

An Example of Consistency Interpretation by the Translator of the Greek Genesis in Rendering the Hebrew Semipreposition לְפָנַי¹

Raija Sollamo

University of Helsinki

*When studying the Greek translations of the preposition לְפָנַי 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 lifne. The three semantic fields were local, lifne, meaning “in front of, before, in the presence of, opposite to”, temporal “before, prior to”, and an intermediate field or field of preceding, lifne , 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*. Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society 89. Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society/Göttingen: 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 לְפָנַי and other semiprepositions² 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, לְפָנַי meaning ‘in front of,’ ‘before,’ ‘in the presence of,’ ‘opposite to,’ 2) an intermediate field or field of preceding, לְפָנַי meaning ‘ahead of,’ ‘before,’ and 3) a temporal field, לְפָנַי meaning ‘before,’ ‘prior to.’

Prepositions in different languages may cover all these three fields, as does לְפָנַי 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 – לְפָנַי 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 ἔναντι, but κατὰ πρόσωπον and ἀπέναντι or κατέναντι in referring to objects. The most common equivalents for the intermediate לְפָנַי are ἔμπροσθεν and πρὸ προσώπου, whereas πρὸ and ἔμπροσθεν are most frequently used for a temporal לְפָנַי.

If compared with the contemporary koine sources, the most common equivalents of לְפָנַי 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 לְפָנַי (pronounced *lifné*), the noun is “face”, which is reflected in the use of the corresponding Greek noun πρόσωπον in part of the translations.

ἔναντι 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 ἐνώπιον, ἐναντίον, and ἔναντι 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 לְפָנַי the preposition ἐναντίον occurs 31 times in Genesis, and 22 times in Exodus, ἔναντι is used 52 times in Leviticus and 57 times in Numeri, while ἐνώπιον as an equivalent of לְפָנַי 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 ἐναντίον. The Ptolemaic papyri have twenty-one instances of ἐναντίον and six of ἐνώπιον. The inscriptions excerpted offer a single case of ἔναντι.³ The great frequency implies expansion of the meaning of these Greek prepositions to correspond to the entire field of local לְפָנַי, including the use of לְפָנַי in different idioms where its meaning is metaphorical, but still clearly originating in local usage. In the metaphorical meaning ἐναντίον and ἐνώπιον 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 לְפָנַי instances of Genesis will be tackled.

In Genesis there are 55 occurrences of לְפָנַי. The Greek renderings of local לְפָנַי referring to persons are ἐναντίον (31), a mere dative (three times: 18:8, 24:33, 46:28) and ἐνώπιον (24:51, 30:33), whereas at Gen 50:18 there is an omission in the Septuagint. The stereotypical or standard rendering ἐναντίον appears consistently whenever the Hebrew has the formula לְפָנַי יְהוָה 'before Yahweh' (4) or לְפָנַי הָאֱלֹהִים 'before God' (6:11) or wherever else the referent is God (after לְפָנַי a pronominal suffix referring to God six times), but ἐναντίον also occurs fairly regularly in referring to human beings in the local sense. The three datives represent good koine Greek after παρατιθέναι 'to set before,' 'to serve' (18:8, 24:33) and συναντᾶν 'to meet' (46:28), but there had been several more opportunities to employ the dative instead of ἐναντίον after such verbs as εὐαρεστεῖν 'to please' 17:1, παραδιδόναι 'to hand over,' 'to deliver' 27:20, and προσκυνεῖν '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 εὐαρεστεῖν twice takes both the dative and the ἐναντίον construction in a relative clause (Gen 24:40 and 48:15).⁴ 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

וְאֶבְרַכְכָּה לְפָנֵי יְהוָה
 ἵνα ... εὐλογήσω σε ἐναντίον κυρίου.
 'that I may bless you **before** the LORD'

Genesis 18:8

וַיִּקַּח חֲמֵאָה וְחֶלֶב וּבֶן־הַבָּקָר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּתֵּן לְפָנֵיהֶם
 ἔλαβεν δὲ βούτυρον καὶ γάλα καὶ τὸ μοσχάριον, ὃ
 ἐποίησεν, καὶ παρέθηκεν αὐτοῖς.
 Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had
 prepared, and set **before them** (LXX: served **to them**).'

Genesis 24:40

יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר־הִתְחַלְכְּתִי לְפָנָיו יִשְׁלַח מַלְאָכּוֹ אִתָּךְ
 κύριος, ᾧ εὐηρέστησα ἐναντίον αὐτοῦ, αὐτὸς ἀποστελεῖ
 τὸν ἄγγελον αὐτοῦ μετὰ σου...
 'The Lord, before whom I walk (LXX: **whom** I please
before him), will send his angel with you...'

Genesis 48:15

הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר הִתְחַלְכְּוּ אֲבוֹתַי לְפָנָיו
 ὁ θεός, ᾧ εὐηρέστησαν οἱ πατέρες μου ἐναντίον αὐτοῦ.
 'The God **before whom** my ancestors Abraham and Isaac
 walked (LXX: **whom** my ancestors ... pleased **before**
him)...'

Genesis 17:1

הִתְחַלֵּף לְפָנֵי יְהוָה תָּמִיד
 εὐαρέσκει ἐναντίον ἐμοῦ καὶ γίνου ἄμειπτος.
 '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 לִפְנֵי הַתְּהִלָּה meaning ‘to walk before, to be a (good/faithful) servant’ is rendered with the verb εὐαρεστέιν ‘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

לְהִתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי אֱלֹהִים בְּאוֹר הַחַיִּים
 τοῦ εὐαρεστήσαι ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν φωτὶ ζώντων.
 ‘...so that I may walk (LXX: be well-pleasing) **before** God
 in the light of life.’

Psalms 116(114):9

אֶתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה בְּאֲרָצוֹת הַחַיִּים
 εὐαρεστήσω ἐναντίον κυρίου ἐν γῶρα ζώντων
 (ἐνώπιον A)
 ‘I walk (LXX: am well-pleasing) **before** the Lord in the
 land of the living.’

In the remaining occurrences of the idiom לִפְנֵי הַתְּהִלָּה in the Septuagint a literal rendering for “walking” and a literal rendering (a stereotype or a standard rendering in a book) for לִפְנֵי 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 38:3.⁵ On the basis of these data it is likely that the translator of the Psalms took his equivalent εὐαρεστέιν ‘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 לִפְנֵי 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 εὐαρεστέιν to convey the correct interpretation

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.⁶ But even in this case, they rendered לְפָנַי separately with ἐναντίον 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 ἐναντίον even here:

Genesis 24:51

הִנְהַרְבֵּקָה לְפָנַי
 ἰδοὺ Ῥεβέκκα ἐνώπιόν σου (ἐναντίον σου D^G b d f 130^{txt}
 -343-344' 346)
 'Look, Rebekah is **before** you...'

Genesis 30:33

כִּי־תָבוֹא עַל־שִׂכְרִי לְפָנַי
 ὅτι ἐστὶν ὁ μισθός μου ἐνώπιόν σου (ἐναντίον σου L 82
 128 129 130^{mg} 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” תָּבוֹא is corrupt; the original reading was possibly “I come” אָבוֹא, 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,⁷ it is possible that ἐνώπιον occupied the place of ἐναντίον in some manuscripts or rather on certain occasions in the transmission history. It often appears as a variant for ἐναντίον. 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 ἐναντίον is given by B D^G O⁷² b 56* n 130 527 76 319, and ἐνώπιον is a well supported variant reading.

in the other books of the Pentateuch⁸ 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.⁹ 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 לְפָנַי referring to things in Genesis. In this instance, Gen 23:17, לְפָנַי is rendered with κατὰ πρόσωπον:

Genesis 23:17

בְּמִכְפֵּלֵה אֲשֶׁר לְפָנַי מִמְרָא
 ἐν τῷ διπλῷ σπηλαίῳ, ὅς ἐστιν κατὰ πρόσωπον Μαμβρή
 ‘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 לְפָנַי appearing in the immediate context and being usually translated as κατὰ πρόσωπον or ἀπέναντι in Genesis.¹⁰

The second field of meaning concerns the לְפָנַי of preceding. It is rendered in Genesis as ἔμπροσθεν (11 cases). The verb taking ἔμπροσθεν 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

יַעֲבֹר־נָא אֲדֹנָי לְפָנַי עֲבָדוֹ
 προελθέτω ὁ κύριός μου ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ παιδός
 ‘Let my lord pass on ahead of his servant.’

8 In Genesis there are five other occurrences of ἐνώπιον (Gen 11:28 על־פָּנַי, 16:13, 14 free renderings, ἐνώπιον as an adverb, 30:38 a different source text?, and 31:35 מִפְּנֵי). 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 על־פָּנַי as do the Samaritan Pentateuch and a few Hebrew manuscripts. For the Greek renderings see Sollamo 1979, 105–108. See also Wevers 1993, 341.

Genesis 32:21(20)

אֲכַפְּרָה בְּנִי בַּמְנַחָה הַחֹלֶכֶת לִפְנֵי

Ἐξιλάσομαι τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ἐν τοῖς δώροις τοῖς
προπορευομένοις αὐτοῦ.

‘I may appease him with the present that goes **ahead of me** (LXX: the presents that come **before him**)’

In the MT לִפְנֵי הָלַךְ means “go before me”; the gifts (scil. sheep and goats) go before me (sc. Jacob). But the translator apparently read לִפְנֵי because of a dittography from the next word וַאֲחֵרָי. 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^c (and Co) have changed αὐτοῦ to ἔμπροσθεν 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 αὐτοῦ (Wevers 1993, 538). If we group the instances of לִפְנֵי 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 לִפְנֵי denotes pre-eminence or priority. The translator interpreted and translated correctly:

Genesis 48:20

וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת־אֶפְרַיִם לִפְנֵי מְנַשֶּׁה

καὶ ἔθηκεν τὸν Ἐφραίμ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ Μανασσή

‘So he put Ephraim **ahead of** Manasseh.’

There is a significant difference in the use of ἔμπροσθεν between the Septuagint and the New Testament. In the Septuagint it is rather seldom used in the local field of meaning, but more often in intermediate and temporal fields, while in the New Testament it mainly appears in the local field referring both to persons and things (Sollamo 1983, 191–197). This usage emerged in the New Testament independently of the Septuagint. In the earliest books and layers of the New Testament (Mark, Q-Source, Matthew, and 1 Thessalonians) ἔμπροσθεν is used, while ἐναντίον and ἐνώπιον do not appear at all. I should like to explain the increasing frequency of ἐναντίον and ἐνώπιον in the later books of the New Testament with the influence of the Septuagint (Sollamo 1983, 199–200).

In purely temporal usage לִפְנֵי is employed in Genesis only before an infinitive, and the renderings are πρὸ τοῦ + infinitive (4 cases) and πρὶν ἢ + infinitive (29:26).¹¹ For instance:

Genesis 50:16

אָבִיךָ צִוָּה לִפְנֵי מוֹתוֹ

ὁ πατήρ σου ὤρκισεν πρὸ τοῦ τελευτήσαι αὐτόν
'Your father gave this instruction **before** he died...'

Conclusion

In the overwhelming majority of instances the translator immediately knew the meaning of לִפְנֵי 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 מְעַט אֲשֶׁר-הָיָה לְךָ לִפְנֵי וַיִּבְרַח לְרַב

μικρὰ γὰρ ἦν ὅσα σοι ἦν ἐναντίον ἐμοῦ, καὶ ηὐξήθη
εἰς πλήθος

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 לִפְנֵי 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 לִפְנֵי in Genesis reveal that the translator understood and interpreted the meanings and different nuances of לִפְנֵי 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. παραδιδόναι ἐναντίον 'deliver before', Gen 27:20), προσκυνεῖν ἐναντίον 'bow down before' (Gen 23:12) εὐαρεστεῖν 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 συναντᾶν 'to meet' (Gen 46:28) and παρατιθέναι 'to set before,' 'to serve' (Gen

¹¹ The phrases מוֹתֵי לִפְנֵי or מוֹתוֹ לִפְנֵי Gen 27:7 and 50:16 were evidently read as infinitives by the translator.

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 יהוה יְפָנִי: 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 (ἔναντι and ἐναντίον) have a stereotype for local יְפָנִי referring to human beings. Genesis furthermore has a stereotype for יְפָנִי of going ahead of, namely ἔμπροσθεν. Also the few occurrences of temporal יְפָנִי 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 ἐνώπιον – are free, idiomatic renderings.

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