

### 3. THE PESHITTA RENDERING OF PSALM 25: SPELLING, SYNONYMS, AND SYNTAX

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The very act of making a translation implies that the rendered text will differ from the source text. The underlying presupposition is that the grammar, syntax, and semantics of the source and target languages are sufficiently divergent as to warrant a translation. Translations differ in how close they stay to the source text, a qualification which is both lauded and disdained. Yet all translations tend to exhibit a number of shared characteristics. Using the Masoretic and Peshitta versions of Psalm 25, the characteristics of the Syriac rendering are explored, taking note of issues involving spelling, synonyms, and syntax.

#### 1. CHARACTERISTICS OF TRANSLATIONS IN GENERAL

Numerous studies have explored the Syriac rendering of the original Hebrew text. Ignacio Carbajosa in his study of Psalms 90–150 mentions more than ten studies dedicated to the study of the character of the Peshitta Psalms alone.<sup>1</sup> Questions as to which original text was used, translation technique, and how well the translator knew Hebrew are considered. Attempts are made to differentiate between the influence of the two language systems themselves, on the one hand, and exegetical and text-historical factors, on the other. The opinions of scholars have ranged from remarks about carelessness and a lack of knowledge of Hebrew on the part of the translator to appreciation of the dynamic and satisfying result of his work. When opinions are so divergent, it is time to gather and register data as it presents itself in the two versions, saving interpretations and qualifications of what is observed for later.

During the past several years, in a project comparing the Peshitta and the Masoretic text of the Books of Kings, I have worked closely with Dr. Percy van Keulen, a text-historical scholar from Leiden. We have both been confronted with the vast differences between a linguistic approach and a text-historical one. This enriching experience compels me to caution the reader that this contribution is from a linguist's point of view and needs complementation from other disciplines. Yet I am convinced that the contribution of linguistics to this type of research is not

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<sup>1</sup> Carbajosa, *The Character of the Syriac Version of the Psalms: A Study of Psalms 90–150 in the Peshitta*, 3–14.

insignificant and can provide additional perspectives from which to view what is observed in the texts.

Studies on the universal nature of translations provide a broader context in which translations can be studied. In one Finnish study, texts translated from two different languages — Russian and English — were compared both with non-translated source language texts and with each other:

The findings based on such comparable corpora indicated that translated texts deviated clearly from the original, untranslated texts, and on the whole, translations bore a closer affinity to each other than to untranslated texts. At the same time, different source languages ... showed individual profiles of deviation. The results suggest that the source language is influential in shaping translations, but it cannot be the sole cause, because the translations resembled each other.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that translated texts resemble each other more than they resemble the languages of the source texts could indicate, it seems to me, that these results reflect universal tendencies of the human brain in its effort to deal simultaneously with two encoding systems.

Much of what can be observed in the Syriac translation reflects the characteristics of translations in general. It is in the light of the broader picture that the true uniqueness of the Peshitta version can be defined. Some of the characteristics or tendencies of translations in general include overall length, explicitation, lexical density, simplification and levelling out.<sup>3</sup>

### **1.1. Overall Length**

Translated texts tend to be longer than the source text. This overall length is related to the fact that translated texts often contain explicitation.

### **1.2. Explicitation**

Explicitation involves adding material in the translated text that is taken to be implicit in the source text. Explicitation may occur in the form of lexical, syntactic, or semantic additions, expansions, or substitutions. This results in a lower lexical density.

### **1.3. Lexical Density**

Lexical density is the proportion of content, or lexical words to function words which have little lexical meaning, but serve to express grammatical relationships. The rationale behind this is that translations tend to add material to disambiguate elements in the source text, to make explicit syntactic and grammatical relationships which are implicit in the source text, and to supply elided material. Much of this is done using a higher proportion of function words. However, inherent in this added

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<sup>2</sup> Mauranen, “Corpora, Universals and Interference,” 79.

<sup>3</sup> See Lind, “Translation Universals (or laws, or tendencies, or probabilities, or ...?),” 2–4.

material are also content or lexical words which therefore increase the lexical density. In spite of this, translated texts tend to have a lower lexical density.

#### 1.4. Simplification

Some textual features resulting from simplification may be just the opposite of explicitation: more general terms can replace specific ones, a number of short sentences replace a long one, modifying phrases and words can be omitted. Other types of simplification include reduction or omission of repetition, a narrower range of vocabulary and a related lower number of unique lexical items (lower type / token ratio, that is, the number of distinct lexical items in translated texts is lower in relation to the total number of words).

#### 1.5. Levelling Out

There is a tendency in translated texts “to gravitate toward the centre of the continuum.”<sup>4</sup> There is a “relatively higher level of homogeneity of translated texts with regard to their own scores on given measures of universal features” in contrast to non-translational texts which are more idiosyncratic with a higher level of variance.<sup>5</sup>

In discussing some aspects of Peshitta Psalm 25, we will try to place the observations within the context of the general characteristics of translated texts. As the title has suggested, we will look at some phenomena involving spelling, synonyms, and syntax in this Psalm.

## 2. SPELLING

### 2.1. Acrostic

Like various other Hebrew psalms, Psalm 25 has the letters of the alphabet as the first letter of a verse or line. The Psalm has a number of departures from a strict alphabetic acrostic:

- verse 2: the first word should begin with *beth* but the verse begins with *aleph*; it is only by placing this word at the end of the line of verse 1 that the second word, beginning with a *beth*, occurs in the initial position of the second line
- verse 5b: the *waw* line actually begins with *aleph waw*
- verses 17 and 18: there are two lines beginning with *resh*
- verse 22: after the completion of the alphabet an extra line beginning with *pe* is added.<sup>6</sup>

Although it has often been observed that the Peshitta translators paid particular attention to graphic and phonetic characteristics of the Hebrew text, they

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<sup>4</sup> Baker, “Corpus-based Translation Studies: The Challenges That Lie Ahead,” 184.

<sup>5</sup> Laviosa, *Corpus-based Translation Studies: Theory, Findings, Applications*, 73.

<sup>6</sup> See Talstra, “Psalm 25: Partituur van een gebed,” for a view on how this final line can be seen as integrated into the prayer of the Psalm as a whole.

did not seem to exert particular efforts to follow the alphabet in rendering Psalm 25. However, this observation does not present the whole picture. A number of lines in the Syriac version begin with the same letter as the line in the Hebrew original.<sup>7</sup> It is the use of cognates which allows for a partial reflection of the Hebrew acrostic, but the focus is on the sense of the passage. The fact that the two languages are related facilitates the resemblance in the form of some words, but it would be assuming too much to say that the Syriac was trying to follow the form of the acrostic. A convincing example is verse 13 — the *nun* line: both versions begin with the cognate words for “soul, breath, life”; however, the Syriac inserts a conjunctive *waw* at the beginning of the line to connect this clause to the preceding line. This moves the initial *nun* away from the first position, thus giving precedence to syntactic connections over acrostic form.

A brief look at other Psalms with an acrostic in Hebrew confirms this impression. With its eight lines per letter of the alphabet, Psalm 119 provides the most material for comparison and some interesting observations can be made.

- The *beth* scores the highest: seven of the eight lines beginning with *beth* in Hebrew begin with the *beth* in Syriac. These all involve the preposition “in” which is spelled identically in the two languages. For the one line without *beth* in Syriac the Hebrew begins with בְּדֶרֶךְ, where the *beth* introduces the complement of the verb שׂוֹשׂ, “rejoice.” Syriac renders this verb as ܣܘܫܝܢܝܘܢ, “love, delight in, desire,” and introduces the object of the

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<sup>7</sup> Verse 2 — the *beth* line: in this the Peshitta text follows the Hebrew exactly, with the first word beginning with an *alaph* and the second with a *beth*. Verse 5, first line — the *be* line: the Hebrew begins with a Hiphil form, which provides the *be*, of the verb beginning with *daleth*, while the Syriac begins with a verb starting with *dalath*. Though the acrostic is not followed, the Syriac verbal root ܕܠܝܢܝܘܢ does begin with the *dalath* and furthermore contains two of the same letters as the Hebrew root דָּלַד. Verse 5, second line — the *waw* line: Hebrew begins with *aleph waw* while the Syriac begins with *waw*. Since the coordinating conjunction is also added to other lines where it does not benefit the acrostic, the *waw* is probably not to be counted as an attempt to follow the acrostic, but as a syntactic connection between clauses. Verse 8 — the *teth* line: both Hebrew and Syriac begin with *teth*, the words are cognates. Verse 9 — the *yod* line: the Hebrew has an imperfect form of the verb beginning with the desired *yod*, while Syriac begins with a conjunctive *waw* and a participial form beginning with *mem*. The two verbs, however, share two letters in their roots (דָּרַךְ / ܕܪܝܝܢܝܘܢ). Verse 10 — the *kaph* line: both texts begin with the word “all,” a cognate word in the two languages. Verse 12 — the *mem* line: the interrogative pronouns מִי and ܡܝܝܢ both begin with the required letter. Verse 13 — the *nun* line: both versions begin with the cognate “soul, breath, life,” but the Syriac inserts a conjunctive *waw* before this word to connect this clause syntactically. Verse 15 — the *ayin* line: both begin with the cognate, “eyes,” which begins with the required letter. Verse 16 — the *pe* line: the cognate verbs פָּנָה / ܦܢܝܢܝܘܢ begin the verse, but the Syriac uses the verb in the Ethpeel which shifts the *pe* away from initial position. Verse 21 — the *taw* line: both versions begin with the cognate words תָּמַל / ܬܡܠܝܢܝܘܢ. Verse 22 — the extra *pe* line: the Hebrew פָּדָה, “ransom,” is rendered ܦܕܝܢܝܘܢ, “redeem,” an adequate translation which also preserves the initial *pe*.

verb by ܩܪܐ, thus respecting the valence pattern of the Syriac verb chosen, even though this means departing from the acrostic pattern.

- The second highest score is attained by the *qof*: 6 of the 8 lines. These all involve cognate verbs in the two languages — twice each ܩܪܐ / ܩܪܐ, ܩܪܐ / ܩܪܐ, ܩܪܐ / ܩܪܐ, and ܩܪܐ / ܩܪܐ.
- Where cognates are available in the two languages, these provide similarity in spelling, like ܩܪܐ / ܩܪܐ, “servant,” ܩܪܐ / ܩܪܐ, “eye,” but this does not occur to the detriment of syntax. The clearest example of this is perhaps the line beginning with ܩܪܐ, “peace,” in Hebrew. This word is translated by the cognate ܩܪܐ in Syriac, but the word does not occur in initial position, which would satisfy the requirements of the acrostic, but rather later in the sentence.
- More evidence that the sense rather than the spelling guided the rendering can be seen in verses 73–80 beginning with the letter *yod* in Hebrew. Five of the eight lines in Hebrew begin with a third person imperfect verbal form. These are rendered by the imperfect in Syriac, beginning with the letter *nun*. The line beginning with ܩܪܐ, “hand,” is translated appropriately, beginning with an *alaph* in Syriac (ܩܪܐ). Only the line beginning with the cognate verbs ܩܪܐ / ܩܪܐ in the perfect preserves the initial letter *yudb* in Syriac.
- In some cases the effect of phonological variation is evident: though the lines beginning with *gimel* have only one rendering beginning with *gamal*, there are two lines beginning with *alaph* and one with *E*, thus evidencing to fuzziness in the velar / glottal area of articulation. Similarly the *sin / shin* lines are rendered beginning once with *shin* and twice with *semkath*. Finally, the *tsade* has a score of zero for lines beginning with *tsadbe*, but there are four lines beginning with *zain*, a letter phonologically related to the *tsadbe*. The renderings of the *sin / shin* and the *tsade* bear witness to the fluidity of the sibilants in the pronunciation and spelling of these two languages.<sup>8</sup>

On the basis of the comparative evidence from Psalm 119, we can confirm our impression of the acrostic in Psalm 25: the translator focused on conveying the sense of the passage. Cognate words in the two languages provided a means of maintaining some of the initial letters, but this was not done to the detriment of syntactic or semantic considerations, and it is, as it were, almost by accident that the acrostic is partially reproduced.

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<sup>8</sup> Phonological variation in the Peshitta rendering of the books of Kings is explored by Dyk and Van Keulen in *Language System, Translation Technique and Textual Tradition in the Peshitta of Kings*, chapter 3: “Linguistic Observations.”



### 2.3. Relation to Translation Universals

Usually the aim of a translation is to make a text understandable to an audience different from the one for which the original text was composed. In doing so, preserving poetic techniques like an acrostic in the source text tends to be less important than communicating the sense of the passage. This appears to be confirmed by the observations made on the spelling in Psalm 25.

Though more could be said about the graphic and phonetic characteristics of the Peshitta rendering of this Psalm, we now turn to words, in particular to the use of synonyms.

## 3. SYNONYMS

The fact that Syriac does not render a Hebrew item consistently using a single item has been both criticized, as though the translators were careless in their renderings or had imperfect knowledge of Hebrew, and praised, attributing to the translators creativity and versatility in finding the most suitable expressions for the passage. We look at a number of content words which do not exhibit a one-to-one correspondence in the two versions.

### 3.1. Syriac Renders a Single Hebrew Word in More Than One Way

In Psalm 25 a number of Hebrew words are rendered by more than one Syriac word:

חטאה “sin”	ܫܘܠܗܐ “folly, transgression, offence”	Verse 7
חטאה	ܫܘܠܗܐ “sin”	Verse 18

In verses 7 and 18 the same Hebrew word occurs. Although the rendering using the cognate would seem to be the more obvious choice, the context in verse 7 speaks of the “sins of my youth,” and apparently the translator therefore chose a milder term, “folly,” in this context instead of using the cognate Syriac word.

נשא “lift, treat with partiality, carry, bear guilt, take away guilt, forgive”	ܢܫܐ Aphel, “raise, lift up”	Verse 1
נשא	ܡܚܘܢ “leave, let go, forgive”	Verse 18

In verses 1 and 18 the Hebrew uses the verb נשא. Although נשא commonly means “lift, carry,” in particular syntactic combinations it means “forgive.” Precisely the combination meaning “forgive” is present in verse 18 and the meaning is correctly transmitted by means of the different Syriac verb than in contexts where נשא means “raise, lift up,” as in verse 1.

ענו “poor, humble, meek”	ܥܢܘܘ partc. pass., “low,	Verse 9
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*Translation Technique and Textual Tradition in the Peshitta of Kings.* For the addition of the coordinating conjunction between the two words, see comments on phrase structure, below.

	humble, meek”	
ענו	ܥܢܘ “poor, needy, wretched”	Verse 9

In verse 9 the Hebrew word ענו, “poor, humble, meek,” occurs twice. It could be that the translator sought to avoid repeating the same word within a short distance. Avoidance of repetition is one of the observed characteristics of translated texts in general.<sup>11</sup>

### 3.2. Syriac Renders Multiple Hebrew Words Using the Same Word

In the following cases, different Hebrew words are rendered by a single word in Syriac:

רחב Hiphil, “enlarge, make room”	ܦܠܠ “increase, multiply, grow in number”	Verse 17
רבב “become many or much”	ܦܠܠ	Verse 19

עון “transgression, guilt”	ܥܘܠܐ “iniquity, injustice, injury”	Verse 11
חמס “violence, wrong”	ܥܘܠܐ	Verse 19

The renderings are taken from the appropriate semantic domain, and can therefore be characterized as adequate renderings, but by using a single Syriac item for more than one Hebrew word the number of unique Syriac items is reduced. The tendency for translations to have a reduction in unique lexical items is reflected here, but it will be noticed that this is in contrast to the tendency to avoid repetition mentioned above. Yet both tendencies have been documented in research dealing with translation universals.

### 3.3. Multiple Synonyms Rendered by More Than One Item

A semantic domain often contains multiple lexical items, and seldom is there a one-to-one correspondence between two languages for items occurring within a semantic domain. Weitzman presents an interesting theory of how the Peshitta dealt with this phenomenon. According to Weitzman, “the translators found Hebrew richer than Syriac in synonyms, at least in some fields.”<sup>12</sup> He proposes that:

The relative lack of synonyms in Syriac has led to one device that works systematically against consistency of equivalence. Where two synonyms are available in Syriac, the translators may eke them out by treating one as the ‘A-word’ and one as the ‘B-word’. If any of the Hebrew synonyms occurs alone,

<sup>11</sup> Jääskeläinen, “The Fate of ‘The Families of Medellín,’” 205: “Avoiding repetition is one of the assumed translation universals, which professional translators (as good writers) tend to engage in almost automatically.”

<sup>12</sup> Weitzman, *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament: An Introduction*, 30.

P [Peshitta] tends to use the ‘A-word’ for the first and the ‘B-word’ for the second.<sup>13</sup>

The cases treated in section 3.1 go against this theory, for the Syriac translation does not manifest a “relative lack of synonyms,” but gives two different synonyms for single items of Hebrew. The cases treated in section 3.2 show the reduction in unique items in the Syriac translation as compared to the Hebrew, but due to there being only two occurrences they do not provide the opportunity to test Weitzman’s proposal of the “A-word” and the “B-word.” In this section, we look at multiple Hebrew synonyms rendered by more than one item in Syriac. This provides the opportunity to see whether Weitzman’s proposal fits the use of synonyms in this Psalm. It will not be possible to discuss all of these within the limitations of this paper, but we single out a few for attention.

Noun: “path, way, track”

דרך “way, road, journey, manner, custom”	ܐܣܘܡܐ “way, journey, custom”	Verses 4
ארח “way, path, way of life”	ܡܚܠܐ “path, road, trace”	Verse 4
דרך	ܐܣܘܡܐ	Verses 8
דרך	ܐܣܘܡܐ	Verses 9
ארח	ܐܣܘܡܐ	Verse 10
דרך	ܐܣܘܡܐ	Verses 12

Here two Hebrew forms are rendered by two Syriac forms, but the distribution is not symmetric. Hebrew uses two terms which occur throughout the text in the pattern: A B A A B A. Syriac also uses two terms, one of which — ܐܣܘܡܐ — is a cognate of the “B-word” in Hebrew. This term is used in all cases except in verse 4, where the Hebrew cognate of this Syriac term is rendered by ܡܚܠܐ instead. Why is there a differentiation by means of the unexpected ܡܚܠܐ? One possible explanation is that verse 4 already contained ܐܣܘܡܐ as a rendering for דרך and that the translation reflects the difference in the Hebrew choice of synonyms by choosing two different words as well, though disregarding in its choice which terms are cognates. In the rest of the Psalm, however, the Syriac sticks to its “A-word.” The translation did not maintain a “consistency of equivalence,” nor did it alternate the “A-word” and the “B-word.”

Noun: “stress, distress”

מצוקה “stress”	ܡܚܠܐ “sadness, grief, distress, adversity”	Verse 17
צרה “distress”	ܡܚܠܐ	Verse 17

<sup>13</sup> Weitzman, *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament: An Introduction*, 30–31.

צרה	ܐܘܦܪܥܘܢܐ “oppressor, besieger, torturer”	Verse 22
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Two terms in Hebrew are rendered by two terms in Syriac. The Hebrew pattern is A B B, while the Syriac use of the synonyms is A A B. This example goes against the theory that the translator of Psalm 25 made a conscious effort to have a diversity of synonyms within a single verse, for in verse 17 two different Hebrew nouns are rendered by a single Syriac form, thus reducing the unique lexical items in the translation. Furthermore, the rendering in verse 22 involves a shift from asking for deliverance from “distress” to asking for deliverance from the one causing the stress. The Hebrew form could hardly have been read as an active participle, referring to the one causing distress, for the form in the Hebrew is in the feminine plural and would refer to feminine oppressors while the Syriac renders the form as masculine plural. This appears rather to be a case of deliberate explicitation. However, one could also observe that the effect is that the repeated Hebrew item, the “B-word” (צרה) in verses 17 and 22, is matched by two different synonyms in Syriac.

Verb: “hope, expect, wait expectantly”

בטח “be reliant, trust”	ܡܒܚܢ Pael, “hope, trust, declare, publish tidings”	Verse 2
קוה “wait”	ܡܒܢ	Verse 3
קוה	ܡܦܠ Pael, “wait for, look for, expect”	Verses 5
חסה “seek refuge”	ܡܒܢ	Verse 20
קוה	ܡܦܠ	Verses 21

In this collection of synonyms, three Hebrew terms are rendered by two in Syriac. The distribution of the Hebrew terms is A B B C B, while the Syriac pattern is A A B A B. The only term which extends the semantic domain somewhat is חסה, “seek refuge.” The Syriac rendering captures the sense, for one with whom you seek refuge is one in whom you hope and trust. The repeated Hebrew element “B-word” (קוה) is rendered in Syriac by two different verbs in the Pael, providing an “A-word” and a “B-word” for the two occurrences which are closer together (vv. 3, 5), even though this entails repeating the “A-word” which had already been used in verse 2. For the third term in Hebrew, the Syriac reverts to the “A-word.”

Verb: “guard, keep”

נצר “guard, watch, keep”	ܢܘܨܐ “guard, watch, keep”	Verse 10
שמר “guard, watch, keep”	ܢܘܨܐ	Verse 20
נצר	ܡܦܦ “cleave, stick to, adhere”	Verse 21

Two Hebrew items are rendered by two Syriac items. The Hebrew distribution is A B A, while the Syriac is A A B. The effect of this is that the “A-word” in Hebrew is rendered first by the “A-word” in Syriac and then by the “B-word.” This would concur with Weitzman’s proposal, but the fact that this “A-word” in Syriac is repeated between these two occurrences makes it more likely that the choice in the third case is due to other motivations. The usual rendering both for **נָצַר** and for **שָׁמַר** is ܢܥܪܐ, which is also the cognate of the first Hebrew term. The rendering ܥܦܐ for **נָצַר** in verse 21 appears to be influenced by the preceding context: where the Masoretic text reads: “let integrity and uprightness preserve me,” the Peshitta renders “innocence and honesty have adhered to me,” perhaps an *ad sensum* rendering. It could also be that the proximity to ܢܥܪܐ in verse 20 prompted choosing a different term in verse 21 for the sake of variety; however, this is but a suggestion.

How complex the relationships within a semantic domain can be is illustrated by the verbs meaning “teach, make to know”:

Verb: “teach, make to know”

יָדַע Hiphil, “make known”	ܥܦܐ Pael, “show, make manifest, declare”	Verse 4
לָמַד Piel, “teach”	ܥܦܐ Aphel, “make known, show, tell”	Verse 4
לָמַד	ܥܦܐ Pael, “teach, inform, train”	Verse 5
יָרָה Hiphil, “direct, teach”	ܥܦܐ “direct, make straight or right” <sup>14</sup>	Verse 8
לָמַד	ܥܦܐ	Verse 9
יָרָה	ܥܦܐ	Verse 12
יָדַע	ܥܦܐ	Verse 14

Three Hebrew items are rendered by four Syriac items. The Hebrew items occur in the pattern: A B B C B C A, and the Syriac in the pattern: A B C D C C B. The “A-word” in Hebrew (יָדַע Hiphil) is rendered in Syriac by the “A-word” (ܥܦܐ Pael) and the “B-word” (ܥܦܐ Aphel), the latter being a cognate of the Hebrew item; the “B-word” in Hebrew (לָמַד Piel) is rendered by the Syriac “B-word” (ܥܦܐ Aphel) and twice by the “C-word” (ܥܦܐ Pael); the “C-word” in Hebrew (יָרָה Hiphil) is rendered first by the “D-word” in Syriac (ܥܦܐ) and then by the “C-word” (ܥܦܐ Pael). This confirms the effort the translator appears to have made to vary the synonyms, but the rendering of the “B-word” in Hebrew goes contrary to the pattern of alternation proposed by Weitzman. One could note that in verse 4 where the Masoretic text uses two different verbs within the same semantic field, the Peshitta also presents two different synonyms. The fact that the three Hebrew verbs are rendered by four Syriac verbs increases rather than decreases the proportion of unique lexical items.

<sup>14</sup> The passive participle of this verb is also used to translate the adjective **יָשָׁר**, “straight, upright, just,” in verse 8 and the noun **יִשְׁרָא**, “uprightness,” in verse 21.

References to the deity:

אלהים “God”	ܐܠܗܐ “God”	Verses 2, 5, 22
יהוה <i>tetragrammaton</i>	idem 	Verse 7
idem 	ܡܢܐ “Lord”	Verses 1, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15

The usual renderings for the references to God are provided in the more frequent entries above. However, once the *tetragrammaton* is rendered by “God.” No clear motivation for this is evident within the limitations of the data. There may be text-historical information which could shed light on this as well as on some of the other synonyms discussed above.

### 3.4. Relation to Translation Universals

Translations tend to level out, simplify, and reduce the vocabulary in comparison to the original and tend to make explicit information that is taken to be implicit in the original. The result is that a translated text tends to be longer than the original and to have an overall lower rate of lexical density.

In the case of Psalm 25, counting the letters occurring between blanks as words, the Peshitta rendering is indeed somewhat longer than the Masoretic text: Hebrew 159 words, Syriac 166. If we count separately the items which are written attached to another form, such as prepositions, the coordinating conjunction, and pronominal suffixes, the difference is greater: Hebrew has 247 items, and Syriac 276. The translated text is indeed longer than the original as represented in the Masoretic text.

As registered in the WIVU database, the parts of speech in Psalm 25 have the distribution of occurring forms (tokens) given in table 1. Disregarding the definite article, which has no lexical counterpart in Syriac, and the single adverb without an adverbial counterpart, the most significant differences are found with the nouns, prepositions, and pronouns. In all of these the Peshitta version has significantly higher statistics. While the higher numbers of prepositions and pronouns could be largely explained by a difference in syntactic structures between the languages, to be commented on below, the higher number of nouns is noteworthy.

The lexical density of two texts is calculated by taking the proportion of lexical (content) words over the total number of words. For this total we add up the separate lexical entries, even though they may be written connected to another word, as are certain prepositions and conjunctions. Verbs, nouns, proper nouns, and adjectives are counted as content words, the rest as functional words.<sup>15</sup> The lexical density of the Masoretic text of Psalm 25 is .494, while that of the Peshitta version is .442. The Peshitta version has a lower lexical density and in this follows the general tendency of translations.

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<sup>15</sup> These include: the definite article (Hebrew), adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, negatives, and interrogatives.

<i>Part of speech</i>	<i>Masoretic text</i>	<i>Peshitta</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Verb	44	43	-1 (-2.3%)
Noun	57	66	+9 (+15.8%)
Proper noun	12	10	-2 (-16.7%)
Adjective	9	3	-6 (-66.7%)
Definite article	5	–	-5 (-100%)
Adverb	1	–	-1 (-100%)
Preposition	28	53	+25 (+89.3%)
Conjunction	26	26	=
Pronoun	60	71	+11 (+18.3%)
Negative	5	4	-1 (-20%)
Total	247	276	+29 (+11.7%)

**Table 1. Frequencies of Occurrence of Tokens per Part of Speech in Psalm 25**

Translated texts often have fewer unique lexical items. Indeed for the Books of Kings, we registered a 10% reduction in unique lexical items. For the Peshitta of Psalm 25, this is not the case: there are 101 unique lexical items in the Masoretic text and 103 in the Peshitta. Table 2 provides an overview of the unique items per part of speech.

<i>Part of speech</i>	<i>Masoretic text</i>	<i>Peshitta</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Verb	28	27	-1 (-3.6%)
Noun	38	43	+5 (+13.2%)
Proper noun	3	2	-1 (-33.3%)
Adjective	7	3	-4 (-57.1%)
Definite article	1	–	-1 (-100%)
Adverb	1	–	-1 (-100%)
Preposition	8	10	+2 (+25%)
Conjunction	3	3	=
Pronoun	10	14	+4 (+40%)
Negative	2	1	-1 (-50%)
Total	101	103	+2 (2%)

**Table 2. Frequencies of Unique Items per Part of Speech in Psalm 25**

The overall difference is slight, but still it is one which goes against the general tendency of translations. Many of the statistics are so low as to be insignificant, but two parts of speech deserve more attention, namely, the noun and the pronoun. It is well known that Syriac makes extensive use of pronominal elements in its phrase structure, and this involves using more different pronouns than appear in the Hebrew text. We will have occasion to speak more on this when we look at syntax.

That the Peshitta of Psalm 25 has more unique nouns than the Masoretic text comes as a bit of a surprise (43 Syriac to 38 Hebrew, an increase of about 13%). We return to what was said above about synonyms. In a number of the cases looked at, the Peshitta did not choose the most common translation for a term, but used a less frequently used item, like **ܡܚܠܐ**, “path, road, trace,” for **אָרֶץ**, though the cognate and more commonly used term is **ܐܘܨܡܐ**, “way, journey, custom.” We suggested that this might have been to avoid repetition of the word within the verse. The use of **ܦܫܥܐ**, “folly, transgression, offence,” for the sins of the youth instead of the more usual and cognate form **ܫܦܝܐ**, “sin,” points to a creative adaptation to the content of the passage. That the translator recognized and understood the meaning of the Hebrew specific valence pattern of the verb **וָשָׂא**, “carry,” is confirmed by the rendering of a separate verb meaning “forgive.” Thus in the number of unique lexical items, the Peshitta rendering of Psalm 25 comes off quite well.

#### 4. SYNTAX

##### 4.1. Phrase Level: Construct State Constructions in Hebrew

Hebrew makes extensive use of the construct state in phrases. Though Syriac has this syntactic possibility, it makes a much more limited use of it, using it both less frequently and with a shorter range of government. In Syriac the coherence is provided by pronominal elements and the particle **ܘ**, which join together the separate links of the chain piece by piece instead of having a lengthy string of construct state forms whose range of government can be quite extensive in Hebrew.<sup>16</sup> Syriac frequently repeats governing nouns or prepositions to maintain the chain of government within phrases, while for Hebrew this is not necessary. Based on the study of Kings, I attribute these extra elements necessary to maintain the syntactic binding to the more limited scope of government of the construct state in Syriac as compared to the Hebrew. These differences between the two languages are so well known that a single example will suffice:

Verse 10

**כָּל אֲרָצוֹת יְהוָה**

“all-of paths-of the Lord”

**ܟܠܡܢܐ ܐܘܨܡܐܝܗ ܕܝܗܘܘܐ**

“all-of-them ways-his of the Lord”

“all the ways of the Lord”

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<sup>16</sup> As many as five construct state forms in a chain can be found in Num 14:5 and in Isa 21:17.

The Syriac phrase has two extra pronominal suffixes as well as the particle ܝ to maintain the cohesion brought about by the two construct state forms in the Hebrew text.

The manner in which construct-binding constructions are rendered in Syriac accounts for much of the difference in statistics for prepositions and pronouns, as can be seen in table 3.

	<i>Masoretic text</i>	<i>Peshitta</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Total occurrences	28	53	+25 (+89.3%)
Unique items	8	10	+2 (+25%)

**Table 3. Prepositions: Tokens and Types**

In Psalm 25, nine of the twenty-five extra prepositions occurring in the Syriac version represent the occurrences of the preposition ܝ, five times used to render a construct state binding in Hebrew (verses 3, 7, 10, 14, 17), three times to make an attributive relationship explicit (verses 12 [2×], 19), and once to express a genitive relationship between items which are additions in relation to the Masoretic text (verse 7).<sup>17</sup>

The statistics for pronouns are given in table 4.

	<i>Masoretic text</i>	<i>Peshitta</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Total occurrences	60	71	+11 (+18.3%)
Unique items	10	14	+4 (+40%)

**Table 4. Pronouns: Tokens and Types**

Of the eleven additional pronominal elements in the Peshitta, six occur in constructions which render the construct state structure in Hebrew where the Hebrew lacks a corresponding pronominal element (verses 10 [2×], 14, 17, 18, 22).<sup>18</sup>

The construct state construction also appears in participial structures in Hebrew. The Hebrew participle is versatile in its syntactic function, maintaining both verbal and nominal qualities side by side. It appears that in Syriac a choice must be made for either the verbal or the nominal aspect:

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<sup>17</sup> For remarks on this particle occurring as a plus in various syntactic constructions, see Carbajosa, *The Character of the Syriac Version of Psalms*, 39–42.

<sup>18</sup> Three occur in nominal clauses in which Syriac adds an extra pronominal element which functions as the copula (verses 5, 8, 12). Two involve an extra pronominal suffix making explicit an aspect of the verbal valence which is not expressed thus in Hebrew (verses 11, 18; see also clause structure below). One case could involve misreading the ending of the Hebrew word as a pronominal suffix and rendering it accordingly (verse 3; see above, section 2.2). In one case the Peshitta renders a construct state structure in Hebrew by two coordinated nominal elements, attaching a pronominal suffix to both while Hebrew has only one (verse 5; see discussion below). To complete the picture, in two cases a Hebrew pronoun is not rendered in Syriac (verses 6, 7; see section 4.4, below).

Verse 10

לְנֹצְרֵי בְרִיתוֹ וְעֵדוּתוֹ

“to-keeping-of (participle construct state) covenant-his and testimonies-his”

לְלֹמְדֵי וְשֹׁמְרֵי מִצְוֹתָיו

“to-those who-keeping (participle absolute state) covenant-his and testimonies-his”

“to those who keep his covenant and his testimonies”

An example of the choice for the verbal or nominal function of a Hebrew construct state form can be seen in what I would call the participle of an *a-l* verb, though many dictionaries call this form an adjective:

Verse 12 — with a verbal form in Syriac

מִי זֶה הָאִישׁ יֹרֵא יְהוָה

“who this, the man (who is) fearing (participle construct state) the Lord?”

ܡܝ ܙܗܗ ܗܘܐ ܐܝܫ ܝܘܪܝܐ ܝܗܘܘܗ

“who (is) he the man that fears (participle absolute state) before the Lord?”

Verse 14 — with a nominal form in Syriac

לְיֹרְאָיו

“to-fearing-him” = “to those fearing him / who fear him”

ܠܘܫܝܒܝܗܘܘܗ

“upon worshippers-his” = “upon his worshippers”

One construct state structure in the Hebrew text presents an interesting difference in the Peshitta rendering:

Verse 5

אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעִי

“God of my salvation”

ܐܠܗܝܝܘܫܝܥܝܘܗܝܘܘܗ

“my God and my saviour”

Various explanations for this are conceivable. It could be that the construct state plural ending on “God” was read as the first person possessive suffix with the following word in apposition: “my God, my salvation.” There are a number of examples in the Books of Kings where construct state binding between two terms is rendered as though there is an appositional relation between the two. If that is the case, the addition of the coordinating conjunction between the two would be a minor intrusion into the significance of the original structure.

Comparing the structures within the Hebrew Psalms in which **אל** or **אלהים** occurs in construct state binding with a following term provides more background for a judgement in this case. The construct state form of **אל** or **אלהים** governs the following form; the combination expresses various types of relationships.

In only two cases is the construction rendered in the same manner in Hebrew and in Syriac:

Ps 50:1

אל אלהים

אלהים

“god of gods”

Ps 136:2

אלהי אלהים

אלהים

“god of gods”

In all other cases, Syriac uses a different syntactic construction. The most common and least intrusive is when the first element is rendered in emphatic state and the following element is introduced by  $\text{ܝ}$ :

אל אמת “god of truth”	ܐܠܗܐ ܝܘܨܬܐ “god of truth”	31:6
אלהי העמים “god(s) of the peoples”	ܐܠܗܐ ܝܚܩܩܐ “gods of the peoples”	96:5
אלהי מעוזי “god of my strength”	ܐܠܗܐ ܝܨܚܕܐ “god of my strength”	43:2
אלהי תשועתי “god of my salvation”	ܐܠܗܐ ܝܘܨܬܐ “god of my righteousness”	51:16
אלהי ישועתי “god of my salvation”	ܐܠܗܐ ܝܘܨܬܐ “god of my salvation”	88:2
אלהי חסדי “god of my mercy”	ܐܠܗܐ ܝܚܩܩܐ “god of my kindness”	59:18
אלהי תהלתי “god of my praise”	ܐܠܗܐ ܝܘܨܬܐ “god of my praise”	109:1
אלהי ישראל “god of Israel”	ܐܠܗܐ ܝܘܨܬܐ “god of Israel”	41:14; 72:18; 106:48

The same construction can be rendered in Syriac with a possessive suffix on the first element. This occurs in particular when the governed noun in Hebrew is a proper name, although in the list above “Israel” occurs without the possessive suffix on the preceding noun:

אל יעקב “god of Jacob”	ܐܠܗܐ ܝܘܨܬܐ “god of Jacob”	146:5
אלהי יעקב “god of Jacob”	ܐܠܗܐ ܝܘܨܬܐ “god of Jacob”	20:2; 46:8, 12; 75:10; 76:7; 81:2, 5; 84:9; 94:7
אלהי אברהם “god of Abraham”	ܐܠܗܐ ܝܘܨܬܐ “god of Abraham”	47:10
אל ישראל “god of Israel”	ܐܠܗܐ ܝܘܨܬܐ “god of Israel”	68:36
אלהי ישראל “god of Israel”	ܐܠܗܐ ܝܘܨܬܐ “god of Israel”	59:6; 68:9; 69:7

In a number of cases, Syriac makes the second word attributive to the first one:

אל-הכבוד “god of honour”	ܐܠܗܐ ܡܥܒܘܠܐ “glorious god”	29:3
אלהי צבאות “god of hosts”	ܐܠܗܐ ܡܫܠܬܐ “powerful god”	89:2
אל חיי “god of my life”	ܐܠܗܐ ܡܢܐ “living god”	42:9

In a somewhat similar fashion, the second word is made to modify the first, but now not as an attributive but as an apposition:

אל-נקמות “god of vengeance”	ܐܠܗܐ ܠܥܘܒܐ “god, the avenger”	94:1 (2x)
אלהי ישעו “god of his salvation”	ܐܠܗܐ ܦܢܝܡܐ “god, our saviour”	24:5
אלהי ישענו “god of our salvation”	ܐܠܗܐ ܦܢܝܡܐ “god, our saviour”	65:6; 79:9; 85:5

In Ps 59:11 the relationship between the referents in the text is altered:

אלהי חסדו יקדמני “god of his (K <sup>e</sup> tib) / my (Q <sup>e</sup> re) mercy will go before me”	ܐܠܗܐ ܠܚܒܘܢܐܡܝܢܐ “god (vocative), your kindness has proceeded me”	59:11
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In Ps 136:26 an extra preposition makes explicit what could be taken to be implicit in the Hebrew construction, though the Hebrew could also imply ruling in the heavens and not necessarily merely the location “in the heavens”:

אל חסדו השמים “god of the heavens”	ܐܠܗܐ ܘܡܥܒܘܠܐ “god who (is) in heavens”	136:26
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The Hebrew text is altered in the following case by a sizable expansion:

אלהי צדקי “god of my righteousness”	ܐܠܗܐ ܡܦܢܝܡܐ ܘܝܘܥܥܘܠܐ “my god and the saviour of my righteousness”	4:2
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Disregarding the expansion, the case resembles most the case in Ps 25:5, which as a construction also occurs twice more within the book of Psalms:

אלהי ישעי “god of my salvation”	ܐܠܗܐ ܡܦܢܝܡܐ “my god and my saviour”	18:47; 25:5; 27:9
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It is only in this combination that the construct state plural ending of אלהי, “god,” is rendered as though it were the first person singular possessive suffix. It is tempting to explain this by the proximity of the first person singular possessive suffix on the second noun. However, with the other examples of the second noun

having a first person singular possessive suffix,<sup>19</sup> the Syriac version did not resort to this solution. Two cases of “god of my salvation” with a different Hebrew word for “salvation”<sup>20</sup> are rendered with the particle ܝ, to cover the construct state binding construction in Hebrew. The clue might lie in the form of the second word itself.<sup>21</sup> It could be that the Syriac translator read the second Hebrew term as an active participle with object suffix: “the one who saves me.”<sup>22</sup> The two terms would then be in apposition to each other. In such cases it is not unusual for Syriac to connect the two with a coordinating conjunction instead of leaving them asyndetically conjoined.

## 4.2. Clause Level

### 4.2.1. Word Order

According to Nöldeke,

The relative arrangement of the principal parts of the sentence is very free. The Subject in the Verbal sentence, — just as in the Nominal sentence, stands sometimes before, sometimes after the Predicate; and sometimes its parts are even broken up or inverted by parts of the predicate. ... In none of these cases do absolutely unbending rules prevail; and a Syriac sentence can scarcely be imagined, in which the position of the subject, relative to the predicate, might not be altered, without offending against grammar.<sup>23</sup>

Due to this tendency, it would seem logical that the word order in the source text would be reproduced in the translation. In his study of Peshitta Psalms 90–150, Carbajosa found this not to be the case; instead, in the Psalms he studied, the Syriac version had a different word order than that found in the Masoretic Text. Carbajosa observes the following tendencies in relation to word order in the Psalms he studied:<sup>24</sup>

Tendency to advance the verb to the first position  
Tendency to bring together the verb and the subject

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<sup>19</sup> Ps 43:2; 51:16; 59:18; 88:2; 109:1.

<sup>20</sup> Ps 51:16; 88:2.

<sup>21</sup> My thanks are due to those participating in the discussion of this paper, in particular to M. Sokoloff and R. Taylor, for emphasizing this possibility.

<sup>22</sup> A next step would be to check all the Syriac renderings for the approximately forty occurrences of this Hebrew word in the Masoretic text to see how often it is rendered as “saviour.” One can no doubt expect variety in the renderings of the term.

<sup>23</sup> T. Nöldeke, *Compendious Syriac Grammar*, § 324. See also E. Nestle: “Syriac resembles Ethiopic in the greater freedom it enjoys in regard to the arrangement of the different members of the sentence as compared with Arabic and Hebrew” (E. Nestle, *Syriac Grammar*, § 50). According to Carbajosa, referring to comments by Duval (*Traité de grammaire syriaque*, 363), “[t]his flexibility is considered to make Syriac a language especially suited to translations” (Carbajosa, *The Character of the Syriac Version of Psalms*, 21).

<sup>24</sup> See Carbajosa, *The Character of the Syriac Version of Psalms*, 21–25.

Tendency to bring together the subject and predicate in nominal clauses  
 Tendency to bring together the verb and the direct object

It seems to me that all of these tendencies point to a need to keep the core of the clause together, and could be explained by the shorter range of government of the Syriac verb.

In Psalm 25 these tendencies are not reflected. Rather, the Hebrew word order appears to be followed closely. There is one case of bringing the subject and verb together, but not going so far as to advance the verb to initial position:

Verse 13

נפשו בטוב תלין

“his soul in goodness shall spend the night”

ܘܡܥܡܘܐ ܐܚܘܐ ܕܠܝܠܝܢ

“and his soul shall pass the night in goodness”

In two instances Hebrew has the verbal complement following the verb and Syriac places the verbal complement before the verb:

Verse 20

כי חסיתי בך

“for I seek refuge in you”

ܘܠܝܢ ܘܚܪ ܘܚܝܢܐ

“for in you I trust”

Verse 21

כי קויתך

“because I have waited (for) you”

ܘܠܝܢ ܘܚܪ ܘܚܝܢܐ

“because for you I have waited”

This is contrary not only to the Hebrew order but also to the “normal” order found by Carbajosa: verb + subject + direct object + indirect object + adverbial modifier.<sup>25</sup> Carbajosa does mention an exception to the general rule when elements appear in the form of pronouns preceded by a preposition. These tend to be advanced, joining them to the verb, even if it means displacing the subject or direct object.<sup>26</sup> In our example, however, the preposition with pronominal suffix is placed before the verb in the Syriac text. Both of these occur after , but other  clauses do not show this adjustment.

In one case while the Hebrew has the subject following the verb and followed by the verbal complement, Syriac places the verbal complement after the verb, thus separating the verb and the subject instead of bringing them together:

Verse 2

אל יעלצו איבילי 

<sup>25</sup> Carbajosa, *The Character of the Syriac Version of Psalms*, 22.

<sup>26</sup> Carbajosa, *The Character of the Syriac Version of Psalms*, 26.

“let not them exult my enemies against me”

لا يعللوه;ه, لك حنكحب

“may they not glorify themselves over me my enemies”

This is an example of a preposition with a pronoun which gets placed close to the verb even if it means displacing the subject, as mentioned above.

In one case where the Hebrew has the verb and object clause initially, followed by the vocative, the Syriac even separates the verb and the object by placing the vocative between them:

Verse 6

זכר רחמִיךָ יהוה

“remember your mercies, LORD”

א,א,וכ: חננא זכר

“remember, Lord, your mercies”<sup>27</sup>

In nominal clauses where the Hebrew has a coordinated predicate complement, the Syriac construction separates the two elements and provides extra pronominal elements if necessary. The second element is added later. The overall word order, however, follows that of the Hebrew.

Verse 8

טוב וישר יהוה

“good and upright (is) the LORD”

הב וסס ס'הניס חננא

“good (is) he and upright, the Lord”

Verse 16

כי יחיד ועני אני

“for alone and afflicted (am) I”

חלה, וססבא אלא סחמא

“for alone (am) I and poor”

In summary, the syntactic tendencies of word order noticed by Carbajosa in Peshitta Psalms 90–150 are not reflected in the present Psalm, where the word order of the Hebrew is followed quite faithfully.<sup>28</sup>

#### 4.2.2. Conjunctions

In Psalm 25, both texts contain an identical number of conjunctions, and each has three unique lexical items: **גם**, **ו**, and **כי** for Hebrew and **א, א, ו** for Syriac. Yet this

<sup>27</sup> Carbajosa mentions a “minor” tendency to “change the position of the divine vocative whenever its function could be ambiguous, thus facilitating comprehension,” and cites Ps. 92:9; 119:52, 75 as examples (Carbajosa, *The Character of the Syriac Version of Psalms*, 26); however, in our case the position of the vocative does not seem to create ambiguity.

<sup>28</sup> Carbajosa mentions exceptions to the tendencies he found for Psalms 90–150; these tend to reflect the Hebrew order more closely.

does not mean that there is a simple one-to-one correspondence between these conjunctions. In nine cases Syriac adds a conjunction at the beginning of a sentence where Hebrew begins without the conjunction: eight times with ܐ (verses 4, 5, 7, 9, 13, 17, 18, 19), once with ܘܠ (verse 7). These added conjunctions connect the sentences together and make for smoother syntax.

Three occurrences of the conjunction ܘܢ are rendered by ܘܢܐ (verses 6, 11, 19; see below under simplification and explicitation) and five by ܘܢܐܘܘܢܐ (verses 5, 15, 16, 20, 21).<sup>29</sup>

### 4.2.3. Prepositions

The part of speech which shows the most drastic increase in frequency of tokens is the preposition.

	<i>Masoretic text</i>	<i>Peshitta</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Total occurrences	28	53	+25 (+89.3%)
Unique items	8	10	+2 (+25%)

**Table 5. Prepositions: Tokens and Types**

The difference in the number of total items and the number of unique items in both languages indicates that there are a few lexical items which occur frequently. The frequently occurring cognate prepositions ܒ / ܐ, “in,” ܠ / ܠܐ, “to, for,” ܡܢ / ܡܢܐ, “from,” and ܥܠ / ܥܠܐ, “upon,” come to mind.

At least half of the prepositions occurring in the Peshitta version with no corresponding item at that position in the Hebrew text are related to the verbal valence patterns of the verbs concerned. While Hebrew has a pronominal suffix or an unmarked noun phrase as object, Syriac introduces this element by various prepositions.<sup>30</sup> One could say that strictly speaking these are not additions since they are a necessary part of adequately rendering the valence pattern of the Hebrew verb.

In some constructions besides the object, the Syriac version has an added prepositional phrase, indicating the one affected. This element is not expressed in the Masoretic text.<sup>31</sup> These are cases where the translation makes explicit information that is taken to be implicit in the original.

<sup>29</sup> Both of these Syriac forms have been assigned “preposition” as a basic part of speech because they sometimes function as prepositions. While a preposition can function as a conjunction within certain environments, the opposite does not hold true.

<sup>30</sup> This occurs with the preposition ܐ, “in,” accompanying ܚܘܒܐ Pael, “hope, trust” (verse 3), with the preposition ܠܐ, “to, for,” accompanying ܠܐܘܪܝܢܐ, “set straight, direct” (verse 8), ܘܢܐ, Pael, “lead, guide” (verse 9), ܘܢܐܘܘܢܐ, “teach, inform, train” (verse 9), ܘܢܐܘܘܢܐ, “proceed” (verse 21), and ܘܢܐܘܘܢܐ, “wait for, expect” (verse 21), with the preposition ܡܢܐ, “from,” accompanying the verb ܡܢܐܘܢܐ, “fear” (verse 12), and the preposition ܥܠܐ, “upon,” accompanying ܥܠܐܘܢܐ Pael, “have mercy upon” (verse 16).

<sup>31</sup> Examples include the preposition ܠܐ + first singular suffix occurring with ܠܐܘܪܝܢܐ, “remember, call to mind” (verse 7), and ܠܐܘܪܝܢܐ, “let go, remit, forgive” (verse 18).



By readjusting a few elements the syntax of verse 19 is made more simple and clear:

Verse 19

ראה אויבי כי רבו

“see my enemies, for they have become many”

ܫܡܝܢ ܘܫܝܚܝܢ ܩܢܝܚܝܢ

“and see that my enemies have multiplied”

Syriac replaces the **כי**, “for,” which indicates the reason why the Lord should look at the enemies by the particle **ܘ**, which serves to introduce the direct object of “see.” This makes a single clause out of the two-clause structure in Hebrew, thus simplifying it. Another similar adjustment occurs in verse 11, where the causal clause is transformed into an attributive clause:

Verse 11

וסלחת לעוני כי רב הוא

“and forgive my transgression, for it is great”

ܫܘܠܚܬܝ ܠܥܘܢܝ ܕܚܘܒܝܢ ܘܚܘܒܝܢ

“pardon me from my iniquity which is great”

This also occurs in verse 6 where the causal clause in “and your mercies, for they are from eternity” is rendered attributively as “and your kindnesses which are from eternity.”

In verse 22, the unvocalized Hebrew form could be read either as an imperative or a perfect. The Syriac chose the perfect.:

Verse 22

פדה אלהים את ישראל מכל צרותיו

“redeem, God, Israel from all its troubles”

ܦܕܝܢ ܐܠܗܝܡ ܐܬ ܝܫܪܐܝܝܠ ܡܟܠ ܥܘܪܘܬܝܗܘܢ

“God has redeemed Israel from all its oppressors”

Though the rendering is neither simplified nor made explicit, it is perhaps more respectful and, therefore, more suited within the Syriac worldview to state that God has redeemed Israel than to command God to do so.

#### 4.4. Omissions

Besides the occasional words omitted to simplify or smooth out the rendering, a couple of omissions deserve separate mention.

In verse 6, the Syriac renders a dependent causal clause as an attributive phrase and in doing so omits the subject pronoun of the Hebrew clause.

In verse 7, a list of the sins not to be remembered is reduced, perhaps to avoid repetition: “the sins of my youth and my transgressions do not remember” is rendered as “the follies of my youth do not remember.” In the second half of the same verse, an explicit subject pronoun in post-position in Hebrew is skipped in Syriac: “according to your mercy remember me you because of your goodness, LORD” is rendered more smoothly as: “but according to your mercies remember me because of your goodness, God.”

Also in verse 7 the Syriac omits a syntactically awkward postposed subject pronoun in the Hebrew text.

In verse 20 a full clause אֵל אֲבוֹשׁ, “let me not be ashamed,” is skipped in the Syriac Psalm. In verses 2 and 3 the request not to be put to shame occurs already twice. Whether the motivation was to avoid repeating this in verse 20 is unclear. In any case it is true that the two clauses surrounding this omitted one connect easily and logically together so that the Syriac reads: “and deliver me, because in you I trust.”

#### 4.5. Additions

The additional elements in this Psalm have to do with the differences in phrase structure (added pronominal elements and the particle ܝ), with making explicit what is taken to be implicit in the Hebrew text, and with conjunctions which make smoother connections between clauses. No larger stretches of text have been added in this Psalm.

#### 4.6. Relation to Translation Universals

There are a few cases which can be labelled simplification, particularly the rendering of a causal clause as an attributive one (verses 6, 11, 19), omitting an awkward conjunction (verse 11), and providing smoother syntax for an awkward Hebrew infinitive construction (verse 14). Also the omission of a full clause “let me not be ashamed” from verse 20 can be seen as a form of simplification, for the clauses preceding and following the skipped clause flow smoothly into one another. Reducing “the sins of my youth and my transgressions” to just one misdemeanour “the follies of my youth” can be seen as a form of simplification by reducing what is taken to be repetition.

Explicitation is discernible in a few cases where aspects assumed to be implicit in the Hebrew text are made explicit: the referent of the participial construction (verse 10), the attributive relationship between elements (verse 12), and adding a prepositional phrase indicating the one affected by the action of the verb (verses 7, 18).

### 5. CONCLUSIONS

Various aspects of what we have observed concerning the spelling, synonyms, and syntax of the Peshitta Psalm 25 can be summarized as follows.

#### 5.1. Spelling

The Peshitta Psalm 25 does not reflect a conscious effort on the part of the translator to follow the acrostic alphabet of the Hebrew text. Where cognate forms are available, these may coincide with the acrostic in Hebrew. The arbitrary fashion in which this occurs indicates that matching the Hebrew acrostic is at most a by-product of the translation process and not one of its goals.

In one case it appears that the graphic form of the Hebrew word occasioned a translation deviating from the Masoretic text.

## 5.2. Synonyms

One of the most interesting discoveries concerning this Psalm is that there are more unique lexical items in the Syriac text than in the Masoretic text. The 13% higher proportion of unique nouns in the Syriac text seems to point to a conscious effort to provide synonyms and to avoid repetition of the same item. This appears to be a tendency, though not a hard and fast rule (see verse 17 where two separate lexical items in the Masoretic text are rendered by a single item in the Peshitta).

Within this Psalm, “the relative lack of synonyms in Syriac” noted by Weitzman for other portions of the Peshitta translation has not been substantiated.<sup>32</sup> An attempt to apply his description of the technique of the Syriac translator to compensate for this lack of synonyms by alternating an “A–word” and a “B–word” seemed to work for this Psalm in patches, but not consistently. It was frequently possible to offer other motivations for the alternations.

## 5.3. Syntax

At phrase level, the syntax of Psalm 25 in the Peshitta version makes the necessary adjustments in structure so as to render Syriac phrase structure faithfully, in particular adding pronominal elements and the particle ܝܘܢܝܢ.

At clause level, the Peshitta Psalm 25 appears to follow the word order of the Hebrew text quite strictly, particularly as compared to the syntactic adjustments found by Carbajosa in the Peshitta Psalms 90–150. Where adjustments in word order were made, these were contrary to what Carbajosa found as the main patterns for Psalms 90–150, thus pointing to diversity in the character of the Peshitta Psalms. In its use of prepositions and conjunctions, however, Peshitta Psalm 25 exhibits a certain amount of freedom, creating a text whose clauses are more often connected by means of conjunctions, and supplying the appropriate prepositions to fit the valence pattern of the Syriac verb selected.

## 5.4. Shorter Range of Government in Syriac

Though in other Syriac texts there is abundant evidence of the shorter range of government of items in construct state, of prepositions, and of verbal valence, in this Psalm there is only evidence of different tactics for rendering the construct state.

## 5.5. Creative Closeness to the Original

In Psalm 25 the translator appears to have remained creatively close to the Hebrew text, adjusting phrase structure to suit Syriac demands, but closely following the Hebrew word order. The choice of words shows little deviance from the significance of the Hebrew, though additional synonyms are used perhaps to avoid repetition.

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<sup>32</sup> Weitzman, *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament: An Introduction*, 30.

### 5.6. Relation to Translation Universals

Translations in general tend to simplify, make explicit what is taken to be implicit in the source text, avoid repetition, and gravitate towards the centre. The aim is to render the significance of the original in the target language in a manner which can be understood. In so doing, the translated text ends up being longer than the original and has a lower lexical density of content words as compared to function words. Peshitta Psalm 25 bears traces of all of these tendencies. The fact that the acrostic is not preserved in any convincing manner testifies to the fact that sense took precedence over form, although at clause level syntax, this Psalm appears to have followed the form of the Hebrew quite closely with regard to the order of syntactic elements. This, too, turns out to be a universal tendency of translations of religious texts.<sup>33</sup> The differences with Carbajosa's findings on Peshitta Psalms 90–150 underline the fact that there is diversity among various texts within the Peshitta. A pleasant surprise is the discovery that the Peshitta Psalm 25 contains a higher number of unique lexical items, testifying to a conscious effort to produce variation in the choice of lexical items.

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<sup>33</sup> See Lind, "Translation Universals (or laws, or tendencies, or probabilities, or ...?)," 5: "... translators tend to prefer to avoid risks — they will conform to target norms (through explicitation, or simplification, or other means) when that is where the rewards lie (clear communication), and they will allow the interference of the source text (through literal translation, for example) when that is where the rewards lie (in the case of a high status source text such as the Bible, for example)."