Translating the Crown Jewel

The Book of Mormon in Dutch Between Conservatism and Modernism

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Abstract

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly known as LDS or Mormon Church, translates its originally English scriptures worldwide, also in Dutch for its 10,000 members in the Low Lands. The focus in this article is on the Book of Mormon, written in an English biblical style of the 1600s, first translated in Dutch in 1890 and followed by several revisions and a retranslation. This article sketches how LDS translation is conducted in a tight framework that is both religiously and institutionally defined. It explores how the developments that characterize new Dutch Bible translations also play out in the LDS Dutch context as the Church's insistence on formal-equivalent translation rubs against modernizing pressures. Exemplary for these transitions in Dutch Bible versions is the choice of the pronoun of address: from *gij* which the *Statenvertaling* Bible (1637) deeply embedded, to the modern but still solemn *u* and next to the informal *jij, je, jullie*. The Dutch retranslation of the Book of Mormon struggled with these and similar issues, in particular because the wording and style should reflect, for coherence, the official LDS choice for an existing Dutch Bible. When a Bible choice changes, it affects the next revision of *Het Boek van Mormon*. Finally, translation is also and perhaps foremost the story of human actors — how each of them has room to maneuver in spite of the tight framework. As a result, diversity thrives where unity was intended.

Keywords: Latter-day Saints; Bible; translation; Book of Mormon; doctrine

Introduction[1]

In 1830, the prophet Joseph Smith Jr. (1805–1844) founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the State of New York, commonly known as LDS or Mormon Church, the very year he published the Book of Mormon.[2] Mormon missionaries reached the Netherlands in 1861, initiating a permanent presence of the Church since. Still, migration of converts to the 'Mormon Cultural Region' in the western United States has been a constant for more than a century, including thousands of Dutchmen. Flanders took a much slower start, with permanent missionary work only since 1947. The present membership in the Low Countries reaches some 10,000, organized over 28 congregations. Worldwide the Church counts some seventeen million members.

This article is an exploration of the translation dynamics of scripture, defined as writings considered sacred or authoritative by a particular religious tradition. For most Christians this equals the Bible, but at issue here is the Book of Mormon, which for the LDS is an equivalent companion to the Bible. To the Bible the Church adds three sacred texts, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price, all being the legacy of Joseph Smith. The four together are called the 'Standard Works'. The Book of Mormon, our topic here, is a text that Joseph Smith dictated from gold plates, which according to his report an angel had delivered to him. Published in 1830, the book tells the story of a group of Israelites who migrated in the seventh century BCE to the American continent, their further history spanning about a millennium. Its main message is biblical and fully Christological, hence the book's subtitle, added in 1982, 'Another Testament of Jesus Christ'. In this article on the Dutch translation, *Het Boek van Mormon*, the original English text is the source text.

The Book of Mormon is the 'crown jewel' of the Church, to use an expression of its current president. The two, the Church and the Book of

2   We will refer to 'LDS Church' or simply 'the Church'. Now headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA. It is the main Church among other 'Restoration' Churches that trace their origin to the prophet Joseph Smith.

In 1829 Joseph Smith (left) dictated the text of the Book of Mormon to his scribe Oliver Cowdery (right). Picture from the Church's Restoration Project. Image: By Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

Mormon, are joined at the hip. Since the 1830s it has served as its main vehicle for missionizing, while in public discourse 'Latter-day Saints' quickly became 'Mormons', with their religion dubbed 'Mormonism'. Church members hear the injunction to 'read the Book of Mormon' repeatedly and missionaries are expected to 'place' the Book of Mormon and ask their potential converts to pray about its truthfulness. Testimonies of members often center around the veracity of the work. For them, it has the same authoritative status as the Bible. At the scholarly level, considerable efforts have gone into the study of the book's genesis and its textual features.[3]

The LDS Church is a predominantly lay-church which has neither paid ministers nor a formal theological training, and for its organization runs on part time volunteers on a rotational basis, with intense member participation in lessons and discussions. The Standard Works form a core element in LDS religiosity, and members are very familiar with scripture. Yet, this highly centralized Church has an elaborate body of doctrine, and is bent on unity, congregational and worldwide. Thus, for the Church a shared text plus

3   Besides many venues which publish studies on the Book of Mormon, the peer-reviewed *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* (University of Illinois Press) is the most focused.

firm exegetic control are crucial, especially regarding the texts it 'owns'. As such, the LDS Church is a prime example of doctrinal religiosity, with few imagistic aspects,[4] with an undisputed center of authority that has a regional stronghold, Salt Lake City, Utah.

A Theology of Translation

Translation has been a crucial LDS concept from the start. One of the Articles of Faith states: 'We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.' The order is significant, Bible first, Book of Mormon second — but for the latter the caveat of correctness does not hold since Joseph Smith dictated the text by revelation. His endeavor was a spiritual process, a notion that persists in present translation projects within the Church. For any scripture, translation implies theology, as it must interpret the meaning of many words that carry doctrine,[5] but in LDS thought the process itself carries a significant doctrinal load, since most of the LDS additions to the canon are revelatory translations of old documents which are no longer available.

Language as such is seen as a divine gift, but lingual diversity results from transgression as the story of the tower of Babel asserts. Perfect was the Adamic language, spoken in the Garden. Language variety thus forms a challenge for a centralized Church which stresses unity. Still, the message must be spread worldwide: by 2021, the Book of Mormon has been translated into 112 languages — 91 full translations, with selections of the book in another 21 languages, while over 180 million copies of the book have been printed since 1830. New translations are going on in another 70 languages. For Church members, each new translation is a story of success, offering yet another group of people a venue into salvation.

The English Book of Mormon (EBM) is considered the word of God, albeit couched in human language, one that adopted the style of the King James Version (KJV), widely used in Joseph Smith's era. To wit, this typical verse from the very first pages: 'For behold, it came to pass that the Lord spake unto my father, yea, even in a dream, and said unto him: Blessed art thou Lehi, because of the things which thou hast done'.[6] Moreover, early in the

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4   Whitehouse, *Modes*.

5   Noss, 'Translators' Words'; Ogden, 'Translation'; Robinson, 'Theology as Translation'.

6   1 Nephi 2:1. Like the Bible, the Book of Mormon is divided in internal books, chapters and verses.

book chapters from Isaiah appear almost verbatim, while further on the America-based tale is dotted with analogous New Testament quotes, like the beatitudes, all in KJV-style.[7] It explains why the Church became firmly wedded to this classical seventeenth-century Bible edition, even considering it 'inspired'.[8] This closeness of the EBM with the KJV also implies that many terms and phrases in the EBM reflect the choices the KJV authors made when using their own sources,[9] while at the same time EBM alters some of these biblical phrases.[10] When EBM is translated to other languages, some of these early KJV theological and doctrinal choices come to haunt contemporary translators. For example, in Dutch, it can be questioned whether *salvation* should be translated by *heil, redding, verlossing* or *zaligmaking.* How to express the difference between *mercy* and *grace*, between *Redeemer* and *Savior,* or between *love* and *charity?* The quandaries are legion. Translators of EBM often face theological conundrums akin to those working on Bible translations from Greek, Hebrew or Aramaic sources. They are, however, strongly encouraged to seek divine inspiration and decide accordingly, bringing translators themselves in the realm of theology.

This 'theology of translation' has several consequences that illustrate the paradox of central steering of a complex, multilingual and multicultural process. First, translation is considered an ecclesiastical 'calling', albeit a paid one, but not contingent upon professional expertise. Anyone knowledgeable in two languages, can translate 'with the spirit', but as an inspirational effort, it implies a tension between Spirit and Organization. In the early days of the Church, Joseph Smith relied on inspiration shared by all members, but soon found out that 'a Church full of prophets was a holy bedlam'.[11] Historically, this led to an organization in which inspiration is channeled by structural constraints: It must fit the range of a person's position or 'calling' in the Church. However, as one translator may feel inspired to translate a certain way, the result is imposed on all readers and thus reason for controversy. Second, as a top-down organization with an extensive administration headquartered in 'Salt Lake', the Church has been regulating the translation process ever more meticulously, with handbooks

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7   For comparisons of the two texts, see Parry and Welch, *Isaiah*; Welch, *Illuminating.*

8   Barlow, 'Why the King James Version?'. When critical studies produced more modern English Bible translations mid-twentieth century, J. Reuben Clark, a prominent Church authority, led a staunch defense of the KJV, siding with orthodox Christian denominations.

9   The literary history of the KJV is a complex one. See Butterworth, *The Literary Lineage*; Norton, *A Textual History.*

10   For comparisons, see Frederick, 'Finding Meaning(s)'; Martin, 'The Theological Value'.

11   Givens, *People of Paradox,* 10.

of instructions, extensive lexicons, translation guides and supervising teams. However, the individual translator or an influencer in the faraway local translation bureau, when feeling moved by personal conviction or the Spirit, can still impose own preferences and orient a translation in either conservative or modernizing directions, thus mirroring the opposing tendencies in Bible translation. These local movements also lay bare the delicate dynamics between the 'Domestic Church' in Salt Lake and the periphery,[12] as our article will illustrate.

The First Dutch Translation (DBM-1890) and Subsequent Revisions

The first Dutch translation was very much the effort of one man, John Volker.[13] As a eighteen-year old Dutch boy he converted to Mormonism in 1877, together with his mother. They emigrated to 'Zion' in Utah, as was common in those times. He was soon sent back as a missionary and then again as mission president for four years (1885–1889). Volker's journal details his daily endeavors — travelling from city to city, holding public meetings, baptizing, organizing emigration for converts, and translating English Church material into Dutch. Hence, the entry on 30 June 1886: 'I commenced to translate the Book of Mormon at 8 p.m.'[14] That day, he translated in Dutch biblical idiom the verse cited above: 'Want ziet, het geschiedde, dat de Here tot mijnen vader sprak in enen droom en tot hem zeide: Gezegend zijt gij, Lehi! door hetgeen gij gedaan hebt'.

Then 27 years old, Volker had no formal lingual schooling and had started to learn English only at 18. However, his journal and letters in English show how quickly he mastered English. He finished the translation on 4 June 1889, a little less than one year after he started it, averaging about two pages a day, not long before his term as mission president was completed. In 1890 his successor Francis Brown finalized the publication. Two thousand copies were printed by I. Bremer in Amsterdam. The linen bound book of 650 pages sold at 2,50 guilders. It was the tenth language in which the Book of Mormon was translated.[15]

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12 Van Beek, 'Mormon Europeans'.

13 For a biography of Volker, see Woods and Huysmans, 'The Consecrated Service'.

14 Salt Lake City, Church History Department, *John W. Volker papers, 1880–1931*, ms. 6458, *Mission Journals 1885–1889*, 118.

15 After Danish, German, French, Italian, and Welsh in 1852, came Hawaiian in 1855, Spanish in 1875, Swedish in 1878 and Maori in 1889. See Olsen and Otterstrom, 'Language and the Internationalization', 2807.

HET
BOEK VAN MORMON.
EEN VERSLAG GESCHREVEN DOOR
DE HAND VAN MORMON.
OP
Platen genomen van de Platen van Nephi.

Daarom is het een uittreksel van het verslag van het volk van Nephi en van de Lamanieten, geschreven aan de Lamanieten die een overblijfsel zijn van het huis Israëls; en eveneens aan de Joden en de Heidenen, geschreven op bevel en door den Geest der profetie en openbaring. Geschreven en verzegeld en tot den Heere verborgen opdat het niet vernietigd zoude worden, om voort te komen en vertaald te worden door de gave en kracht Gods; verzegeld door de hand van Moroni en tot den Heere verborgen om in zijnen tijd door middel der Heidenen voortgebracht en vertaald te worden door de gave Gods.

Eveneens een uittreksel genomen uit het Boek van Ether, hetwelk een verslag of geschiedenis is van het volk van Jared, dat verspreid was toen de Heere de taal van het volk verwarde toen zij eenen toren bouwden om tot den Hemel te komen; welk verslag gegeven is om aan het overblijfsel van het huis Israëls te toonen welke groote dingen de Heere voor hunne vaderen gedaan had; en opdat zij de verbonden des Heeren mogen weten, opdat zij niet voor eeuwig verstooten zijn en eveneens tot de overtuiging van Jood en Heiden, dat JEZUS de CHRISTUS is, de EEUWIGE GOD, die zich aan alle natiën openbaart. En indien er fouten zijn, het zijn fouten van menschen. Veroordeel daarom niet de dingen Gods, opdat gij vlekkeloos moogt bevonden worden voor den rechterstoel van Christus.

VERTAALD DOOR JOZEF SMITH Jr.

VERDEELD IN HOOFDSTUKKEN EN VERZEN MET AANHALINGEN,
DOOR ORSON PRATT, Sen.

UIT HET ENGELSCH VERTAALD DOOR J. W. F. VÖLKER.

EERSTE NEDERLANDSCHE UITGAVE,
DOOR FRANCIS A. BROWN.

AMSTERDAM.
1890.

Title page of the first Dutch edition of the Book of Mormon (1890).

DBM-1890, already of a remarkable quality given the circumstances, was revised in 1909 and 1924. The 1950 revision was more thorough. It not only applied the Dutch spelling reform of 1947, including the abandonment of archaic case declensions, but it also tried to simplify the text. It replaced the frequent 'And it came to pass' by an asterisk and by making sentences more direct.

> Example 1 (1 Nephi 2:2)
> – EBM: And it came to pass that the Lord commanded my father, even in a dream, that he should take his family and depart into the wilderness.
> – DBM-1924: En het geschiedde, dat de Heere mijnen vader in eenen droom beval zijn gezin met zich te nemen en naar de wildernis te vertrekken.
> – DBM-1950: *En de Heer beval mijn vader in een droom de wildernis in te trekken en zijn gezin met zich te nemen.

Numerous reprints of this edition, DBM-1950, with only slight corrections, followed for more than half a century until 2004, when a completely new translation was published. But before that milestone was reached, eighteen years of groundwork preceded, which forms our main story.

Structural Developments and Scripture Study

In the 1960s the Church moved into a new phase of expansion into ever more countries. At Church headquarters in Utah, a Translation Services Department was organized to oversee translations worldwide. Next, the 'Every Nation' program planned to bring Church materials, including the Book of Mormon, to many more languages on earth.[16]

In the 1970s other developments would affect the mode of translation. First, the discovery of ancient Hebraic textual structures in the English text of the Book of Mormon altered perceptions: The sometimes awkward English in EBM was now seen as proof of the ancient provenance of the source text.[17] These Hebraisms include short and elaborate chiasmi (repetitions in reverse order), cognate objects (*dream a dream*; *fear with fear*), prepositional phrases instead of adjectives (*rod of iron; altar of stones*) and polysyndetons (long enumerations with identical conjunctions). Former translations, unaware of these features, had often dissolved them for a more fluent translation. Should not new editions restore these structures to illustrate authenticity?

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16   Olsen and Otterstrom, 'Language and the Internationalization', 2806.
17   Skousen, 'Hebraisms'; Tvedtnes, 'The Hebrew Background'; Welch, 'Chiasmus'.

Second, in 1972 the Church established a Scriptures Publications Committee to prepare its own LDS edition of the King James Bible with new chapter headings, cross-references to the other three Standard Works, an LDS-oriented Bible dictionary and topical index. It was published in 1979, followed in 1982 by the four Standard Works in one volume, the so-called 'quad'.[18] For individual Church members, this major endeavor reinforced the importance of coordinated scripture study. The same holds for speakers of other languages, thus implying major translation undertakings to produce harmonized scriptures.[19]

Third, in 1980 a completely new translation of the Book of Mormon in German revolutionized tradition. It was the solitary enterprise of an Austrian Church leader, Immo Luschin, who proceeded according to these self-described principles:

> I have neither the right nor the permission to change the style of the translator (Joseph Smith); to force ambiguous passages arbitrarily into unequivocal statements; to omit anything, for example on the grounds that one isn't allowed to use the same word twice in the same sentence in German; or to add anything.[20]

Consequently, Luschin's 'concordant' German retranslation, published in 1980, differed considerably from the version members were used to. For years it spurred controversies.[21]

In the same overall period since the 1960s, internal dynamics reinforced the Church organization as a top-down structure. A system of 'correlation' ensured identical procedures and programs worldwide. In 1982 lesson materials for Sunday School (which include all ages, also adults) became based on reading the Standard Works – Old Testament, New Testament, Book of Mormon and Doctrine & Covenants –, in a four year cycle. Translations as well as the choice of the local Bible had also to be 'correlated' to ensure both organizational and exegetical conformity.

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18 Matthews, 'The New Publications'. See for the place of the Bible in Mormonism: Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*; Maffly-Kipp, 'Mormons and the Bible'.

19 In 2009 the Church produced a 'quad' in Spanish, with the Bible based on the 1909 Reina-Valera translation. In 2015 an LDS version of the Portuguese Bible, the 1914 Almeida version, saw the light, and similar projects run for Italian, French, German and Chinese.

20 Cited in Snow, 'The Challenge', 135–136.

21 Luschin was not a linguist or professional translator, but he was dedicated, strong-willed and close to Church leaders who approved of his project, and did most of his translation while president of the Swiss temple, a position of authority. His translation had 'strange, elevated, regional and archaic overtones' (Folsom, 'Some Stylistic Features', 104). See also Folsom, 'The Concordant Principle', and Snow, 'The Challenge'.

With these developments in the background, in 1980 Church leaders issued a Policy for Church translators:[22] Translators should convey the meaning of the source in the most accurate, precise, and literal way possible; literalness implies following the words, phrases, and sentence structure, as well as the idiomatic expressions and literary style of the original authors very closely, including redundant expressions and awkward sentence structure and thus preserving the literary idiosyncrasies and style of each author; translators should not water down doctrines or adapt the text to their culture. Overall, the Policy can be seen as a stringent version of the formal-equivalent approach in Bible translation, which aims at preserving the historical-cultural codes of the source text. This position eschews more functional-equivalent approaches which tend to weaken these links with the past and favor a culturally adapted message over form.[23]

To achieve optimal coherence, the Translation Department developed an English Lexicon and a Translation Guide to monitor all translation endeavors. Begun in 1986, both tools were being finalized in the early 1990s. A major team effort, the three-volume Lexicon defines all words used in the three LDS scriptures. The Guide discusses for each verse the words, phrases, sentence structures, idiomatic expressions, literary style, redundant expressions and awkward constructions that should be maintained in translation. The Guide eventually grew to 7000 pages. Together these two tools go deep into the details of the texts and constitute a powerful exegetic instrument that fixes both the meaning of words, phrases and their doctrinal relevance. Thus, the challenge of lingual diversity was met, not by addressing each of the languages in question, but through a standardized interpretation of the source text.

The New Dutch Translation, First Phase (DBM-1993)

The new English 'quad', Luschin's new German version, translations into new languages and the development of local Translation Bureaus, all this

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22 'First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Policy Relative to Translation of the Standard Works', dated 17 April 1980. This internal document for Church translation teams is not publicly available but is discussed in Snow, 'The Challenge', and Folsom, 'A Discussion'. We thank Tod Harris from the Church Translation Department for confirming the salient points of the policy, which we use in our text.
23 The range from formal equivalence to dynamic/functional equivalence and next to communicative equivalence covers many aspects of both cultural and linguistic entities. The terms carry various meanings, even in the developing insights by experts themselves. See Kerr, 'Dynamic Equivalence'; Naudé, 'An Overview'; Statham, 'Nida and functional equivalence'. For a broad-based, contemporary perspective, see Wilt, *Bible Translation*.

created a momentum favorable to new projects.[24] Although Dutch-speaking Church members were not asking for a revised DBM, voices within the Dutch *Kerkelijk Vertaalbureau* (Church Translation Office, from here on *Vertaalbureau*) advocated for one. The *Vertaalbureau* was then an all-Netherlands led endeavor, without input from Flanders. In 1984 the Scriptures Publications Committee approved a plan to 'revise' the LDS scriptures in all European languages, so they would be in line with the 1980 Policy. The intended 'scope' for the Dutch project, i.e., the instructions for the revision, was thus not a new translation, only a revision of verses where literalness could be improved. After starting the work, the *Vertaalbureau* argued that it would require so many annotations in the existing text that working out a new text would be more practical. Permission for this extended scope was obtained from 'Salt Lake'.

The Dutch project was presented to local church leaders and participants at a meeting on 27 October 1986, at the premises of the *Vertaalbureau* in the city of Nieuwegein, near Utrecht. Leading the proceedings was Immo Luschin, now supervising scripture revision projects in European languages. For the Dutch project, he announced as principal translator one of the *Vertaalbureau* employees.[25] Somewhat theatrically as part of a translation test for all participants, Luschin handed her the English source text, asked her to go into an adjoining room and start the translation of a specific passage right away, just with pen and paper. She did, but emerged again to get her current Dutch Book of Mormon. 'No need for that, you are going to translate from scratch. You do not need the old translation'. This event firmly established the notion that the new text did not have to take the existing text, DBM-1950, into account – like Luschin had done in German.[26]

The principal translator engaged with great gusto in this complete retranslation project. It put her on a journey together with colleagues working on Icelandic, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian and French, plus intense workshops with her supervisors from Salt Lake City. A team of local members functioned as reviewers. In 1992 the retranslation work was concluded, including the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price. The resulting unpublished manuscript of the retranslated Book of Mormon is labeled DBM-1993.

24   Sources for this and next sections are documents received from the Church as well as interviews and email exchanges with various participants in the translation process from 1986 to 2017.
25   She preferred to remain anonymous for this article, as do the other interviewees.
26   Though she did consult the existing translation during the process.

During her work, also a *Vertaalbureau* supervisor watched along with her and articulated his views on scripture translation as a compromise between the criteria of literalness on the one hand and of readability in 'contemporary language' on the other hand.[27] In contrast to the 1980 Church Policy, a 1993 *Vertaalbureau* retrospective of the project stated:

> The basic principle of this translation is that if possible all elements carrying meaning are translated, in whatever way. No forced attempt has been made to establish outward parallels between English and Dutch, such as the use of the same tenses. Related to this is the principle of corresponding impact. The message of the scriptures should make more or less the same impact on the readers in the target language as the original makes on the English speaking readers (...) the Book of Mormon is a message to the world and should be understandable by people in general, young members of the Church in particular.[28]

These principles seem to reflect Eugene Nida's functional or dynamic equivalence in Bible translation, intended to bring the meaning 'as close as possible within the parameters of a contemporary culture (...) rather than the wooden, artificial one conveyed by literal translation'.[29] At the same time, the DBM translator was bound by the strict 1980 Policy which insists on literal translation. However, the new DBM-1993 did modify the existing text, even where this text was also literal, by substituting words, altering phrases, replacing genitives (*Gods macht; des Heren*) by possessive phrases (macht van God, van de Heer) and changing verbal structures.

Example 2 (title page, where the prophet Mormon prefaces his work)
– EBM: Wherefore, it is an *abridgment* of the *record* of the people of Nephi.
– DBM-1950: Het is daarom een *beknopte bewerking* van het *geschiedboek* van het volk van Nephi.[30]
– DBM-1993: En wel een *samenvatting* van de *kroniek* van het volk van Nephi.

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27   Stolp, 'Scripture Translation Guidelines', 1–2.
28   Dutch Scripture Translation Project, 'Principles of Translation', 1. The memo is anonymous.
29   Statham, 'Nida and Functional Equivalence', 38.
30   Main differences are italicized. We do not translate most examples in Dutch back to English as this would be quite place-consuming and would still miss some specific and relevant nuances. We trust most *Trajecta*-readers are Dutch-speakers or well familiar with Dutch.

Lexical substitutions are debatable. Here the English *abridgment* reflects how Mormon composed a shorter text by selecting detailed writings and connecting them with personal comments and a few summations – what DBM-1950 rendered well by *beknopte bewerking*, though *verkorting* or *inkorting* would be the closest literal translation. But editorial abridging of a text is not what is usually meant by a *samenvatting* ('summary').

> Example 3 (title page)
> – EBM: wherefore, condemn not *the things of God*, that *ye may be found* spotless at the judgment-seat of Christ.
> – DBM-1950: veroordeelt daarom *de dingen Gods* niet, opdat *gij* voor de rechterstoel van Christus vlekkeloos *moogt worden bevonden*.
> – DBM-1993: veroordeel daarom niet *hetgeen van God* is, opdat *u* voor de rechterstoel van Christus vlekkeloos *wordt bevonden*.

Note how the genitive *dingen Gods* was altered to the relative clause *hetgeen van God is,* how *gij* was changed to *u* and the verbal structured simplified. That brings us to one major predicament. (Re)translating the Book of Mormon involves a quandary not present in other scripture projects: The choice of a Bible version as a model for language style, as source of terminology and as basis for Book of Mormon passages that have a biblical counterpart.

For English, the KJV is the obvious counterpart. For other languages, an existing Bible translation should be chosen 'that best meets the Church's criteria for language formality and doctrinal accuracy'.[31] Out of Dutch tradition, LDS members in the Netherlands had always used the *Statenvertaling* ('States Translation'). In Catholic Flanders, it was the *Petrus Canisius vertaling*, and later on the Willibrord version. In 1951, the Protestant *Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap* ('the Netherlands Bible Society') published a new translation, the NBG-1951. The text was significantly modernized compared to the *Statenvertaling*, but, to satisfy the more orthodox Protestants, it kept traditional markers that gave the text its scriptural ring: the address pronoun *gij*, some old plurals like *vaderen* en *vogelen* and many standard genitive forms such as *in de naam des vaders, vreze des Heren, vogelen des hemels, eind der tijden* or *Heilige der Heiligen*.[32] None of these disturbs comprehension, but they retain the solemnity of scriptural tradition. In 1975, four years

31   '12 Questions with Tod Harris, Church Translation Department – Part II,' *Times and Seasons*, 23 February 2016, URL: https://www.timesandseasons.org/harchive/2016/02/12-questions-with-tod-harris-church-translation-department-part-ii/ (accessed 16 December 2021).
32   Beelen and van der Sijs, 'Van sprake Canaans'.
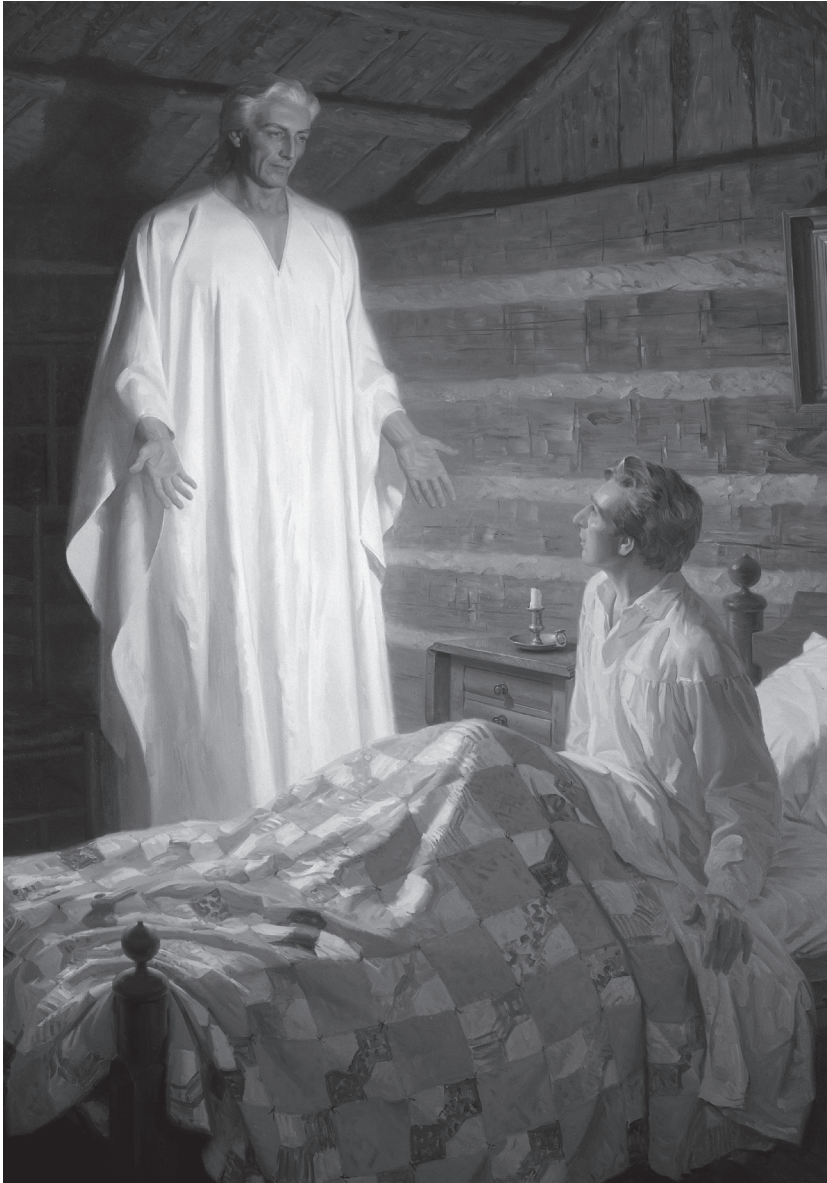
The Book of Mormon started with a vision: Artist's impression of the appearance of Moroni to Joseph Smith. Moroni is Mormon's son, the last of the Book of Mormon prophets. Imag: By Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

before the start of the DBM retranslation project, the LDS Church leaders in the Netherlands had opted for the NBG-1951 as its benchmark Bible. At the time, most members in the Netherlands still used the *Statenvertaling*, but they gradually shifted to the NBG.

DBM-1993 did mostly follow NBG-1951 in parallel biblical verses, but not in its traditional scriptural markers. For instance, it changed the 2493 occurrences of the pronoun *gij* into *u* (including some verbal form changes)*, vaderen* into *vaders*, and genitive forms like *macht Gods, huis Israëls, in des Heren hoede*, into *macht van God, huis van Israël, in de hoede van de Heer.* It was a major step in modernization. Early 1993, an Ecclesiastical Committee of three persons was called to 'provide a final certification that the translation is doctrinally accurate as well as acceptable to the intended audience'.[33] The Committee responded with divided opinions. One mentioned the loss of the unique scriptural style, such as the change from the pronoun *gij* to *u*, in spite of the requested conformity with the benchmark Bible, NBG-1951. Another critical remark questioned whether a completely new translation was needed since the former text was already the result of several careful and 'inspired' revisions. Sent to the Scripture Commitee in Salt Lake, the report did strike a chord. Two high profile Dutch-speaking Church leaders saw the changes as an unacceptable loss of scriptural tradition and solemnity.

In August 1993, the Scriptures Committee directed that the Dutch project be restarted. For those who had been involved with the project, and had pushed for a more modern text, this was a frustrating message. Supervisors from Salt Lake instructed to use both the formerly published Dutch text and the new text of DBM-1993 as starting point. Furthermore, they gave one new instruction related to the debates on the German translation and the criticism of the Dutch committee: Cherished verses and passages that were cited often, which members tend to know by heart, should not be changed, unless these contained erroneous translations. This instruction was given in person, in workshops, and had its impact on the process of re-translation.

The New Dutch Translation, Second Phase (DBM-2004)

After some soul searching, the translator was ready to revise her own text, assisted by a colleague. She dutifully went back to the drawing board, changed all 2493 occurrences of *u* back to *gij* and restored *vaderen* and the genitive forms. In that sense the endeavor managed a surface return to the former

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33   Harris, 'Translation', 24.

version, DBM-1950. The revision did not, however, restore the hundreds of other words and phrases that were changed from DBM-1950 to DBM-1993.

> Example 4 (2 Nephi 26:16)
> – EBM: For those *who shall be destroyed* shall speak unto them out of the ground (...) and their voice shall be as *one that hath a familiar spirit.*
> – DBM-1950: Want zij, *die zullen worden verdelgd*, zullen *uit* de grond tot hen spreken (...) en hun stem zal zijn als van *iemand, die een welbekende geest heeft.*
> – DBM-2004: Want zij *die worden vernietigd*, zullen *vanuit* de grond tot hen spreken (...) en hun stem zal zijn *als iemand die de doden bezweert.*

The pericope comes from a citation of Isaiah chapters in the Book of Mormon (Isa. 29:4). LDS interpretation sees the verse as predicting the surfacing of the Book of Mormon in America: A voice that had been buried after the people's destruction will come back to life. The *familiar spirit* is explained in missionary terms: When reading the Book of Mormon, people will recognize the voice as familiar and more readily accept the message. DBM-1950 renders *familiar spirit* quite literally: *een welbekende geest.* DBM-2004 turns to an alternate translation of Isaiah: Necromancy that brought the recognizable voice of the dead through a medium: *die de doden bezweert.* Thus, the translator choose to follow the biblical form over the Book of Mormon interpretation, which is unusual.

Aside from substantial lexical and syntactic dissimilarities vis-à-vis DBM-1950, DBM-2004 is, overall, a valuable product. Its return to the traditional scriptural markers, after the unpublished DBM-1993's attempt to modernization, aligns the solemnity from tradition with EBM – *thou* and *ye* are well rendered by *gij*. Moreover, it follows the word and phrase sequencing of EBM quite literally as requested, more than DBM-1950. It restores the 'And it came to pass', a preamble that occurs throughout EBM, and which DBM-1950 had replaced by an asterisk; also it replicates the Hebraisms that DBM-1950 had dissolved, such as the cognate object.

> Example 5 (1 Nephi 3:2)
> – EBM: *And it came to pass* that he spake unto me, saying: Behold *I have dreamed a dream*, in the which the Lord hath commanded me that thou and thy brethren shall return to Jerusalem.
> – DBM-1950: *En hij sprak tot mij en zeide: Zie, *ik heb een droom gehad*, waarin de *Here* mij heeft *bevolen*, dat gij en uw broeders naar Jeruzalem *moeten terugkeren.*

– DBM-2004: *En het geschiedde dat* hij tot mij sprak, zeggende: Zie, *ik heb een droom gedroomd* waarin de *Heer* mij heeft *geboden* dat gij en uw broeders naar Jeruzalem *zullen terugkeren*.

After the usual round of committees, the final text of DBM-2004 was approved. The three scriptures together were published in 2004 as the Dutch 'triple'.

The Third Round (DBM-2017)

The English 'quad' was published in 1982. As Church experts continued to note spelling errors and small discrepancies and as they developed more extensive referencing and indexing, a revised edition was published in 2013. Next, all non-English versions had to incorporate the relevant changes, as well as correct errors in their own editions, discovered since the last publication. The scope was very restricted: For any other change than the ones in the English text, permission had to be asked from Salt Lake. For the Dutch revision, one major change surfaced, an irony of history: Change all traditional scriptural markers again to contemporary usage, as DBM-1993 had attempted to, but had been whistled back by headquarters. The rationale for this upheaval was yet another Bible translation as benchmark.

NBG-1951 had been the Church's official Bible for more than 30 years. In 2004 the *Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap* published a new Bible, *de Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling* (NBV-2004). It was the result of a wide interconfessional endeavor, including both Protestants and Catholics, from the Netherlands and from Flanders. The Flemish experts made sure that 'Hollandisms' were replaced by unequivocal words and expressions.[34] On their own, quite a few Dutch and Flemish LDS Church members adopted NBV-2004 enthusiastically. In 2010 the Protestant *Gereformeerde Bond* ('Reformed Association'), an orthodox Calvinist group, published the *Herziene Statenvertaling* ('Revised States Translation', HSV-2010). Faced with these new Bible choices, the *Vertaalbureau* deemed NBV-2004 too progressive for serious consideration and only evaluated key verses in two *Statenvertaling*-versions, the Tukker from 1977 and the new HSV-2010.[35] The latter was approved. On the national level, this choice for the HSV implies that the Dutch LDS community defines

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34   Grezel, 'Vlamingen'.
35   The original assessment zoomed in on 88 key verses for doctrinal accuracy. This system is not used anymore, and the evaluation now uses four general criteria – doctrinal accuracy from

itself scripture-wise as part of the ultra-orthodox Protestant wing. For Flemish members, happy with NBV-2004 as common ground for the whole of the Low Lands, HSV-2010 remains a thoroughly Protestant Bible from 'Holland'.

For the new Dutch revision of *Het Boek van Mormon*, the *Vertaalbureau* could now refer to HSV-2010 to modernize the text — changing again thousands of *gij* and genitive forms — an in-depth transformation that had been previously denied to preserve tradition. At this point it is fitting to clarify the question of the address pronoun in the broader perspective of lingual and biblical developments. The issue exemplifies the perpetual tension between conservatism and modernism. In Bible translations, both in English and in Dutch, the issue has indeed sparked historical debates as it also concerns the pronoun addressing God. For the KJV in 1611, it was decided to keep the old singular *thou* – 'Thou shalt not kill' – instead of adopting the then 'modern' use of the plural *ye* (later *you*) also for the singular. In the Netherlands, for the *Statenvertaling* in 1637, an opposite standpoint dropped the olden singular *du* – 'Du en sultse niet doden'[36] – to adopt the then 'modern' and more courteous *ghy* (later *gij*)*,* valid both for singular and plural – 'Ghy en sult niet dooden'. A plural was clarified by the addition of *lieden:* 'Weest dan ghy lieden volmaeckt.'[37]

In next centuries, however, deference rules made the address pronoun further evolve in Dutch. Since *gij* made no social difference between speakers, *U* emerged to show respect (probably from addressing higher-ups with their title 'Uwe hoogheid, Uwe edelheid'). Meanwhile, dialects in the Holland provinces were spreading the informal *jij* (reduced *je*) as singular pronoun, followed by *jullie* (from *je-lieden*) for the plural. By 1900 *jij-je-jullie* had overtaken *gij* as common address pronoun in nearly all of the Netherlands, but not in oral use in Flanders. The pronoun *U*, both singular and plural, capitalized in writing, remained for deference, but the evolution towards an increased use of *jij-je-jullie* is ongoing. Social conventions change: While children used to address a parent with *u*, the common norm is now *jij-je,* even spreading to students addressing their teacher.[38]

LDS viewpoint, faithfulness in matching the source texts, reading accessibility and formality and dignity of the style.

36 Ex. 20:13 according to the *Delftse Bijbel* (1477).

37 'Be ye therefore perfect.' *Lieden* further evolved to *lie* or *lui,* combining with *gij* into *gyly, ghijlui* or *gyluy*. The same suffix leads to plural words such as *kooplieden, kooplui, werklieden, werklui.*

38 Vermaas, *Veranderingen.*

Dutch Bible versions followed those developments with much delay and reticence. Scriptural language expresses tradition and emotion. The high frequency of *gij* and genitive forms affects the biblical text deeply and gives it its own ritual style. So, even in 1951, the 'modern' NBG kept *gij:* 'Gij zult niet doden.' *Gij* has the significant deictic advantage of permanent appropriateness since only the context can interpret the tone of the address.

As *gij* aged in the Netherlands, new Bible translations striving for a more contemporary and accessible text opted for *u* for formal addressing and partially for *jij-je-jullie* for interaction between equals or by superiors towards inferiors. The popular interconfessional NBV-2004 chose to maximize *jij-je-jullie* for contemporary fluency and sociability between subjects. The cautious HSV-2010, on the other hand, strongly favored *u* to maintain biblical solemnity, but allowed *jij-je-jullie* sparingly for interactions between intimate friends, fellows and family members.[39] But here is the problem: The choice of the pronoun obliges the translator to interpret the type of relation between the actors – between God, Jesus, angels, Satan, disciples, family members and conflicting subjects.[40] Does Satan address Eve respectfully with *u* or familiarly and thus alluringly with *jij-je* or *jullie* to include Adam?[41] Does Mary address her twelve-year old son Jesus with *jij-je,* or the capitalized *Jij-Je,* or with the respectful, even capitalized *U*?[42] Moreover, any choice for *jij-je* also affects the related reflexive and object pronouns and possessives: 'Nu dan, *jouw* twee zonen, die bij *jou* in het land Egypte geboren zijn voordat ik bij *je* in Egypte kwam, zijn van mij' (Gen. 48:5, HSV-2010).

All of this also impacted DBM-versions as major issue. Our English source text, EBM, basically follows KJV in using *thou* when addressing one person and *ye* for more than one (occasionally *you*). Connotations of friendship, contempt or deference are determined by the context. By translating both *thou* and *ye* by *gij*, Dutch DBM versions since 1890 faced no translation dilemmas. Then, as we saw, DBM-1993 shifted all occurrences of *gij* straightforwardly to *u. Next,* under conservative pressure, it had to fold back to *gij* for DBM-2004.

39   Somewhat more used in the Old Testament, in narratives involving family members, the address with *jij* or *je* occurs only twelve times in the New Testament. See also Boot, 'De Statenvertaling'.
40   Wenzel, 'Wie tutoyeert God?'
41   NBV chooses *jullie*: (Satan) vroeg aan de vrouw: 'Is het waar dat God gezegd heeft dat jullie van geen enkele boom in de tuin mogen eten?' HSV opts for *u*: 'Is het echt zo dat God gezegd heeft: U mag niet eten van alle bomen in de hof?' (Gen. 3:1)
42   NBV chooses the reduced *je*: 'Kind, wat heb je ons aangedaan?' but NBV-21 capitalizes to *Je.* HSV uses the capitalized *U* (Luke 2:48).

By adopting HSV-2010 as its official Bible, the *Vertaalbureau* could now argue that for stylistic coherence a new DBM-revision should follow the HSV lingual norms. It meant all *gij* occurrences and genitive forms would be discarded again. However this time, as was the case in the latest Bible editions, the pronoun revision was faced with numerous choices as to interpersonal relations between *u* and *jij-je-jullie,* with the related changes in object pronouns and possessives. The result was DBM-2017. Analysis shows that this revision went far beyond the preference of HSV for *u* and its restraint use of *jij-je-jullie*. DBM-2017 opted to use *jij*, and even much more the colloquially reduced *je*, in every address by a parent to a son, and the plural *jullie* to sons, irrespective of the context. Between married partners and friends, it hesitated. The translator thus subjectively interpreted each situation and it varied. For example, Sariah, wife of the prophet Lehi, addresses him with *jij* (1 Nephi 5:2). But king Lamoni, waking up from a coma and seeing his wife at his side, addresses her with *u* (Alma 19:12), as well as a befriended missionary (Alma 20:4). The king's father addresses his son with *je* in a situation of conflict, while addressing an enemy, whom he just despised as a liar, with a formal *u* (Alma 20:13-23). King Benjamin addresses his son Mosiah with a solemn 'Mijn zoon', but continues with *je* while giving orders of national importance for his succession: 'Mijn zoon, ik wil dat je ...' (Mosiah 1:18). In all these cases English uses *thou* because one person is being addressed.

Besides this major overhaul, DBM-2017 basically follows the text of DBM-2004, though a detailed analysis reveals some noteworthy changes. Overall DBM-2017 stays close to EBM and can thus be considered a fairly literal translation, though its mix of conservatism and modernism impinges on internal coherence. On the one hand, by remaining textually close to EBM, it exudes its ancient character, with Hebraic structures, complex sentences, solemnity and a peculiar religious vocabulary. On the other hand, the use of colloquial pronouns and the rejection of traditional idioms gives DBM-2017, in many places, the tone of a comfy book with an easy narrative. Both approaches grind against each other. The tension is particularly obvious because nearly all addresses of a father to his son(s) – Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, Alma, Benjamin, Mosiah, Mormon – or of a brother to his sibling(s), pertain to prophecies, blessings, forewarnings, doctrinal exposés or formal letters, all cast in solemn or exalted language. None is of a conversational nature: 'Daarom gebied ik je, mijn zoon, in de vreze Gods, je te onthouden van je ongerechtigheden' (Alma 39:12, with even the genitive 'vreze Gods' kept at this place). It is true that with time, by habituation and interpretation, the use of *je* can also be sensed as solemn,

The message of the Book of Mormon is fully Christological: Artist's impression of a central Book of Mormon prophet, Alma, who baptizes his followers. © By Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

but for experienced DBM-readers the change is striking. For the translator of DBM-1993 and DBM-2004, 89 years old at the time of our writing, this shift to *jij, jou, jullie* was a bridge too far, but she told us: 'Have courage, history will change again.' She is probably right.

As to the members at large, many continue to use the cherished DBM-version of their childhood or of the moment of their conversion. For a Bible, some purchase the HSV-2010 together with their triple, but many either continue to use their familiar NBG-1951, or have by now bought the widely available NBV-2004, with its more accessible text. Also, more easy-reading Bibles, such as the *Groot Nieuws Bijbel* ('Great News Bible') circulate in Sunday School classes, often depending on their availability on the internet.. In spite of the Church's push to unity, diversity prevails on the ground.

Discussion

In this case study of DBM translations we followed the genesis of a book of scripture against the backdrop of a developing Church. First, a young convert, John Volker, simply and self-confidently translated the Book of

Mormon in the stately style of his era. The subsequent revisions were more centrally regulated. The 1950 revision modernized grammar and spelling, pruned some of the redundancy, but still stayed close to a traditional biblical idiom. It would remain the standard text for more than half a century, well embedded in Dutch and Flemish LDS culture. Meanwhile the 1980s saw a new edition of the English Standard Works, the reinforcement of scripture study and further substantial Church growth outside the USA. It triggered the question of the habitus of an American-based church going global. The eventual Church reaction was institutional tightening in an orchestrated move towards doctrinal and organizational unity. As for the challenge to render the Book of Mormon message in many languages and yet safeguard doctrine, Church leaders required strict literal translation of the English scriptures, emphasizing the connection with the KJV. Assigned to local Church translation bureaus, the work remained under strict supervision by 'Salt Lake'. It led to micro-management of the process through a set of directive translation tools that hemmed in the interpretive space for local translators.

Yet, the discourse of translating with the Spirit — the theology of translation — was maintained throughout this whole process, in seeming contrast to the minute instructions. In our interviews we found that this discourse was much less used by the individual translators themselves, so the discourse functioned primarily as an ulterior justification for the result. After every translation is completed, stories are told of divine guidance.[43] But this discourse functions better in a new translation than in a revision or retranslation.

The Dutch retranslation was pre-empted by the German translation, which also set the tone for the translation mode. But the process of translation is inherently difficult to manage. Unforeseen by the leadership in Salt Lake, local translators and committee members can significantly alter the existing text, even within the boundaries of literal translation and in spite of the directive to preserve a formal and solemn biblical tenor. The membership at large had no say in all of these decisions. What was also unforeseen, generally, both by the leadership and the translation offices, was the members' reaction on changes in 'their' scriptures: Texts are much more than expressions of authority or linguistics, they are vehicles of emotion and tools of identity construction. Anglophone Church members never had to experience intense changes in text, in the Bible or in the Book of Mormon. The self-evident place of KJV precluded an appreciation of both

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43   For examples, see Chou and Chou, 'To Every Nation'.

the constructed nature of scriptural texts, and the emotional attachment to specific wording. The notion that such emotions need to be taken into account when retranslating only slowly surfaced in this process. The Church's plan, in 1984, to revise all non-English scriptures in line with the 1980 Policy of literalness, and the many tools developed to streamline the translation process, did not seem to foresee the implications that different well-known texts might have on members. Yet, this is a Church in which doctrinal religiosity is central,[44] where members are expected to read the Standard Works over and over, even memorize core verses to use when they speak themselves from the pulpit. So, in a universe of new translations, these re-translations – such as in Dutch and in German – brought to light disconcerting aspects of scripture use in the LDS Church, also for the leadership.

Central in this debate is therefore the Bible benchmark. In English, EBM is viewed as untouchable because of its sacred origin, which led to impose KJV as normative Bible. With time, however, EBM and KJV become increasingly difficult texts, not only for native Anglophones, but especially for converts using English as lingua franca, like those from African and Asian nations. One wonders whether this close link between EBM and KJV is not gradually morphing into a liability. Much more accessible Bible translations in English are available now, raising the question how long the Church will be able to maintain this stance. In other languages, , better Bible editions oblige the Church to support 'translations that deviate in many and sometimes significant ways from the KJV'.[45] For Dutch, the Church moved from the *Statenvertaling* (comparable to KJV) to NBG-1951 and next, in one leap, to HSV-2010, which again is far from the most modern Bible versions. On the national level, this choice implies that the Dutch LDS community defines itself scripture-wise as part of ultra-orthodox Protestant denominations, while for Catholics HSV remains a thoroughly Protestant Bible.

For the *Vertaalbureau* HSV-2010 is mandatory, but Dutch and Flemish members in practice choose other Bible versions, and the differences between the biblical texts in the Dutch Church magazines and lesson material and their Bible are easily passed over. Thus, instead of textual harmony, the insistence on global Church unity produces local diversity, even in Book of Mormon versions. The various DBM-revisions make that Dutch-speaking members now also use three different DBM-versions in Church: reprints of DBM-1950 till 2000, and the editions of 2004 and 2017. Conservative and modern texts encounter each other from the pulpit and in lessons.

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44   Whitehouse, 'Modes'.
45   McClellan, 'As Far', 64. McClellan provides telling examples in German, Portuguese and Spanish.

Thus, the story of the Dutch Book of Mormon translation is a study in centralization of a process that is very hard to centralize, a process in which unity in organization and doctrine faces the dynamics of language developments and the mindsets and persuasions of individual translators. Still, just like in Bible translations, the whole process reflects a theology of translation where the search for the ideal words and phrases is meant to convey inspiration and solace to new generations of readers.

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