetition in Sesotho is used more pervasively and, in particular, with the tail-head pattern of repetition in laments. For this reason, the oral translation has incorporated additional instances of repetition, and especially tail-head repetition, into the oral translation at multiple points. An example occurs in verse 19 with the phrase “they have died” which is repeated two additional times:³

Baprista le baetapele ba ka/Priests and my leaders
ba shwele/have died,

3 Additional examples include: o a lla/you weep (verse 2[x2]); tsomeditse/overtaken (verse 3[x2]); isitswe kgolehong (verse 5[x2]); hlakotswe/wiped away (verse 6[x2]); baleha/running away (verse 6 [x2]); matlotlo/treasures (verse 7[x3]); nyedisa/despise (verse 8[x2]); kgomaretse/sticks (verse 9[x2]); nanabeditse/stretched out (verse 10[x3]); ho fehelwa/to groan (verse 11[x2]); mphuthuhela/attack me (verse 13[x2]); tlabiketse/have trodden (verse 15[x2]); manyala/unclean (verse 17[x2]); shwele/died (verse 19[x3]); kotlo/punishment (verse 22[x3]).

ba shweletse diterateng tsa motse/they have died on the streets of the city,
ba eshwa ba ntse ba sikila bohobe/they died while searching for bread,
 hore ba tle ba tsebe ho iphedisa/in order for them to survive.

Just as Hebrew laments use pervasive parallelism, so does Sesotho. The use of antithetical parallelism is heightened in the Sesotho in some instances, as illustrated in verse 8:⁴

bohle ba neng ba o hlomphe/ all those who respected you
jwale ke ba o nyedisang/ now are the ones who despise you,

Finally, a cultural problem for Sesotho oral translation is posed by the use of the Hebrew euphemism “uncleanness” (verse 9) as a metonymy for menstruation, which causes ritual uncleanness. In the translation, the Sesotho euphemism “go to your month” was used, an iconic translation.

Ho ya kgwedding ha hao Jerusalema/By going to your month, Jerusalem,
ho kgomaretse,/it sticks
ho kgomaretse, aparong sa hao,/it sticks to your clothes,
ha o a ka wa inahanela/you did not think
pheletso ya hao/about your end time.

However, in an oral performance, especially in a church setting, the minister, who is quite commonly a man, finds it difficult to speak of menstruation, even by way of euphemism. For this reason, the *persona* of the prophet in verse 9 is performed by the mothers of the congregation, rather than by the minister. This example illustrates further the complex semiotic relationships that must be considered in an oral Bible translation.

The re-creation of the laments of Lamentations allows participants to mourn the loss of everything held sacred and dear in a time of social upheaval and change. The poet of Lamentations does not urge survivors to find consolation in Israel’s glorious past, nor does the poet look forward to a happy tomorrow where the glorious past will be revived. Instead, Lamentations shows ordinary persons who have known the depths of suffering, remembering the unfailing love of the Lord during loss. The performance of Lamentations to grieve loss and recover hope is part of a broader programme of performative Scripture engagement in Sesotho that began with Psalm 24 (Makutoane, Miller-Naudé & Naudé 2015; Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2018) and continued with texts concerning happiness (Naudé, Miller-Naudé & Makutoane 2017) and forgiveness (Makutoane 2022).

4 See also the antithetical terms *mofumahadi/ princess; lekhabunyane/slave* (verse 1).

6. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we return to the original question: What are we translating in oral Bible translation? As we have described above, oral Bible translation takes place within a complex semiotic web of interrelationships, all of which play a role in the translation – oral Bible translation is not simply translation *from* orality *to* orality (Maxey 2009). Instead, oral Bible translation must begin with an intimate understanding of the oral-written interface of the incipient texts of ancient Israel and the early church. It then requires attention to the oral-written interface of the hearing-dominant or text-dominant subsequent culture and especially to the ways in which oral features are instantiated in various kinds of oral performance. Finally, the emergence of an oral Bible translation must take note of the various choices that are open to the translator in terms of the semiotic relationships between the incipient sign system and the subsequent sign system. Only by carefully examining each of the factors and being aware of the choices and their consequences for the emerging translation can there be a truly meaningful, memorable, and powerful oral translation of Scripture.

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Sesotho

Sesotho