

Clever Construction?

Here I'll focus on the genitive case and literalism. One issue is about nuancing, rather than replacing, the [of + noun] genitive. Let's take 1 Jhn.3:2. "God's children" (ESV)¹ is worse than "children of God" (ERV/LEB/MSG/MEV/NASU/NCV/NIV/NKJV/TNIV/WEB). Why? Well, the ESV's expression, though losing an English word, might imply that the audience were *the only* children of God. Strictly speaking, "we're God's children" isn't the same as "we're *some of* God's children", since only the latter makes it clear that we are representative of a wider reality. Likewise in the first person "I am God's child"² is not the same as "I am *a* child of God", and "I am God's son" sounds positively blasphemous.³ 'A' is the indefinite article, which can highlight that we are not It, yet a part of It, members of one family (1 Cor.12:27).

Another issue of genitives is about replacing the ambiguous, sometimes puzzling, [of + noun] construction. Payne preferred Rm.1:17 as "righteousness of God" (ESV), saying that while Paul *might* have meant "righteousness from God," it was safer not to pre-interpret – let the reader decide. The Greek *dikaïosunē theou* has the word 'God' (*theos*) in the genitive case (*theou*), a case that sometimes translates as descriptive possession – for example "it belongs to God/part of his nature" – and sometimes as a source – for example "it is from God". The just judge gives justice. In fact, the TNIV agreed with the ESV against the old NIV.

¹ The ISV & GNB are far worse than the ESV, but here we are comparing it to the TNIV which is put in opposition on gender reasons. Whether the metaphor issue is a common ESV weakness is moot.

² Even Gordon Fee's "...one is to live...as God's loved and redeemed child" (Fee & Stuart *How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth*, 1994:130)!

³ Unintentionally blasphemous, no doubt. Similarly the currently popular *Be Thou My Vision* song (http://wikichristian.org/index.php/Be_thou_my_vision), which having a good beat ensures it high votes even if each singer replaces Jesus as God's true Son. Biblically there is always both a *commonalty yet distinction* between Jesus & Christians. Paul used *huios* of both, but the singular *only* for Jesus; John used *huios* only for Jesus, and only *tekna* or *paidia* for Christians. Removing this distinction has been the lot of demonic Spiritualism, & anthropocentric Liberalism.

I can agree some particulars, such as Rm.1:17 as “righteousness of God” (righteousness intrinsic to God), without agreeing with Payne in principle. “Let’s not say what we *think* it means, simply say *what* the text says” is naive, since translation demands interpretation at some level. In one *Star Trek* film,⁴ Mr Spock, scientist & logician, was urged by logic & his captain’s trust (“*he feels safer about your guesses than most other people’s facts*”), to *guess*. “*Ah! Then I will try to make the best guess I can*”, he replied. An educated guess – from Hebrew & Greek scholars – can outweigh uneducated certainties. The eunuch asked for educated help (Ac.8:31). Should we scorn the helping hand? Wrongly, postmodernism denies all certainty to words; rightly, it highlights guesswork in achieving meaning. Though both Carson & Payne have spoken of readers’ sakes, they have taken different positions along a spectrum of interpretation, Payne unfairly denying the spectrum. Payne & Carson said that the old NIV/TNIV’s bias was to over specify; only Payne unfairly concealed that the ESV’s bias to under specify leaves meaning unclear & ambiguous. At best the argument is to compare versions text by text, short listing the more reliable ones, and getting to know them well.

The chart below examines genitives from only a small range of versions. Based on Fee & Strauss’ *How To Choose A Translation For All Its Worth*, 2007:38f., 77-83, it is about *of + noun* constructions, that is, translating genitival nouns. Using 16 texts, I have tried to see how much effort has gone into removing ambiguity from genitives unambiguous in the Greek NT, as well as keeping ambiguity when the Greek NT is ambiguous. A general helpfulness, so to speak. It’s not the issue that sparked the ESV, so I’ve not bothered to show the TNIV, which I made 82%. Plus I’ve simply thrown in a few other versions for added interest. Generally, Right = 2 marks, Wrong = zero marks; Wrong but footnoting the right, 1 mark.

⁴ *The Voyage Home*

Genitive Chart

Texts

The texts, in chart order: A (Jhn.5:29); B (Jhn.6:45); C (Rm.1:7); D (Rm.1:17); E (Rm.6:4); F (1 Cor.1:9); G (1 Cor.3:9); H (Eph.1:13); I (Eph.1:17); J (Eph.1:18); K (Php.3:10); L (1 Ths.1:3); M (1 Ths.2:13); N (1 Ths.3:2); O (Heb.1:3); P (Rv1:1). I suspect that it's more likely that versions with low scores have been lazy or sleepy, rather than deliberately trying to preserve ambiguousness lest they dictate to those they were meant to serve. All scores have then been divided by 30%, turning them all into comparative percentages.

Comparative Class Grades

This chart is not used in the overall Summary Chart. NCV (A); NIV (A-); NLT (B+); HCSB/NABRE (C-); ESV/NKJV (E). I would normally fail assignments below D+, but any good marker would wish to factor in other assignments, and at higher levels a number of markers would be involved. But these are comparative grades, and no version above stands, or stands condemned, on these marks.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	%	
ESV	0	2	2	2	0	0	0	2	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	2	27	E
HCSB	0	2	2	0	2	2	1	2	2	0	0	0	2	0	2	2	50	C-
NABRE	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	2	2	1	0	2	2	2	50	C-
NCV	2	2	2	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	100	A
NIV	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	2	2	0	91	A-
NKJV	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	E

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	%	
NLT	2	2	2	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	82	B +