

THE OLD ICELANDIC LITERATURE IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION  
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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## Introduction

## Introduction

Translation is a very difficult task and presents a number of problems. The aim of a translation is to transfer intellectual and aesthetic values from one language into another. The process of translation not only involves surface matching of forms by rules of correspondence; rather it entails a complex analysis, transfer and restructuring.

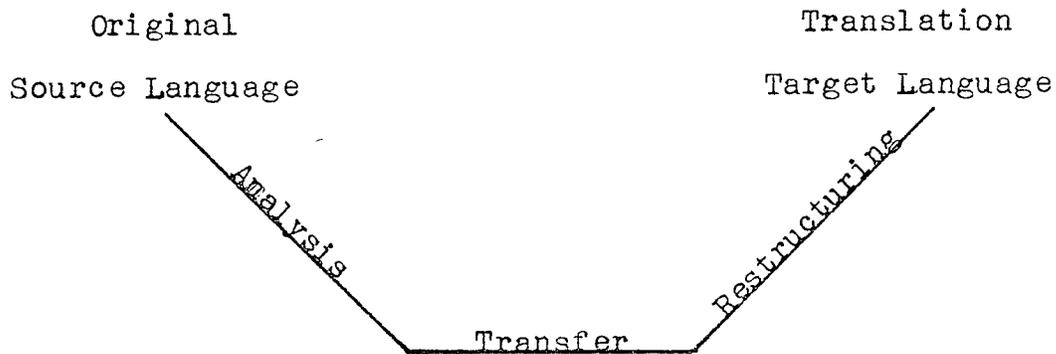


Figure 1

The original is initially analysed and rendered into its basic form. It is transferred at this level and then restructured to the level in the target language that is acceptable to the audience it is intended to reach.

Translation may be described in terms of three functional levels: a science, a skill, and an art.<sup>1</sup> As a science, translation requires knowledge of the

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<sup>1</sup>For a summary of opinions on this subject see E.A. Nida, Toward a Science of Translating (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1964).

principles of comparative linguistics, the structure of language, and the techniques involved in the application of linguistic principles. A translator must have the skill necessary to evaluate the quality of a translation and the ability to exercise and maintain sound judgment. Art in translation requires of the translator the ability to reflect the creativity of the author in terms of original thought and excellence of diction. In general, the translation process involves an encounter with both linguistic and literary systems.

The problems involved in translation vary according to the structural difference between the source and target languages. If the languages are structurally, culturally, and spatially remote, the task of the translator is a difficult one. Related languages, common to countries of close proximity, present fewer problems to the translator because of their structural similarities.

Any translation presents certain basic problems.<sup>2</sup> It is evident even to those lacking an extensive knowledge of language, that the linguistic entities of one language do not form simple equivalences with given entities of another language. The basic linguistic units, e.g. (words) are defined and circumscribed in different ways, and the

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<sup>2</sup>For a detailed description of the translation problem see J.P. Postgate, Translation and Translations (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1922).

meaning of these units varies according to context.

A clear understanding of meaning in the original is essential. If linguistic entities were capable of functioning as units isolated from other linguistic entities complete transference of meaning might be accomplished with considerable facility. However, because linguistic entities do not function in isolation, literal transfer from the original is often misinterpreted. The transference of meaning will be discussed in greater detail in the lexical analysis.

The degree of accuracy of a translation is determined by several factors. A translator who does not possess adequate knowledge of the language of the original or the subject matter contained in it may misunderstand the subtleties, hidden meanings and formal similarities between the original and the target language. In literary translation, a misunderstanding of this nature may pass undetected. Errors of interpretation of the original in historical, scientific or political translations, however, are of more serious concern.

Factual information can be distorted by inefficient renderings. The original may contain a number of words which are unfamiliar to the prospective readers. In short, differences in language and culture combine to create significant problems for the translator.

In addition to the difficulty of reproducing

original content, one must consider the method of expression. The stylistic level which the translator tries to achieve has a direct effect upon the formal dimension of the restructuring process.<sup>3</sup> The level of style may be interpreted as being of a technical, formal, or informal nature. A translator might misinterpret the level of style in the original and reproduce formal or informal expressions as technical in the target language. Misrepresentation is the unavoidable consequence of moving from one level to another. Translators may attempt to overcome their inability to determine the precise level of style in the original by raising the literary level of the translation, the result being a markedly different style. As a rule, it is difficult to offer a stylistic interpretation of an original work not to mention the difficulty of reproducing its stylistic quality.

Every translator must make the important choice between a literal and a free rendering. In making this decision he must consider the degree of faithfulness he wishes to maintain to the exact wording of the original. A translator may be of the opinion that the essence of the original should be transmitted without closely reproducing the structure or lexical items.<sup>4</sup> In trans-

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<sup>3</sup>Chapter two is devoted to a more thorough discussion of style.

<sup>4</sup>For further discussion see A.F. Tytler, Essay on the Principles of Translation (London: J.M. Dent and Co., 1791).

lation of literary material, this approach can easily result in decreased emphasis on other equally important features of the translation. Style and content must be considered of equal importance in the rendering of literary works. However, these two components may not be conveyed in free translation. In considering a possible choice between a free and a literal translation, one is led to believe that the latter lends itself more readily to the precise transference of information and the preservation of style.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, rigid adherence to the use of literal reproduction often violates acceptable usage of target language grammar. The problem lies in the extent of variability or simply, the degree of freedom a translator is justified in using in the process of translation.

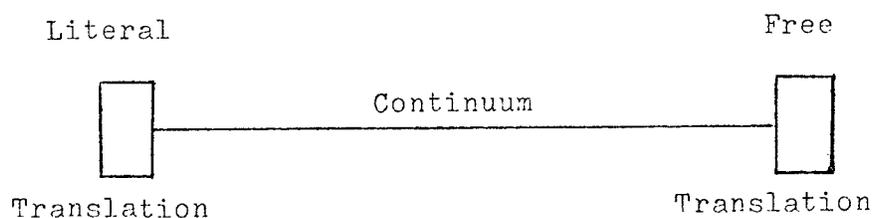


Figure 2

Figure 2 illustrates the degree of adherence to the words of the original. Strict literal translation may be placed at one end of the scale and free rendering at the

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<sup>5</sup>For a more extensive treatment of literal translation see J.B. Postgate, Translation and Translations, (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1922).

other. Translations of variable accuracy occur, the degree of accuracy being affected by the position of the translator along the continuum.

Deceptive cognates have proved to be a problem area for translators. Words which sound or look alike may be misinterpreted on the basis of similarity of form. The English word 'plume' has an entirely different meaning in English from the French 'plume'.

The translation of poetry entails unique problems. It demands greater creativity than does the most highly stylistic prose.

There are many problems of translation in addition to those mentioned; however, the limits of this work do not warrant a discussion of them.

It is important at this stage to re-emphasize what might be termed the impossibility of translation. Even though languages may appear to be similar to one another in form, they are never identical. Knowledge of more than one language enables one to see that it is not possible to produce an exact rendering of complex messages in all their delicate variations, tones, associations, and connotations. This statement is simple, yet significant. If, for example, an expression formulated in the source language does not function independently, but only as a part of the language as a whole, then its correlative in the target language

cannot be separated from the total context of this language. Therefore, instead of accurate translation, one finds more approximation, and the degree of equivalence between original and target language varies according to the similarity between form and meaning in the two languages. The greater the cultural and structural differences between one language and the other, the less likely it is that the original can be reproduced in translation.

The transfer of connotative meaning<sup>6</sup> is a much greater problem than the transfer of straight forward denotative meaning. Consequently, the degree of difficulty in approximating the content of the original increases with the relative importance that connotative meaning may possess in the text to be translated.<sup>7</sup>

The problems of replacing certain forms in the original with approximations are always present. A translator must decide what elements to preserve and what elements to sacrifice. It appears that the translator's goal is in fact an unattainable one. It is not entirely a question of the skill and proficiency of a translator which determines the success of a translation. The structures of the languages (source and target)

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<sup>6</sup>The concept of meaning transfer is examined extensively in the lexical analysis.

<sup>7</sup>For an extensive survey of 'meaning', see W.V. Quine "Meaning and translation", On Translation: Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959).

may set the limit of the effectiveness of the outcome. The fact that total translation is unattainable in literary works does not mean, however, that successful translation is beyond reach nor that it does not occur. Despite great differences in linguistic structures and cultural features, a high degree of effective interlingual communication is always possible.

Translation is a literary activity of great importance. Difference between the various languages has produced a barrier to intercourse which is revealed whenever communication is attempted across distance or over a great interval of time. Interpreters and translators have the task of creating passages through this barrier.

As language exists and is used, it contains a kind of hidden intelligence which is superior to the intelligence of its users. Any language is the sum of the communication<sup>of</sup> generations and contains more potential knowledge and ideas than any single user can hope to acquire. Language furthers the expansion of consciousness; however, it is merely a potential, and if it remains unrealized, much of it is wasted.

Successful translations make available the works of scientific and literary importance among nations. They also constitute a large area where useful criticism

can be applied. Overall, translation aims to place within the reach of all, the world's literature, science and political thought. It seeks to decrease the great difficulties which confront individuals the instant they pass beyond their national borders.

Translations are of a particularly great importance to smaller countries, like those of Scandinavia, for example. One reason for this is that few people outside Scandinavia take the time or trouble to learn the Scandinavian languages. One may therefore claim that as far as the smaller countries are concerned, translations play an important role in creating their image abroad.

Iceland is one of these smaller countries and therefore it must depend heavily upon translation to make its culture known.

It is necessary to establish the importance of Icelandic literature in order to be able to understand some of the values various translations have for the country. Iceland, located in the extreme North, a country of small population and area, has attracted much attention because of the great accomplishments of its people. First and foremost, it is known as a centre of literary activity; the home of the scaldic verse and saga literature. The literature of Iceland which has had a remarkably strong effect on the world's intellectual life and culture, is

in many ways unique.<sup>8</sup> It is almost as old as the nation which created it and with an unbroken continuity it covers a wider time span than any literature in an existing European tongue. In terms of the written work, the Old Icelandic in which it is recorded has changed very little over a thousand years. Icelandic is the only Scandinavian language which has become isolated from all the other Scandinavian tongues because of its resistance against linguistic change. Mutual intelligibility between Icelandic and the other Scandinavian languages is non-existent. The people of these other countries must now depend upon translations in order to be able to appreciate Old Norse literature.

Not long after the migration of the Icelandic settlers from Norway (about 900 A.D.) literature began to develop in Iceland, far superior to anything contemporaneous on the Scandinavian mainland. In fact, it has come to be regarded as the best literature that was created about northern themes for a period of some four hundred years (860 - 1260) and it is the saga, a solely Icelandic production, which is the mainstay of this literary achievement. The sagas vividly express the life and culture of the age they describe and it is for

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<sup>8</sup>An extensive description of Icelandic literature can be found in Stefán Einarsson, A History of Icelandic Literature (New York: John Hopkins Press, 1957).

this reason that they are of such great importance to the Icelandic people and to the Scandinavian people as a whole.

Not only are the sagas important to the people of Scandinavian descent, they also possess a universal value. In the sagas, the Icelanders succeeded in creating a living picture of their world as well as the life of the neighbouring peoples. A great deal of information is given on all the areas then inhabited by the Northern peoples. The scope of the sagas goes beyond Scandinavia, encompassing all Europe and other areas more remote. It is evident that saga literature has much historical value; this literature displays the culture and ideas of the people of the North and much of it preserves the time-honoured heroic motifs of the old Germanic tribes in a more detailed form than can be found elsewhere.

In addition to literary and academic interest, the sagas have a universal human value; they disclose man, his life, his soul, his fate. He is seen in all types of people: kings and farmers, servants and warriors, poets and seamen. People of all ages appear on their pages and in a variety of circumstances. The sagas tell of love and hate, courage and cowardice, honor and dishonor, joy and sorrow, hope and despair.

Though Iceland had to battle for existence for many

centuries against oppression, literary production never ceased. The Old Icelandic literature has proved to be a constant source of inspiration and national strength.

Literary translations of the languages of past ages present the translator with a set of problems quite different from those which translation of modern languages entail. The translator is faced with a relatively small, finite, body of literary discourse and is unable to make use of the two-way communication which the readily accessible data of a contemporary language offers him. This presents at times an almost insurmountable barrier to proper evaluation of the flavor imparted by a word's singularity or familiarity, its literary, antique or colloquial associations, and to interpretation of the nature and significance of unfamiliar habits and institutions.

As has been noted, language is to a large extent culture bound and meaning is therefore likely to be lost in translation. Even though a translator has developed a working knowledge of the language of saga-age Iceland, he is still faced with the great difficulty of transmitting the unique cultural characteristics. Subtleties of meaning and the frequent use of understatement in Old Icelandic literature are two culturally determined areas which have been reproduced with only relative success. No royal road exists for the translator of

Old Icelandic Literature. He must consider his audience, purpose, medium, nature of the original, not to mention his own particular abilities and preferences. It requires a major scholastic effort to produce successful English versions of the Icelandic sagas, Eddas and other poetry.

Medieval Icelandic literature has enjoyed considerable popularity in the English-speaking world for over a hundred years. Translations can claim much of the credit for the development of this recently awakened interest in the people of Iceland, their literature and culture. The need for reliable translations of Icelandic literature is borne out by gradually expanding instruction in universities in the United States and Canada.<sup>9</sup> There are a number of institutions in these countries teaching Icelandic. For the university faculty of Icelandic, effective translations can promote interest in its courses. For the student, translations can serve as a guide to the original creation. They can indeed be a valuable aid to the learning of the language itself.

In North America today, few families of Icelandic origin speak Icelandic in the home to the extent sufficient

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<sup>9</sup>H. Bronner and Gosta Franzen, Scandinavian Studies in Institutions of Learning in the United States, Scandinavian Studies, (Wisconsin: George Banta Co., Nov. 1961) Vol. 33

to enable their children to learn the language. With the decline of the spoken word, it is important to provide a replacement to prevent the ethnic culture from dying out. Translations can to some extent fulfill this purpose.

English translations from Icelandic make the literary works of Iceland readily available and provide a basis for realistic comparative literary studies. Accurate translations are necessary, however, if the country is to be justly represented.

English translations of Icelandic literature have been appearing for more than a century, yet, one may question whether the quality of the works has increased greatly. There are successful translations which do justice to the original, but there are those which have only a remote resemblance to it. A comprehensive investigation of the problems involved in the translation of Old Icelandic history and literature has never been undertaken. An investigation of some of these problems is the central theme of this thesis.

Defects in the translations of Icelandic literature are becoming increasingly common and are often taken for granted, being labeled unavoidable hazards inherent in working with an ancient language.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>See Einar Haugen, "On Translating from the Scandinavian", Old Norse Literature and Mythology (E.C. Polóme, editor; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969).

At this point it is necessary to return to the discussion of the general features of adequate or inadequate translations for the purpose of establishing the definition of a successful translation.

Because "good" is a relative terms, "successful" will be used as a substitute for it in this discussion. There are, as has already been mentioned, a number of variables affecting the success of a translation and no one definition of successful translation is complete. This quotation from Tytler is relevant:

"That in which the merit of the original work is so completely transfused into another language, as to be as distinctly apprehended, and as strongly felt, by a native of the country to which that language belongs, as it is by those who speak the language of the original word." <sup>11</sup>

Although idealistic, this definition illustrates three fundamental points which are relevant to the discussion of a successful translation. First, the translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work. Second, the style and manner of writing should be of the same character as that of the original. Third, the translation should have all the ease of original composition.

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<sup>11</sup>A.F. Tytler, Essay on the Principles of Translation (London: J.M. Dent and Co., 1791).

In commenting on the first principle one may suggest that there has always been a general consensus that a translation should be faithful to the original. The main argument in favour of faithfulness is that a translator must not overlook the fact that he is merely reproducing what the original author has written. At this stage it is in order to point out that an examination of a translation with strict literal rendering reveals the limitations of this technique.<sup>12</sup>

The second point states that the style and manner of writing should be of the same character as that of the original. In order to produce this effect, a translator must be able to ascertain the exact nature of the style of the original and possess the ability to reproduce this in the translation.

Translators may impose a style of their own, entirely different from the original and in many instances this style may be a reflection of prevailing literary trends.<sup>13</sup>

The third point asserts that the translation should have all the ease of original composition. This is difficult to accomplish since languages are linguistically

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<sup>12</sup>Further discussion of 'faithful' translation is reserved for lexical analysis.

<sup>13</sup>See Einar Haugen, "On Translating from the Scandinavian", Old Norse Literature and Mythology (E.C. Polóme, editor; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969) for further study.

distinct.

There are various other less significant points which collectively contribute to make a translation successful or unsuccessful. However, they are too numerous to be included within the scope of this investigation.

Possibly the best way of achieving a successful translation is that of being faithful to the original as much as possible without sacrificing the grammatical idiom or producing a foreign or artificial style. Juliusz Zulawski comes very close to describing a successful translation in saying:

"I think that you accept it as 'good' when it gives you in a different language a true image of the thoughts, realities, and poetical intentions of an original, and at the same time reveals itself as an equally integral, genuine piece of work. 14

One important consideration regarding the translating of Old Icelandic has to do with the nature of the effect or impression produced upon the reader. This effect can vary in both directions along the previously mentioned continuum. At one extreme there is the bringing up-to-date or modernization of old works. This represents an attempt to domesticate works from ages

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<sup>14</sup> Juliusz Zulawski, "The Place of Translation in Literature", The World of Translation (New York: P.E.N. American Centre, 1971) p. 87

past; to renovate them in such a manner that they sound as if they were written in the twentieth century. The opposite extreme seeks to preserve the past by using "ancient" terminology and imposing a system of archaisms. When the latter method is used, the modern reader may find himself engulfed by impenetrable jargon. Often an archaism is used in the translation where there was none in the original. In most cases the reader is justified in expecting language which is familiar to him. Moderation seems to be the main point here. Even though the translator has the average reader in mind, he is not justified in using 'street' or 'pedestrian' language, consisting of considerable slang and colloquialism. It must be noted that a different situation arises when the original author is read more for his manner rather than his matter.

The question inevitably arises: what effect should the translation have on its readers? This problem is commonly resolved by applying the principle of equivalent effect which states that the translation should have the same effect on its readers as the original had on its readers.<sup>15</sup> For example, it would be desirable to produce the same effect upon English-speaking readers of the translation of the sagas as the original had, not upon

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<sup>15</sup>Sir H. Idris Bell, "The Problem of Translation," Literature and Life: Addresses to the English Association (London: 1948) p. 23

Icelanders of the nineteenth century, but upon Icelanders of the age in which they were written. This raises the question of the nature of the effect the original had on its readers, and the means by which it was produced. In order to ascertain what this effect is a translator must have the ability to interpret the original accurately and then reproduce this interpretation correctly in the language of the translation.

The Scandinavian languages are deceptively similar in basic structure to English and a translator must be conscious of this to prevent misinterpretation.

A diagram applicable to the translation of Old Icelandic literature may be constructed to illustrate the utilization of the law of equivalent effect.

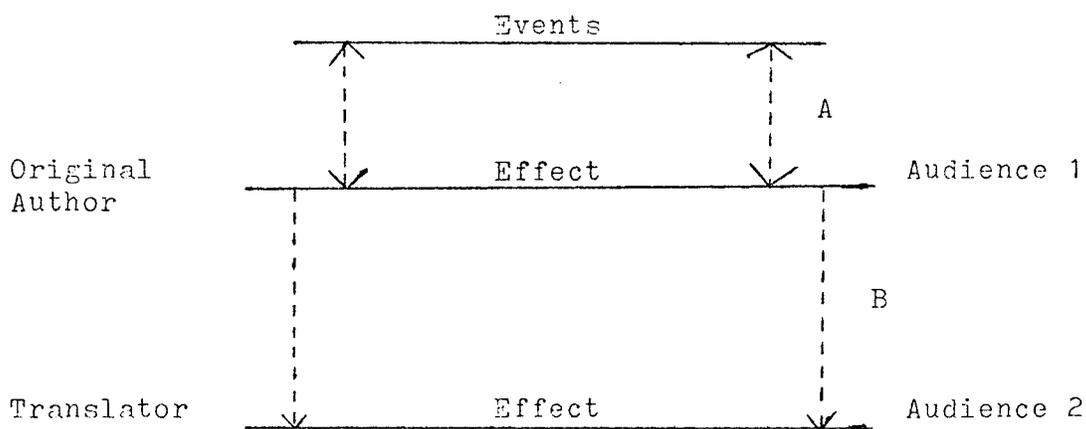


Figure 3

The original author is interested in communicating certain information (events) to his audience. This

information is represented by distance A in the diagram. The translators who are attempting to produce the same effect on their readers (audience 2) as the source author produced on his readers (audience 1) will try to decrease the distance B. Some translators try to keep their audience removed from the original preserving the work as something not even closely akin or familiar to modern literature. This has been attempted by the imposition of an archaic system. Translators of this school are partial to maintaining the distance B in the diagram, holding, that equivalence is not a desirable effect. Reference will be made in later chapters to specific translators who favor either of the two approaches.

The following is a brief description of the organization of the remainder of the thesis.

Chapter one consists of a critical analysis of lexical items, the difficulties involved in their translation and a discussion of possible alternate means of overcoming the problems. The family sagas are the main area selected for analysis. A subsection is reserved at the end of the chapter for the discussion of special problem terms.

Chapter two is concerned with problematic areas of style. The difficulties in the interpretation of style, saga style, and success achieved in reproducing the saga style will be discussed in this chapter.

The first two chapters constitute the literary analysis whereas the remaining two comprise the linguistic analysis.

Chapter three examines the problems involved in translation in the area of syntax. Icelandic syntax presents inherent difficulties to the translator and the section illustrates the nature of the problems and the manner in which they have been rendered in translations.

The final chapter of the analysis discusses the morphological-phonological aspects of Icelandic literary translation. The rendering of place names and proper names is discussed using specific examples.

Following is a list of the Icelandic literature analyzed in the thesis.<sup>16</sup>

#### Family Sagas

- A. Njáls saga
- B. Egils saga
- C. Laxdæla saga
- D. Grettis saga
- E. Hrafnkels saga

The Old Icelandic letters  $\varphi$  and  $\theta$  have been written as ö, and oe has been incorporated into æ throughout the investigation.

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<sup>16</sup>A complete bibliography of the works discussed can be found in Appendix A.

## Lexical Analysis

## LEXICAL ANALYSIS

The purpose of this analysis is to examine critically an important quality of English translations of the Icelandic sagas by determining for a specified amount of literary text the degree of success translators have achieved in interpreting and reproducing Icelandic lexical units in English. A lexical analysis will help reveal whether or not a translation conveys exactly what is contained in the original. Precise rendering of lexical units entails a number of problems for the translator as will be further discussed below.

Meaning is understandably an important part of the translation process. If one adopts the definition that a translation is "the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)",<sup>1</sup> it becomes evident that a translator must have the ability to determine the meaning of the source language material. Meaning is a property of language. Textual material from the source language has source language meaning and textual material in the target language has target language meaning. An accurate definition of meaning has been proposed

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<sup>1</sup>J.C. Catford, A Linguistic Theory of Translation (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p 20.

by J.C. Catford:

"meaning is the total network of relations entered into by any linguistic form-text, item-in-text, structure, element of structure, class, term-in-system." <sup>2</sup>

In complete translation all aspects of the source language text must be replaced by target language text. This means that SL grammar and lexis must be replaced by equivalent TL grammar and lexis. A central problem in translation is concerned with the finding of appropriate target language equivalents.

Because Icelandic and English have many words similar in sound and appearance, yet essentially different in meaning, it is conceivable, as was pointed out earlier, that a translator may misinterpret the meaning of an Icelandic lexical unit by replacing it with an inappropriate rendering. Without an adequate understanding of the textual meaning of the source language, a translator may, for example, easily mistranslate the Icelandic "A" which has many different meanings - such as river, on, upon, during, towards and against.

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<sup>2</sup>J.C. Catford, A Linguistic Theory of Translation, (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p 35.

Even though translations may achieve their end, source language and target language items seldom have exactly the same meaning. This is due in part to the asymmetry and disparity in the development of the two languages in question. Because exact equivalents can rarely be found, most equivalents must be selected on the basis of common situational range. The lexical item of the target language must have some situational features in common with the lexical item from the source language which it replaces. Lexical units are vehicles for the transmission of semantic components. What is important is not the units (words) themselves but the fact that the relevant componential features are lexically transmitted. As has been said earlier, the translator must decide the form and the content of the original in a way that will have the same effect on its readers as the source language had on its readers.

In the transfer of referential content there is an inevitable alteration in meaning, generally associated with some degree of loss. In the translation of literary works, the loss may be substantial, for literary quality implies

the greatest employment of the genius of the original language structure. To duplicate the same degree of quality in the receptor language demands exceptional ability.

In the discussion of meaning, it is important to note what has been said earlier about the distinction between literal or faithful translation. Close translation is an ideal, a working principle, not an unbreakable law. Einar Haugen has written in his article On Translating from the Scandinavian:

"a faithful translation must be both literal and free. That is, it must convey in the new language both the content and the form of the message: not only what the original says, but also the way in which it is said."<sup>3</sup>

In rendering the Icelandic Sagas into English, a translator would be expected to adhere as closely as is reasonably possible both to the words and order of the original. In this way it is possible to keep the distortion of the style and content of the original to a minimum.

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<sup>3</sup>Einar Haugen, On Translating from the Scandinavian (In Old Norse Literature and Mythology, ed. E.C. Polomé, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969.) p 7.

The following selections illustrate the use of literal and free translation as has been employed by various translators of the Icelandic sagas:

Njal's Saga

"Síðan tóku þeir eld ok gerðu bál mikit fyrir dyrunum. Þá mælti Skarphedinn: "Eld kveykvið þér nú, sveinar! Hvárt skal nú búa til seyðis?" Grani svaraði: "Svá skal þat vera, ok skaltú eigi þurfa heitara at baka." Skarphedinn mælti: "Því launar þú mér, sem þú ert maðr til, er ek hefnda föður þíns, ok virðir þat meira, er þér er óskyldara."

(Fornrit ed. pp. 328)

"Now they took fire, and made a great pile before the doors. Then Skarphedinn said, "What, lads! are ye lighting a fire, or are ye taking to cooking?"

"So it shall be," answered Grani Gunnar's son; "and thou shalt not need to be better done."

"Thou repayest me," said Skarphedinn, "as one may look for from the man that thou art. I avenged thy father, and thou settest most store by that duty which is farthest from thee."

(G.W. Dasent)

"Then they kindled a fire and made a great blaze in front of the doors.

Skarp-Hedin said, "So you're making a fire now lads! Are you thinking of doing some cooking? 'Yes,' said Grani, 'and you won't need it any hotter for roasting.' 'So this is your way,' said Skarp-Hedinn, of repaying me for avenging your father, the only way you know; you value more highly the obligation that has less claim on you."

(Magnusson and Pálsson)

Magnússon and Pálsson's version of this passage is markedly different from that of G.W. Dasent. Dasent worked on a close translation, at times, too close to the words of the original to give the sense intended by the author. It appears as if he tries to make his English imitate the Icelandic. "Now they took fire" (Síðan tóku þeir eld) is a very literal translation. In longer passages of an overly literal translation, the reader often becomes confused by the unfamiliarity of the sentence structure. In their Introduction to *Njáls Saga*, Magnússon and Pálsson comment on Dasent's 1861 version of the saga:

"It was a magnificent and pioneering work, scrupulously accurate and heroically phrased; but it has a deliberately archaic flavour, a too-literal rendering of the Icelandic style and syntax, that makes it unnecessarily alien to the modern reader."<sup>4</sup>

Magnússon and Pálsson translate in the more modern idiom. This makes the saga easier to read. As the example shows, they often deviate substantially from the words of the original and condense or paraphrase the content. There is, of course, a certain amount of danger involved in translating a saga text into the current idiom of

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<sup>4</sup>Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson, *Njal's Saga* (Aylesbury and Slough: Hazell Watson and Viney Ltd., 1960) p 33.

the twentieth century. The modern phrase which is used to fit the sentiments of today undoubtedly distorts the sentiments of the thirteenth-century saga age. Magnússon and Pálsson's "sliced him in two", found in *Njal's Saga*, Ch. 63, does in some way translate the phrase "höggr hann í sundr", however, the verb 'sliced' is too modern for the above context. A translator of the sagas must be aware of the pitfalls which his own language habits may create for him. Too modern an idiom may result in misrepresentation.

The following passage, selected from *Egil's Saga*, further illustrates the problematic effects which strict adherence to either literal or free translation may have:

"Ver þú vel við," segir Egill, þótt ek bökumk við eldinn, ok mýkjumsk vér við um rúmin." Statt þú upp," segir hon, ok gakk til rúms þíns ok lát oss vinna verk vár."

Þat var enn eitt sinn, er Egill gekk til elds at verma sik, þá spurði maðr hann, hvárt honum væri kalt á fótum ok bað hann eigi rétta of nær eldinum.

(Fornrit ed. pp 295-6)

"Be you civil," said Egil, "though I bask by the fire, and let us bear and forbear about place. "Stand you up," said she, and go to your seat and let us do our work.

Again, once when Egil went to the fire to warm himself, a man asked him whether his feet were cold, and warned him not to put them too near the fire."

(Rev. Green)

"Be content thou," said Egil, "though I bake myself by the fire, and let us be kind and give place to one another." "Stand thou up," said she, "and get thee to thy place and let us get out work done."

That was yet another time when Egil got him to the fire to warm himself, then asked a man of him whether he was cold in the feet, and bade him not stretch them out too near the fire."

(E.R. Eddison)

"Be easy," said Egil, "though I toast myself by the fire, and let us give and take a little here." "Stand up," she ordered. Be off with you to your place, and let us get on with our work.

It happened one time again when Egil went to the fire to warm himself, that a man asked him whether his feet were cold, and warned him not to stretch them too near the fire."

(Gwyn Jones)

Eddison and Green closely adhere to both the words and order of the original. The verbal faithfulness of 'Be you civil' is harder to justify than Jones' more natural 'Be easy'. The translations of Rev. Green and E.R. Eddison sound abrupt.

Gwyn Jones, however, overcomes this abruptness by using a free translation. At the same time his translation is quite faithful to the original.

The following section offers a critical analysis of lexical items of a chapter chosen from five different Family Sagas: Njal's Saga, Egil's Saga, Laxdæla Saga, Grettir's Saga and Hrafnkel's Saga.

A substantial amount of text has been examined from each saga and the special chapters chosen for investigation have been selected on the basis of their being representative of the works at hand. Since the saga translators have based their translations on editions following different manuscripts, it has not always been possible to compare the different translations item for item.<sup>5</sup>

Nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives and prepositions are the primary lexical units examined in this section. The context is given in instances where the lexical item cannot be illustrated in isolation.

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<sup>5</sup>Where applicable, the standard editions of the Íslenszk fornrit series (Vols. II, V, VII, XI, XII) have been used as the original edition.

## NJAL'S SAGA

Njal's Saga has come to be known as the greatest of the Icelandic sagas. There are three different English translations of this saga. The first one, *The Story of Burnt Njal*, is by Sir George Webbe Dasent, 1861.<sup>6</sup> The second translation by Carl F. Bayerschmidt and Lee M. Hollander did not appear until 1955. The third translation, by Magnus Magnússon and Hermann Pálsson appeared in 1960.

Njal's Saga - The Story of Burnt Njal, Ch. 61:  
translated by G.W. Dasent.

I Nú er þar til at taka

Ice: Nú er þar til máls at taka  
Lit: Now we must there begin our speech  
Dasent: Now we must go back and say  
Comment: Acceptable

I<sup>2</sup> æja: (to stop, rest the horses, rest yourself and eat)

Ice: ok það hann eia þar  
Lit: and bid him stop and rest there  
Dasent: and bade them lie down and rest there  
Comment: Slight change in meaning.

I<sup>3</sup> lét illa (láta illa: behave badly)

Ice: Hann sofnaði fast ok lét illa í svefni  
Lit: He slept soundly and behaved badly in his sleep.  
Dasent: He fell fast asleep, and struggled much as he slumbered.  
Comment: Difficult phrase. Acceptable translation.

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<sup>6</sup>Dasent based his translation on the ed. Sagan af Niáli Þórgeirssyni ok Sonvm Hans by Ólafur Olavius, Kaupmannahavfn, 1772.

- I<sup>4</sup> skikkjunni (skikkja: a cloak)
- Ice: ok varp síðan af sér skikkjunni  
 Lit: and then threw off his cloak  
 Dasent: and threw off his shield from him  
 Comment: Information of the original not clearly conveyed here.
- II Njal's Saga Ch. 63: translated by L. Hollander and C.F. Bayerschmidt
- II<sup>1</sup> eggjaði (at eggja: to egg on, incite, goad)
- Ice: Síðan eggjaði Starkaðr sína menn  
 Lit: Then Starkad egged his men on  
 H.&B.: Thereupon Starkad urged his men on  
 Comment: 'Urged' is a weaker, less forceful word than 'egged'.  
 The context requires a stronger word.
- II<sup>2</sup> snúa (snúa: turn)
- Ice: snúa þeir þá fram í nesit at þeim  
 Lit: they turned upon the three on the headland.  
 H.&B.: they advanced upon the three on the headland.  
 Comment: Inappropriate verb choice.
- II<sup>3</sup> Kom í gegnum (koma í gegnum: come through)
- Ice: ok kom á hann miðjan ok í gegnum hann  
 Lit: and hit him in the middle and through him  
 H.&B.: It struck him in the middle, came out through him  
 Comment: Effective restructuring. Adequate translation.
- II<sup>4</sup> bani (bani: death)
- Ice: ok varð þat hans bani  
 Lit: and that caused his death  
 H.&B.: so that he, too, was killed  
 Comment: Word 'too' not in the original. 'Bani' means death, not 'killed'.
- II<sup>5</sup> bardagi (bardagi: battle)
- Ice: Er þá bardagi inn harðasti lengi  
 Lit: The battle was long and hard.  
 H.&B.: It was a very bitter struggle.  
 Comment: 'Struggle' less forceful than 'battle'.

II<sup>6</sup> berskjaldaðr

Ice: er ek var berskjaldaðr  
 Lit: for being without shield (unprotected)  
 H.&B.: from not being covered with my shield  
 Comment: Difficult expression. 'Unprotected'  
 may represent the meaning more accurately.

II<sup>7</sup> höggur (höggva: strike a blow, smite)

Ice: hleypr hann at Gunnari ok höggur til hans  
 Lit: ran at Gunnar and struck at him  
 H.&B.: rushed at Gunnar and leveled a blow at him.  
 Comment: 'Leveled a blow'; not as strong an impact  
 on the reader as 'struck' would have.

II<sup>8</sup> hönd (hand: a hand)

Ice: en Gunnarr hjó hönd af Öttari í ölbogabót  
 Lit: but Gunnar cut off Öttar's forearm  
 H.&B.: Gunnar lopped off Öttar's arm at the elbow.  
 Comment: Well translated. 'Arm' must replace 'hönd'  
 in this context for a hand cannot be  
 chopped off at the elbow.

II<sup>9</sup> ekki er við menn

Ice: Flýjum nú, ekki er við menn um at eiga  
 Lit: Let us flee now, these are not human  
 beings we are fighting.  
 H.&B.: Let us flee, now; we are fighting trolls  
 not men!  
 Comment: 'trolls' not in the original. Something  
 'not human' is implied but not  
 elaborated upon.

II<sup>10</sup> hörmuðu (að harma: to mourn)

Ice: Margir menn hörmuðu hann.  
 Lit: Many men mourned him.  
 H.&B.: Many men mourned his death.  
 Comment: Good translation. The Icelandic 'hann'  
 must be replaced in English by 'his death'.

III Njal's Saga Ch. 62-63: translated by  
M. Magnusson and H. Pálsson

III<sup>1</sup> æja (að á: to stop, rest the horses, rest  
yourself and eat)

Ice: ok bað hann pá æja  
Lit: and bid him stop and rest there  
M.&P.: and asked his brothers to make a halt  
Comment: The idea of 'rest' is not implied in  
'make a halt'. One can stop, yet not  
rest.

III<sup>2</sup> English 'out' added

Ice: Njóta skal hann draums síns.  
Lit: let him dream his dream.  
M.&P.: let him dream his dream out.  
Comment: 'Out' not in the original. It tends  
to weaken the sentence.

III<sup>3</sup> Þóttumsk (þykkjask: to feel as if)

Ice: at ek þóttumsk ríða fram hjá  
Knafahólum  
Lit: that I seemed to be riding past  
Knafahólum  
M.&P.: that I was riding past Knafahills  
Comment: the original uses 'seemed'. Appropriate  
in this context for Gunnar was dreaming.

III<sup>4</sup> Þóttumsk ek sjá

Ice: Þar þóttumsk ek sjá marga varga.  
Lit: I thought I saw many wolves.  
M.&P.: and in my dream I saw a pack of wolves.  
Comment: 'in my dream' is unnecessary for the  
sentence begins 'I dreamt'.

III<sup>5</sup> marga (margr: many)

Ice: ek sjá marga varga.  
Lit: I saw many wolves.  
M.&P.: I saw a pack of wolves.  
Comment: 'pack' is effective use of diction. It  
implies security in number which is  
implied in the original. An analogy  
is made between the band of men and  
the pack of wolves.

III<sup>6</sup> snerumsk undan (snúask undan: turn away from)

Ice: en ek snerumsk undan fram at Rangá  
 Lit: and I escaped from them to Rang River  
 M.&P.: I retreated down to Rang River.  
 Comment: Effective word choice. 'Retreated'  
 more in keeping with the heroic  
 character of Gunnar.

III<sup>7</sup> hlífða ek mér pá ekki

Ice: as above  
 Lit: could not shield myself  
 M.&P.: and did not know what was protecting me  
 Comment: Complete meaning not transferred.  
 The motivation for not using the  
 shield is not conveyed.

III<sup>8</sup> hafði (hafa: to have)

Ice: ok hafði einn hjartat í munni sér  
 Lit: and one had his heart in his mouth  
 M.&P.: and one of them seized his heart in  
 its jaws  
 Comment: 'seized' is a good choice here. It is  
 in keeping with the force and savageness  
 of the battle.

III<sup>9</sup> munni (munnr - muðr: mouth)

Ice: ok hafði einn hjartat í munni sér  
 Lit: and one had his heart in his mouth  
 M.&P.: and one of them seized his heart in its  
 jaws  
 Comment: 'jaws' is a good equivalent for 'munni'.  
 It successfully reproduces the suggested  
 comparison between men and wolves.

III<sup>10</sup> nú (nú: now)

Ice: Hvat skal nú til ráða?  
 Lit: What should we do now?  
 M.&P.: What shall we do?  
 Comment: 'Now' omitted in translation. Necessary  
 to indicate a new set of circumstances.

III<sup>11</sup> ek get

Ice: ek get, at þú vilir eigi renna undan þeim.  
 Lit: I surmise, that you do not want to run  
 from them.  
 M.&P.: I take it you don't intend to run from them.  
 Comment: Quite modern phrase. Literal rendering  
 would seem more appropriate.

- III<sup>12</sup> törguskjöld (törguskjöldr: target shield)
- Ice: ok hafði törguskjöld einbyrðan  
 Lit: and had a target shield in one hand  
 M.&P.: with a thin round shield in one hand  
 Comment: Description given rather than an equivalent word. The term is not familiar to the modern reader.
- III<sup>13</sup> stóð nökkut höllum fæti
- Ice: Gunnar stóð<sup>6</sup>nökkut höllum fæti.  
 Lit: Gunnar stood with one leg rather bent.  
 M.&P.: He pivoted on one foot.  
 Comment: Situation not implied in the original. Two sentences of the original combined into one in translation.
- III<sup>14</sup> Hvárt nam þik eða eiqi?
- Ice: as above  
 Lit: Did I hit you or not?  
 M.&P.: Did that one land or not?  
 Comment: Acceptable
- III<sup>15</sup> höggur (höggva: strike, cut)
- Ice: ok höggur hann í sundr í miðju  
 Lit: and cut him in two at the waist  
 M.&P.: and sliced him in two at the waist  
 Comment: Verb 'sliced' too modern for the context. 'cut' more in keeping with the type of battle described.

As was pointed out earlier, Sir George Webbe Dasent produced a close (literal) translation of Njal's Saga. The examples reveal a rigid adherence to the original. In his introduction, Dasent says he "has withstood the temptation to use Old English words" and has avoided expressions "which are not still in every-day use".<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>G.W. Dasent, The Story of Burnt Njal (Edinburgh 1861) 1. XIV - XV

Yet, there are numerous instances of forms like 'sore afraid' and 'redes'. On the whole, Dasent produced a reasonably faithful translation, even though incorrect renderings of lexical items are quite frequent. Inaccuracies of this kind can no doubt be attributed to an overly literal reproduction.

Hollander and Bayerschmidt's translation is in a much more modern idiom than the Dasent translation, and it is therefore easier to read. The two translators often deviate from the words of the original and give the meaning of the text in their own terms. However, their interpretation of the lexical items of the original in examples II<sup>2</sup>, II<sup>5</sup>, and II<sup>9</sup> is open to question.

Perhaps the most accurate rendition of lexical items of this saga is to be found in the translation by Magnusson and Pálsson, where the original text has been adequately reproduced. The two translators favour free rendering as is borne out by the numerous instances where a single sentence in the translation represents one or more sentences in the original.

Egil's saga has been translated into English

three times, by W.C. Green in 1893, by E.R. Eddison in 1930, and by Gwyn Jones in 1960. A lexical analysis of chapter 85 follows:

Egil's Saga - The Story of Egil Skallagrímsson Ch. 85:  
translated by W.C. Green

I<sup>1</sup> gerðisk hann þungfærr

Ice: en í elli hans gerðisk hann þungfærr  
Lit: but in his old age he began to find it difficult to move about  
Green: and in his old age he became heavy in movement.  
Comment: Difficult phrase to translate. The idea is conveyed here.

I<sup>2</sup> glapnaði (glapna: grow dim)

Ice: ok glapnaði honum bæði heyrn ok sýn  
Lit: both hearing and sight began to play tricks on him  
Green: dull both in hearing and sight  
Comment: 'Dull' is not specific enough here. Too general a term.

I<sup>3</sup> bóndi (bóndi: a farmer)

Ice: Þá segir Grímr bóndi  
Lit: Then said farmer Grim  
Green: Then said the master Grim  
Comment: 'Bóndi' is simply a farmer. 'Master' may be too strong for the context.

I<sup>4</sup> mýkjumsk vér við um rúmin

Ice: Þótt ek bökumk við eldinn, ok mýkjumsk vér við um rúmin  
Lit: though I warm myself by the fire, and let us make space for each other  
Green: though I bask by the fire, and let us bear and forbear about space  
Comment: Difficult phrase. Meaning comes through.

I<sup>5</sup> bökumk (baka: to warm body and limbs by open fire)

Ice: þótt ek bökumk við eldinn  
 Lit: though I warm myself by the fire  
 Green: though I bask by the fire  
 Comment: 'Bask' is a questionable equivalent and perhaps too descriptive.

I<sup>6</sup> ok er ofdaufligt sjónleysit

Ice: as above  
 Lit: dismal is sightlessness  
 Green: a very dismal thing is blindness  
 Comment: A difficult expression is translated forcefully and effectively.

I<sup>7</sup> öndverðum (öndverðr: first part, early)

Ice: þat var á dögum Hákonar ins ríka öndverðum  
 Lit: It was in the early days of Hakon the Great.  
 Green: In the later days of Hakon the Great  
 Comment: Mistranslation.

I<sup>8</sup> sá (sá: sow)

Ice: síðan ætla ek at sá silfrinu  
 Lit: then I intend to saow the silver  
 Green: then I mean to sow broadcast the silver  
 Comment: 'Broadcast' is added for no apparent reason. Unusual in this context.

I<sup>9</sup> undarligt (undarliggr: strange)

Ice: ok þykki mér undarligt  
 Lit: and I would think it strange  
 Green: and I shall be surprised  
 Comment: Significant difference between the original and translation.

I<sup>10</sup> firnum (firn: outrage)

Ice: svá miklum firnum  
 Lit: so great an outrage  
 Green: such monstrous folly  
 Comment: 'folly' may be considered out of place here. Unacceptable term for the context.

I<sup>11</sup> selför (mountain pasture shieling)

- Ice: At Mosfelli var höfð selför  
 Lit: At Mosfelli was a mountain pasture shieling.  
 Green: At Moss-fell were the summer sheds of the milch kine.  
 Comment: A difficult word to translate. Green elects to explain the term.

I<sup>12</sup> klæði góð

- Ice: Þá lét Grímr fara Egil í klæði góð.  
 Lit: Grim had Egil dressed in fine clothes.  
 Green: Then Grim had Egil dressed in goodly raiment.  
 Comment: Perfectly adequate translation.

Egil's Saga Ch. 85: translated by E.R. Eddison

II<sup>1</sup> gerðisk hann þungfærr

- Ice: en í elli hans gerðisk hann þungfærr  
 Lit: but in his old age he began to find it difficult to move about  
 Eddison: but in his old age he began to be heavy of movement  
 Comment: An adequate version.

II<sup>2</sup> glapnaði (glapna: become dim)

- Ice: ok glapnaði honum bæði heyrn ok sýn  
 Lit: and both hearing and sight began to play tricks on him.  
 Eddison: and he was dull both of hearing and sight  
 Comment: Quite literal reproduction.

II<sup>3</sup> Farinn ertu nú, Egill, með öllu, er þú fellr einn saman

- Ice: as above  
 Lit: Now you are finished, Egill, if you fall alone.  
 Eddison: Shent art thou now Egil, altogether, sith thou fallest of thine own self.  
 Comment: Verbose. Confusing mode of expression.

II<sup>4</sup> matseljan (matselja: woman in charge of cooking)

Ice: matseljan ræddi um, at þat var undr mikít

Lit: The lady in charge of cooking, remarked that it was a great wonder.

Eddison: The kitchen-wench talked of it, that that was a great wonder.

Comment: Example of an antiquated English word restricted to dialect.

II<sup>5</sup> Ver þú vel við

Ice: as above

Lit: React kindly to this.

Eddison: Be content thou.

Comment: Overly literal rendering. Meaning not clear.

II<sup>6</sup> bökumk (baka,-bakask: to warm body and limbs by open fire)

Ice: Þótt ek bökumk við eldinn

Lit: though I warm myself by the fire

Eddison: though I bake myself by the fire

Comment: Undesirably literal rendering.

II<sup>7</sup> Statt þú upp

Ice: "Statt þú upp," segir hon

Lit: "Stand up," says she.

Eddison: "Stand thou up," saith she.

Comment: Word-for-word translation. Unacceptable in English.

II<sup>8</sup> ok er ofdaufliqt sjónleysit

Ice: as above

Lit: dismal is sightlessness

Eddison: and over-deaflike tis, this loss of eyesight

Comment: 'Over-deaflike' is an ambiguous term.

II<sup>9</sup> tíqi (tigr: decade)

Ice: Þá var Egill Skalla-Grímsson á níunda tíqi.

Lit: Then Egil Skallagrimson was in the ninth decade of years.

Eddison: Then was Egil Skallagrimson in the ninth-ten years of his age.

Comment: Overly literal translation.

II<sup>10</sup> undarligt (undr-ligr: strange, wonderful)  
 Ice: ok þykki mér undarligt, ef allir skipta vel sín i milli  
 Lit: and I would think it strange if all share it evenly among them  
 Eddison: 'twill be wonderful if they all divide it well betwixt 'em  
 Comment: Incorrect choice.

II<sup>11</sup> hvarflaði (hvarfla: wander)  
 Ice: Þá sá þeir, at Egill hvarflaði á holtinu  
 Lit: then they saw Egil wandering on the mound  
 Eddison: then saw they how Egil staggered on the mound  
 Comment: A distinction must be made between 'wandered' and 'staggered'.

Egil's Saga Ch. 85: translated by Gwyn Jones

III<sup>1</sup> með öllu (completely, entirely)  
 Ice: Egill varð með öllu sjónlauss.  
 Lit: Egill became completely blind.  
 Jones: Egill grew quite blind.  
 Comment: Distinction must be made here between 'quite' and 'entirely' for the understanding of later events.

III<sup>2</sup> matseljan (matselja: woman in charge of cooking)  
 Ice: matseljan ræddi um  
 Lit: the lady in charge of cooking remarked  
 Jones: the housekeeper prated  
 Comment: Questionable rendering. Distinction must be maintained among the various people in the house.

III<sup>3</sup> ver þú vel við  
 Ice: "Ver þú vel við," segir Egill.  
 Lit: "React kindly to this," says Egill.  
 Jones: "Be easy," said Egill.  
 Comment: Appropriate translation. Conveys the idea of 'react more kindly'.

III<sup>4</sup> bökumk (baka, bakask: to warm and rub the limbs before an open fire)

Ice: þótt ek bökumk við eldinn  
 Lit: though I warm myself by the fire  
 Jones: though I toast myself by the fire  
 Comment: Overly literal rendering. Inappropriate to the context.

III<sup>5</sup> bað hann (biðja: ask)

Ice: ok bað hann eigi rétta of nær eldinum  
 Lit: and asked him not to stretch too near the fire  
 Jones: and warned him not to stretch them too near the fire  
 Comment: 'Warn' is well chosen. It is appropriate as Egill was blind.

III<sup>6</sup> tók því seinliga

Ice: Grímr tók því seinliga.  
 Lit: Grímr was slow to agree.  
 Jones: Grímr was reluctant to agree.  
 Comment: 'Reluctant' - effective word selection.

III<sup>7</sup> hvarflaði (hvarfla: to wander)

Ice: En um morgininn, er menn risu upp, þá sá þeir, at Egill hvarflaði á holtinu.  
 Lit: But in the morning, when men rose, they saw Egil wandering on the mound.  
 Jones: But in the morning when men rose, they could see Egil blundering about on the mound.  
 Comment: Misrepresentation of the original.

III<sup>8</sup> garð (garðr: enclosure)

Ice: Fyrir austan garð at Mosfelli  
 Lit: East of the homefield at Mosfell  
 Jones: East of the garth at Mosfell  
 Comment: Word restricted to dialect.

III<sup>9</sup> muni þar fét hafa fólgið

- Ice: geta sumir menn þess, at Egill muni þar fét hafa fólgið.  
 Lit: some men guess that there Egill hid his money  
 Jones: some guess that Egill will have hidden  
 Comment: Incorrect verb rendering. Original refers to a past event.

III<sup>10</sup> hauga-eldr (hauga-eldr: cairn fire)

- Ice: því at þangat er optliga sénn hauga-eldr  
 Lit: for often cairn fires are seen there  
 Jones: for howe-fire is often seen that way  
 Comment: Word limited to dialect.

III<sup>11</sup> færa í (put into)

- Ice: Þá lét Grímr færa Egill í klæði góð.  
 Lit: Grim had Egill dressed in fine clothes.  
 Jones: Grim had Egill shifted into fine clothes.  
 Comment: Doubtful rendering of verb.

The preceding chapter analysis shows that W.C. Green's translation from 1893 has a number of questionable renderings which do not transmit the precise meaning of the original. Rev. Green states in his Introduction that:

"The prose of the Saga presents few difficulties to a translator. Icelandic prose, as regards order of words, is simple and runs naturally enough into English."<sup>8</sup>

8

Rev. W.C. Green, The Story of Egil Skallagrímsson, (London: Elliot Stock and Paternoster Row, 1893) IX

The main difficulty is that of being able to translate the living word. The stylistic simplicity and lack of ornamentation in a saga text may be quite deceptive. The outward simplicity of Icelandic prose has a complex inner structure which makes heavy demands on the translator.

E. R. Eddison, in the essay appended to his translation of Egil's Saga, claims that a good translation must reproduce the original word by word. Yet one might question the literalness of "Egil became all frowning: seemed to himself to have lost much fee there, and nowise rightfully." As the analysis indicates, this translation, in a number of instances, does not accurately represent the quality of the original. For example, in II<sup>10</sup>, "wonderful" is not the correct choice of equivalent for "undarligt" in this context.

Of the translations of Egil's Saga, the one by Gwyn Jones is the most readable. On the whole, it has rendered lexical units both effectively and accurately. However, one occasionally finds examples of overly precise rendering.

The following is a comparison of three translations of Laxdæla Saga: Chapter 46.

Laxdæla Saga Ch. 46: translated by Muriel Press.

I<sup>1</sup> mönnum (maðr: man)

Ice: á með inum yngrum mönnum  
Lit: among the younger men  
Press: between the younger people  
Comment: Shift in the significance of meaning.

I<sup>2</sup> bauð (bjóða: invite)

Ice: bauð þá hvárr þeira öðrum til sín  
Lit: each one invited the other to come.  
Press: and they each asked the others to  
their houses  
Comment: Questionable verb translation.  
Phrase added.

I<sup>3</sup> sómi at vera

Ice: Þá þætti hvárum mestr sómi at vera.  
Lit: as many men as each thought it the  
greatest honor to bring  
Press: as many men as each deemed most  
honorable to himself  
Comment: Insufficient conveyance of information.

I<sup>4</sup> steypði yfir sik: (hurriedly put on)

Ice: steypði yfir sik skarlatskyrtli  
rauðum  
Lit: hurriedly put on a scarlet tunic  
Press: slipped on a red kirtle of scarlet  
Comment: Does not convey the element of  
'hurry'.

I<sup>5</sup> í hljóði: (in silence)

Ice: Annan dag eptir ræddi Guðrún í  
hljóði til Hrefnu.  
Lit: Next day, Gudrun asked Hrefna in silence.  
Press: The next day Gudrun spoke on the sly to  
Hrefna  
Comment: Pedestrian phrase.

I<sup>6</sup> Lauk upp (ljúka upp: unlock)

Ice: Lauk Hrefna upp kistu  
Lit: Hrefna unlocked a chest.  
Press: and Hrefna opened a chest  
Comment: Loses importance of chest being locked.

I<sup>7</sup> guðvefjarpoka (guðvefjarpoki: velvet bag)

Ice: ok tók þar upp guðvefjarpoka  
 Lit: and took out a velvet bag  
 Press: and took out the pocket of costly stuff.  
 Comment: Misleading. Inadequate word choice.

I<sup>8</sup> Hér skulu vér fara með sem hljóðast

Ice: As above  
 Lit: We shall keep quiet about this.  
 Press: We must go about this most gently.  
 Comment: Meaning not clearly conveyed.

I<sup>9</sup> hugleiða: (watch)

Ice: Án inn hvíti skyldi ríða með liði  
 Ósvífrs ok hugleiða afhvarf manna...  
 Lit: Án the white was to ride with the  
 Ósvif's group and watch if any man left.  
 Press: An the white had to ride with Ósvif's  
 company, and to keep an eye upon men  
 turning aside.  
 Comment: Colloquid expression.

I<sup>10</sup> fylgði (fylgja: accompany)

Ice: Án fylgði þeim til Laxár.  
 Lit: Án accompanied them to Laxár.  
 Press: An followed him all the way unto  
 Salmon-river.  
 Comment: Mistranslation.

Laxdæla Saga Ch. 46: translated by Margaret Arent.

II<sup>1</sup> þústr: (anger)

Ice: Þótt nökkut væri þústr á með inum  
 yngnum mönnum.  
 Lit: though there was ill feeling among the  
 younger men  
 Arent: though there was some friction between the  
 young people  
 Comment: 'Friction' inappropriate. 'Between'  
 is used where 'among' would be the  
 correct term.

- II<sup>2</sup> bezta grip (gripr: treasure)
- Ice: ok sýna mönnum svá inn bezta grip,  
er komit hafði til Íslands
- Lit: and show the people the greatest  
treasure that had ever come to  
Iceland
- Arent: and show the people this fabulous  
adornment, the likes of which had  
never before been seen in Iceland.
- Comment: Too rapturous phraseology.
- II<sup>3</sup> heyrði (heyra: hear)
- Ice: Kjartan var hjá ok þó eigi allnær  
ok heyrði hvat Guðrún mælti.
- Lit: Kjartan was near by, although not  
very near them, and heard what  
Guðrun said.
- Arent: Kjartan was standing a little way  
off, yet within earshot, and heard  
what Guðrun said.
- Comment: Idiom overly modern.
- II<sup>4</sup> mestu (meiri: mestr: greatest)
- Ice: Þykki mér skipta, at Hrefna eigi  
ina mestu gersemi.
- Lit: I think it more important, that  
Hrefna will own the greatest treasure.
- Arent: I deem it more important that Hrefna  
own this most costly treasure.
- Comment: Phraseology overly descriptive.
- II<sup>5</sup> í hljóði: (in silence, private)
- Ice: ræddi Guðrún í hljóði til Hrefnu
- Lit: Guðrun asked Hrefna in private.
- Arent: Guðrun asked Hrefna on the sly.
- Comment: Questionable equivalent expression.
- II<sup>6</sup> skyldu vera skyldu: (vera: to be)(skyldr: should)
- Ice: hon hvað svá vera skyldu
- Lit: She agreed to do this.
- Arent: Hrefna promised to do so.
- Comment: Significant difference between 'agree'  
and 'promise'.

II<sup>7</sup> tók (taka: take)

Ice: en ór pokaum tók hon motrinn  
 Lit: and from the bag she took out the  
 headdress  
 Arent: and pulled out the headdress  
 Comment: 'Anticipation' implied where there is  
 none in the original.

II<sup>8</sup> löst né lof (löstr: fault) (lof: good report)

Ice: ok ræddi hvárki um löst né lof  
 Lit: but made no comment neither good nor bad  
 Arent: but had not a word to say, neither  
 praise nor blame  
 Comment: 'Blame' - unsuitable here. The context  
 does not imply 'blame'.

II<sup>9</sup> lauk upp (ljúka upp: unlock)

Ice: Lauk Hrefna upp kistu.  
 Lit: Hrefna unlocked a chest.  
 Arent: Hrefna opened up a chest.  
 Comment: The fact that the chest was locked not  
 represented in the translation.

Laxdæla Saga Ch. 46: translated by Thorstein Veblen.

III<sup>1</sup> þat sumar

Ice: Þat sumar hafði Óláfr heimboð.  
 Lit: That summer Olafur had a feast.  
 Veblen: This year Olaf gave a banquet.  
 Comment: Incorrect rendering of the word.

III<sup>2</sup> skarlataskyrtli (kyrtill: tunic)

Ice: ok steypði yfir sik skarlataskyrtli rauðum  
 Lit: and hurriedly putting on a scarlet tunic  
 Veblen: and was just putting on his red  
 scarlet coat  
 Comment: Similar but not precise.

III<sup>3</sup> hversu konum

Ice: hversu konum skyldi skipa í sæti  
 Lit: about the seating of the women  
 Veblen: about the order of seating  
 Comment: 'Women' must be included to give  
 meaning to the paragraph.

- III<sup>4</sup> falda: (cover the head)
- Ice: Ekki skal hon falda sér með motri.  
 Lit: She will not wear the headdress.  
 Veblen: She will not deck herself out with the bonnet.  
 Comment: Pedestrian style.
- III<sup>5</sup> eigi (eiga: own)
- Ice: Því at meira þykki mér, skipta, at Hrefna eigi ina mestu gersemi  
 Lit: for I think it more important, that Hrefna will own the greatest treasure.  
 Veblen: For it means more to me that Hrefna has got the best there is.  
 Comment: Affected. Unnecessary deviation from the original.
- III<sup>6</sup> at sinni: (for the time being)
- Ice: en boðsmenn hafi nú augnagaman af at sinni  
 Lit: than that guests should feast their eyes on it for the time being  
 Veblen: than to make a spectacle of it for the crowd of guests today  
 Comment: Meaning not clearly transmitted.
- III<sup>7</sup> poka (poki: bag)
- Ice: ok tók þar upp guðvefjarpoka  
 Lit: and took out a velvet bag  
 Veblen: and brought out a satin poka  
 Comment: Incorrect rendering of lexical unit.
- III<sup>8</sup> látit kyrrt (að láta kyrrt: keep quiet)
- Ice: Var nú látit kyrrt yfir þessu.  
 Lit: This was kept quiet.  
 Veblen: Nothing was done about this.  
 Comment: The meaning of the original text is incorrectly reproduced in translation.
- III<sup>9</sup> Kjartan hafði jafnan minni mætur á sverðinu síðan.
- Ice: As above.  
 Lit: Kjartan always valued the sword less than before.  
 Veblen: Kjartan was more careful of the sword after this.  
 Comment: Mistranslation.

Laxdæla Saga is one of the more popular Sagas and exists in six different English translations. All these were examined and then three of them selected for the present analysis.

Muriel Press translated the Laxdæla Saga in 1899. This edition is faithful to the original and moderate in its use of colloquialisms and esoteric cognates. On the whole, it is a very readable work. However, the preceding analysis has revealed many instances of questionable renderings.

In 1925 Thorstein Veblen's translation of Laxdæla Saga appeared. In the Introduction he acknowledges the translator's difficulty as follows:

"The run of idiom in the English language as now current is as widely out of touch with that of the Icelandic Saga as the current run of custom, knowledge, and belief among the English-speaking peoples is now out of touch with the arts of life in that archaic phase of their culture. Under these circumstances translation becomes in good part a work of makeshift and adumbration in which any consistently literal rendering of the text is out of the question."<sup>9</sup>

This point of view is reflected by the poor quality of the translation. A lexical analysis of

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Thorstein Veblen, The Laxdæla Saga (New York: B.W. Huebsch Inc., 1925.) X11

of a number of chapters reveals that this translator frequently deviates to a large degree from the words of the original. As the examples indicate, the choice of equivalent English lexical items often obscures the meaning of the original. Although a literal rendering is not possible, a translator should neither retrench nor recreate the ideas of the original text. "Makeshift" is an inappropriate method and an adequate literal rendering is not beyond the realm of possibility.

Margaret Arent comments in her Introduction on the very noticeable mistranslation by Veblen:

"Veblen's fault lies mainly in his inaccuracies and the poor edition of 1826 which he used as a basis for his translation."<sup>10</sup>

Margaret Arent's translation of *Laxdæla Saga* from 1964 is written in a modern and fluent idiom which reproduces the literary quality of the saga. There are some instances, however, of colloquial or pedestrian style which serves to reduce its effectiveness.

Grettr's Saga is the third Family Saga selected for the present analysis. It exists in only two English translations: the one by Eiríkr Magnússon

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(1) Margaret Arent, *The Laxdæla Saga* (New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964.) XXXIX

and William Morris published in 1869 under the title, *The Story of Grettir the Strong*, and the one by G.A. Hight, *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*, in 1965.

Grettr's Saga - The Story of Grettir the Strong Ch. 82

translated by W. Morris and E. Magnússon

I<sup>1</sup> stigann (stigi: ladder)

Ice: Hann skyldi eigi upp draga stigann.  
 Lit: He would not pull up the ladder.  
 M.&M.: He would not draw them up.  
 Comment: Incomplete transmission of information.

I<sup>2</sup> víst (víss: certain)

Ice: vitum þat fyrir víst  
 Lit: we know for certain  
 M.&M.: for, wot this well  
 Comment: Obscure meaning in this terminology.

I<sup>3</sup> kenndi (kenna: recognize)

Ice: Þorbjörn kenndi Glaum.  
 Lit: Thorbjorn recognized Glaum.  
 M.&M.: Therewith Thorbiorn knew Noise.  
 Comment: Distinction between the verbs must be made.

I<sup>4</sup> mannfýluna (mannfýla: rascal)

Ice: ok bað mannfýluna vaka  
 Lit: and bade the rascal awaken  
 M.&M.: and bade him, "Wake up beast."  
 Comment: The understatement of the original translated into a harshness.

I<sup>5</sup> ráðs (ráð: counsel, advice)

Ice: ef vér geymum ráðs at  
 Lit: if we act with caution  
 M.&M.: if we follow wary redes  
 Comment: Lexical archaism.

I<sup>6</sup> drep (drepa: kill)

Ice: ella drep ek þik  
 Lit: or I shall kill you  
 M.&M.: or else be slain of us.  
 Comment: More impact with "kill".

I<sup>7</sup> lögðu illt til (leggja illt til: reproach)

Ice: Margir lögðu illt til hans.  
 Lit: Many of them reproached him.  
 M.&M.: Then many laid evil things to his charge.  
 Comment: Literal rendering. Acceptable.

I<sup>8</sup> heldr: (rather)

Ice: ok knýr heldr fast, sagði Grettir  
 Lit: and knocks rather loud, said Grettir  
 M.&M.: Yea, yea, hard, and over hard.  
 Comment: Subtle understatement lost in translation.

I<sup>9</sup> tóptina (tópt: enclosure)

Ice: hljópu þeir ofan í tóptina.  
 Lit: they sprang in from above.  
 M.&M.: as he leapt in betwixt the walls  
 Comment: Unnecessary deviation from the original.

I<sup>10</sup> steypðisk (steypa, steypask: tumble down)

Ice: ok steypðisk búkrinn ofan á Gretti  
 Lit: and the body fell on Grettir  
 M.&M.: and the body so smitten atwain  
 tumbled over on to Grettir  
 Comment: Taken from a battle scene. The sentences are not long. Short sentences are in keeping with the swiftness of the action.

Grettir's Saga - The Saga of Grettir the Strong Ch. 82:

translated by G.A. Hight

- II<sup>1</sup> stundar fast: rather hard
- Ice: ok kómu við hurðina stundar fast  
 Lit: walked to the hut and struck the door  
 rather hard  
 Hight: went on to the hut and knocked  
 violently at the door  
 Comment: 'Violently' is too strong a word for  
 the context. Understatement is  
 intended by 'rather hard'.
- II<sup>2</sup> lagði (leggja: thrust at, lunge)
- Ice: ok í því lagði Þorbjörn Öngull í  
 milli herða honum  
 Lit: and with that Thorbjorn Angle thrust  
 at him between the shoulders  
 Hight: so that Thorbjorn Angle was able to  
 wound him severely  
 Comment: The force and abruptness is lost by  
 excluding 'between the shoulders'  
 from the translation.
- II<sup>3</sup> með öllu: (in all respects, completely)
- Ice: en Grettir var með öllu óvígur  
 Lit: but Grettir was completely unfit for  
 fighting  
 Hight: but Grettir was unfit for fighting  
 Comment: 'Completely' expresses total inability.
- II<sup>4</sup> til lands: (ashore)
- Ice: Skulu vér nú hafa höfuðit með oss  
 til lands.  
 Lit: We shall now take the head with us ashore.  
 Hight: We will take his head with us.  
 Comment: 'Ashore' reinforces the isolated, lonely  
 picture of Drangey, an offshore island.
- II<sup>5</sup> er þik hefir hent sú óvizka, at ráðask til  
 illvirkja með útleqðarmanni þessum
- Ice: as above.  
 Lit: that you should be so foolish as to commit  
 evil deeds with this outlaw  
 Hight: You should have committed such a folly  
 as to cast in your lot with this outlaw.  
 Comment: 'Folly' does not possess the same  
 intonations as 'foolish'.

- II<sup>6</sup> dræpr: (who may be killed with impunity)  
 Ice: ok verða fyrir þat dræpr ok ógildir  
 Lit: and be declared a man who may be killed unatoned  
 Hight: at last to die unatoned  
 Comment: Acceptable, however, the active form 'kill' has more impact than the passive 'die'.
- II<sup>7</sup> ofan á fordæðuskap  
 Ice: ok gerðuð svá mikit níðingsverk ofan á fordæðuskap  
 Lit: and then committed a base deed over and above witchcraft  
 Hight: Many a base deed did you do over and above your witchcraft.  
 Comment: 'Your' is misleading. The witchcraft was practised by the old hag, not Angle.
- II<sup>8</sup> ferð: (journey)  
 Ice: er í þessarríferð hafa verit  
 Lit: who have been on this journey  
 Hight: who has been with us on this occasion  
 Comment: 'Occasion' is unsatisfactory in this context.
- II<sup>9</sup> umtalsmál: (a thing worthy of discussion)  
 Ice: Þat þætti mér umtalsmál.  
 Lit: I would think it worthy of discussion.  
 Hight: I might have thought of it.  
 Comment: 'Value' or 'worth' not clearly projected.
- II<sup>10</sup> slíkr ódrengr (slíkr: such a) (ódrengr: deceitful man)  
 Ice: at vera slíkr ódrengr sem þú  
 Lit: by becoming such a deceitful man as you are  
 Hight: by becoming a poltroon like you  
 Comment: Uncommon word, restricted to dialect.

The Magnússon-Morris translation, The Story of Grettir the Strong, is essentially a literal word-

for-word rendering by the Icelfander, Eiríkr Magnússon. He understood and appreciated the quality of the original and tried to remain faithful to it. William Morris, on the other hand, was less proficient in Icelandic than his associate. It was Morris' task to give the text the kind of finishing touches which, unfortunately, brought with them a number of archaisms.<sup>11</sup> On the whole, it is the faithfulness to the original which holds the attention of the reader, whereas the use of archaisms and peculiarities of style drive him to distraction.

The twentieth century translation of Grettir's Saga by G.A. Hight possesses many of the qualities of a successful translation. The information of the original text is, in most cases, effectively presented.<sup>12</sup> However, as can be seen in the lexical analysis, the translator sometimes adds extraneous material, apparently for the purpose of clarity. In the Introduction, Hight readily acknowledges his deviations from the original in places where he found that these could be justified.

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<sup>11</sup> Archaism will be discussed in greater detail in the chapter on style.

<sup>12</sup> A list of original editions will be given in the Appendix.

Hrafnkel's Saga is the last saga to be included in the present analysis. Three translations of this work have appeared; by Vigfússon and Powell, 1905, Gwyn Jones, 1935, and Hermann Pálsson 1971.

Hrafnkel's Saga Ch. 4, 5, 6: translated by  
Vigfússon and Powell.

I<sup>1</sup> skiótan kost: (quick choice)

Ice: Ek goere þer skiótan kost.  
Lit: I give you a quick choice.  
V.&P.: I will soon tell thee my terms.  
Comment: Essentially the same meaning.

I<sup>2</sup> skilja á: (lay down the same conditions)

Ice: en bó vil - ek skilja á við þik einn hlut  
Lit: but I want to lay down the same  
conditions with you  
V.&P.: but I must point out one thing to thee  
Comment: Information is correct, however, the  
importance of the line is diminished.

I<sup>3</sup> orz-kviðr (orðskviðr: wise saying)

Ice: Þat er forn orz-kviðr.  
Lit: It is an old saying.  
V.&P.: It is an old saw.  
Comment: 'Saw' dated term.

I<sup>4</sup> Nú veiztu hvat ek hefe um mælt

Ice: as above.  
Lit: Now you know what vows I have made.  
V.&P.: Do thou pay heed to what I have  
spoken to thee on this head.  
Comment: Verbose, formal expression.

I<sup>5</sup> fyr framan: (in front of)

Ice: Hon fell fyr framan selet.  
Lit: It flowed in front of the shieling.  
V.&P.: That fell down from the shieling.  
Comment: Incorrect.

- I<sup>6</sup> eyronom (eyrr: gravel bank)
- Ice: en þar á eyronom lá fé  
 Lit: there on the gravel banks lay the sheep.  
 V.&P.: there on an eyre of land lay the sheep.  
 Comment: 'Eyre' - word limited to dialect.
- I<sup>7</sup> stóð-hrossen (stóð-hross: stud horse)
- Ice: Hann sér stóð-hrossen framm á eyronom.  
 Lit: Now he sees the horses farther down  
 on the gravel bank.  
 V.&P.: and now he saw the mob of horses in  
 front of him on the eyre.  
 Comment: 'Mob' questionable description for a  
 herd of horses.
- I<sup>8</sup> er aldri vóro væn at ganga undan manne
- Ice: as above.  
 Lit: though they had never before run away  
 from man  
 V.&P.: that had never been wont to stir when a  
 man went to them  
 Comment: Acceptable.
- I<sup>9</sup> kom í hug: (come into the mind) (lit.)
- Ice: Einare kom þat í hug.  
 Lit: It occurred to Einar.  
 V.&P.: It came into Einar's mind.  
 Comment: Overly literal.
- I<sup>10</sup> reiste (reisa: raise)
- Ice: ok reiste værðe  
 Lit: and raised a cairn  
 V.&P.: and reared a stone heap  
 Comment: Meaning essentially correct.

Hrafnkel's Saga Ch. 4, 5, 6: translated by Gwyn Jones

- II<sup>1</sup> mér þykkir þó illt at hafa órval af
- Ice: as above.  
 Lit: but I am unhappy to have to accept  
 what others did not want  
 Jones: and I think it ill to have one of the  
 leavings  
 Comment: Too dignified a phrase for a sentence  
 spoken by Einar.

- II<sup>2</sup> skilja á: (lay down conditions)
- Ice: En þó vil ek skilja á við þik einn hlut.  
 Lit: But I want to lay down the same conditions with you.  
 Jones: But I must get one thing straight with you.  
 Comment: Appropriate equivalent.
- II<sup>3</sup> flytr (flytja: move)
- Ice: ok flytr heim á Aðalból  
 Lit: and moves to Aðalból  
 Jones: shifted back to Manor  
 Comment: 'Shifted' questionable rendering.
- II<sup>4</sup> gilinu (gil: gully)
- Ice: heyrir hann sauðajarm fram með gilinu  
 Lit: he hears the bleating of sheep from the gully  
 Jones: heard the bleating of sheep from the ghyll  
 Comment: Word restricted to dialect.
- II<sup>5</sup> hátt: (loudly)
- Ice: hneggjaði hann þá hátt  
 Lit: then he neighed loudly  
 Jones: he neighed shrilly  
 Comment: Possible, but not effective in description of a horse.
- II<sup>6</sup> Þá sem þjónaði fyrir borðinu
- Ice: as above.  
 Lit: who was serving at the table.  
 Jones: who served within at table.  
 Comment: Awkward. Break in continuity.
- II<sup>7</sup> garprinn - gripprinn (gripr: possession, value)
- Ice: Hvat mun garprinn vilja.  
 Lit: What does the animal want.  
 Jones: What can the rascal want.  
 Comment: 'Rascal' fails to convey worth.
- II<sup>8</sup> Illu þykki mér
- Ice: as above.  
 Lit: it grieves me  
 Jones: I think it ill.  
 Comment: Acceptable. Conveys the meaning.

II<sup>9</sup> lofat (lofa: give permission to)

Ice: er þér var lofat  
 Lit: that you were given permission to use  
 Jones: that were at your service  
 Comment: Information successfully reproduced.

II<sup>10</sup> En við þann átrúnað, at ekki verði at þeim mönnum, er heitstrenqingar fella á sik

Ice: as above.  
 Lit: but it is my belief that evil befall those who break their solemn vows  
 Jones: But in the belief that nothing goes well with those men who draw down on them the curse for a broken oath.  
 Comment: Literal rendering not possible without some degree of loss of effect.

Hrafnkel's Saga Ch. 4, 5, 6: Translated by  
 Herman Pálsson

III<sup>1</sup> ráðit (ráða: hire)

Ice: Nú hefi ek ráðit öllum þjónum.  
 Lit: Now I have hired all my servants.  
 Pálsson: Now I've already engaged servants.  
 Comment: Transfers the meaning of the original sufficiently.

III<sup>2</sup> kost (kostn: choice)

Ice: Ek geri þér skjótan kost.  
 Lit: I give you a quick choice.  
 Pálsson: I'll make you a quick offer.  
 Comment: Successful translation.

III<sup>3</sup> leitar (leita: search)

Ice: Leitar Einar um alla haga.  
 Lit: Einar searches through all the pastures.  
 Pálsson: Einar scoured all the pastures.  
 Comment: Effectively reproduced in translation.

- III<sup>4</sup> finnr (finna: find)
- Ice: ok finnr eigi  
 Lit: but did not find them  
 Pálsson: without success  
 Comment: Essence is reproduced. Deviates from the words of the original.
- III<sup>5</sup> er heima hafði verið um kveldit
- Ice: as above.  
 Lit: that had been home during the evening.  
 Pálsson: which had been there the night before.  
 Comment: Departs from the wording of the original by re-arranging the sentence. Little difference in meaning.
- III<sup>6</sup> sér (sjá: see)
- Ice: Hann sér nú stóðhrossin.  
 Lit: Now he sees the horses.  
 Pálsson: Then he noticed the horses.  
 Comment: Elects to change the verb:  
 (að taka eftir: notice)
- III<sup>7</sup> eyrunum (eyrr: gravel bank of a river)
- Ice: fram á eyrunum  
 Lit: farther down on the gravel bank.  
 Pálsson: farther down by the river.  
 Comment: Acceptable translation.
- III<sup>8</sup> hyggur (hugsa: think)
- Ice: ok hyggur, at Hrafnkell mundi eigi vita, þótt hann riði hestinum  
 Lit: and thinks that Hrafnkell would not know though he rode the horse
- Pálsson: and decided to ride the stallion, thinking that Hrafnkell would never find out
- Comment: Verb change; information added which is not in the original.

III<sup>9</sup> Éigi mun þat góðu qegna

Ice: as above.

Lit: It does not bode any good.

Pálsson: There can be no good reason for this.

Comment: Sentence restructured for explanation.

III<sup>10</sup> at slíku telja (telja at: criticize, blame)

Ice: Hann kvæz ekki at slíku telja.

Lit: He said he would not criticize him  
for such matters.Pálsson: Hrafnkel said he didn't mind about the  
sheep.

Comment: Slight alteration of meaning.

In the Vigfússon and Powell translation lexical items have been reproduced with reasonable accuracy. The translators follow the original word-for-word, phrase-for-phrase. Additions are identified in footnotes or italics. An element of formality is added by the use of such forms as 'thou, thee, shalt, hast and wilt'. Instead of enhancing the quality of the translation this imposes a degree of distracting artificiality. One might question whether this manner of speech was customary in the saga age. Hrafnkel could hardly have been expected to be that formal when addressing his servant Einar. However, this formal mode of expression was in common usage in Iceland in 1905 when the saga was translated. In short, the translators are overly literal in their

rendering of lexical items. Despite an accurate reproduction, the work as a whole does not read well.

The translation of Hrafnkel Freysgoði's Saga by Gwyn Jones is in a modern idiom. The translator frequently uses eloquent phraseology which often fails to transfer the precise meaning of the original. There are isolated instances of words restricted to dialect. The translation seems to have been intended for the average reader, for it has few archaisms or foreign words. The translator describes his methods as follows:

"I have avoided on the one hand prosiness and a latinized vocabulary, and on the other that extraordinarily "precious" language of the full-blooded school that itself seems sometimes to need translation."<sup>13</sup>

Hermann Pálsson's translation of Hrafnkel's Saga is also written in the modern idiom which is familiar to the modern reader. He deviates substantially from the words of the original as a word-for-word, line-for-line comparison clearly reveals. The lexical items are, however, reproduced with a high degree of accuracy. Material

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Gwyn Jones, Four Icelandic Sagas (Princeton: University Press at Princeton, New York: American Scandinavian Foundation, 1935), preface.

is sometimes added for the purpose of clarification and there are instances of sentence rearrangement.

The following section offers a lexical analysis of translations of culture bound words and phrases.

One of the most difficult tasks of a translator is that of rendering certain "untranslatable" words - particular words of one language which have no precise equivalent in another, the very concept behind these words is hard to find in the second language. Translating languages of past ages further complicates the problem at hand. In this case the translator is dealing with a small, finite body of writing and is unable to utilize the readily available data of a contemporary language. Limited means make it difficult to determine the literary and colloquial associations of words, as well as the nature and importance of unfamiliar customs and institutions. Even though a translator is reasonably well versed in the source language, the incommunicability of its culture creates certain problems. Exactness of translation is, for example, often hindered by

diversity of national customs and linguistic conventions. How does a translator render the Icelandic "hlíð", for instance? Hlíð (Norse li) refers to a mountain side or slope. The following example, selected from Njal's Saga shows how various translators have attempted to deal with this lexical item:

Ice: "Fögr er hlíðin, svá at mér hefir hon aldri jafnfögr sýnz"<sup>14</sup>

Dasent: "Fair is the lithe; so fair that it has never seemed to me so fair;"

Holl. & Bayer.: "Fair is the slope, fairer it seems than I have ever seen it before,"

Mag. & Pálsson: "How lovely the slopes are," he said, "more lovely than they have ever seemed to me before."

Dasent's choice of "lithe" is questionable for it fails to transmit the information of the original as well as the flavour imparted by the word. Hollander and Bayerschmidt prefer "fair is the slope", but the word 'fair' does not possess the impact of the original 'fögur'. Magnusson and Pálsson choose to paraphrase with "How lovely the slopes are". This, nevertheless, fails to reproduce the emotional impression found in

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<sup>14</sup>  
Njal's Saga, Íslenzk Fornrit Vol. XII

"fögr er hlíðin". In this case, subjective language is interwoven with emotion which is either expressed or implied, and emotional values are difficult to translate. The experience expressed in the example cannot be entirely reproduced in English because there is no equivalent for 'hlíð' in the language.

The problem of translating culture bound lexical items is further compounded by the existence of overlapping meanings in the language of translation. For example, the Icelandic 'viðr' may mean: a tree, a wood, forest, felled trees, wood. In America, a translator may choose 'lumber' as an equivalent, whereas in England 'timber' would be considered more appropriate. 'Timber' would not be considered adequate in America for it would imply standing trees. In the same way, 'lumber' would be misleading to the English reader.

In connection with 'untranslatable' words, a translator may leave such words in their original form and choose not to select an alternate equivalent. This, however, gives the translation an exotic flavour which it should

not have. A translator may often resort to the use of technical terms, defined in footnotes. This technique is not particularly desirable for it interferes with the normal reading process. The most satisfactory solution seems to be the most difficult, that of finding some equivalent or near-equivalent which is a true representation of the original.

Translators experience considerable difficulty in interpreting and rendering idioms and idiomatic expressions. Idioms are terms of expression which do not belong to the universal vocabulary but are exclusive to each individual language. Languages have their own particular idiomatic expressions, familiar phrases, common to conversation and writing which approaches the ease of conversation. Idioms are products of national characteristics. Because a literal translation of such phrases would be unacceptable, a translator must try to find in his own language an idiomatic phrase corresponding to that of the original. In the case of saga translations this must be done with particular caution, for overuse of twentieth-century ex-

pressions may reduce chronological remoteness unduly. Explanation or expression of the sense often proves to be inadequate, since the very merit of the passage to be translated may lie in its idiomatic flavour.

The following pages provide examples of untranslatable words and idiomatic expressions:

## I Njal's Saga

1. Ice: Þú skalt ríða suðr til fundar við Mörð, ok bið hann, at þit skipið máldaga annan, ok siti hon þrjá vetr í festum.

Lit: You must ride south and see Mord, and ask him to change the agreement, and she sit in bonds for three winters. i.e. remain betrothed - 'sitja í festum' refers to the period between the betrothal and the wedding.

Dasent: "Thou must ride south," said Hauskuld, "and see Mord, and ask him to change the bargain which ye two have made, and to let his daughter sit for thee three winters as thy betrothed."

H.&B.: "You must ride south and speak to Mord, " Hoskuld answered. "Ask him to postpone the date which you two have agreed upon. Let his daughter remain at home for three years as your betrothed."

- M.&P.: "You must ride south and see Mord,"  
said Hoskuld. "Ask him to alter  
the agreement and have Unn wait for  
three years as your betrothed.
2. Ice: "Þess varir mik," segir Hrútr,  
"at þú mælist feigum munni."
- Lit: "That forbodes me," said Hrút,  
"that you speak with a mouth  
foreboding death."  
(Lit: or fated to die)
- Dasent: "Something tells me," says Hrut,  
"that thou speakest with a 'fey'  
mouth!"
- H.&B.: "It seems to me," said Hrut, "that  
these are the words of a doomed  
man!"
- M.&P.: "I have the feeling that these  
will be your last words," said Hrut.
3. Ice: "Við ramman mun reip at draga,"  
segir Gunnhildr.
- Lit: Against the strong would rope to  
pull. (The image is that of pulling  
a rope against a strong man;  
i.e. to be in a difficult situation.)  
To struggle against what is fated.
- Dasent: "It is pulling a rope against a strong  
man," said Gunnhilda.
- H.&B.: "You have an obstinate man to deal  
with," said Gunnhild.
- M.&P.: Gunnhild said, "You cannot pull  
against a force like this."

## II Laxdæla Saga:

4. Ice: "er hann þar þó í eyjunum ok hefir þat at vísu í hug sér, at rétta þenna krók, er honum var svá nauðuliga beygðr.
- Lit: He stays in the islands, he has it to be sure in mind, to straighten this hook (device or trick) that (for) him was so direly bent.
- Proctor: he abides yet in the isles and has it of a surety in his heart to repay this trick, wherein he had been so scurvily entreated.
- Veblen: Yet he stayed on in the islands, with his mind made up somehow to straighten out this twist that had been put upon him so much to his misliking.
- M.&P.: He remained in the islands, and was determined to put right the injustice that had been forced on him.
5. Ice: (Um fósturu Melkorku)...er þá lá í kör
- Lit: (About foster mother of Melkorka)... who then lay bedridden. (kör - a bed for the bedridden).
- Proctor: she lay then bedridden
- Veblen: and who was now bedridden
- M.&P.: who was now bedridden.
6. Ice: Þóttu þat ólífismenn, er slíka fjölkyngi frömðu, sem þau Kotkell höfðu þá lýst.
- Lit: Thought them men not fit to live, (who practised) such sorcery that Kotkel and his family had done.

- Proctor: Those were deemed men not worthy of life who practised such sorceries as Kotkel and his kin had used.
- Veblen: Such folks were considered unfit to live, who carried on sorceries of this kind, such as Kotkel and his folks had displayed in this case.
- M.&P.: Everyone felt that death was the only proper end for people who performed the kind of sorcery that Kotkel and his family had done.

### III Grettis Saga:

7. Ice: "Satt er it fornkveðna: Ofleyfingjarnir bregðast mér mest;"
- Lit: True is the ancient saying: Those who are over praised fail me the most.
- M.&M.: Ali answered, "True is the old saw, over-praised and first to fail."
- Hight: Ali said: "True is the ancient saying: The overpraised are the worst deceivers."
8. Ice: Lítit laqðist nú fyrir þik, þvílíkr garpr sem þú ert, er vesalmenni skyldi taka þik."
- Lit: "You were demeaned, such a warrior as you are, that wretched men should capture you."
- M.&M.: "Stout as thou art, but little was to be paid for thee, when thou must needs be taken of minnikins."
- Hight: "You have sold yourself very cheap, such a man of prowess as you are, to let yourself be taken by churls."

9. Ice: Því at "Vit munum ekki kafna í vinsældum manna; máttu vel af leggja ferðir þínar hingat, því at alt er um gert fyrir mér."
- Lit: Because we will not be smothered by men's friendliness, you may well discontinue your trips here, for everything is over for me now. (leggja af - to cease. Cf. the slang expression "lay off"). (Everything is over - I am done for).
- M.&M.: "for not such are we twain, as are like to be smothered in the friendship of men, and thou mayst leave coming hither, for on my side is all over and done."
- Hight: "since neither is suffocated with the love of his fellows. You may as well put off your journeys hither, for the matter is settled so far as I am concerned."

#### IV Hrafinkel's Saga:

10. Ice: (Um Hrafinkel)...Þá efldi hann blót mikil.
- Lit: (About Hrafinkel)...He prepared a great sacrifice feast. (efla - give power or strength) (blót - sacrificial feast).
- V.&P.: He established or performed great sacrifices.
- Jones: He made a great sacrifice.
- Pálsson: He had a large temple built and held sacrifices to the gods.
11. Ice: ...þat skal vera fjórtán náttum eftir vápnatak.
- Lit: It shall be fourteen nights after the taking up of weapons. (waving or brandishing of weapons to signify approval.)

- V.&P.: Omitted, the translation is fragmentary.
- Jones: .... and shall be fourteen nights after the weapontake.
- Pálsson: (and that must be done at his legal domicile), fourteen days after the weapontake.  
(Explanation given in footnotes)
12. Ice: "Slíkan ægishjálmi get ek at hann beri yfir aðra menn sem áður.
- Lit: Such a helmet of terror I consider that he wears over other men as before. (He has such tremendous power over other men as he did before.)
- V.&P.: Omitted.
- Jones: but I expect him to hold over other men the same helm of terror as before.
- Pálsson: but he'll no doubt carry on bullying everyone just as he always did.

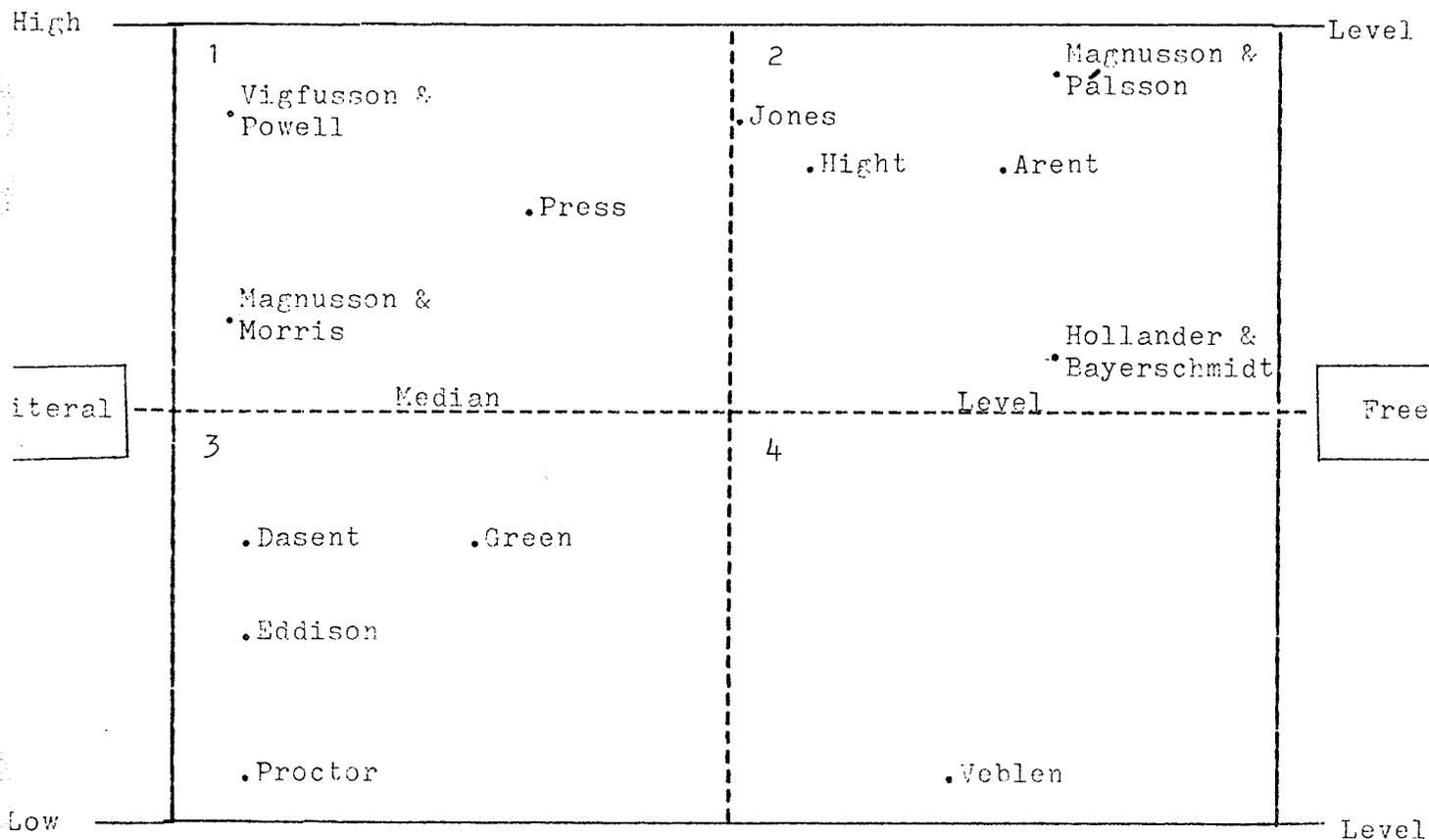
The preceding analysis of saga translations has examined accuracy of interpretation and reproduction of lexical items. The investigation indicates that translators, as for example, Press, Jones, Magnusson and Pálsson have been quite successful in rendering lexical items, whereas others (Proctor, Eddison, Magnusson and Morris) have not gained the same measure of success. Examples of incorrect renderings can be found not only in the nineteenth century translations but also in those of the twentieth century.

The translators' choice of the free or the literal approach has a direct bearing upon the degree of their success in reproducing lexical items.

Some of the more serious difficulties posed by culture bound words and idiomatic expressions have been examined in this chapter and examples given to illustrate the various techniques which translators have applied to this problem. The most reasonable course appears to be that of finding near-equivalent English expressions.

Accuracy is one of the primary goals of a successful translator. His failure in reaching it inevitably diminishes the value of his work. The analysis indicates that a reasonably close translation of Old Icelandic texts will result in an English text of a higher quality than can be attained by a free rendering. It is also quite obvious that accurate translations can be achieved in contemporary English. By foregoing contrived or archaic idioms a translator greatly reduces the risk of undue stylistic strain and outright misrepresentation.

## Accuracy in the Translation of Lexical Items



- Quadrant 1 - Moderate to High Accuracy - Literal  
 Quadrant 2 - Moderate to High Accuracy - Free  
 Quadrant 3 - Moderate to Low Accuracy - Literal  
 Quadrant 4 - Moderate to Low Accuracy - Free

Special Lexical Items

## SPECIAL LEXICAL ITEMS

Representative selections of lexical items from certain specialized areas of activity will now be examined. These include: legal terms, terms of government, terms of measurement, sailing terms, and terms of weaponry. The cultural remoteness of these terms very often defies direct translation into English. The selections are from Njáls Saga and Egils Saga.<sup>1</sup>

TERMS OF GOVERNMENT AND LAW

1. þing: an assembly, or meeting for the purposes of legislation; then is called parliament and includes a court of law.
 

Ice: Nú liðr til þings framan.  
 Dasent: Now the time for the Thing was coming on.  
 B.&H.: Now the time for the Assembly drew near.  
 M.&P.: Shortly before the Althing was due.
2. Althing: a general assembly of the Commonwealth with forty-eight members in attendance.
 

Ice: Ok er hann kom vestan, þá býr hann sik til Alþingis ok lét ríða með sér alla nábúa sína.  
 Dasent: When he came home he asked him to ride to the Thing, and made all his neighbours ride with him.

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1. The present selections do not represent a detailed comparison of the various texts; rather they are designed to illustrate certain difficult problems in translation.

B.&H.: After he had returned from the west, he prepared for the trip to the Althing and had all his neighbours ride with him.

M.&P.: When he got back, he made ready for the journey to the Althing and told all his neighbours to accompany him.

3. lögrétta: legislative body consisting of forty-eight members that passed the laws (derived from the phrase at rétta lög - to introduce new amendments).

Ice: Síðan ganga þeir til lögréttu.

Dasent: High Court

B.&H.: court

M.&P.: court

4. goði: a chieftain and a temple priest of a district.

Ice: Vann þá Gizurr eið ok Geirr goði.

Dasent: Geir the Priest

B.&H.: Geir Godi

M.&P.: Geir the Priest

5. lögsögumaðr: lawspeaker. Recited the law for memory to the assembly. Guardian of the law and chief legal authority of the entire country. President of the Fifth Court.

Ice: ,en hann kvezk þat eigi víst vita ok segir lögsögumann ór því skyldu leysa.

Dasent: Lawman

B.&H.: Law-speaker

M.&P.: Law-speaker

6. goðorð: the jurisdiction of a goði.

Ice: ,vildi engi selja sitt goðorð.

Dasent: No one was willing to sell his priesthood.

B.&H.: there was no one who wished to sell his godard.

M.&P.: No one was prepared to part with one (chieftainship).

7. Lögberg: law hill, where the lögsögumaðr recited the laws of the land to the assembled people.

Ice: Segfúsýnir lýstu sökum at lögbergi ok spurðu at þingfesti ok heimilisfangi.  
 Dasent: Hill of Laws  
 B.&H.: lawyer  
 M.&P.: lawyer

8. lögmaðr: an authority on law.

Ice: Hann var ríkr höfðingi ok málafylgjumaðr mikill ok svá mikill lögmaðr.  
 Dasent: lawyer  
 B.&H.: lawyer  
 M.&P.: lawyer

9. hólmganga: a prescribed form of duel accepted by law as a last resort to settle a dispute. (hólmr: an islet. ganga: walk. holmganga: a walk to the islet). Wherever a þing was held a place was appointed for the wager of battle, as the hólmr in the Axe River on þingvellir. This kind of single combat differed from a duel as to legal significance. The victor was awarded his opponents possessions if he killed him.

Ice: ,at vér reynim nú hólmgöngu þessa.  
 Jones: holmgang

10. hólmgöngulög: refers to laws of the duel. Plaintiff or defendent could challenge the other to a holmganga. A man forfeited all his heritage if he was killed in the duel.

Ice: þat váru hólmgöngulög í þann tíma,  
 Jones: law of holmgang.

11. Gulapingslög: laws of the Assembly at Gula in Norway.
- Ice: ,at Gulapingslög skipi um mál okkur;  
Jones: Gulathing's law.
12. tylftareidr: (tylft: dozen; eiðr: oath)  
Oaths sworn by twelve men required to give testimony in court.
- Ice: ,en Atli bauð lögvörn í mót, tylftareiða, at hann hefði ekki fé þat at varðveita, er Egill ætti.  
Jones: an oath of twelve
13. heslistengr: poles of hazelwood joned together with ropes, placed around an area to designate the ping.
- Ice: ,var völlr sléttr ok settar niðr heslistengr í völlinn í hring,  
Jones: hazel poles.
14. vébönd: (vé: a temple or holy place; band: bond) Literally, "holy bonds"; however, the reference here is to thirty-six judges in a ring, twelve from three assembly districts.
15. hús-ping: council or meeting to which a king or earl assembled his men.
- Ice: Þá skaut konungr á húspingi ok sagði þá fyrir ætlan sína.  
Jones: meeting.
16. níðstöng: a spite-pole, or post with a horse's head on it raised against a man; it had hostile runes and poetry written on it. Raising a spite-pole against a person was punishable by outlawry.
- Ice: Hér set ek upp níðstöng,  
Jones: scorn-pole

17. stefna: to issue a summons.

Ice: Stefna skal málinu,

Dasent: In this suit I must be summoned.

B.&H.: I have to be summoned in this suit.

M.&P.: A summons must be made.

18. handseldr: implies the transferring of a duty to others by shaking hands; concluding a bargain and making it official by a handshake. This was required by law.

Ice: Stefni ek handseldri sök Unnar Marðardóttur.

Dasent: I summon thee in the suit which Unna, Mord's daughter, has made over to me with her plighted hand.

B.&H.: I hereby summon you in this suit, the prosecution of which I have taken over from Unn, Mord's daughter!

M.&P.: I make this summons in the action assigned to me by Unn Mord's daughter.

19. sóknargögn: proof which was submitted as evidence for prosecution.

Ice: (Gunnar) bauð Hrúti at hlýða til eiðspjalls sínns ok framsögu sakar ok sóknarqagna allra;

Dasent: (Gunnar) challenged Hrút to listen to his oath and declaration of the cause of the suit and to all the proofs which he was about to bring forward.

B.&H.: (Gunnar) challenged Hrút to listen to his oath and to his presentation of the case and all testimony.

M.&P.: (Gunnar) called Hrút to hear his oath and his statement of claim and all the evidence.

20. stefnuvætti: a cited witness.

Ice: ;síðan lét hann bera stefnuvætti,  
pá sakartökuvætti.

Dasent: After that he took his oath, and declared his case.

B.&H.: Then he took his oath and presented the charge.

M.&P.: Then he took his oath, stated his claim.

21. sakartökuvætti: a witness to the taking up of a law suit. Required by law.

Ice: ;síðan lét hann bera stefnuvætti, þá sakartökuvætti.

Dasent: After that he took his oath and declared his case.

B.&H.: Then he took his oath and presented the charge.

M.&P.: Then he took his oath, stated his claim.

22. váttorð: evidence or testimony given in legal cases.

Ice: Hrútr nefndi vátta ok sagði ónýtt málit ok sagði hann misst hafa þeira þriggja váttorða,

Dasent: Then Hrut took witness, and said the suit was naught, and that there was a flaw in the pleading; he declared that it had broken down because Gunnar had failed to call those three witnesses.

B.&H.: Hrút then named witness and declared that the suit was null and void, because Gunnar had failed to present to the court the three statements.

M.&P.: Hrut named witnesses, and declared the whole action null and void on the ground that Gunnar had omitted three witnesses statements.

23. nefna fyrir rekkjustokki: summons or citation required by law to be read before the edge of a person's bed. This summons was next to be read at the men's door and finally at the Alþing.

Ice: er nefnt var fyrir rekkjustokki,

Dasent: ,that which was taken before the marriage-bed,

B.&H.: spoken at the bed post.

M.&P.: those originally made at the bedstead.

24. váttir at benjum: a witness of wounds. Witnesses were required to be present when a body was exhumed to examine the wounds.

Ice: ,ok grófu upp líkamina ok nefndu vátta at benjum.

Dasent: ,and dug up the bodies, and took witness to the wounds.

B.&H.: They dug up the bodies and named witnesses to the wounds.

M.&P.: They dug up the bodies and named witnesses for each man's fatal wound.

25. vígsök: refers to a charge for a killing. (víg: a killing as distinct from a murder) - Any slaughter with a weapon in open warfare and private feud. If the killer confessed the crime at the next or at least the third house, the deed was considered manslaughter (að lýsa vígi). The deed was liable to indictment according to law but might with the agreement of the relatives of the slain be atoned by weregild. If the killer concealed the deed, he was guilty of murder.

Ice: Stóð þá upp Geirr goði ok lýsti vígsök á hendir Gunnari um víg Otkels;

Dasent: Then Geir the Priest stood up and gave notice that he had a suit of manslaughter against Gunnar for the slaying of Otkell.

B.&H.: Geir Godi arose and gave notice of a suit of manslaughter action against Gunnar for the killing of Otkel.

M.&P.: Geir the Priest stood up and gave notice of a manslaughter action against Gunnar for the killing of Otkel.

26. þingfesti: a declaration of allegiance to a goði.

Ice: Hann spurði at þingfesti ok at heimilisfangi.

Dasent: He asked, too, in what Quarter court the suits lay, and in what house in the district the defendants dwelt.

B.&H.: omitted in translation.

M.&P.: Then he made formal inquiry about the domicile and district of the defendants.

27. bjóða búum í setu: invite neighbours to sit on the jury.

Ice: Þá lét hann bjóða búum í setu.

Dasent: Then he called upon the neighbours who were to form the inquest to take their seats;

B.&H.: Then he had the jury of neighbors seated in their proper places.

M.&P.: he now called upon to take their places as a jury.

28. lýsingarvætti: witnesses to a declaration.

Ice: Þá lét hann bera lýsingarvætti.

Dasent: Then he let men bear witness of the notice given by the suit.

B.&H.: (He) had witnesses testify that the listing of wounds had been duly made.

M.&P.: He led evidence that notice of the charges had been given in the presence of nine neighbours.

29. eiðspjall: the delivery of an oath.

Ice: Geirr goði býðr Gunnari at hlýða til eiðspjalls síns.

Dasent: Geir the Priest bade Gunnar to listen to his oath.

B.&H.: Geir Godi enjoined Gunnar to listen to his oath.

M.&P.: Geir the Priest bade Gunnar to listen to his oath.

30. segja fram sök: make a charge.

Ice: eptir þat sagði hann fram sök.

Dasent: ,and afterwards declared his suit.

B.&H.: He then brought the charge.

M.&P.: and stated the charges.

31. ryðja kvið: to challenge a neighbour or juror of the jury out of the court on the grounds of his being prejudiced in some way.

31. Ice: Þá bauð hann til ruðningar um kviðinn.  
 Dasent: he called on Gunnar to challenge the inquest.  
 B.&H.: he called on Gunnar to examine the members of the jury carefully.  
 M.&P.: He invited the defence to challenge the jurymen.
32. framburðr um kvið: delivery of the verdict in a legal case.  
 Ice: Þá beiddi hann framburðar um kviðinn.  
 Dasent: then he called on the inquest to utter their findings.  
 B.&H.: Thereupon he called on the jury of neighbours to utter their findings.  
 M.&P.: then he called upon them to state their findings.
33. aðili: chief defendant or plaintiff in a law suit.  
 Ice: ,at aðili var í Nórøgi ok þeir áttu eigi um at skila um málit  
 Dasent: because the next of kin who ought to follow it up was in Norway, and so they had nothing to do with that suit.  
 B.&H.: that the lawful prosecutor of it was in Norway, and that they would make no findings in his case.  
 M.&P.: because the lawful plaintiff was in Norway and they had therefore no jurisdiction.
34. at óhelga: to commit an offence punishable by death.  
 Ice: ,ok óhelgaða ek Otkel fyrir búum af þeirri blóðugri þen,  
 Dasent: and outlawed Otkell before my neighbours for that bloody wound.  
 B.&H.: I declared Otkel an outlaw for the bloody wound.  
 M.&P.: I declared Otkel an outlaw for the blood-wound.

## 35. lagalýriti: a citizen's veto

Ice: Ver ek þér lagalýriti.

Dasent: I forbid thee by a lawful protest.

B.&H.: I make this protest on the basis of my legal right.

M.&P.: This is a lawful (interdict).

## 36. skúta: a small cutter or ship used on rivers and along the coasts.

Ice: ;en skúta Egils gekk skjótt hjá fram.

Jones: but Egil's skúta forged quickly ahead.

## 37. langskip: long ship. Viking warship.

Ice: Þá reru fjöldi annarra skipa ór höfninni, er Arinbjörn átti, skútur ok róðrarferjur en langskip, er Arinbjörn átti, fór síðast, því at þat var þyngst undir árum;

Jones: There rowed out of the harbor a swarm of other ships which belonged to Arinbjörn, skútur and rowing-ferries, with a longship of Arinbjörn's bringing up the rear, for she was the heaviest under oars.

## 38. snekkja: a smaller form of a long ship. A craft with a high length-beam ratio.

Ice: ,ok reru fram í milli landsins ok snekkju þeirar,

Jones: they rode off between the land and that warship...

## 39. róðrarferja: a rowing ferry boat.

Ice: Þá reru fjöldi annarra skipa ór höfninni, er Arinbjörn átti, skútur, ok róðrarferjur en langskip, er Arinbjörn átti, fór síðast, því at þat var þyngst undir árum;

Jones: There rowed out of the harbor a swarm of other ships which belonged to Arinbjörn, skútur and rowing-ferries, with a longship of Arinbjörn's bringing up the rear, for she was the heaviest under oars.

40. stýrisstengur: a helm or rudder post on a ship.

Ice: ,en skútan flaut við stýrisstengur milli lands ok skípsins.

Jones: ;but the skuta floated, with her rudder ready, between the land and the ship.

41. lypting: poop-deck. A raised area above the stern of a ship.

Ice: ok er lyptingar bar saman

Jones: ;and as the raised decks came into line one with the other.

42. karfi: a ship of twelve to thirty-two oars. Long, narrow, and light used primarily on lakes or inlets.

Ice: Rögnvaldr konungsson átti karfa einn.

Jones: Rögnvald the King's son had a karfi.

43. barð: armoured prow of a ship or cutter.

Ice: Þá kom barð skútunnar á kinnung karfans.

Jones: ,and as the ships ran together the beak of the skúta struck the karfi's bows.

44. kinnungr: name for the common prow of the ship.

Ice: Þá kom barð skútunnar á kinnung karfans.

Jones: ,and as the ships ran together the beak of the skúta struck the karfi's bows.

45. stafnljár: A grappling hook used in naval battles to pull a ship toward another in order to board it.

Ice: Vandill þreif upp stafnljá ok kastaði á meðal skipanna.

Dasent: Vandil caught up a grappling-iron, and cast it between their ships.

B.&H.: Vandil threw a grappling hook over to their ships.

M.&P.: Vandil seized a grappling-hook and hurled it across.

TERMS OF WEAPONRY, CLOTHING, MEASUREMENT.

46. alvæpni: with complete weaponry; fully armed.
- Ice: Þá runnu þeir þegar upp til bæjar með alvæpni;
- Jones: they immediately ran all armed up to the farm.
47. taparöx: a small tapering axe or halberd of English workmanship.
- Ice: (Þar skalt þú hafa undir in góðu klæði þín) ok taparöx í hendi.
- Dasent: (and under, all, thy good clothes).  
Thou must take a small axe in thy hand.
- B.&H.: (Under all that wear your good clothes,) and carry a small axe in your hand.
- M.&P.: ;underneath all that you must wear your good clothes, and carry a small axe.
48. atgeirr: a bill or halberd.
- Ice: ;tók hann þá atgeirinn ok sverðit ok vegr með, báðum höndum.
- Dasent: ,and then he takes his bill and sword and fights with both hands.
- B.&H.: Then he threw them down and took his halberd and sword and fought with both hands.
- M.&P.: ;then he threw the bow down, took sword and fought with both hands.
49. höggspjót: a kind of halberd.
- Ice: Egill hafði vápn sín, þau er hann var vanr at hafa, hjálm ok skjöld, gyrðr sverði, höggspjót í hendi;
- Jones: Egil had those weapons of his which he commonly had, helmet and shield, a sword belted round him, and a halberd in his hand.

50. kesja: a kind of halberd.

Ice: Hann tók í hönd sér kesjuna ok rann þá fram í mót Berg-Önundi.

Jones: Catching hold of his halberd he ran forward to encounter Bergönund.

51. törguskjöldr: a small round target shield.

Ice: Sigurðr svínhöfði fór fyrstr ok hafði törguskjöld einbyrðan, en sviðu í annarri hendi.

Dasent: Sigurd Swinehead came first and had a red targe;

B.&H.: Sigurd Swinehead was foremost; in one hand he had a small round shield.

M.&P.: Sigurd Hog-Head was in the lead, with a thin round shield in one hand.

52. söluváða kyrtill: a tunic of common cloth.  
(váð - common cloth for trade;  
vaðmál - cloth that was the  
standard of payment.)

Ice: ;skalt þú hafa váskufi yztan klæða ok undir söluváðarkyrtil mórendan;

Dasent: Over all thou shalt have a great rough cloak, and under that, a russet kirtle of cheap stuff;

B.&H.: Cover yourself with a raincoat and underneath wear a brown-striped woolen cloak.

M.&P.: You must be wearing a coarse overcoat on top of a striped woolen tunic.

53. váskufi: a rain cloak.

Ice: ;skalt þú hafa váskufi yztan klæða ok undir söluváðarkyrtil mórendan;

Dasent: Over all thou shalt have a great rough cloak, and under that, a russet kirtle of cheap stuff.

B.&H.: Cover yourself with a raincoat and underneath wear a brown-striped cloak.

M.&P.: You must be wearing a coarse overcoat on top of a striped woolen tunic.

54. gullhlað: gold lace worn by men and women used especially to tie up the hair.

Ice: Þat sá ek, at fram undan erminni kom eitt gullhlað ok rautt klæði;

Dasent: I saw how a golden fringe and a bit of scarlet cloth peeped out at his arm.

B.&H.: I noticed that from under his sleeve there peeped a piece of gold lace and some red cloth.

M.&P.: I saw that there was a little gold lace and scarlet cloth showing under his sleeve.

55. jústa: a Norse measure for liquids. (4 justur - 1 bolli. 4 bolli - 1 askur. 1 askur - 16 justur.)

Ice: Síðan tók Kolskeggr jústu eina fulla af miði.

Dasent: After that Kolskegg took a beaker full of mead.

B.&H.: Thereupon Kolskegg took a cup full of mead,

M.&P.: Kolskegg took a bowl full of mead.

For most of the lexical items examined above, there is no precise English equivalent. As can be seen, some translators leave the term in its original form. This cannot be considered acceptable for it is both confusing and distracting to the reader who has limited knowledge of the language of the original. The most acceptable course seems to be that of finding near equivalents and explaining them with the use of footnotes. The reader, therefore, is not confronted by an alien term and he has the option of further explanation should he desire

it. When 'níðstöng' is replaced by 'spite-pole', for example, the reader still requires additional information in order to understand the term in context.

S T Y L E

## S T Y L E

The following section offers an analysis of saga style - its interpretation and reproduction.

Analysis of a translation should not be limited to a study of the syntactic relationships between linguistic units or to the examination of the meaning of these units. Rather it must also deal with the purely stylistic features of the communication. Style is an essential characteristic of all writing. A successful translation does not result simply from accurate rendering of the lexical items. If the style of the translation differs greatly from that of the original, the work is little more than a linear glossary. The style and manner of writing must be discerned in the original text if the quality of the work is to be reproduced successfully. Fidelity to the literary flavour of the original has a high claim on the translator.

A translator must interpret the true character of the original author's style. He must determine with exactness to what class it belongs; whether to the elevated, grave,

ornamented, lively, or simple and unaffected.

Literary translation involves an interaction of stylistic norms: the norm of the original and the norm of the translation. The norm of the original is established or fixed as far as it concerns the translator. In contrast, the transformation of that norm into the norm of the translation is contingent upon the interpretation and creative ingenuity of the translator. The stylistic structure of the original can be subdivided into individual qualities of expression which function in conjunction with one another and as a whole manifest a certain pattern. The recognition of stylistic patterns requires careful analysis.

Even though a translator may interpret the general character of the original author's style, he may fail in the reproduction of it. This reproduction must always be governed by the nature of the languages of the original and of the translation. If a translator is not constantly aware of the precise nature of the original, he is running the risk of misrepresentation.

Style is inevitably influenced by the personality of the writer as well as the time in which he lives. Each sentence from the author's pen reveals this to some extent. The same is also true of the translator. To some degree, his rendering of the text is bound to have the characteristics of his own personal style. However, a translator must never lose sight of the important fact that the style of his translation must retain the character of the original. In effect, the life, tone, rhetorical level, imagery as well as the schematic and associative sound patterns of the original must be dexterously transmitted.

The prose and literary conventions of the various Icelandic Sagas share a large enough number of stylistic qualities to warrant the term 'saga style'. In order to understand the unique nature of this style, it is necessary to describe the origins of the sagas briefly.

The period of Icelandic history (930-1030) is known as the söguöld or saga age. The events which are described in the family sagas

occurred in this time. The succeeding period, the friðaröld or period of peace, (1030-1118), was marked by a decline in the internal struggles and a stability in the political and social conditions of the country. The period following (1120-1230), has been called the ritöld or era of writing, the age when the Icelanders gave the sagas their written form. About two or three centuries had therefore passed between the time the events occurred and the time they were actually written down or composed. It is generally agreed that a rich store of prose narrative, a folk literature of oral tradition must have existed in this period. There is, however, considerable disagreement about the form of this tradition and the extent to which it is represented in the sagas as they exist today. Are the sagas to be considered oral narratives which were written down or should they be viewed as written compositions which are based upon oral traditions?

The advocates of the oral tradition of the sagas, sometimes referred to as the free-prose theorists, contend that the sagas as they exist,

acquired their form during the period of oral tradition. They were then passed on orally and recorded by a scribe. In other words, the sagas are representations of earlier oral versions which utilize the forms of oral tradition. A number of characteristics of saga style have led to the development of this view. The first has to do with form. Much of the prose of the sagas is made up of paratactic constructions. The events are presented in sequences which seem natural for conversation. Traditional and familiar scenes make up the material of the sagas and according to the free-prose theory, this material can not exist apart from some form. It is the oral tradition which is responsible for the conveyance of patterned material of this nature. As the events of the stories became tradition, they were further subjected to a polishing of the narrative.

The method of presentation of the sagas suggests that there is a close relationship between their style and oral narrative. Their

form had to be suitable for recitals for the entertainment of the people of the farms in Iceland. This practise of saga entertainment is known as 'sagnaskemmtan'.<sup>1</sup> The stories brought enjoyment, and relief from the monotony and boredom of life in isolated areas. Phrases are used again and again in relating the same or similar situations. A common style was no doubt shaped by a number of recitals of the same story. The established practise of sagnaskemmtan suggests that the reading of the family sagas was a public occasion, and therefore, chief mode of existence lay in the relationship between lecturer and listener.

The advocates of the book-prose theory hold that in essence, the sagas are the works of individual authors of the 12th and 13th centuries who utilized to some degree, oral tradition, personal experience, and existing writings. Therefore, some features of saga style may not be characteristic of oral narratives. There is a definite lack of descriptive terminology in

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1. A.F. Allen, *Fire and Iron, Critical Approaches to Njáls saga* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971) p. 24.

the discussion of familiar scenes. Facts and information important to the story are not repeated as frequently as they are in oral literature. There is limited use of such technical devices as similes, metaphors, and alliteration. Also, the sagas incorporate a complex structure or form not likely to be used by oral narrators. Events are intricately developed in a manner more indicative of written than oral compositions.

The main difference between the free-prose theorists and the book-prose theorists lies in their interpretation of the role played by the final shaper of the saga and his use of the oral tradition behind it. T.M. Andersson describes the difference thus:

"Bookprosaists and freeprosaists can often be in substantial agreement on what the sources of a saga were but rarely on the form of those sources or the way in which the saga author used them. In most cases the adherent of freeprose believes in a central core of formed tradition which could (but need not) be infinitely varied by the writer, but which imparted to the saga its fundamental structure and

narrative art. The believer in bookprose for the most part rejects this central core and sees the lines of a saga as the work of an author who imposed his artistic will on heterogeneous materials."<sup>2</sup>

In the preceding section the oral quality of the Icelandic Sagas was discussed. It is necessary at this point to review some of the other more important features of saga style.

The saga is a well-defined type of prose narrative whose stylistic peculiarities set it apart from other narrative forms. The motives and characters are revealed through a step by step, incident by incident presentation of action. This action takes precedence over reflection or description and it is the subject itself which is of central importance. The author neither interferes nor draws conclusions of his own. In the same way, he never directly invites the reader to draw any conclusions. Saga prose approaches pure narrative. It is objective, terse, non-lyrical and emotionally restrained. The harsh, relentless presentation of fact imparts the

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2. Theodore M. Andersson, The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins (New Haven and London, 1964) p.79.

swiftness to the action. The sagas are free from digressions as well as psychological and moral descriptions. As was pointed out earlier, there is an obvious element of descriptive economy. Only occasionally is there description of scenery and nature; description tends to be external and dramatic. R.F. Allen has discerned several types of narrative in the Icelandic Sagas. These are as follows:

"The first might be called distant narration, a rapid chronicling of events, of the mechanics, for example, of who rode to visit whom. The second is close imitation, giving details of an action in the saga man's own words. The third is also close imitation in direct speech, interchanges between the characters, sometimes in extended dialogue, sometimes in just a brief glimpse of a conversation's high point. Often such moments of close imitation provide an occasion for the utterance not of individual thought but of traditional lore."<sup>3</sup>

Study of Old Icelandic Literature has led to the distinction between two styles, the

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A.F. Allen, Fire and Iron, Critical Approaches to Njáls saga (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971) pp. 30-31.

learned style and the popular style. The former is a latinized type of style which frequently uses rhetorical figures. Popular style is relatively free from Latin influence and is believed, therefore, to approximate the spoken language. A third variety, the court style, is related to the learned style, but has many distinctive features of its own. It has characteristics which can be related to the chivalric romances and other similar works. The fourth stylistic variety evolved towards the end of the 13th century in that the learned style had by then undergone considerable modification and by the middle of the 14th century it took on a new character. The resulting florid style was pedantic and diversified. It embodied the use of compound nouns and emotionally charged adverbs and adjectives, features never found in earlier works. For the most part, the family sagas were written in the popular style. Having considered and understood the above stylistic variations, a translator must try to reproduce the art, the distinctive literary craftsmanship which gives

the saga its unique power as a literary masterpiece.

It is important at this point to determine how successful translators have been in the interpretation and reproduction of saga style. Passages from *Njáls saga*, *Egil's saga*, *Laxdæla saga* and *Grettis saga* have been selected for examination.

Njal's Saga Ch. 62

"Then I took my sword and I smote with it with one hand, but thrust at them with my bill with the other. Shield myself then I did not, and methought then I knew not what shielded me. Then I slew many wolves, and thou too, Kolskegg; but Hjört methought they pulled down, and tore open his breast, and one methought had his heart in his maw; but I grew so wroth that I hewed that wolf asunder just below the brisket, and after that methought the wolves turned and fled."

(Dasent)

Then I took my sword, and with sword in one hand and halberd in the other I struck and thrust at them. I didn't seem to be protecting myself at all, and I really do not know what was protecting me. I killed many wolves, and you helped me Kolskegg. But Hjört they seemed to have overpowered. They tore open his breast, and one wolf had Hjört heart in its mouth. Then I seemed to become so enraged that I cut that wolf in two below the shoulder, and after that the other wolves turned and fled.

(Hollander and Bayerschmidt)

"Then I drew my sword, and fought with sword in one hand and halberd in the other; I never used my shield, and did not know what was protecting me. I killed many of the wolves, and you were helping me, Kolskegg; but they overpowered Hjort and ripped open his chest, and one of them seized his heart in its jaws. Then in my dream my rage was so violent that I sliced the creature in two behind the shoulder; and with that the rest of the wolves fled."

(Magnusson and Pálsson)

A translator's decision to produce a literal rendering or a free rendering clearly determines to some extent his success in reproducing its style. The vocabulary of a translation is a second factor affecting style. Some translators of the sagas feel that the use of archaisms imparts an ancient flavour to the original. Others feel that the language of the translation should be contemporary or as up-to-date as possible. Most twentieth century translators of the sagas seem to be of this latter opinion. The problem lies in deciding the degree of modernity to be attained.

Dasent followed a close translation and his

style appears to be archaic. His use of such words as 'wroth', 'sore afraid', 'redes' and 'methought' gives the saga an unreal or unfamiliar flavour. The tone and vigour of the original is disguised behind this antiquated vocabulary. Archaisms are obtrusive and annoying to the reader. The most obvious feature of Dasent's style is that it lacks vigour.

Hollander and Bayerschmidt have described Dasent's translation as bearing many earmarks of Victorian style and prudery.<sup>4</sup> Their translation is in a more modern idiom and they freely deviate from the words of the original. The colloquialisms and idiomatic expressions, however, seem to distort the very nature of saga style. Their combining of short sentences into long, flowing paragraphs fails to reproduce the stylistic terseness of the original. Although the work reads well, the objectivity of saga style is lacking the characteristic which gives the story its force.

Magnusson and Pálsson also follow the free-translation approach in an attempt to make the saga familiar to the modern reader. The most obvious consequence of this is the distortion of its style. The saga must be contemporary in its impact on the

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<sup>4</sup>C.F. Bayerschmidt and L.M. Hollander, Njal's Saga, (New York: University of New York Press, 1955) p.v.

reader; yet, it must achieve the humanization and the distant perspective which has given the original much of its appeal. Magnusson and Pálsson's use of 'pedestrian' idiom divorces the reader from the life of the past, the very element they are trying to illustrate. The reader finds it difficult to become totally involved in the story when its twentieth century association continually brings him back to the present. Magnusson and Pálsson smooth out the abruptness of the original by giving its main clauses a subordinate status in long paragraphs. The translators at times add explanatory words which may seem necessary, but nonetheless weaken the story. An example of this is 'and you were helping me', found in the passage previously given. When "seta fjölmenn" becomes "a large body of armed men", one cannot help but feel that a vital part of the story is being dissolved in definition. Repeated explanation constantly reminds the reader of his remoteness from the events of the saga. The very essence of saga technique is to present the sequence of events objectively, tersely. When a translator habitually uses explanation, the sense of action is lost and the translation takes on a character alien to the original.

Egil's Saga Ch. 85

"Whereupon the cook said that it was a great wonder, so mighty a man as Egil had been, that he should lie in their way so that they could not do their work. "Be you civil," said Egil, "though I bask by the fire, and let us bear and forbear about place." "Stand you up," said she, and go to your seat, and let us do our work."

(Rev. Green)

The housekeeper prated of how strange it was that a man such as Egil had been should loll about under their feet, so that they could not get on with their work. "Be easy," said Egil, "though I toast myself by the fire, and let us give and take a little here." "Stand up," she ordered. "Be off with you to your place, and let us get on with our work."

(Gwyn Jones)

Gwyn Jones is quite successful in reproducing the style of the sagas. His translation is contemporary; yet it is not written in a 'pedestrian' idiom. It reads well and retains the spirit of the original. Gwyn Jones does not use unfamiliar archaisms. It seems that he has taken the middle road between the modernizing and archaizing approaches. His translation is close and at the same time modern.

On the other hand, the translation by Rev. Green does not possess the force or life found in Jones' translation. The overly-literal rendering not only makes it difficult to read but obtrusively mannered. At times it is merely an imitation of the original -

'Stand you up' for example. Though the language is contemporary, it does not adequately express the swiftness of action or the vigour of the narrative. On the whole, it does not have the same impact upon the reader as does the translation by Gwyn Jones.

Laxdæla Saga Ch. 46

"Kjartan was loth thereto, and yet pledged himself to the faring at the prayer of his father. Thorgerd the housewife asked: When wilt thou take out so brave a jewel if it must lie in chest when thou farest to guestings. Hrefna answers: Many men speak thus, that it is nought unlike that I may come thither whereas are fewer men of evil heart than are at Bathstead."

(Proctor)

"Kjartan held back, but still he agreed to go at his father's insistence. But her (Hrefna) mother-in-law - Thorgerd asked her the question, "When are you to make use of such a splendid ornament if it is to be left locked up at home while you are visiting?" Hrefna answered, "There are those who say that I could easily go to places where there are fewer to envy me than at Laugar."

(Veblen)

"Kjartan held back but nonetheless promised to go after his father's pleading. Thorgerd, the mistress of the house put it to her (Hrefna) this way: "When are you ever going to make use of such finery, if it is to be left behind at home in a chest when you go to feasts?" Hrefna answered: "There are those who say that I could find many places to go where I would have fewer ill-wishes than at Laugar."

(Arent)

The passages just cited represent three distinct styles. Robert Proctor tried to achieve a close translation and favoured an archaic style. The remoteness of his idiom, however, creates certain problems. The events are difficult to follow, if not outright tedious.

Thorstein Veblen's style, in contrast to Proctor's, is natural, simple, and contemporary. Although it retains a medieval flavour, it enables the reader to remain a contemporary of saga events and feel that they might easily have come from a story of his own time. Veblen's translation, like that of Green, lacks the life and spirit of the original and for this reason its appeal is greatly reduced.

Margaret Arent chooses a free rendering in the modern idiom. The work is very readable and accurate; yet there are instances of pedestrian idiom. Also, Miss Arent adds material for the purpose of explanation. This translation, like those of Magnusson and Pálsson, tends to keep the readers attention in the twentieth century and prevent a sustained involvement in the story.

Grettir's Saga Ch. 84

"Noise looked up thereat and said, "Ah! now are they minded to go on according to their wont; do ye, mayhappen, think my freedom too great, though I lie out here in the cold?"

"Art thou witless," said Angle, "that thou seest not that thy foes are come upon thee, and will slay you all?"

(E. Magnusson and  
W. Morris)

"Glaum looked up and said: "They are going on as usual. Do you think my freedom such a great thing while I am lying here in the cold?"

Angle said: "Have you lost your wits? Don't you see that your enemies are upon you and about to kill you all?"

(G.A. Hight)

In the Magnusson-Morris translation, *The Story of Grettir the Strong*, Morris made frequent use of archaisms. By doing so he felt he was reproducing the ancient flavour or quaintness which he perceived in the sagas. Morris' language, however, was archaic even in the mid-nineteenth century. It gives the saga artificiality which thoroughly masks its chronological setting. In this way Morris may be accused of misrepresenting the style of the original. His individual style is his own experience, the pleasure and enjoyment he felt for the literature of the Viking Age. Vigfusson and Powell comment on the use of archaisms in their Introduction to

## Corpus Poeticum Boreale:

"There is one grave error into which too many English translators of old Northern and Icelandic writings have fallen, to wit, the affectation of archaisms, and the abuse of archaic, Scottish, pseudo-Middle English words. This abominable fault makes a Saga, for instance, sound unreal, unfamiliar, false; it conceals all diversities of style and tone beneath a fictitious mash of monotonous uniformity, and slurs over the real difficulties by a specious nullity of false phrasing. 5

Morris' archaisms are obtrusive and tend to distort the vigour of the original.

G.A. Hight's translation has many of the qualities of a successful translation. It is a free translation in the modern idiom. In the Introduction, he states his position thus:

"My aim has been to translate in the colloquial language of my own day, eschewing all affectation of poetic diction or mediaevalism. 6

A translator's style is to some degree influenced by the audience for whom the translation is

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<sup>5</sup>Gudbrand Vigfusson and F. York Powell, Corpus Poeticum Boreale (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883), I, CXV.

<sup>6</sup>The Saga of Grettir the Strong, trans. George Ainslie Hight (London: Dent, EVERYMAN'S library, 1914) Preface.

intended. For the reader who has no knowledge of the original language and who reads out of curiosity or interest, a free translation may be the most appealing. It is familiar, reads easily and satisfies his curiosity. For the person who is studying the language of the original and does so in part by the aid of a translation, a more literal rendering would be of greater benefit than an idiomatic one. For the person who knew the language in the past but is beginning to forget it, a translation which sounds like a translation would seem appropriate. It gives him the impression that he is reading the original and reminds him of his earlier scholarship. Scholars, who are familiar with the style and content of the original, would prefer a translation which accurately reproduces its quality. However, all translators are faced with the problem that in Europe and North America, fashions in translation are changing, although individuals who have an established interpretation of style may remain resistant to change.

There is no modern or archaic English style which precisely corresponds to saga style. A translator must therefore create a style which retains as closely as possible the characteristics of the

original. Not only must it embody the saga technique, it must also have life, spirit and impact. The artful illusion can neither be maintained by the use of archaisms nor modern colloquialism. A saga translation should be contemporary and impart at the same time the flavour of ancient time. It seems that this can be accomplished by using a reasonably literal rendering in twentieth century English. Life must be maintained by the energy the translator puts into his work. If the sagas are to retain their original identity and quality, the modernization approach to translation must be kept in check.

REPRODUCTION OF SAGA STYLE

CHAIC STYLE	Magnusson &
	Morris
	Dasent
	Eddison
	Proctor

Contemporary

Contemporary Simple, bald, and lifeless
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Veblen Vigfusson & Powell Green

Contemporary, Retaining quali- ties of Saga Style
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Jones Press Hight

MODERN STYLE (destrian)	Magnusson & Pálsson
	Hollander & Bayerschmidt
	Arent

EXAMINATION OF SYNTAX

## EXAMINATION OF SYNTAX

The main objective of this chapter is to give specific examples from saga translations to illustrate how translators have succeeded in rendering basic Old Icelandic syntactic constructions into English. The general nature of syntax will be dealt with in a brief introductory note, followed by a description of the basic syntactic patterns in Old Icelandic. Since this chapter consists of a syntactic analysis, a brief discussion of the function of syntax would appear appropriate.<sup>1</sup>

Sentences are sequences of words, and grammar is concerned with analysis of the structures and regular patterns of sentences. Syntax, which is a very important part of grammar, deals with the patterned inter-relations of words in the sentences of a language and with the means by which these can be described in syntactic terms. The classification of syntax and ordering of words in sentences are vital components of the grammar of every language.

In his discussion of grammar, R.H. Robins

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<sup>1</sup>For a thorough discussion of the nature of syntax see John Lyons, Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969) Ch. 5.

mentions an essential feature of syntax, namely:

"that words, even when they are collocationally appropriate, cannot be put together in just any order; in addition to grammatical acceptability and intelligibility, the total meaning of a sentence may depend in part simply on word order, as in the English pair of sentences "the tigers killed the hunter" and "hunter killed the tigers."<sup>2</sup>

Because of a historically close linguistic relationship, the Icelandic language is similar to the English language in word formation, syntax, and idiom. There is in both languages a great number of cognates of similar form and meaning. The two languages also have similar stress patterns. These are, however, deceptive similarities. Therefore, a translator has to know Icelandic syntax well if, in translating Icelandic into English, he is to be able to avoid confusing formally similar but semantically distinct patterns in the two languages. Some Icelandic syntactic constructions can be reproduced literally in English without sacrificing the rules of English grammar. Other patterns in Icelandic syntax do not fit into English syntax. A translator may be tempted to imitate these patterns of the original with parallel English constructions

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<sup>2</sup>R.H. Robins, GENERAL LINGUISTICS (London: W. Clowes and Sons Limited, 1971) p 215.

in the translation. The result may give the impression to the readers of the translation that the style of the original is mannered. Literal reproduction of Icelandic syntactic patterns which do not fit into English grammar may, for example, fail to transfer certain kinds of subtlety and understatement often found in the original work. Also, translators whose mother tongue is that of the language of the original, and who have an inadequate knowledge of the receptor-language patterns may employ too high a degree of formal correspondence between the source and receptor languages. Because of this unfamiliarity with the structure of the receptor language, the translator may inevitably carry across to the translation the structures which are familiar to him in the source language.

Before discussing the basic syntactic patterns of Old Icelandic, some syntactic features of the Icelandic language may be briefly mentioned.

Modern Icelandic uses basically the same structures as are found in Old Icelandic. The four cases of the ancient Germanic languages (nominative, genitive, dative, and accusative) are still used in the Icelandic language of today. English and Icelandic are similar in that they both use the nominative

as the subject of a sentence. The object is normally in the accusative case. However, there are certain Icelandic verbs which take a genitive or dative object. The function of the dative is conventionally that of an indirect object and the genitive generally functions as a possessive.

The English language uses the indefinite and the definite articles whereas Icelandic has nothing analogous to the former, but it uses the free definite article before adjectives: hinn, hin, hið. Icelandic is similar to English in that, as a rule, proper names are without an article. The verbs in Icelandic carry a full set of conjugational endings and most pronouns and adjectives are fully declined.

Stefán Einarsson illustrates an important point concerning word order in Modern Icelandic when he says:

"The simple and most common word order in Icelandic is quite similar to that of English, but it is much less rigid. This is mostly owing to the fact that distinguishing case forms are still clear in Icelandic, whether they stand in the common order or not, while in English nothing but the word order indicates the function of individual words. When the rules of common word order are broken in Icelandic, it is almost always to emphasize certain words

by moving them to the beginning  
(or the end) of the sentence, or  
to give a vivid or dramatic tone  
to the narrative. 3

As has been said above, observations on Modern  
Icelandic syntax also apply in syntactic analysis  
of Old Icelandic.

Examples:

Normal word order:	Hann hét Egill.	His name is Egill.
Normal inverted order:	Hét hann Egill.	His name is Egill.
Uncommon inverted order:	Egill hét hann.	His name is Egill.

Examples will now be given of the basic syntactic  
patterns in Old Icelandic. These will be selected  
from the sagas and serve to illustrate the various  
ways in which translators have rendered them into  
English.<sup>4</sup> The patterns are described under the  
numerical headings I, II, III, IV, etc.

The following Old Icelandic pattern has a very  
high rate of frequency:

Pattern I:	Subject	+	verb	+	adverb
	hann		kemr		
	he		comes		

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<sup>3</sup>Stefán Einarsson, Icelandic Grammar Texts Glossary.  
(Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1949) p 172.

<sup>4</sup>The basic patterns described in this chapter are  
partly based on Norrón Syntax (Kristiania 1906),  
p 344-345.

This construction is common in all the sagas and the following examples show how it has been translated into English by various translators.<sup>5</sup>

I<sup>1</sup> Hjörtr mælti: Vekja vilda ek hann.

Subject verb

Hjörtr said: I would like to awaken him.

Dasent: Hjört said, "I would like to wake him."

H.&B. : Hjört replied, "I would like to rouse him from his sleep."

M.&P. : I would like to wake him said Hjört.

I<sup>2</sup> Gunnar leggur í móti atgeirinum.

Subject verb

Gunnar strikes back with the halberd.

Dasent: Gunnar thrusts at him with the bill.

H.&B. : Gunnar thrust at him with his halberd.

M.&P. : Gunnar countered with his halberd.

I<sup>3</sup> Egill gekk úti með vegg.

Subject verb

Egill walked along the house wall.

Green : Egil went out along the house wall.

Jones : Egil was walking outside by the wall.

Eddison: Egil walked out along by the wall.

I<sup>4</sup> Egill gekk til elds.

Subject verb

Egil walked to the fire.

Green : Egil went to the fire.

Jones : Egil went to the fire.

Eddison: Egil got him to the fire.

---

<sup>5</sup>In the examples given, translations by Hollander and Bayerschmidt are denoted H.&B., by Magnússon and Pálsson, M.&P., and by Vigfússon and Powell, V.&P.

I<sup>5</sup> Hrafnkell sat í stofu.

Subject verb

Hrafnkel sat in the sitting room.

V.&P. : Hrafnkel was sitting in the big room.

Jones : Hrafnkel was in the sitting room.

Pálsson: Hrafnkel was sitting in the hall.

It can be seen from these examples that the construction 'Subject + verb + adverb' frequently occurs in the family sagas and does not present the translator with difficulty in reproducing it in English. It can be literally translated without sacrificing the rules of English syntax.

Pattern II: Subject + Verb + Complement

Hann er ríkr

He is rich

Predicate nouns or adjectives are in the nominative case. In the example given 'Hann er ríkur', 'hann' is the subject and 'ríkur' is the subjective complement. Following are some examples of this construction from the family sagas:

II<sup>1</sup> þat var hestur brúnmóálóttr at lit.

Subject verb complement

It was a horse mouse-colored

V.&P. : It was a dark mouse-colored stallion.

Jones : It was a stallion.

Pálsson: It was a pale-dun stallion.







III<sup>6</sup>      Lofuðu      allir      hans      hreysti.

verb      subject      object

Praised      everyone      his      courage.

Hight: All praised his courage.

M.&M.: All men praised his great heart.

III<sup>7</sup>      Höfuð      Grettis      lögðu      þeir      í      salt.

Object      verb      subject

The head of Grettir      put      they      in salt.

Hight: They laid Grettir's head in salt.

M.&M.: But Grettir's head they laid in salt.

III<sup>8</sup>      Þá      hafði      Hrefna      motrinn.

verb      subject      object

Then      had      Hrefna      the headdress.

Press : Hrefna took the coif.

Arent : Hrefna took the headdress along.

Veblen: Hrefna wore the bonnet.

The preceding examples indicate that the normal form of Pattern III, subject + verb + object (in accusative, dative, genitive) may be rendered literally into English. This is borne out by example III<sup>4</sup>. Inverted forms of the construction are quite frequent. They may appear in the form: verb + subject + object as in examples III<sup>2</sup>, III<sup>4</sup>, III<sup>5</sup>, III<sup>6</sup>, and III<sup>8</sup>, or take the form: object + verb + subject as can be seen in examples III<sup>3</sup>, and III<sup>7</sup>.

A literal English translation of the inverted form of Pattern III would be unacceptable. Therefore, this pattern presents the translator with a problem. This is borne out by the various English versions of it. From example III<sup>4</sup>, Rev. Green's, "Then I mean to sow broadcast the silver" is markedly different from Jones' "Next I mean to sow that silver all over the place."

In general, however, the examples seem to indicate that Pattern III in either the normal or inverted form has been rendered into English relatively successfully by the translators under consideration.

A fourth basic pattern in Old Icelandic syntax can be described in the following manner:

<u>Pattern IV:</u>	Subject	+	verb	+	object	+	objective complement
	Konungr		gerði		hann		hirðmann sinn.
	The king		made		him		one of his men.

Nouns or adjectives modifying or referring to the object are in the accusative or objective case:

<u>Þeir</u>	<u>halda</u>	<u>hann</u>	vera	<u>ríkan</u> .
Subject	Verb	object		objective complement
They	consider	him	to be	rich.

An objective complement completes the meaning of

a sentence or verb and modifies the object. The following examples of Pattern IV are selected from the sagas and indicate the degree of success translators have attained in reproducing it in English:

IV<sup>1</sup> ok þótti (þeim) þetta miklu meiri svívirðing  
 verb subject object objective complement

and thought they this a much greater disgrace

Press : and thought it by much a greater and worse disgrace  
 Arent : and felt this to be more of a disgrace  
 Veblen : they felt this thing to have been worse and more shameful  
 M.&P. : and thought the incident a much greater humiliation and disgrace  
 Proctor: they deemed it much greater dishonor and worse

IV<sup>2</sup> þrándr kvað hann þar mundu þykkja röskvan mann.

Subject verb object objective complement

þrándr claimed him there would be considered energetic man.

Hight: Thrand said: "Why, you still seem as full of vigor as ever you were.  
 M.&M.: Thrand answered that whereso he was, he would still be deemed a brave man.

IV<sup>3</sup> Ásgrímr gaf jarli nafn ok kallaði hann Auðun geit.

Subject verb object objective complement

Ásgrímr gave <sup>the</sup> earl name and called him Auðun goat.

Hight: (Asgrim) bestowed a name upon the jarl. He called him Audun Nanny-goat.  
 M.&M.: (Asgrim) gave the Earl a name, and called him Audun Goaty.

IV<sup>4</sup> Hann gaf Frey, vin sínum, þann hest, halfan.

Subject	verb		object	objective complement
---------	------	--	--------	-------------------------

He gave Frey, friend his, that horse half

V.&P. : he gave his friend Frey a half share of this  
stallion.

Jones : he gave his friend Frey the half of the stallion.

Pálsson: gave his patron Frey a half-share in it.

Pattern IV is uncommon, and as a rule it does not have a normal word order. Translations of this pattern appear to be adequate.

A fifth pattern considered to be basic to Old Icelandic syntax is of the form:

Pattern V Subject + verb + direct object + indirect object

Þeir	hröfðu	hann		þess
they	asked	him	to do	this (genitive)

In the example, 'Hann gaf mér bók', 'mér' is the indirect object in the dative case and 'bók' is the direct object in accusative case. Pattern V is illustrated by the following examples:

V<sup>1</sup> Hann gaf eina eyna ok yxnina með Hákoni konungi.

Subject	verb	direct object	indirect object
---------	------	---------------	-----------------

He gave one island and the  
oxen there with Hákon the King

Press : He gave one island and its oxen to Hakon the King,

Arent : He made King Hákon a present of one of the  
islands, together with the oxen on it,

Veblen : He made a present of one of the islands with its  
oxen to King Harald.

M.&P. : and he gave one island with all its oxen to  
King Hakon the Good.

Proctor: He gave one isle and the oxen thereon to  
Hakon the king.

V<sup>2</sup> ok mun ek selja þér leqorðssökina

verb subject verb direct object indirect object

and shall I sell you (the) suit of seduction

Dasent: and I will hand over to thee the suit for

seduction

H.&B. : and I am going to hand over to you the suit for

seduction

M.&P. : I am going to assign to you my action against him  
for seduction

V<sup>3</sup> ....Því at mér er þat í móti skapi ef  
þú selr land þetta þeim Bolla ok Guðrúnu

subject verb direct object indirect object

You sell land this to them Bolli and Gudrun

Press : for it is very much against my wishes if you  
sell this land to Bolli and Gudrun

Arent : for it's not to my liking that you sell this  
land to Bolli and Gudrun

Veblen : Because I do not like to have you sell this  
land to Bolli and Gudrun

M.&P. : for it is not my wish that you sell this land  
to Bolli and Gudrun

Proctor: inasmuch as it mislikes me that thou sell this  
land to Bolli and Gudrun

V<sup>4</sup> Þar munda ek hafa gefit þér upp eina sök

verb subject verb direct object indirect object

There would I have given you up one charge

V.&P. : But I would have forgiven thee this once

Jones : I would have let you off this once

Pálsson: I'd have forgiven this single offence





VI<sup>3</sup> "Hörð mun vör sú þykkja," segir Hallr.

Compl. Verb L.S. sub. verb  
(Dat.)

Difficult will you (find)  
that offence

Dasent: You will all think that atonement hard

H.&B. : The terms which he will accept will seem  
hard to you.

M.&P. : The only terms he would accept will seem to  
you harsh.

VI<sup>4</sup> Þykkir oss hann nú einn maðr líkastr til höfðingja  
vestri hingat

Verb L.S. Subj. complement  
(Dat.)

Consider we him now one man most  
likely to be a chieftain  
west here.

Press : To my mind, he is now the one man west about  
here who is most likely to become a chieftain.

Arent : I think he is now the one man here in the west  
who shows the greatest promise of becoming a  
chieftain.

Veblen : We all consider him the one man who is best  
fitted to become a chieftain in this west  
country.

M.&P. : in my opinion he is the most likely man here in  
the west to become a leading chieftain.

Proctor: we deem him the likeliest of all men for  
chieftainship westaway here.

VI<sup>5</sup> en góð þykki mér hver sú stund er þú vilt hér vera

Compl. verb L.S. subject  
(Dat.)

but good feel I each such moment that you will here  
dwell.

Hight: I count every hour a gain that you are here.

M.&M.: but good methinks is every hour that thou art here.

Pattern VI may be found in all the sagas, but not usually in the order initially described (S + V + L.S.(dat.) + C). It is often used with verbs like 'þykja, sýnast, virðast and finnast'. Literal translation of this pattern would be unacceptable. Therefore, the translator must restructure this pattern in a manner compatible with English grammatical usage. Even though one would not consider this an extremely complex pattern, it requires nevertheless a fundamental understanding of Icelandic syntax on the part of the translator. The English versions of this construction are quite similar.

One final pattern considered basic to Old Icelandic syntax may be described thus:

Pattern VII: Subject + Verb + Indirect + Direct  
Object Object  
Hann gaf henni hest (acc.)  
(dat.)  
He gave her a horse

Following are a number of examples of this construction:

VII <sup>1</sup>	<u>Ek</u>	<u>geri</u>	<u>þér</u>	skjótan	<u>kost.</u>
	Subj.	Verb	Ind. Obj.		Direct Object
	I	give	you	a quick	choice

V.&P. : I will soon tell thee my terms.  
Jones : I shall give you a quick choice.  
Pálsson: I'll make you a quick offer.



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Pattern VII can be found in all the texts under consideration. However, it does not have as high a frequency as Patterns I or II. One may have to search through many pages without finding a single instance of this kind. Also, this pattern is more frequent in some sagas than in others. In Njal's Saga, Pattern VII seems to have a higher frequency than it does in Laxdæla Saga or Egil's Saga. Basically, the translators under consideration reproduce this construction in English relatively successfully. It must be noted, though, that there is some degree of variance in their versions of this pattern.

On the whole, translators have been successful in reproducing the basic Old Icelandic syntactic patterns in English. The translations are very similar as far as the simplest patterns (I & II) are concerned. As the patterns become more complex in nature, however, there is a greater degree of variance in the different English versions of them.

The following section deals with special syntactic patterns found in Old Icelandic literature. Examples of these constructions, selected from the sagas, will be discussed.

Deviation from the normal word order (Subject-Verb) is common in Icelandic. It is almost always used to place emphasis upon certain words by shifting them to the beginning or end of a sentence. This is also used to give a lively or vivid tone to narrative. In the following examples, inverted word order (Verb-Subject), has been brought about by a preposed adverb:

PATTERN VIII.

Example:      Nú kemur    hann.

Adverb    Verb    Subject

Now    comes    he

In the preceding example, inverted word order has been brought about by the Adverb "Nú". In this construction emphasis is placed on "Nú" by shifting it to the beginning of the sentence. In the normal word order the sentence would read: Hann kemur nú'. This is an affirmative sentence with no particular emphasis on the adverb.

VIII<sup>1</sup>

Nj. 63-157      Síðan    eggjaði    hverr    annan.

Adverb    Verb    Subject

Then    egged    each    the other.

Dasent: Then each man egged on the other.

H.&B. : Then each one urged on the other.

M.&P. : They urged each other on.

VIII<sup>2</sup>

Lax. 46-143

Var tekit sverð mitt, nú kom þat aptr.

Adverb Verb Subject

now came it again

Press : My sword was taken; it came back to me.

Arent : A sword of mine was stolen. It came back.

Veblen : A sword of mine was taken. That came back.

M.&P. : My sword was taken; that has now been recovered.

Proctor: My sword was taken; now came that back.

VIII<sup>3</sup>

Eg. 85-297 Þá sá þeir, at Egil hvarflaði á holtinu.

Adverb Vb. Subject

then saw they

Green : They saw Egil wandering about in the holt.

Jones : They could see Egil blundering about on the mound.

Eddison: Then saw they how Egil staggered about on the holt.

VIII<sup>4</sup>

Hr. 3-105 Nú tekr hann hest.

Adverb Verb Subject

Now took he a horse.

V.&P. : and took his horse

Jones : he fetched his horse

Pálsson: he fetched his horse

VIII<sup>5</sup>

Eg. 85-297    Síðan    gekk    Þórdís    til tals við Grím.

Adverb      Verb    Subject

Then      walked    Þórdís    to    talk with Grím.

Green : After this Thordis went to speak with Grim.

Jones : Later Thórdís went to speak with Grím.

Eddison: and now went Thordis to talk with Grim.

VIII<sup>6</sup>

L.S. 49-153      Þá    mælti      smalasveinn

Adverb      Verb                      Subject

Then      said                      the shepherd

Press : Then the shepherd said

Arent : The shepherd lad spoke up.

Veblen : Then the herdsboy spoke up.

M.&P. : The boy said

Proctor: Then spake the shepherd

VIII<sup>7</sup>

Gr. 84-248    Nú    veit    ek    víst, at Grettir er dauðr.

Adverb      Verb    Subject

Now    know    I    for certain, that Grettir is dead.

Hight: Now know I that Grettir is dead.

M.&M.: Now I know for certain that Grettir is dead.

Pattern VIII, when literally reproduced, does not fit into the English grammatical pattern. It must be restructured. From the examples given, it is apparent that some translators are successful in interpreting

and restructuring this pattern. Others appear to reproduce it at the expense of correct (acceptable) grammatical usage. Examples VIII<sup>2</sup>, VIII<sup>3</sup>, VIII<sup>5</sup> and VIII<sup>6</sup> bear this out. Proctor's 'now came that back' and Eddison's 'then saw they' are strict literal translations of the Icelandic pattern.

Inverted word order is common in lively or dramatic narrative. By placing the verb before the subject, greater emphasis is achieved.

PATTERN IX.

Example:            Fór    nú    Jón    heim

Verb                    Subject

Went    now    Jón    home

The following are examples of Pattern IX:

IX<sup>1</sup>

NS. 61-155            Dreymir    Gunnar    nú

Verb                    Subject

Dreams                Gunnar    now

Dasent:   Gunnar dreams now.  
H.&B. :   Gunnar is dreaming now.  
M.&P. :   Gunnar is dreaming now.

IX<sup>2</sup>

Nj.            Reið    síðan    Atli    heim

37-98

Verb                    Subject

Rode    then    Atli    home

Dasent: After that Atli rode home  
 H.&B. : Then Atli rode home  
 M.&P. : said Atli, and rode back home

IX<sup>3</sup>

Lax. 46-144

Ríða      þeir      heim      Hjarðhyltingar

Verb      Subject

Rode      they      home (the people of) Hjarðarholt.

Press : The Herdholtings rode home.  
 Arent : The Hjarðholters rode home.  
 Veblen : The Hjarðarholt folks rode back home.  
 M.&P. : The people of Hjarðarholt rode back home.  
 Proctor: Those Herdholt folk ride home.

IX<sup>4</sup>

Hr. 3-103      Reið      hann      þá      austr yfir hálsa.

Verb      Subject

Rode      he      then east over the ridges

V.&P.: : So he rode east over the neck or pass.  
 Jones : He then rode eastward over the ridge.  
 Pálsson: So he rode east across the ridges.

IX<sup>5</sup>

Gr. 84-246      Sóttust      þeir      þá      lengi.

Verb      Subject

Assailed      they      it      a long time

Hight: They assailed it long.  
 M.&M.: Long time they set on him there.

Dramatic narrative is very common in all the sagas. Pattern IV occurs frequently and the nature of its rendering has a substantial effect upon the outcome of the translation. It is important, if a translation is to be considered successful, that translators reproduce this pattern adequately in English. Much of the dramatic effect of the saga may be lost through inadequate rendering of Pattern IV. In example IX<sup>1</sup>: "Dreymir Gunnarr nú", the adverb "nú" is placed at the end of the sentence for emphasis. The English 'Now Gunnar dreams' has a great deal more impact than 'Gunnar is dreaming now'. The other examples of this pattern seem to indicate a great deal of variation in the English versions of it. It appears that this variation contributes to some extent to the differences in the overall effect of the translations.

The translation of 'questions' will be discussed in the following section.

Normal word order is used in Icelandic in questions that begin with interrogative pronouns: 'hvaða maður er þetta?' what man is this?; 'Hver er hann?' who is he? Inverted word order, however, is used in

questions, not introduced by interrogatives: 'Er Jón heima?' Is Jón at home?; 'Kemur hann í dag?' Does he come today? Translators may have difficulty in reproducing in English the different types of questions found in the Icelandic sagas. The following examples illustrate this problem:

1.) Nj. 6-20      Hvat      vilt      þú nú      Hrútr?

What      want      you now      Hrútr?

Dasent: What dost thou want now, Hrut?

M.&P. : What is it you wish, Hrut?

H.&B. : What is it you wish, Hrut?

2.) Nj. 29-76      Hvert      vilt      þú nú      halda?

Where      wilt      thou now      go?

Dasent: Whither wilt thou first fare?

H.&B. : Where shall we sail first?

M.&P. : Where do you want to go now?

3.) Lax. 63-188      Hvat      er      enn      þá?

What      is      yet      then?

Press : What is there yet to tell?

Arent : What more is there then?

Veblen : And what more is there?

M.&P. : Is there more to come?

Proctor: What is yet to tell?

4.) Lax. 52-161      Hverr      býr      hér?

Who      dwells      here?

Press : What is this place called?  
 Arent : What farm is this?  
 Veblen : What is this farm called?  
 M.&P. : What is this farm called?  
 Proctor: How light that stead?

5.) Hr. 4-111 Hvárt ertu goðorðsmaðr?  
 Are you a chieftain?

6.) Gr. 86-274 Hversu þykki þér ævi þín?  
 How find you life yours?

Hight: How do you find your life?  
 M.&M.: How deemest thou of thy life?

7.) Nj. 37-97 Gengr vel klyfjaburðrinn?  
 Goes well the pack-saddles?

Dasent: Go the pack-saddle bands well?  
 H.&B. : How are you getting on tying packsaddles?  
 M.&P. : Is the carting going well?

8.) Nj. 45-115 Sjáið ér rauðálfinn?  
 See you the red elf?

Dasent: See you now the red elf yonder, lads?  
 H.&B. : Do you see that red elf over there?  
 M.&P. : Do you see that red fairy there?

9.) Hr. 3-107 Hefir þú nökkut eptir sæmðum leitast við Hrafinkel?  
 Have you anything after honor looked for with  
 Hrafinkel?

N.&P. : Hast thou sought for any compensation from Hrafinkel?  
 Jones : Have you sought any redress from Hrafinkel?  
 Pálsson: Have you asked for any compensation from Hrafinkel?

10.) Hr. 4-111 "Eru þér fleiri bræðrnir?," segir Sámur.

"Are you more brothers?," says Sámur.

V.&P. : Are there more brothers of you? says Sam?

Jones : Are there any more brothers?

Pálsson: Are there more of you brothers?

11.) Gr. 72-234

Þykki þér svá vera, Grettir; eða hvað munu þeir af  
ráða löfðingjarnir?

Think you so be, Grettir; or what will they  
decide, the chiefs?

Hight: Think you so, Grettir? Which then will the  
chieftains do?

M.&M.: Thinkest you so, Grettir? Knowest thou then what the chiefs will make their  
minds up to?

12.) Gr. 82-259

Þorbjörn mælti: "Eru þeir at skála, bræðr, eða hví  
eru þeir ekki á ferli?"

Þorbjörn said: "Are they in the hut, the brothers, or  
why are they not about?"

Hight: Thorbjorn said, "Are the brothers in the hut? Why are  
they not about?"

M.&M.: Thorbjorn said, "Are they at their hut, those brothers?  
Why are they not afoot?"

In the texts examined, questions occur frequently in direct discourse. As has been indicated, the most common patterns are word questions, i.e. questions with inverted word order introduced by interrogative pronouns,

and yes-or-no questions, i.e. questions with inverted word order not introduced by interrogatives. Occasionally, questions are expressed with tone alone and without the change of normal word order. Questions in the normal word order seem to be reproduced in English quite successfully in the translations examined here. The examples indicate, however, that the translators must have experienced some difficulty in rendering questions of the inverted word order pattern. The English versions of example 7, for instance, are quite different. Literal reproduction of this inverted pattern is hardly acceptable in English. Yet, there are instances where this has been done. In example 11, Hight translates 'Þykki þér svá vera' as Think you so, Grettir. Magnússon and Morris' Thinkest thou that, Grettir, is equally literal. Sir George Webbe Dasent's version of the question, 'Sjá er rauðálfinn', in example 8, is word-for-word translation - See you now the red elf yonder, lads? Magnússon and Pálsson prefer - Do you see that red fairy there? as the English equivalent of this question.

Perspective adverbs like þangat, hingat, þaðan and hédan are common in saga prose. It is important

that they be reproduced accurately in translation.

A few examples of these adverbs have been selected for discussion in this section:

1.)

Es. 85-298

Fyrir sunnan ána eru laugar ok þar skammt frá jarðholur stórar, ok geta þess sumir, at Egil mundi þar hafa fólgt fé sitt, því at þangat er optliga sénn haugaeldr.

Green: And south of the river are hot springs, and hard by these large earthholes, and some men guess that Egil must have hidden his money there, because out that way cairn-fires were often seen to hover.

Jones: South of the river there are hot springs, and a short way off big holes in the earth, and some guess that Egil would have hidden his money there, for howe-fire is often seen that way.

Eddison: To the south of the river are baths and a short way therefrom big earth-holes; and some say from this that Egil would there have hidden his fee because thitherward is often seen howe-fire.

2.)

Nj. 77-187

Gunnar kom þangat at þeim örrunum, ok gátu þeir ekki at gört, ok fór svá fram um hríð.

Dasent: Gunnar found them out with his arrows there also, and still they could get nothing done.

H.&B. : Gunnar was able to reach them with his arrows so that they could not accomplish anything either.

M.&P. : Gunnar found them with his arrows and fought them off.

3.)

Nj. 79-195

Þaðan, fara þeir til Hofs, ok var Mörðr úti á velli ok bað sér griða ok bauð alsætti.

Dasent: Thence they went to Hof, and Mord was outside in the field, and begged for mercy, and offered them full atonement.

H.&B. : From there they rode to Hof where they found Mord outside in the field. He asked for quarter and offered to make a complete settlement.

M.&P. : From there they rode to Hof, where Mord was already out of doors. He begged for mercy, and offered full compensation.

4.)

Lax. 5-2

Björn ok Helgi vildu til Íslands fara, því at þeir þóttusk þaðan mart fýsiligt fregnt hafa;

Press : Bjorn and Helgi wished to go to Iceland, for they said they had heard many pleasing news thereof.

Proctor: Bjorn and Helgi would fare to Iceland, because they thought that they have heard much fair tidings thence.

Arent : Bjorn and Helgi wanted to go to Iceland, for they apparently had heard many favourable things from there.

M.&P. : Bjorn and Helgi wanted to go to Iceland, for they claimed to have heard tempting reports of it.

Veblen : Bjorn and Helgi were for going to Iceland; they said they had heard tell of many good things to be had there.

5.)

Vel er þat boðit, en þó munu nú hvárir hafa þat, sem fengit hafa, ok er þat skjótt at segja yðr, at heðan fer ek eigi, nema ek sé dauðr um dreginn;

Hight: That is a good offer; but each of us shall have that which he has got. I may tell you at once that hence I go not, unless I am dead or dragged away;

M.&M.: "A good offer," said Grettir, "but this time let each keep what he has got; and I tell you, once for all, that hence I go not, till I am dragged away dead;"

6.)

Vænti ek, at þú eigir hér fá gleðidaga heðan frá en hingat til.

Hight: I wish that your days may be less happy in the future than they have been in the past.

M.&M.: good hope I have, Grettir, that thy days of gladness shall be fewer here in time to come than in the time gone by.

7.)

Görla skil ek, hvaðan alda sjá rennr undir; hafa mér þaðan jafnan köld ráð komit;

Press : Clearly I do see from whence that chill wave comes running, and from thence cold counsels have always come to me.

Arent : I plainly see which way the wind blows - I have always felt a cold draught from that quarter.

Veblen: I see plain enough where that chilly draught comes from. Cold comfort has come to me out of the schemes drawn from the same quarter before.

M.&P. : I know all too well where this comes from,  
for I have always felt the brunt of cold counsels  
from that quarter:

Proctor: Full well methinks I wot whence this breaker  
runneth under my boat; thence hath cold  
rede ever come to me:

8.)

Hr. 3-106

Skaltu búa, meðan þér þykkir gaman at, en fara  
þá hingat, er þér leiðisk.

V.&P. : Thou shalt keep on householding as long as  
it is a pleasure to thee, and then come  
here when thou art tired of it,

Jones : You shall keep on your farm at your own  
pleasure, but come here to me when you  
are tired of it,

Pálsson: You can keep on farming for as long as  
you like, but move over here and stay  
with me when you tire of it,

The adverbs of place in Icelandic fall into well  
defined patterns. 'Hingat' - hither and 'þangat' -  
thither, indicate motion to a place, whereas 'heðan' -  
hence and 'þaðan' - thence, mean motion from a place.  
The adverb suffix 'an' usually denotes motion away  
from a place. 'Hvaðan', for example, is equivalent  
to the English 'whence'.

The adverb 'þangat' appears more frequently in  
the sagas examined than the other adverbs of place.

'Hvaðan' is used only occasionally. Examination of a number of English versions of these adverbs seems to reveal that translators have been generally successful in distinguishing among their different forms. The translations may differ slightly, however, the information conveyed by the adverb is adequately reproduced.

The translation of subordinating conjunctions found in the saga literature will be dealt with briefly in the following section.

Two groups of conjunctions can be distinguished in Icelandic: coordinating conjunctions and subordinating conjunctions. They differ according to whether they connect coordinated sentences or subordinated clauses. Simple and correlative conjunctions constitute the coordinating class. Subordinating conjunctions may be followed by the subjunctive, indicative or the indicative and subjunctive. The following are examples of subordinating conjunctions selected from the saga prose:

1.)

Lax. 2-4

Em ek ok þess fúsari, at hafa slíkan dauðdaga sem frændr mínir, en eigi vil ek yðr leiða í svá mikil vandkvæði með einræði mínu, því at mér er kunnigt skaplyndi frænda minna ok vina,

V.&P. : As for myself, I am willing to die the same day as my kinsmen, but I do not wish to lead you into such danger by my obstinacy, for I know very well the disposition of my kinsmen and friends,

Press : Now, as for me, my will is rather to abide the same death that my kinsmen suffer, but I would not lead you by my wilfulness into so great a trouble, for I know the temper of my kinsmen and friends,

Arent : I myself would rather end my days as my forefathers have, but I don't want to lead you into such great trials on my persuasion, for I well know the attitude of my kinsmen and friends -

Proctor: But of that am I the more fair, to have the same death-day as my kin, and I will not lead you into so great trouble by my counsel, because known to me is the high courage of my kinsmen and friends,

M.&P. : I would much prefer to end my days as my forefathers have done, but I have no wish to commit you to such dangers on my decision alone, for I know the temper of my kinsmen and friends:

Veblen : As for me, I should be quite content to end my days like my kinsfolk before me, but I am not going to lead you into such desperate straits by my obstinacy. For I know the temper of my friends and kindred,

2.)

Ns. 63-159

Margir menn hörmuðu hann, því at hann var vinsæll.

Dasent : Many men grieved for him, for he had many dear friends.

H.&B. : Many men mourned his death, for he had been loved by all.

M.&P. : Many mourned his death, for he had been well liked by all.

3.)

Ns. 76-186

Önundr ór Tröllaskógi hjó með öxi í höfuð hundinum, svá at allt kom í heilann; hundrinn kvað við hátt, svá at þat þótti með ódæmum, ok fell hann dauðr niðr.

Dasent: Aunund of Witchwood smote the hound on the head with his axe, so that the blade sunk into his brain. The hound gave such a great howl that they thought it passing strange, and he fell down dead.

H.&B. : Onund of Trollaskóg struck the dog on the head with his axe and the blade sank into his brain. At that the dog let out a loud howl, the like of which they had never heard before.

M.&P. : Onund of Trollwood drove his axe deep into the dog's head, right down to the brain. The animal uttered a loud howl, the like of which none had ever heard before, and fell down dead.

4.)

Es. 85-295

"Ver þú vel við," segir Egil, "þótt ek bókumk við eldinn,

Green : "Be you civil," said Egil, "though I bask by the fire."

Jones : "Be easy," said Egil, "though I toast myself by the fire,"

Eddison: "Be content thou," saith Egil, "though I bake myself by the fire,"

5.)

3-103

Einarr veit, at líðr morguninn, ok hyggr, at Hrafnkel mundi eiga vita, þótt hann riði hestinum.

V.&P. : Einar saw that the morning was passing on, and thought that Hrafnkel would never know even though he rode the horse.

Jones : Einar knew that the morning was wearing on, and thought that Hrafnkel would not know though he rode the stallion.

Pálsson: Einar realized the morning was wearing on, and decided to ride the stallion, thinking that Hrafnkel would never find out.

6.)

Lax. 49-155

það skal fjarri fara; er mér ekki sonr minn at bættri, þó at Bolli sé drepinn, ok unna ek Kjartani um alla menn fram,

Press : Far be it from me, for my son is none the more atoned to me though Bolli be slain; moreover, I loved Kjartan before all men,

Arent : That is far from my will; it won't bring back my son, even if Bolli is slain. I loved Kjartan above and beyond anyone else,

Proctor: That shall in nowise be; no boot would it be to me for my son though Bolli were slain. And albeit I loved Kjartan beyond all other men,

M.&P. : "Far from it," said Olaf. "Bolli's death would not bring back my son. I loved Kjartan above all others;"

Veblen : Far be it! It will not bring me back my son even if Bolli is killed. Kjartan was more to me than all the rest,

7.)

Hr. 3-103

Nú tekr hann hestinn ok slær við beizli, lætr þófa á bak hestinum undir sik ok ríðr upp hjá Grjótárgili, svá upp til jökla ok vestr með jöklinum, þar sem Jökulsá fellr undir þeim.

V.&P. : So he takes the horse, slips the bridle on, lays the felt-pad on the horses' back to sit on, and rides up along Gutgill, and so up to Iockle and west by the Iockle where Iockle's-water falls down,

Jones : He now took the stallion and bridled him, put the saddlecloth under him on the horse's back, and rode up by Grit river Ghyll, so up to the glaciers, and westward along the glaciers where Glacier River falls away,

Pálsson: So he bridled Freyfaxi, fixed the saddlecloth on his back, and rode up along Grjotargill, south to the glacier, and then west along the edge of the ice to the source of Jokuls River.

B.)

Gr 69-224

En með því, at þessi maðr var umfangsmikill ok inn mesti gárungr, átti hann kenningarnafn ok var kallaðr glaumr.

Hight: As the man was so fussy and talkative they gave him a nickname and called him Glaum.

M.&M.: But whereas that man swaggered exceedingly, and was the greatest of tomfools, he had a by-name, and was called Noise.

The preceeding examples, as well as a number not recorded, seem to indicate that translators reproduce the subordinating conjunctions with ease. Translations of past ages maintain the same degree of accuracy, insofar as the reproduction of subordinates is concerned, as those of current times.

Magnússon and Pálsson appear to combine occasionally, two or more sentences in the original to form a single sentence in the translation. In their version of example 6, for instance, the conjunction 'þó at' is not retained. Its meaning has been incorporated in the translation by means of syntactic restructuring. This kind of restructuring seems to be characteristic of the "free translation" approach.

There are several patterns which occur only rarely in the sagas. A brief examination of a few of these would appear in order:

SYNTACTIC SIMILARITY : DIVERGENT MEANINGS

Gr. 72-233

".....skal ek nú ekki dvelja þat, sem ek hefi til fram at láta."

Literal: Shall I now not delay that, that I have to forthwith to do.

Right : I will not delay to show that of which I am capable.

M.&M. : I shall not withhold that which I have to show forth.

Gr. 72-235

"Ekki skal svá vera," segir hann; halda skulu vér grið vár, þó at vér hafi orðit hyggendismunr; vil ek eigi, at menn hafi þat til eptirdæma, at vér sjálfir höfum gengit á grið þau, sem vér höfum sett ok seld. Skal Grettir fara liðugr þangat, sem hann vill, ok hafa grið til þess er hann kemr aptr ór þessarri ferð.

Literal: "Not shall so be," said he; hold shall we our peace, though we have been beguiled; will I not, that men have that as an example, that we ourselves have walked on on the peace (break), that we have established and declared. Shall Grettir go unhindered where he will, and have peace, to do this until he return from this journey."

Hight : " It shall not be so, we will hold the peace with you although our minds have altered. I would not that men should have the example of our having broken the peace which we ourselves gave and declared. Grettir shall depart unhindered whithersoever he will, and shall have peace till such time as he reach his home from this journey."

M.&M. : "So shall it not be," says he; "we shall hold to our peace and troth given, though we have been beguiled, for I will not that men should have such a deed to follow after, if we depart from that peace, that we ourselves have settled and handsettled: Grettir shall go whither he will, and have peace until such time as he comes back from this journey."

Gr. 72-235

Var pá talat til, at annarhvárr þeira Þórðanna myndi taka á Gretti.

Literal: was then talked about, that one or the other them Thordurs, would seize on Grettir.

Hight : Then it was proposed that one or the other of the Thords should close with Grettir.

M.&M. : Now men said that both the Thords should lay hand to Grettir.

Gr. 72-235

Pá mæltu menn, at þeir skyldi fara til báðir bræðrnir senn, ok svá var gört.

Literal: Then said men, that they should go to both brothers soon, and so was done.

Hight : Then the people said that both the brothers should tackle him together, and they did so.

M.&M. : Then men said that both those brothers should go against Grettir at once; and thus was it done.

Lax. 63-187

Vendiliga hefir þú at þessum manni hugat; mun ok mikils um þenna mann vert vera, en ekki mun ek þenna mann sét hafa.

Literal: Carefully have you at this man looked; will andmuch about this man, worthy to be but not will I this man seen have.

Press : You have paid a careful heed, indeed, to this man, and of much account he must needs be; yet this man, I think, I have never seen, so I must make a guess at it who he is.

Arent : You have certainly looked this man over very carefully. He no doubt must of much account, but I don't believe I've ever seen him.

Proctor: Carefully hast thou marked this man, and of mickle worth must he be. I cannot have seen this man, and yet may I guess who he is.

M.&P. : "You've observed this man very carefully," said Helgi. "He must be a remarkable man indeed, but I don't think I've ever set eyes on him.

Veblen: You have been looking this man over pretty carefully. And this man is likely to be a great man yet. But I have never seen this man.

Lax. 63-188

Þar muntu sét hafa Þorstein svarta mág minn,....

Literal: There will you have seen Þorstein the black, brother-in-law mine,.....

Press : for there you must have seen Thorstein the Black, my brother-in-law;

Arent : for there you probably have seen my brother-in-law Thorstein the Black.

Proctor: there must thou have seen Thorstein the Black, my wife's brother.

M.&P. : That must have been my brother-in-law Thorstein the Black you saw.

Veblen : That was my brother-in-law Black Thorstein, that you have seen.

Lax. 63-189

...ok, eigi mynda ek veita honum slíka heimsókn.

Literal: ...and, not would I give him such a visit.

Press : ..,nor would I ever offer him such a home-raid.

Arent : .., for I would never think of making such a raid on him.

Proctor: I would not make such onset on him.

M.&P. : .., for I would never pay him such a visit.

Veblen : And, I would not be making him such a visit.

Lax. 63-189

Þá sátu tveir menn, þeir váru líkir sýnum ok mundu vera miðaldra menn ok inir knáligstu,

- Literal: there sat two men, they were alike in appearance, and would be middle-aged men, and strong looking.
- Press : Next there sat two men like each other to look upon, and might have been of middle age.
- Arent : Then there were two other men sitting there. They looked alike and could have been middle-aged and were most stout and hardy looking.
- Proctor: Next sat two men; they were much alike in looks and should be men of middle age and of the stoutest.
- M.&P. : Then there were two men sitting there. They were much alike, middle-aged I should think, and very stalwart-looking.
- Veblen : Then there were two men together. They were alike in looks and would be about middle-aged, stout and hard working.

Lax. 63-189

Litlu mun ek nú við auka.

- Literal: Little will I now to add.
- Press : I have but little to add now
- Arent : Very little now can I add to this.
- Proctor: Little may I now add thereto, quoth he.
- M.&P. : I've not much to add now.
- Veblen : I have a little more to tell.

Lax. 63-189

Því at nær er þat minni ætlan, at þeir muni vilja hafa minn fund, áðr þeir losni ór heraði, ok eru þeir menn í för þessi, er várn fund munu kalla skaplígan, þó at hann hefði nökkuru fyrr at hendi komit.

Literal: Because closer is it to mine intentions, that they would want have mine meeting before they released from the district, and are these men in journey this which our meeting will call acceptable, even if it had earlier happened.

Press : for near to my mind's foreboding it is, that they are minded to have a meeting with me or ever they leave this countryside; moreover, in this train there are men who would hold that it would have been but due and meet, though this our meeting should have taken a good long time before this.

Arent : .., for if I don't miss my guess, they will want to get at me before they quit the district, and there are men in this party who would have called our encounter due, had it come somewhat earlier.

Proctor: because this is much on my mind that they will be minded to come face to face with me before they depart from this countryside, and men are on this faring who would call our meeting a timely one though it had come to hand somewhat earlier.

M.&P. : .., for I have a feeling they'll be paying me a visit before they leave the district; there are men in that company who would have called our encounter timely if it had taken place much sooner.

Veblen: And now we had better not be caught unawares by these men, for I am inclined to think that they will want to get at me before they quit the neighbourhood, and there are some in that crowd who would have thought it quite all right even if they had got me before this.

## 2.) UNUSUAL CONSTRUCTIONS:

### Commands:

A. Nj. 37-99

"Farið upp til hestsins," segir hann.

" Go up to the horse", said he.

Dasent: and said, "Go ye up to the horse yonder,"

H.&B. : He spoke to them: "Go up to that horse.

M.&P. : "Go and see to that horse up there," said Atli.

B. Eg. 85-295

"Statt þú upp," segir hon,

Stand you up said she.

Green : "Stand you up!" said she,

Jones : "Stand up," she ordered,

Eddison: "Stand thou up," saith she,

C. Hr. 3-104

"Far þú til liðs þíns."

Go you to company thine.

V.&P. : get thee gone to thy company

Jones : off with you to your stud

Pálsson: Go back to your herd.

D. Lax. 36-101

tak við hrossunum, en fá mér bústað  
nökkurn hér í nánd þér.

Literal: Take over the horses, but get me  
dwelling place some, here near you.

Press : Take you the horses and give me some  
place to dwell in here in your  
neighbourhood.

Arent : You take the horses and in return give  
me some place to live hereabouts in  
your vicinity.

Proctor: Take the horses and give me a dwelling-  
place here in thy neighbourhood.

M.&P. : In return for the horses, you must find  
us a place to stay here in this neighbourhood.

Veblen : Take the horses, and give me a place to  
live here somewhere near you.

3.)

í. Lax. 45-139 Þeir Ólafr ok Ósvífr heldu sinni vináttu.

They Olaf and Osvifs held their friendship.

Press : Olaf and Osvif were still friends.

Arent : Óláf and Ósuif held to their friendship as before,

Proctor: Olaf and Osvif held to their friendship.

M.&P. : Olaf and Osvif remained good friends.

Veblen : Olaf and Osvif held to their friendship  
as before.

100  
Lax. 46-142 er þeir Þórólfur höfðu fólgt Konungsnaut.

when they Thorolfur had hidden Konungsnaut.

Press : where An and Thorarin had found the "King's Gift."

Arent : where Thórólf and others had hidden Konungsnaut.

Proctor: where Thorolf hid King's-loom.

M.&P. : where Thorolf and his men hid the sword.

Veblen : where Thorolf thrust the king's gift into hiding.

4.)

1. Nj. 63-158

Kolr mælti Egilsson

Kol said Egilsson

Dasent: Kol Egil's son, said,

H.&B. : Then Kol Egilsson said:

M.&P. : Kol Egilsson said,

Translators appear to have been successful in reproducing the examples listed above despite the deceptive syntactic parallels they inevitably suggest between the two languages. In normal saga prose, inverted word order is used in commands in either the imperative or the subjunctive mood. A literal reproduction would be inadequate. Yet some translators

(e.g. A., B., and D.) appear to be partial to this method. Green and Eddison both translate 'Statt þú upp', as stand you (thou) up; retaining the inverted order: VERB + SUBJECT.

Translators seem to have some difficulty in dealing with 'þeir' in example 3 ii. Magnússon and Pálsson's version is the only one of the five which includes 'and his men' as the English equivalent for 'þeir'.

HYPOTACTIC and PARATACTIC constructions will be discussed in the following section.

Parataxis, by definition, is the placing together of sentences, clauses, or phrases without a conjunctive word. In English, as well as in many other languages, sentences are marked off by modulation, the use of secondary phonemes. In English, secondary phonemes of pitch mark the end of sentences, making paratactic constructions possible. Two forms which are united by no other construction are united by the use of one sentence-pitch only. Thus, in "It's now noon[.] I must be going[.]" with final falling pitch of the statement on "noon", two sentences have been uttered. If a pause-pitch is substituted for this final-pitch, the forms are united by parataxis into

one sentence: "It's now noon[,] I must be going[.] Here 'because' is replaced by the comma; the result being two main clauses. If it had been included, the second main clause would become a subordinate clause and a hypotactic construction would be produced. Hypotaxis may be defined as: dependent relation or construction, as of clauses; syntactic subordination.

Old Icelandic prose consists mostly of paratactic constructions. Examples will now be given to determine how these are reproduced in translations:

#### PARATAXIS

##### 1. Lax 46-143

"Eigi eru vér þessa valdir, Kjartan, er þú berr á oss; myndi oss alls annars af þér vara en þat, at þú myndir oss stuldð kenna."

Press : What you put down to me, Kjartan is not my fault, and I should have looked for anything else from you sooner than that you would charge me with theft.

Arent : We are not guilty of what you accuse us, Kjartan. We would have expected anything else of you but that you would charge us with stealing.

Proctor: We are nought to blame Kjartan, in this thou dost put upon us: all else might we sooner look for from thee than that thou shouldst lay stealing to our charge.

M.&P. : We are not guilty of the charges you make against us, Kjartan. We would have expected anything of you but to accuse us of theft.

Veblen: We are not at fault in these things that you charge us with, Kjartan. We might have looked for anything else from you, but not that you should be charging us with stealing.

2. Lax. 46-144

Takast nú af heimboðin; var þó kyrrt at kalla.

Press : That was the end of the feasts, yet everything was to all appearances quiet.

Arent : The partying back and forth came to an end; yet things stayed quiet, so to speak.

Proctor: So now ends the homefeast. There was yet peace of a sort.

M.&P. : There were no more invitations, but everything was quiet on the surface.

Veblen : The banquetings fell off after this. Still there might be said to be peace.

3. Gr. 82-261

Þá tók Öngull saxit tveim höndum ok hjó í höfuð Gretti; varð þat allmikit högg, svá at saxit stózk eigi, ok brotnaði skarð í miðri egginni.

Hight: Angle took his sword in both hands and hewed at Grettir's head. So mighty was the blow that the sword could not hold against it, and a piece was broken out of the edge.

M.&M. : Then Angle took the short sword in both hands and smote at Grettir's head, and a right great stroke that was, so that the short sword might not abide it, and a shard was broken from the midst of the edge thereof;

4. Gr. 82-261

Hjuggu þeir af honum höndina í úlfliðnum; þá réttusk fingrnir ok losnuðu af meðalkaflanum.

Hight: He hewed off the hand at the wrist. Then the fingers straightened and were loosed from the hilt.

M.&M.: They smote off his hand at the wrist, and the fingers straightened, and were loosed from the handle.

5. Nj. 63-158

Gunnarr stóð nokkut höllum fæti; Gunnarr sveiflar sverðinu, ok kom á hálsinn Þorkatli, ok fauk af höfuðit.

Dasent: Gunnar was standing with his body swayed a little on one side, and he makes a sweep with his sword, and caught Thorkel on the neck, and off flew his head.

H.&B. : Gunnar stood with one leg bent. He brandished his sword and crashed it down on Thorkel's neck so that his head flew off.

M.&P. : He pivoted on one foot and swung his sword at him. The blow fell on Thorkel's neck, and his head flew off.

## 6. Nj. 63-158

Alls vesall ertú, Þórir Austmaðr, er þú  
sitr hjá; nú er veginn Egill húsbóndi þinn  
ok mágr.

Dasent: "Wretch that thou art indeed, "Thorir Easterling,  
"when thou sittest by; but thy host, and  
father-in-law Egil, is slain."

H.&B. : "You are a miserable wretch, Norwegian  
Thórir, to stand by, doing nothing!  
Egil, your host and father-in-law, has  
been slain!"

M.&P. : "You're an utter coward, Easterner," he  
said, "to sit by idle. Egil, your  
host and father-in-law, has just been  
killed."

As has been stated previously, the saga prose consists mainly of paratactic constructions. In rendering these into English a translator may combine main clauses by inserting a subordinating conjunction. Also, it is possible to separate the main clauses into sentences.

The examples show a marked difference in the various English versions of the paratactic constructions examined. On the whole, the translators appear to favour hypotactic constructions over the paratactic constructions of the originals. In example one, Magnusson and Pálsson deviate considerably from the sentence sequence of the original. Proctor, however, retains a long sentence with main and subordinate

clauses. Magnússon and Morris' version of example three also consists of a single sentence. A sequence of paratactic constructions often implies more separate statements than can be condensed into a single sentence of the translation. As a result, the translation may become awkward and difficult to follow.

In conclusion, the method a translator selects to reproduce the Old Icelandic paratactic constructions has a direct bearing upon the overall strength and the total effect of the translation. In part, this disproportionate use of paratactic and hypotactic constructions accounts for some of the fundamental differences between the various English versions of the Icelandic Sagas.

The final section of this chapter deals with the translation of the historical present tense. It has been pointed out that some grammatical units in Old Icelandic prose seem to resist direct translation into English. One of the most obvious of these is the tense pattern which appears to shift back and forth between the simple present and simple past

without any consistent principle. The present tense is used to narrate a past event. This is a common usage in French and Icelandic, but less common in use in English. The historical present is used for emphasis; to make the event more vivid and real, as if it were happening at the moment. Some translators change it to the past tense in English. Yet, it is conceivable that in some instances the simple present form may be retained. The following examples show how various saga translators have reproduced the historical present:

1. Hr. 3-102

Hann tekr staf í hönd sér, beizl ok pófa

He takes a staff in hand his, a bridle and  
saddle-cloth

V.&P. : he took his staff in his hand, a bridle and pad,

Jones : He took a staff in hand, a bridle and saddlecloth,

Pálsson: He took a staff, a bridle and a saddle-cloth,

2. Hr. 3-102

Hann sér nú stóðhrossin fram á eyrunum

He sees now the horses in front on the tongue

V.&P. : he saw the mob of horses in front of him on the eyre.

Jones : He saw the mares out on the tongue,

Pálsson: Then he noticed the horses farther down by the river.

## 3. Nj. 63-157

Gunnarr sér hann ok skýtr til hans af boganum.

Gunnar sees him and shoots at him from the bow.

Dasent: Gunnar sees him and shoots an arrow at him  
from his bow.

H.&B.: Gunnar saw him and shot an arrow at him.

M.&P.: Gunnar sighted him and shot an arrow at him.

## 4. NJ. 63-158

En er þetta sér Egill, hleypr hann at  
Gunnari ok höggur til hans.

But when this saw Egil, runs he at  
Gunnar and strikes at him.

Dasent: But when Egil sees this, he runs at Gunnar  
and makes a cut at him;

H.&B. : When Egil saw that he rushed at Gunnar  
and leveled a blow at him.

M.&P. : When Egil, his father, saw this, he flung  
himself at Gunnar and struck at him.

## 5. Lax. 46-144

Ríða þeir heim Hjarðhyltingar.

Ride they home the Hjarðarholt people.

Press : the Herdholtings rode home.

Arent : the Hjarðholters rode home.

Proctor: Those Herdholt folks ride home.

M.&P. : The people of Hjarðholt rode back home.

Veblen : The Hjarðholt folks rode back home.

## 6. Lax. 47-146

En er Kjartan Ólafsson spyr þessi tíðendi,  
riðr hann þegar við tólfta mann.

But when Kjartan Olafsson hears these tidings  
rides he off with twelve men.

Press : But when Kjartan Olafsson hears of these  
tidings he rides off with twelve men.

Arent : When Kjartan Ólafsson heard this news,  
he rode off at once in a party of twelve.

Proctor: But when Kjartan Olafson learns these tidings  
he rides straightway with eleven men.

M.&P. : When Kjartan heard what had happened,  
he rode at once with eleven men.

Veblen : When Kjartan Olafson heard of this he  
set out at once with a company of twelve  
men.

The examples indicate that most translators change the historical present tense to the simple past in translation. Some however, (Dasent, Proctor, Press) retain it. In this instance, however, a literal translation appears awkward. Retention of the historical presence is designed to create a startling, vivid effect; events assume the immediacy of real life.

Place Names and Proper Names

One of the obvious features of the Icelandic sagas is the abundance of place names and proper names. For the translator, these offer many problems. Because there is no accepted standard, a number of techniques have been used in connection with the rendering of names.

The Icelandic alphabet may be classified as mixed. It is partly Roman and contains two or more non-Roman letters.

Icelandic also uses diacritical marks liberally. Names which are written in scripts other than Roman present the problem of transforming the foreign scripts into corresponding renderings in the Roman alphabet. The non-Icelandic reader would prefer to read names so that they are easy to pronounce. Some names are phonetically misleading to the English reader who thinks, and not unreasonably, that foreign words should be pronounced as they are written. The fact is, that Icelandic names do not amalgamate with English. There are a number of sequences of sounds and letters which are foreign to the non-Icelandic reader and he may become troubled

by repeated confrontation with these unfamiliar symbols. When, for example, a person is reading a translation of *Laxdæla Saga*, and comes upon the name 'Þórðr', he does not know what sound values to assign to the graphemes 'ð' and 'þ'. Unless they are explained in footnotes, he is bound to superimpose the wrong values on them. If barriers to the flow of reading are to be avoided, it is necessary, to adopt the Icelandic orthography to the English alphabet. The difficulty lies in the degree of modification. It seems logical to drop the masculine ending - 'r' (as in *Haraldr*, *Grímr* and *Gestr*) in some cases. Also, the geminates - ll, -nn, -rr (as in *Njáll*, *Gunnarr*, *Thorsteinn*) can be simplified (*Njál*, *Gunnar* and *Thorstein*). The voiced and voiceless spirants 'ð' and 'þ' are best rendered by 'd' and 'th' (thus *Skarphedin*, O.N. *Skarpheðin* and *Thorvald*, O.N. *Þorvaldr*). The retention of the acute accent for the purpose of pronunciation is open to question.

The problem in translation, however, is not merely one of writing foreign names, phonetically in our alphabet, but one of transcribing them so

that they shall preserve their identity well enough to be recognized beyond doubt, either when read aloud, or when compared with the written originals.

Caution must be exercised in the rendering of personal names. As was pointed out earlier, dropping the masculine nominative ending 'r' may be justified in some cases. In others, however, the result may not be positive. The effect is ludicrous and misleading when, for example, 'Sámr' is reduced to 'Sam'. It is also not desirable to directly translate names. 'Austmaðr' may become Eastman or Norwegian, which may be considered appropriate, however, it loses much effect when it becomes 'Easterner'. For the average reader, 'Easterner' could be a man from the Far East.

Patronymics in 'son' and 'dóttir', though they have literal meaning, would be better left in the original form. In this case, a footnote would be more appropriate to explain the Icelandic forms.

Icelandic nicknames are particularly difficult to reproduce successfully in English. Translators have the option of leaving them in their original

form, translating them directly into English, or using a footnote in conjunction with an appropriate English equivalent. Ketil flatnefr, for example, has been translated simply into Ketil Flatnose, as in the Proctor translation of Laxdæla saga. One might question, however, the effectiveness of such names as Jórunn the Sagacious, Aud the Profound, and Bolverk the Rash. Nicknames add much to the characterization in the sagas and, therefore, finding English equivalents for them seems justified. Where the name appears offensive or obscure in the original, the choice of expression is limited. Ulf the Unwashed sounds ludicrous to the English reader whereas the original does not possess these unpleasant connotations. A list of personal names selected from the saga translation follows:

Njál's saga

1. Úlfr  
Dasent: Wolf  
B&H: Úlf  
M&P: Ulf
2. Sóti  
Dasent: Soti  
B&H: Sóti  
M&P: Soti
3. Ozurr  
Dasent: Auzur  
B&H: Ozur  
M&P: Ozur
4. Þráinn  
Dasent: Thrain  
B&H: Thrain  
M&P: Thrain

5. Skammkell  
Dasent: Skamkell  
B&H: Skamkel  
M&P: Skamkel

6. Þóroddr  
Dasent: Thorod  
B&H: Thórodd  
M&P: Thorodd

Egil's saga

7. Berðlu Kári  
Green: Kari of Berdla  
Jones: Berdla-Kári

8. Eyvindr lambi  
Green: Eyvind Lambi  
Jones: Eyvind Lambi

9. Olvir hnúfa  
Green: Aulvir Hnuf  
Jones: Olvir Hnúfa

10. Þórir haklangr  
Green: Thorir Longchin  
Jones: Thórir Haklang

11. Kjötvi inn auðgi  
Green: Kjetvi the wealthy  
Jones: Kjötvi the Rich

Laxdæla saga

12. Óspakr  
M&P: Ospak  
Proctor: Ospak  
Veblen: Ospak  
Arent: Ospak

13. Vandráðr  
M&P: Vandrad  
Proctor: Vandrad  
Veblen: Vandrád  
Arent: Vandrád

14. Torráðr  
M&P: Torrad  
Proctor: Torrad  
Veblen: Torrád  
Arent: Torrád

15. Án svartí  
 M&P: An the Black  
 Proctor: An the Black  
 Veblen: Black An  
 Arent: An the Black

Grettis saga

16. Glaumr  
 Hight: Glaum  
 M&M: Noise
17. Hösmagi  
 Hight: Greybelly  
 M&M: Pied-belly
18. Gamli  
 Hight: Gamli  
 M&M: Gamli
19. Glúmr  
 Hight: Glum  
 M&M: Glum

Hrafnkels saga

20. Sámr  
 Pálsson: Sam  
 Jones: Sam
21. Hallfeðr  
 Pálsson: Hallfred  
 Jones: Hallfred
22. Sighvatr:  
 Pálsson: Sighvat  
 Jones: Sighvat

A translator must be even more cautious in the treatment of place names than in the treatment of personal names. He must always be on guard against making them unrecognizable. Icelandic place names may appear transparent and therefore tempting to the translator. 'Breiðafjörðr' becomes Broadfjord and 'Haukadalr', Hawkdale. The twentieth century translators often reproduce compound place names

ending in 'dall', 'staðir', 'fjörðr', by using the English 'dale', 'stead', and 'fjord' respectively.

A translator must not impede the identification of a place by using unfamiliar variants. He must also guard against the growth of linguistically hybrid names like "Laxá River" from "Laxá", where á means a river. These are the kind of details which reduce the vigour of a translation and give it a flavour it should not have.

Inhabitant names, Hjarðhylltingar and Eyfirðingar for example, are commonly reproduced by Hjarðholters and Eyfirthers.

A few examples of place names have been selected from the sagas for the purpose of comparing the various English translations:

Njáls saga

1. Rangárvellir  
Dasent: Rangrivervales  
B&H: Rangá River district  
M&P: Rangriver Plains
2. Breiðafjarðardalir  
Dasent: Broadfirth dales  
B&H: Broad Firth Dales  
M&P: Breidafjord Dales
3. Hrútsstaðir  
Dasent: Hrutstede  
B&H: Hrútsstead  
M&P: Hrutstead
4. Hallbjarnarvörður  
Dasent: Hallbjorn's beacon  
B&H: Hallbjorn's cairns  
M&P: Hallbjorn Cairns

Egil's saga

5. Þrándheimr  
Green: Throndheim  
Jones: Thrándheim
6. Hafrsfjörðr  
Green: Hafr's Firth  
Jones: Hafrsfjörd
7. Álöst á Sandnesi  
Green: Sandness in Alost  
Jones: Alöst at Sandnes
8. Víkin  
Green: Vik  
Jones: Vík
9. Hlaðir  
Green: Hlada  
Jones: Hladir

Laxdæla saga

10. Raumsdælafylki  
M&P: Romsdale Province  
Proctor: Raumsdalefolk  
Veblen: Romsdal district  
Arent: Romsdal District
11. Sunnmæri  
M&P: Sunnmore  
Proctor: Southmere  
Veblen: Sunnmæri  
Arent: Sunnmoere
12. Norðmæri  
M&P: Nordmore  
Proctor: Northmere  
Veblen: Nordmæri  
Arent: Nordmoere
13. Hvalfjörðr  
M&P: Hvalfjord  
Proctor: Whalefirth  
Veblen: Hvalfjord  
Arent: Hvalfjord
14. Kristnes  
M&P: Kristness  
Proctor: Kristness  
Veblen: Kristnes  
Arent: Kristnes

Grettis saga

15. Sótanes  
Hight: Sotanes  
M&M: Sotanes
16. Barreyjar  
Hight: Barra Isles  
M&M: Barra
17. Suðreyjar  
Hight: Hebrides  
M&M: South-isles
18. Skotlandsfirðir  
Hight: Scotch firths  
M&M: firths of Scotland

Hrafnkels saga

19. Fljótsdalsherað  
Pálsson: Fljotsdale District  
Jones: Fleetdale
20. Arnþrúðarstaðir  
Pálsson: Arnthrudarstead  
Jones: Arnthrud
21. Lagarfljót  
Pálsson: Lagarwater  
Jones: Lakefleet
22. Hallfreðarstaðir  
Pálsson: Hallfredarstead  
Jones: Hallfredstead

In the treatment of foreign names, the distinguishing form must be retained as closely as possible and the temptation to improve it, for orthographical, grammatical or phonetic reasons, must be resisted. The main function of the geographical names is to ensure the identification of places. What regularity they have is dependent upon the conventions of the times when they were given and

on their irregularity depends much on their effectiveness. The translation of names, like the translation of prose, is an art and requires a true scholastic effort.

## Conclusions

Old Icelandic literary works have appeared in a number of English translations. However, a comprehensive investigation of the translated works has never been attempted. To a limited degree, the preceding examination has centred on the translators' problems.

A successful translation should not be regarded as an unattainable goal, yet there are few translations which may be considered truly successful. There are certain difficulties which stand in the way of all translation. A translator must say in his own tongue what has been said by someone else in another. He is confronted with the problem of reproducing complex grammatical patterns from a foreign language into his own. In his approach, he must decide upon the degree of faithfulness he will maintain to the words of the original. Old Icelandic has a number of complex grammatical patterns which resist direct translation into English. A translator must use sound judgement if he is to represent these patterns accurately. The syntactic analysis has revealed that some translators attempt to reproduce complex Icelandic syntactic patterns by a strict adherence to the words of the original. This approach

has proved to be unsuccessful, for it often violates the rules of English grammar. The free translation approach does not offer a solution to the problem. The original begins to lose identity when the syntactic constructions are substantially reorganized. Those translators who take the middle course appear to be most successful in this area. Not only is the original adequately represented, the translation is considered acceptable on the grammatical level. It is apparent from the Lexical Analysis that correct rendering of lexical items is vital to the production of an adequate translation. If the information contained in the original is not accurately transmitted, the text has limited value. The investigation reveals numerous instances of incorrect renderings both in the nineteenth century and twentieth century translations. If these are not taken seriously, future translations may bear little resemblance to the original text.

Few translators have been successful in reproducing saga style. This may result from the incorrect interpretation of it. The choice between a literal or free rendering affects the stylistic level.

The investigation seems to indicate that various levels coincide with one another. If, for example, there are archaisms at the lexical level, there are often archaic constructions at the syntactic level. A modern morphology seems to coincide with a modern syntactic structure.

Successful translation implies accuracy at all the levels mentioned in this analysis. Only when this has been achieved can the real quality of the original be realized. In conclusion, though total translation is unattainable, successful translation is nevertheless within reach.

This thesis has dealt primarily with the Family Sagas. A more extensive investigation into the problems involved in the translation of Old Icelandic literature would include an analysis of the Mythical Heroic Sagas as well as the Eddic and Scaldic poetry. This is, however, beyond the limits of the present work. Continued research in this area would undoubtedly prove to be useful to anyone who wishes to familiarize himself with the problems involved in translation.

## Appendix

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