An Example of Consistency
Interpretation by the Translator of
the Greek Genesis in Rendering the
Hebrew Semipreposition רַגְלִים

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When studying the Greek translations of the preposition רַגְלִים and other
semiprepositions in the Septuagint for my doctoral dissertation Renderings of
Hebrew Semiprepositions in the Septuagint (1979), I worked in a very disciplinary
manner and wrote a descriptive and philological study based on an analysis of the
complete corpus of all the individual instances. The hard data of the instances led
me to distinguish three semantic fields or categories of meaning in order to describe
the different uses of רַגְלִים. The three semantic fields were local, רַגְלִים, meaning “in
front of, before, in the presence of, opposite to”, temporal “before, prior to”, and an
intermediate field or field of preceding, רַגְלִים, meaning “ahead of, before”.

The prepositions in different languages may cover all three fields, but very often
they only cover one or two of these three fields. In my dissertation I demonstrated
that the distinction between these three fields was crucial from the point of view of
the translator, but I was unable to concentrate on the question as to how the translator
was able to distinguish different instances and why he sometimes deviated from his
usual practice within these fields. The philosophy or psychology of the translator
remained beyond the scope of my doctoral thesis, but my present aim is to deal with
the human process of translation, even though I am fully aware that this subject is
a risky one because I am not a trained philosopher, for one thing, and the thinking
of the translator is not open for our study; everything must be deduced from his way
of translating.

1 This paper has been published in Antti Mustakallio, Heikki Leppä and Heikki Räisänen (eds.) 2005
Lux Humana, Lux Aeterna. Essays on Biblical and Related Themes in Honour of Lars Aejmelaeus.
Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 3–12. The present form of the paper is meant for an interdisciplinary
audience who does not necessarily read Hebrew and Greek. Therefore, translations have been
added to the examples, and the differences between the Hebrew source and the Greek translation
have been emphasized.
Introduction

When studying the Greek translations of the preposition יָנוּסִי in the Septuagint for my doctoral dissertation Renderings of Hebrew Semiprepositions in the Septuagint (1979), I distinguished three semantic fields or categories of meaning. The three semantic fields were 1) local, including metaphorically local cases, יָנוּסִי meaning 'in front of,' 'before,' 'in the presence of,' 'opposite to,' 2) an intermediate field or field of preceding, יָנוּסִי meaning 'ahead of,' 'before,' and 3) a temporal field, יָנוּסִי meaning 'before,' 'prior to.'

Prepositions in different languages may cover all these three fields, as does יָנוּסִי in Hebrew, but very often they only cover one or two of the three. In my dissertation I demonstrated that the distinction between these three fields was crucial from the point of view of the translators, but I was unable to concentrate on the question as to how the translators were able to distinguish different instances and why they sometimes deviated from their usual practice within these fields. The philosophy or psychology of the translators remained beyond the scope of my doctoral thesis, but my present aim is to deal more with the human process of translation, even though I am fully aware that this subject is a risky one because the thinking of the translators is not open for our study; everything must be deduced from the results of their work, i.e. their manner of translating. I shall concentrate on Genesis, the first book of the Pentateuch, the oldest part of the Septuagint translation.

The general picture of the translation technique followed by the Septuagint translators forms the background against which the details and individual translators are to be seen in due proportion. A rough scheme of their normal translation technique can be briefly outlined as follows: In each of the three semantic fields – local, intermediate, and temporal – יָנוּסִי is rendered differently. In local use, the Greek equivalent depends on the actual referent: a person or a thing. When the referent is a person, the most frequent counterparts are ἐνώπιον, ἐναντίον, and ἐναντίον, but κατὰ πρόσωπον and ἀπέναντι or κατέναντι in referring to objects. The most common equivalents for the intermediate יָנוּסִי are ἐμπροσθεν and πρὸ προσώπου, whereas πρὸ and ἐμπροσθεν are most frequently used for a temporal יָנוּסִי.

If compared with the contemporary koine sources, the most common equivalents of יָנוּסִי in the Septuagint occur in exactly the same sectors of meaning as in the koine, excluding, of course, πρὸ προσώπου, which is not attested in the contemporary koine literature or in earlier Greek at all (Sollamo 1979, 328). As for the semantics, the only significant difference between the Septuagint and the contemporary koine is the lack of figurative senses of ἐνώπιον, ἐναντίον, and

2 The designation "semipreposition" refers to the compound nature of these prepositions, consisting of a genuine preposition and a noun. In the case of יָנוּסִי (pronounced lìmè), the noun is "face", which is reflected in the use of the corresponding Greek noun πρόσωπον in part of the translations.
enanti in the koine sources. In their syntax and phraseology the translators adhere to Hebrew syntax, offering idiomatic Greek renderings only sporadically.

In all, the high frequency of enantiōn, enantiōn, and enanti in the Septuagint is quite unparalleled in the contemporary koine: these prepositions are favoured in an unidiomatic abundance in the Septuagint. As an equivalent of יְנֵפְלִי the preposition enantiōn occurs 31 times in Genesis, and 22 times in Exodus, enanti is used 52 times in Leviticus and 57 times in Numeri, while enantiōn as an equivalent of יְנֵפְלִי is very frequent in Judges (A-text 12, B-text 17), and 1–4 Kingdoms (37, 26, 35, and 17 occurrences), 2 Esdras (20 occurrences), and Psalms (27 occurrences) (Sollamo 1979, 14–15).

Let us take a few examples from original Greek sources for the sake of comparison. Books 1–5 of Polybius’ Histories contain only two cases of enantiōn. The Ptolemaic papyri have twenty-one instances of enantiōn and six of enantiōn. The inscriptions excerpted offer a single case of enanti.3 The great frequency implies expansion of the meaning of these Greek prepositions to correspond to the entire field of local יְנֵפְלִי, including the use of יְנֵפְלִי in different idioms where its meaning is metaphorical, but still clearly originating in local usage. In the metaphorical meaning enantiōn and enantiōn are, for instance, attested in idioms meaning ‘(to be) open for a person,’ ‘(to be) at a person’s disposal’ or ‘(to be of a certain quality) in another person’s judgment.’

Interpretations in the Three Semantic Fields

In the light of the above statistics the יְנֵפְלִי instances of Genesis will be tackled.

In Genesis there are 55 occurrences of יְנֵפְלִי. The Greek renderings of local יְנֵפְלִי referring to persons are enantiōn (31), a mere dative (three times: 18:8, 24:33, 46:28) and enantiōn (24:51, 30:33), whereas at Gen 50:18 there is an omission in the Septuagint. The stereotypical or standard rendering enantiōn appears consistently whenever the Hebrew has the formula יְנֵפְלִי ‘before Yahweh’ (4) or יְנֵפְלִי יִֽנְטָה ‘before God’ (6:11) or wherever else the referent is God (after יְנֵפְלִי a pronominal suffix referring to God six times), but enantiōn also occurs fairly regularly in referring to human beings in the local sense. The three datives represent good koine Greek after παρατίθεναι ‘to set before,’ ‘to serve’ (18:8, 24:33) and συναντάν ‘to meet’ (46:28), but there had been several more opportunities to employ the dative instead of enantiōn after such verbs as εὔφρασταί ‘to please’ 17:1, παραδοούναι ‘to hand over,’ ‘to deliver’ 27:20, and προσκυνάειν ‘to bow down,’ ‘to worship’ 23:12.

3 For more details, see the Appendix of my Renderings of Hebrew Semiprepositions in the Septuagint (Sollamo 1979, 308–317).
although εὑρέστειν twice takes both the dative and the ἐναντίον construction in a relative clause (Gen 24:40 and 48:15). Once (Gen 32:21[20]) a genitive is used in an instance where the Massoretic Text (= MT) and the source text of the translator have a different reading and, accordingly, a different interpretation (local in the LXX, but intermediate in the MT). The example will be dealt with in connection with the intermediate field of meaning.

Examples:

Genesis 27:7

'that I may bless you before the LORD'

Genesis 18:8

Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set before them (LXX: served to them).

Genesis 24:40

The Lord, before whom I walk (LXX: whom I please before him), will send his angel with you…'

Genesis 48:15

The God before whom my ancestors Abraham and Isaac walked (LXX: whom my ancestors … pleased before him)…'

Genesis 17:1

Walk (LXX: be well-pleasing) before me and be blameless.'

4 For this phenomenon, see Sollamo 1991, 75–85.
In the Septuagint the figurative idiom ἀναπαύεσθαι meaning 'to walk before, to be a (good/faithful) servant' is rendered with the verb εὐαρέστειν 'to be well-pleasing, acceptable' only in Genesis (17:1, 24:40, and 48:15) and in Psalms (55[56]:14 and 116[114]:9).

Psalms 55(56):14

τοῦ εὐαρεστῆσαι ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν φωτὶ ζωτῶν.
‘…so that I may walk (LXX: be well-pleasing) before God in the light of life.’

Psalms 116(114):9

εὐαρεστῆσαι ἐναντίον κυρίου ἐν χώρῃ ζωτῶν
‘I walk (LXX: am well-pleasing) before the Lord in the land of the living.’

In the remaining occurrences of the idiom ἀναπαύεσθαι in the Septuagint a literal rendering for “walking” and a literal rendering (a stereotype or a standard rendering in a book) for ἀναπαύομαι is offered: διέρχεσθαι ἐνώπιον 1 Kgdms 2:30.35, 12:2b, διαπορεύεσθαι ἐνώπιον 1 Kgdms 2:12a, περιπατεῖν ἐνώπιον 4 Kgdms 20:3, and πορεύεσθαι ἐνώπιον Isa 38:3. On the basis of these data it is likely that the translator of the Psalms took his equivalent εὐαρέστειν ‘to please,’ ‘to be well-pleasing’ from Genesis and on one occasion (116[114]:9) he also took the preposition ἐναντίον with it, even though his own favourite rendering of ἀναπαύεσθαι was ἐνώπιον (in 57% of all cases).

We still have to explain why the translators at times preferred a metaphorical rendering and at other times a literal rendering. It seems to me that they understood well all the cases in their metaphorical sense, but followed a minimizing manner of translating: if there were more precise definitions of walking in the clause, such as “in truth,” “in righteousness,” “from one’s childhood unto this day,” the literal equivalents πορεύεσθαι, διέρχεσθαι, and περιπατεῖν were used. Only in cases where the clause contained no definition of “walking” or weak or unclear definitions did the translators prefer the verb εὐαρέστειν to convey the correct interpretation.

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5 Sollamo 1979, 62–64. Gunkel 1910, 473, suggested that the figurative idiom originally meant ‘to lead.’ But he is wrong. The idiom also occurs in the texts found at Qumran and in the same meaning as in Genesis, e.g. 1Q28b(1QSB) V, 22, 1QS I, 8, 4Q418 (several occurrences). In the texts from caves 1 and 4 there are 14 plus 38 instances.
to the reader. But even in this case, they rendered יִפְגַּשְׁךָ separately with ἐναυτίον or ἐνώπιον, even though this is contrary to Greek verbal syntax. The literal manner of translating in general probably also contributed to the choice of the equivalents in 1–4 Kgdms.

The translator was never quite consistent, the two cases of ἐνώπιον, in Gen 24:51 and 30:33, for instance, lack any logical explanation, and one expects to find ἐναυτίον even here:

Genesis 24:51

ἄνθισεν ἔμπροσθεν ἐνώπιον σου (ἐναυτίον σου D b d f 130mnt -343-344' 346)
‘Look, Rebekah is before you…’

Genesis 30:33

ὡς ἐστίν ὁ μισθός μου ἐνώπιον σου (ἐναυτίον σου L 82 128 129 130mg 509)
‘When you come to look into my wages before you…’
(LXX: ‘for my wages are before you…’)

The translator interpreted the Hebrew clause correctly. His translation makes “excellent sense in the context, though it is a paraphrase rather than a translation” (Wevers 1993, 490). In the morning the sheep and goats are in front of Laban so that he can check which belong to Jacob as his wage. The MT is unclear as to the identity of the person who came. The second person singular “you come” ἅρπαγμα is corrupt; the original reading was possibly “I come” ἄρπαγμα, sc. I come with my wage before you. It is hard to say whether the source text of the translator was similar to the MT, but it seems very likely.

Because the manuscript tradition is divided on some occasions, it is possible that ἐνώπιον occupied the place of ἐναυτίον in some manuscripts or rather on certain occasions in the transmission history. It often appears as a variant for ἐναυτίον. The change is natural in this direction, because ἐνώπιον is more common

6 In my opinion this choice of equivalents does not depend on theology, but on the manner of translating adopted by different translators. This is pace Luciani, for instance, who suggested that εὐαρεστεῖν was preferred whenever the translators endeavoured to stress the significance of Law and the importance of obedience to it, while the literal counterparts appear in instances where these values are not highlighted. Luciani 1973, 473–476.

7 See for example Gen 48:15 where ἐναυτίον is given by B D O72 b 56* n 130 527 76 319, and ἐνώπιον is a well supported variant reading.
in the other books of the Pentateuch and in the historical books, in 1–4 Kgdms in particular. The main difference between ἐναντίον and ἐνώπιον is that ἐναντίον is highly literal and already appears in Classical Greek, while ἐνώπιον was originally a koine word and probably provincial (from Egypt) (Sollamo 1979, 311–313), but became common in Christian literature. In the New Testament ἐνώπιον occurs 94 times, mainly in Revelation (35), Luke (22), Acts (13), and in the Corpus Paulinum (17), while ἐναντίον is used only five times in the NT, all occurrences being in Luke and Acts (Sollamo 1983, 181–200).

There occurs only one example of a local ἐν ἑαυτῷ referring to things in Genesis. In this instance, Gen 23:17, ἐν ἑαυτῷ is rendered with κατὰ πρόσωπον:

Genesis 23:17

ἐν τῷ διπλῷ σπηλαίῳ, δός ἔστιν κατὰ πρόσωπον Μαμβρη‘ in the double cave, which was facing Mamre / to the east of Mamre’

The counterpart κατὰ πρόσωπον is suitable for use with both persons and objects. It is a good Greek expression. It seems that it occurred to the translator because of the synonym ἐν ἑαυτῷ appearing in the immediate context and being usually translated as κατὰ πρόσωπον or ἀπέναντι in Genesis.10

The second field of meaning concerns the ἐν ἑαυτῷ of preceding. It is rendered in Genesis as ἐμπροσθεν (11 cases). The verb taking ἐμπροσθεν is four times prefixed with προ-, e.g. προπορεύεσθαι Gen 32:17(16), 18(17), προέρχεσθαι 33:3, 14. Most cases denote motion and the order, i.e. who or what goes before the other. These were rather simple cases to be recognized by the translator, except for Gen 32:21(20).

Examples:

Genesis 33:14

προελθέτων ὁ κύριός μου ἐμπροσθεν τοῦ παιδός ‘Let my lord pass on ahead of his servant.’

8 In Genesis there are five other occurrences of ἐνώπιον (Gen 11:28 ἐνώπιον, 16:13, 14 free renderings, ἐνώπιον as an adverb, 30:38 a different source text?, and 31:35 ἐνώπιον). For Gen 16:13, 14 see Wevers 1993, 225–226, and for Gen 30:38 ibid. 493.

9 It is often a variant reading in the Church Fathers, see e.g. Gen 17:1 and 48:15.

10 It is possible that the source text of the translator offered the variant ἐν ἑαυτῷ as do the Samaritan Pentateuch and a few Hebrew manuscripts. For the Greek renderings see Sollamo 1979, 105–108. See also Wevers 1993, 341.
In the MT יָנֵפַל means “go before me”; the gifts (scil. sheep and goats) go before me (sc. Jacob). But the translator apparently read לְפָנָי because of a dittography from the next word יָרֵאָת. He then interpreted the phrase to mean here “the gifts passing before him / coming in front of him (i.e. Esau)”. In the tradition two manuscripts 53-664 (and Co) have changed אֵל to ἐμπροσθεν μου according to the MT and as it is in Gen 32:16 (LXX). The manuscripts and translations 17'-135 C 128 b 370 30' La s (sed hab La a) Arm improve the text by omitting אֵל (Wevers 1993, 538). If we group the instances of יָנֵפַל according to their interpretation in the MT, this belongs to the intermediate field of meaning, but if we follow the interpretation by the translator, this belongs to the local field where it appears in my statistics.

There is also one metaphorical instance where יָנֵפַל denotes pre-eminence or priority. The translator interpreted and translated correctly:

Genesis 48:20

'So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.'
In purely temporal usage יַבִּיא is employed in Genesis only before an infinitive, and the renderings are πρὸ τοῦ + infinitive (4 cases) and πρὶν ἦ + infinitive (29:26).\footnote{The phrases יַבִּיא were evidently read as infinitives by the translator.} For instance:

Genesis 50:16

אברך לך יבוא מות

ὁ πατὴρ σου ὁρκίσεν πρὸ τοῦ τελευτήσαι αὐτῶν

‘Your father gave this instruction \textit{before} he died…’

\textbf{Conclusion}

In the overwhelming majority of instances the translator immediately knew the meaning of יַבִּיא that he was translating. He was instinctively able to distinguish between the three fields of meaning. One exception confirms the rule: in Gen 30:30 he took the case as local, even though a temporal interpretation would have been optional:

Genesis 30:30

כִּי מָכָן אֶמֶּרָהָה לְךָ יֵבָאוּ מֵעֲרָבָה

מִכְּרוֹת עַל-הָעֵין-בָּה בָּהֵן לִפְנֵי-יהוָה,

אֶיֶה צַלְמָוֶת

The Greek translation means: “For it was little in my eyes what you had, but it has increased to plenty.” This makes good sense, even though most modern translations consider יַבִּיא here as temporal: “For you had little before I came, and it has increased abundantly.”

Another case which is interesting from the point of view of interpretation by the translator is Gen 32:21(20) discussed above.

The translations of יַבִּיא in Genesis reveal that the translator understood and interpreted the meanings and different nuances of יַבִּיא correctly. He also considered well the context and idiomatic expressions, and verbal syntax. When he now and then, however, deviated from the normal verbal syntax, he retained his favourite equivalent in the semantic field in question, e.g. \textit{παραδίδω}νεί ἐναντίον ‘deliver before’,Gen 27:20, \textit{προσκυνεῖ}ν ἐναντίον ‘bow down before’ (Gen 23:12) \textit{ἐυφροσύνε}ῖν ἐναντίον ‘be well-pleasing before’,Gen 17:1, note, however, both the dative and ἐναντίον in Gen 24:40, 48:15). Also free renderings, such as a dative after \textit{συναντά}νει ‘to meet’ (Gen 46:28) and \textit{παραστή}ναι ‘to set before,’ ‘to serve’ (Gen
18:8, 24:33), a genitive after προπορεύεσθαι ‘to go before’ (Gen 32:21[20]), and a fine utilization of preverbs are characteristics of this translator.

The entire Greek Pentateuch is characterized by the frequent use of both ἐναντίον and ἔναντι, but in Genesis ἔναντι does not occur. Each book has a stereotypical rendering for τὸ προς: Genesis ἐναντίον κυρίου, Exodus ἐναντίον κυρίου and ἔναντι κυρίου, Leviticus ἔναντι κυρίου, Numeri ἔναντι κυρίου, and Deuteronomy ἔναντι κυρίου (ἐναντίον κυρίου only Deut 12:7 and 24:13). In addition, Genesis (ἐναντίον), Exodus (ἐναντίον) and Numeri (ἐναντίον and ἐναντίον) have a stereotype for local προς referring to human beings. Genesis furthermore has a stereotype for ζητήσας of going ahead of, namely ἐμπροσθεν. Also the few occurrences of temporal προς are quite constantly rendered by πρό, with one exception: Gen 29:26). It is justified in calling Genesis the most consistent translation in the Pentateuch. The translator’s competence and good knowledge of Greek can be seen in the fact that all the deviations from his stereotypical counterparts – except for two cases of ἐναντίον – are free, idiomatic renderings.

References


