When we compare the way the different Evangelists tell the same story in the Bible, it is clear that oral tellers have always varied their stories to some extent. If you have a favorite translation, you may at least discover some new possibilities for your story by comparing translations. While the goal in NBS is to be faithful to the version of the story we have in the Bible, there are now many translations, so translation differences from teller to teller are inevitable. Therefore translation variations from one person's telling to another are legitimate, too.

As a storyteller, knowing a range of possible translations will allow you to be more responsive to your listeners as you and they get caught up in the story. It will also keep you responsible to the Gospel storyteller, whose particular words may have a range of nuances that can only be manifested through the use of various English words or phrases.

Translations range across a spectrum from “formal correspondence” to “dynamic correspondence.” The “dynamic” disregard the verbal patterns in the original text; the “formal” retain them as much as possible. Since I am interested not just in the content of the Evangelist’s story but in the style of telling, I prefer translations that lie at the “formal” end of the spectrum. “Dynamic correspondence” advocates criticize the “formal” by saying, “Nobody talks that way today.” I respond, “We don’t update Shakespeare to modern language and style. Much of the impact of Shakespeare’s plays lie in their style, not just in the story line. The same is true of the Bible.” My favorite is the Revised Standard Version (RSV), corrected for gender inclusive language with the help of the New RSV. If you know how to use an interlinear Greek-English text properly, you may also discover some beauties of style eradicated even by the RSV. You just need to realize that an interlinear does not give you the best translation. It simply uses an English translation to tell you what Greek word may be in question. What you can see, however, with the help of the interlinear is the word and phrase order. Let’s look at some translations of Mark 14:30 as a good example:

**Revised Standard Version:**
3. this very night,
4. before the cock crows twice,
5. three times me you will deny

**One particular interlinear rendering:**
1. you
2. today
3. this night
4. before twice a rooster crows,
5. three times me you will deny

Secondly, the Greek text has three words or phrases for naming the time of Peter’s denial, each successive one more narrow than the one before it. “Today” is 24 hours. “This night” is 12 hours. “Before the cock crows” puts the denial between 12 and 3 a.m. In telling the story this makes a difference. (The NRSV does not get the emphatic “You!” but does get the three time phrases.) After pointing the finger at Peter with “You!” — the one who has just said he was going to be different from all the others — Jesus then thrusts in the knife, not all the way at first but deep enough to begin to hurt. “Today” means without delay. There will be barely time between Peter’s bragging and whatever action of Peter Jesus foresees. Then another thrust, “this night,” bringing whatever Jesus has in mind a little closer, and finally the knife is in almost to the hilt. Whatever Peter is going to do, it will be almost
immediate: “before the cock crows twice.” But we still don’t know what Jesus is going to say! To that extent Jesus leaves the final thrust for last. That much the RSV has right.

Now the interlinear shows something that is not easily reproducible in English. “Three times me you will deny” is not good English. But the interlinear word order shows that Jesus leaves the telling verb that names what Peter will do till the very end of the sentence. Very dramatic. We can, however, do better than the RSV and NRSV “you will deny me three times.” We can at least say, “Three times you will deny me!” That is good English. And because the Greek word order clearly builds the suspense until the final verb, “deny!” we might find a way to maintain the suspense as long as we can in English. When I tell it, I am very emphatic and I break up the clause with pauses: “Three times (pause) you will (pause).” The listeners are waiting for the final thrust of the knife, for the axe to fall. Then finally, “deny me!”

Here is the section as it appears in the NRSV:

New Revised Standard Version:
2. this day,
3. this very night,
4. before the cock crows twice,
5. you will deny me three times

Formal correspondence translations are the King James Version, Revised Standard Version, New Revised Standard Version, New International Version and the New American Bible Revised (NABR), the latter being sensitive to gender inclusiveness. Dynamic translations are the Revised English Bible, New Jerusalem Bible, Today’s English Version (aka Good News Bible). Then there are the amplified versions of the Bible such as the Living Bible (The LB is highly interpretive. For example, it translates “Beloved Disciple” as “I,” because Taylor thinks the “Beloved Disciple” is the author, a view that many people would disagree with). Other highly interpretive translations are Peterson’s The Message (Cotton Patch Version) and God Is For Real, Man.

Because of my commitment to maintaining the style of the original language as much as possible, I work with and adapt formal correspondence translations. So I have the RSV, the NRSV, and the NABR.

The New Jerusalem Bible and Revised English Bible can also help clarify meaning or suggest new insights, even when I don’t adopt their English style. I also have a number of study Bibles based on different translations that offer good notes on particular verses and resources like cross references to other passages in the Bible and a glossary of unusual terms. Most are published by Oxford Press. Harpers also published one done by scholars of the Society of Biblical Literature. The New English Translation is an online Bible that has excellent notes. Finally, www.text-week.com is a great site for Bible translations. When you click on a text, you get the option of NRSV, Greek Interlinear, or Bible Gateway, a portal to many translations in all sorts of languages.

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