

# TRANSLATING NEW TESTAMENT PARABLES IN THE STYLE OF ZARGULLA NARRATIVE TEXTS: LUKE 15:11-32.

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**Abstract:** A source language and a receptor language are not necessarily similar in every linguistic characteristic. Consequently, discourse analysis has gained significant interest among Bible translation scholars and practitioners, as it helps inform translation choices that improve quality. This study explores narrative discourse characteristics of the SL Greek (the source language) and the Zargulla (the receptor language), an Omotic language in Southern Ethiopia. The study presents a comparison between selected narrative discourse characteristics of both languages. It addresses narrative discourse structure (such as introduction and closure), connectives, and participant reference. Finally, based on a sample translation draft of Luke 15:11-32, the study presents conclusions and recommendations for translating New Testament narrative texts in the style of natural Zargulla stories.

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

### RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The consideration of discourse characteristics has gained greater attention from Bible translation scholars and practitioners in the last few decades. Among many, Eugene Nida notes that the quality of translation concerns every aspect of translation: “text, exegesis, discourse structure, style, illustrations, format, and supplementary materials”.<sup>2</sup> He makes it clear that compromising on any aspect results in failing to maintain quality. Furthermore, the acceptability and usability of the translated Scripture are directly proportional to the extent to which the quality of the translation is maintained. Hence, translation quality is one of the major factors affecting the acceptability, usability, and the impact of the translation product, namely, the transformation of lives in the language community. Consequently, all translation agencies agree not only on the importance of ensuring translation quality (clarity, accuracy, and naturalness) but also on the vital role it plays towards the acceptability of the Bible translation product.

To improve the naturalness, clarity, and accuracy of the translation, it is essential to study the linguistic features of both the source and receptor languages. However, little is known about the discourse characteristics of Ometo languages in general, and of Zargulla<sup>3</sup> in particular. This study aims to fill the gap by making an extensive comparison between the narrative discourse characteristics of the source language (Greek), and the

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<sup>1</sup> I am truly grateful to Anne-Christie Hellenthal (PhD) for her invaluable guidance and comments throughout this work, which made this article possible.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene A. Nida, “Quality in Translation,” *The Bible Translator* 33, no. 3 (1982): 329–32.

<sup>3</sup> Zargulla is an Afroasiatic-Omotic language, spoken by over 50,000 people (Geressie Zuria Woreda, Population Profile 2025) who live in South-Western Ethiopia. Zargulla speakers identify themselves as part of the larger Gamo ethnic group (one of the 42 *Dereta* “communities” which comprise Gamo), and live in the Gamo Zone, Ethiopia.

receptor language (Zargulla). Narrative texts in the source language and receptor language are not necessarily similar with regard to every linguistic characteristic. There are some similarities in participant referencing, but significant differences in opening and closing markers, in the disclosure of the moral of a story, and in connectives. These findings should be taken into account in a future translation of the Bible into Zargulla to enhance accuracy, clarity, and naturalness in the receptor language.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, the study calls upon Bible translators, advisors, and consultants in Ethiopia to meticulously consider the narrative discourse characteristics of local languages in Ethiopia, in general, and Zargulla in particular, as a contextual application of these characteristics will benefit translation quality and usability.

#### OUTLINE OF THE ARTICLE

The article has four sections. Section one introduces the rationale behind this study of discourse features and the methodology used. It also introduces some basic concepts of discourse structure. Section two compares the linguistic features (opening and closing markers, connectives, and participant tracking) of the source language (Greek) and the receptor language (Zargulla). Section three presents the application to translating a Bible passage into Zargulla. Finally, section four presents the conclusion and recommendations.

#### METHODOLOGY

In this study, I employed qualitative research to analyze the narrative discourse characteristics of Zargulla. First, a field linguistic approach has been employed to record, transcribe, and present ten Zargulla stories in interlinear form. Secondly, I reviewed the structural build-up, use of connectives, and ways of participant referencing (Givon’s scale of coding weight has been employed)<sup>5</sup> In the source language, based on the parable of the prodigal son. Thirdly, I analyzed the seven narrative texts in my corpus of Zargulla natural texts, noticing similarities and differences with the source language, based on the parable of the prodigal son. Thirdly, I analyzed the seven narrative texts. Fourthly, using the Literary Functional Equivalence (LiFE-style) translation model, I translated the parable of the prodigal son into natural Zargulla. Finally, based on my study of discourse features and my experience translating this parable, I draw some conclusions and make suggestions for a future translation of the New Testament narrative texts into Zargulla.

#### NARRATIVE DISCOURSE BASIC TERMS

Discourse<sup>6</sup> is defined in various ways. According to Koroma, “A discourse is a group of words, spoken or written, which connect logically and make sense.”<sup>7</sup> Narrative discourse features a temporal sequence and prominent characters, distinguishing it from other genres such as exposition.

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<sup>4</sup> Nowadays, doing discourse analysis before or at the beginning of a translation project is considered best practice. Many discourse analysts offer practical advice on how to involve translation teams in discourse analysis. Steve Nicolle, “Workshops in Discourse Analysis for Translation,” in *Participatory Linguistics: Methods and Case Studies from Around the World*, ed. Michael Cahill, Phil Davison, and Timothy M. Stirtz (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2024), 423–34.

<sup>5</sup> Robert A. Dooley and Stephen H. Levinsohn, *Analyzing Discourse: A Manual of Basic Concepts* (Dallas: SIL International, 2001), 111-14.

<sup>6</sup> Narrative discourse and narrative text are used interchangeably in this paper.

<sup>7</sup> Regine Koroma, *Student Notes for Discourse and Translation*, ed. Eshinee Veith (Addis Ababa: Mekane Yesus Seminary, 2021), 1.

Narrative discourses can be categorized into true and fictional ones. Steve Nicolle points out that true and fictional stories differ in their features.<sup>8</sup> In the African context, traditional fictional stories often serve both instructional and entertainment purposes.

Structurally, narrative texts are built from groups of sentences that form paragraphs. There may be several sections and sub-sections in a given narrative text. Section or paragraph divisions are made based on linguistic features in the given text that correspond to changes in time, place, participant, and action.<sup>9</sup>

There are several parts in the narrative discourse as charted by Koroma:<sup>10</sup>

Title and opening	Introduction
Setting / Orientation	
*Rising Action / First Event Proper	
Section before the peak / Developmental Episodes	
*Peak	
Falling Action / Denouncement	
Closure	Conclusion
Finish	

Table 1 Main parts in narrative discourse

Linguists note that the most important parts of narrative texts are the rising action, or the first event proper, and the peak in episode development. The rising action is a section in which a conflict occurs, and the subsequent storyline follows the conflict or complications that arise.

Also, the peak is an essential part of narrative texts. Thomas E. Payne makes it clear that the “Peak refers to a point in a narrative discourse where events are presented in rapid succession, with little backgrounded material interspersed.”<sup>11</sup> When describing the features of the peak of a story, Steven E. Runge quotes Longacre, who says that the peak is “a zone of turbulence in regard to the flow of the discourse.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, the peak of a story involves tension and intense action, causing turbulence in the narrative's development. Then, turbulence brings about changes in word order, verb tense (from present to past or vice versa), clause length, and, sometimes, a concentration of converbs in a verb-final language such as Zargulla. Runge notes that work is needed to discover which linguistic features indicate the peak in the story.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Steve Nicolle, *Narrative Discourse Analysis and Bible Translation*, SIL Forum for Language Fieldwork (Dallas: SIL International, 2017), n.p.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen H. Levinsohn, Steve Nicolle, and Tim Stirtz. *Discourse Analysis and Bible Translation* (Dallas, Texas: SIL International, 2024), 22.

<sup>10</sup> Koroma, *Student Notes*, 19–20.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas E. Payne, *Describing Morphosyntax: A guide for field linguists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 354.

<sup>12</sup> Steven E. Runge, “Discourse Analysis,” In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, edited by John D. Barry et al., (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016). n.p.

<sup>13</sup> Runge, “Discourse Analysis,” n.p.

## COMPARISON OF SOURCE LANGUAGE AND RECEPTOR LANGUAGE DISCOURSE FEATURES

In this section, I draw attention to selected discourse features of the Source Language (Greek) and the Receptor Language (Zargulla).

### STATING PURPOSE

The main purposes of traditional stories in the Zargulla community are moral instruction and entertainment. As most Zargulla children do not have the opportunity to watch TV or listen to radio programs, they spend time with their parents in the evenings before bedtime. During this time, the family gets to talk about how they spent the day (cattle, farming, community updates, etc.). Additionally, parents often tell stories, especially when they are cooking dinner. This provides a good opportunity for parents to share stories about the ethnic group to which they belong, moral instructions, religious practices, and war stories, among other things.

When Zargulla parents tell stories to their children, they know when and how to disclose the moral of the story. Usually, the moral of a fictional story comes at the end, right after the conclusion. Example 1 is the last utterance of a story.

#### Example 1:

Nees koiro laggett-ene hiyukko-nne hant-ene hiyukko-nne  
 For.you first be.friends-FUT if.say-and walk-FUT if.say-and  
 moḍačče yeššinna ʔellusi ʔega gelidikko.  
 without.thinking exist in.hurry in.it do.not.get.in

To be friends and walk together, do not enter into it without first imagining the consequences.

The story tells of the friendship between Donkey and Hyena that cost Donkey her life. Although they agreed to be good neighbors, the hyena was unfaithful and broke the agreement, killing the donkey. Therefore, the moral is that the donkey should have tested the hyena before she became friends. With this story, parents teach their children to be wise in choosing their friends.

Likewise, the moral at the end of the following story is given in example 2. In the story, the donkey refused to listen to her good friend, a dog, and cried out in the middle of their way home, and was consequently eaten by hyenas who arrived at the scene when they heard the donkey braying. Similarly, a person who refuses to listen to his or her friends, parents, and the community will suffer the consequence, even to the extent of death.

#### Example 2:

Zore zor-umma ʔepe ʔik'ar-ese ʔatsts meto-y  
 advice give.advice-DS.CNV take-INF refuse-REL1 person problem-NOM  
 hii mala-tte hii ʔaalooy mak'k'e.  
 that like-COP that end-NOM happen

A person who refuses to accept advice will be similar to that; the end will be (like) that.

Therefore, one can see that Zargulla traditional stories have instructional purposes as discussed above. Likewise, there are stories or parables in the New Testament in which Jesus Christ makes the moral lessons explicit. For example, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), the parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21), and the parable of the Great Dinner (Luke 14:15-24) all contain explicit moral lessons. This, of

course, is not the case with the parable of the Prodigal Son, in which Jesus left it for the audience in the given context to find the moral implications of their own behavior. While an open end is also possible in Zargulla, most often the moral of the story is explicitly provided in the concluding section.

However, in Zargulla real stories, one does not necessarily wait for the closing remarks to learn what the speaker wants to communicate. The main message the speaker wants to convey in the text may be stated at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end.

#### INTRO AND CLOSURE

In the New Testament, many of Jesus' parables are identified with the Greek noun *παροβολή* (feminine, singular). The term *παροβολή* could also be translated as “figure, allegory, figure of speech.”<sup>14</sup> Its occurrence helps the readers to interpret what follows.

In Luke 15, *παροβολή* is the genre marker the narrator Luke uses to introduce the story. There appears to be no set formula for closing a story. However, in Zargulla stories, there are specific opening and closing markers, and a moral at the end of the story.

#### Opening markers

Stephen H. Levinsohn, Steve Nicolle, and Tim Stirtz state that “the way the story begins may indicate whether or not the storyteller is recounting events that actually happened.”<sup>15</sup>

The opening marker in Zargulla traditional stories is *Zaga (wodega)*. We can see this in example 3 below. The opening marker *Zaga (wodega)*, meaning “a long time ago,” or “in ancient times,” signals that the story is fictional.<sup>16</sup>

#### Example 3:

zaga	haree-ra-nne	tolkoo-ra	wola-tt-in	dootsunte ne	hitta
Long.time.ago	donkey-with-and	hyena-with	together-FOC-INC	neighbor.ABST-FUT	say.PST

Long ago, donkey and hyena agreed to live as neighbors.

Unlike fictional stories, true stories in Zargulla may be opened in various ways. When a story begins by mentioning a specific time period, like *Darge wodega*, “during the Derge regime,” *z’inbero*, “last year,” the story is identified as one that actually happened. It consists of historical events. In example 4, the storyteller mentions the exact time the event occurred.

#### Example 4:

Šiʔa-nne	tantsine	s’eeta-nne	ʔizip	tama-nne	namʔu (1962)	laitsu-nna
Thousand-and	nine	hundred-and	six	ten-and	two (1962)	year-by
Geretsa	timirte	keetse-ga	ʔeed-I	ta	ʔade-y	gel-its-umma
Geressie:LOC	education	house-in	bring-CNV	1Sg:POS	father-NOM	enter-CAUS-DS.CNV
šaato-tte-t	yešše.					
child-FOC-1Sg	was					

<sup>14</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 1:391.

<sup>15</sup> Levinsohn, Nicolle, and Stirtz, *Discourse Analysis*, 10.

<sup>16</sup> This marker is equivalent to the Amharic “*be diro giʔe*”. Amharic is a language of wider communication (LWC) in Ethiopia, and Amharic Bible versions (Amh 62, Amh 05, NASV) are used as “base texts” in most of the Bible Translation Projects in Ethiopia.

In 1962, I was a child when my father brought me to the school in Geressie.

The storyteller mentions a specific year he attended school. The people who listen to the story in Zargulla will therefore easily identify that the story being told is real. This helps them take every detail seriously, more so than in traditional stories, where the moral is put at the end.

Therefore, the opening markers of true and fictional stories in Zargulla differ. Fictional stories are typically opened by *Zaga (wodega)*.

### *Closing Markers*

True and fictional stories in Zargulla can also be distinguished on the basis of the closing marker. Zargulla's traditional story closing formula is *yaattiš biyuttide*, “it is said like that.”

However, closures in real stories differ. Often, these are concluding statements that remind listeners of the text's main idea. Examples 5 and 6 are concluding statements. In example 5, the speaker indicates that he finished all he could tell about the topic by saying, “[T]hat is how they (the bridegroom and his father) demonstrate their happiness.” It is the culmination of a story about a typical wedding celebration.

Example 5:

Hii-tte    ʔu       ʔufaysi.  
That-FOC   3Pl:POS   happiness

That is how they demonstrate their happiness.

In example 6, Father Tariku concludes his speech with a statement that wraps up the theme of the text. The story focuses on how Father Tariku attended school and college and served in several positions.

Example 6:

Timirte   taarikee-ra   ʔootso   taarikee-ra   kumuts   yaa-tte   male.  
Education   history-with   work   history-with   full       that-FOC   like

My education and job history are like that.

In a fictional or traditional story, the listener would expect the appropriate closure formula, because that is the natural form of the Zargulla traditional narrative stories. Therefore, Zargulla Bible translators would do well to consider the different closing markers. Likewise, consultants should inquire about translation teams' choices regarding the use of natural opening and closing markers.

### CONJUNCTIONS

Since discourse analysis addresses grammatical and linguistic elements beyond the sentence level, it is essential to understand how sentences and paragraphs are interconnected. A well-known device in connecting sentences and paragraphs is the conjunction. Runge states that conjunctions play the role of joining clauses and sentences. For example, he makes it clear that there are two “main conjunctions in English – ‘and’ and ‘but’”. These two English conjunctions function differently: “‘and’ signals semantic continuity, whereas ‘but’ signals semantic discontinuity.”<sup>17</sup> However, this basic division may be absent in other languages, including Hebrew and Greek. Runge explains: “The Hebrew conjunction simply joins two items of equal status with no judgment about semantic continuity. In Greek, the meaningful distinction between *καί* and *δέ* is not

<sup>17</sup> Runge, “Discourse Analysis,” n.p.

continuity/discontinuity, but thematic development.  $\Delta\acute{\epsilon}$  signals that what follows is the next step or segment in the plot or argument.”<sup>18</sup>

It is crucial to understand the types of conjunctions and their uses in different languages. Every Bible translation practitioner should consider this area of grammar in both the source and target languages to make reasonable choices and maintain a good flow of thought.

Levinsohn states that  $\kappa\alpha\iota$  is a default conjunction in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts, but  $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$  is a default development marker.<sup>19</sup> According to Wallace’s description, the two morphemes are also used as adverbative, connective, or emphatic conjunctions in a given context.<sup>20</sup> A third connector is  $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$  (for). These conjunctions are the most frequent ones in the Gospel and Acts. They connect clauses, sentences, and paragraphs.

When turning to the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15, we find the same three connectors,  $\kappa\alpha\iota$  (and),  $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$  (and), and  $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$  (for). Particularly in Luke 15,  $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$  serves as an episode development marker, while  $\kappa\alpha\iota$  is the default conjunction. Both  $\kappa\alpha\iota$  and  $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$  occur with the speeches of participants in the parable: the young son, the father, and the elder. For reasons of space, I leave out a discussion of other conjunctions, such as  $\delta\tau\iota$  (because), a subordinate conjunction that appears in verses 24, 27, and 32, but not on episode (paragraph) breaks.<sup>21</sup>

Another device that connects sentences and paragraphs is tail-head linkage. Scholars such as Stephen H. Levinsohn, Steve Nicolle, and Tim Stirtz state that, “Speakers of some languages often connect sentences by repeating the final part of one sentence when they begin the next.”<sup>22</sup> This particular repetitive linkage is common in oral texts.<sup>23</sup>

The word order in Zargulla is subject-object-verb.<sup>24</sup> In verb-final languages, the default conjunction is commonly tail-head linkage. Indeed, tail-head linkage is frequently attested in my corpus. Hence, the default connective is tail-head linkage. Examples 7 and 8 below are connected by tail-head linkage:

Example 7:

Ya	hidi	wola	der-et-i	ʔusuni	ʔarda	yes-umma-tte	bizzi
That say.CNV	together	village.INCH-CNV	3Pl	live		exist-DS.CNVFOC	one
wode	hare-so	haiʔo-y	kes-inne.				
time	donkey-house	death-NOM	go.out-PST				

Saying that, while they were living as neighbors/villagers, one day, death happened in the donkey’s house.

<sup>18</sup> Runge, “Discourse Analysis,” n.p.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen H. Levinsohn, *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek: A Coursebook on the Information Structure of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. (Dallas: SIL International, 2000) n.p.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 293–302.

<sup>21</sup> Readers interested in comparing Greek  $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$  and  $\delta\tau\iota$  could likely analyze them in ways similar to English *for* and *because*, respectively, even though  $\delta\tau\iota$  also occurs with other subordinate clauses, such as speech clauses, as suggested by Paul Kroeger (p.c). Paul Kroeger, “‘For She Loved Much’: Reason Clauses in Translation,” *Journal of Translation* 18, no. 1 (2022): 13–36. <https://www.sil.org/resources/publications/entry/93465>

<sup>22</sup> Levinsohn, Nicolle, and Stirtz, *Discourse Analysis*, 37.

<sup>23</sup> Dooley and Levinsohn, *Analyzing Discourse*, 16.

<sup>24</sup> Azeb Amha, “The Morphosyntax of Negation in Zargulla,” in *The Linguistics of Endangered Languages: Contributions to Morphology and Morphosyntax*, ed. W. Leo Wetzels (Utrecht: LOT, 2009), 220.

Example 8:

hare-so haiʔo-y kes-umma-tte hikke hare-y dos-ees-i ʔaalumawaʔ  
 Donkey-house death-NOM go.out-DS.CNV-FOC INTJ donkey-NOM like-REL<sub>2</sub>-CNV what:Q  
 When death happened in the donkey’s house, “Now, what does the donkey like?”

Examples 9 and 10 illustrate tail-head linkage in another Zargulla narrative text.

Example 9:

harro-y ʔoga zartsa-y yes-eskaanna gada zarts-o muutta  
 donkeyDEF.F-NOM on.the.way grass-NOM exist-TEMP land grass-DEF.F.ACC eat.INT  
 There was grass on the way and the donkey ate it.

Example 10:

zarts-o muud-i miš-i ʔepa kanni-mma haaʔʔot-ene Haro-y yaa hitta  
 Grass-DEF.F.ACC eat-CNV full-CNV take.INT dog.DEF.F-DAT cry-FUT donkey-NOM that said  
 The donkey became full of eating the grass and asked the dog, saying, “Shall I cry?”

A closer inspection of our texts suggests that tail-head linkage is the default way to connect paragraphs. Out of the twenty-seven clear paragraph breaks in three Zargulla narrative texts, twenty one employed tail-head linkage. In other places where tail-head linkage occurs, a paragraph break would often be possible based on thematic unity. Therefore, it would in principle be possible to translate the Greek δέ with tail-head linkage.

Within paragraphs, sentences may be connected by zero, by different conjunctions, or by stringing clauses in long clause chains.

Function	Zargulla Conjunctions	Amharic	English	Greek
Coordination	-nne	እና	and	καί
Additive	manne	ከዚህ በተጨማሪ	also, again	καί, δέ
Strong adversative or Concessive	šin kaši mak’uko maak’o ʔattošin,	ነገር ግን ይሁን እንጂ	but, however whereas	δέ
Consecutive	hikke hikope datta	አሁን/ም ከዚያ በኋላ	Now then, therefore	καί
Reason	ʔute	ምክንያቱም	because	διὰ τί, επειδή, ὅτι

Table 2 Zargulla conjunctions in comparison to Amharic, English, and Greek

PARTICIPANT TRACKING

As far as discourse cohesion and flow are concerned, linguists generally agree that it is important to track participants correctly. Therefore, this section focuses on how the participants in a given text are marked.

Participant tracking examines how participants are activated (introduced), maintained on stage, reactivated (reintroduced), and dismissed. As stated by Koroma, “How often are the characters referred to by name, and when by a pronoun or a verb form?”<sup>25</sup> Correct participant referencing is important because

<sup>25</sup> Koroma, *Discourse and Translation*, 12.

speakers need to guide their audience so that they will understand who does what to whom. Since reference patterns differ across languages, translators need to pay close attention to them.<sup>26</sup>

Accurately tracking participants in narrative texts is a key quality of Bible translators. Stephen Levinsohn tracks participants in the Greek passage, Luke 15:11-32.<sup>27</sup> Knowing the default encoding in the source language helps translators consider differences in usage between the source and receptor languages and then apply a natural reference pattern in their translation. Therefore, it helps the translators produce a clear text in the style of the receptor language. Levinsohn’s analysis demonstrates how the six participants in the parable (the father, the younger son, the older son, the pig owner, the servants, and the servant answering the older son) are introduced, reintroduced, kept on stage, and deactivated. Based on Levinsohn’s analysis,<sup>28</sup> I propose below an encoding for the participants in different contexts in the parable of the Prodigal Son.

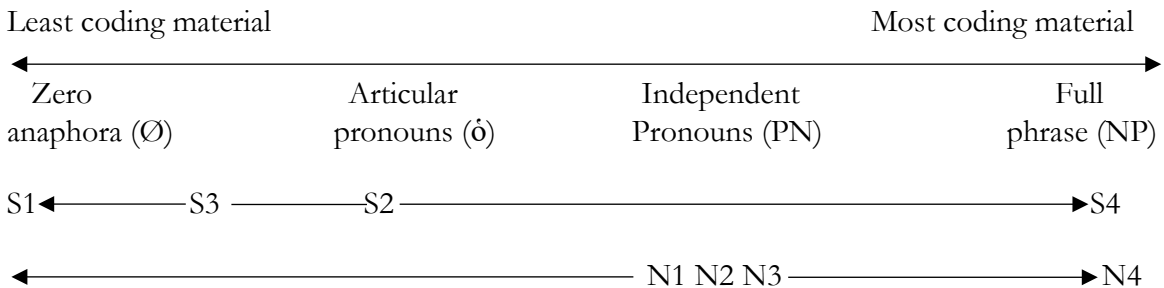
Activated subjects and non-subjects in Greek and Zargulla are encoded across the following eight contexts:

- S1: The subject is the same as in the previous clause or sentence.
- S2: The subject was the addressee of a speech reported in the previous sentence.
- S3: The subject was involved in the previous sentence in a non-subject role other than in a closed conversation.
- S4: Other changes of subject than those covered by S2 and S3
- N1: The referent is in the same non-subject role as in the previous clause or sentence.
- N2: The addressee of a reported speech was the subject (speaker) of a speech reported in the previous sentence.
- N3: The referent was involved in the previous sentence in a different role than that covered by N2.
- N4: Other non-subject references than those covered by N1-N3.<sup>29</sup>

The Greek participant references in subject and non-subject contexts are labelled:

S1	∅	N1	pronoun
S2	ó	N2	pronoun
S3	∅	N3	pronoun
S4	NP	N4	NP

The narrative Greek scale of coding weight is distributed as follows:



The following table shows how participants are referenced in various contexts in three natural Zargulla narrative texts.

<sup>26</sup> Dooley and Levinsohn, *Analyzing Discourse*, 111.  
<sup>27</sup> Levinsohn, *Discourse Features*, n.p.  
<sup>28</sup> Levinsohn, *Discourse Features*, n.p.  
<sup>29</sup> Dooley and Levinsohn, *Analyzing Discourse*, 130–31.



In the S1 and S4 contexts, comparing the Zargulla reference system to the Greek, Zargulla and Greek have the same default reference types. However, Zargulla may use more NPs than Greek in S2 and S3 contexts, as well as fewer independent pronouns than Greek in non-subject contexts.

## APPLICATION TO TRANSLATING A BIBLE STORY IN ZARGULLA

After analyzing the Zargulla natural texts, I studied the historical and literary context of Luke 15. Then, I translated the text sentence by sentence, and considered paragraph breaks as I produced the translation. The translation draft was made in Paratext, a software for Bible translators.

In the Greek text, conjunctions occur frequently. However, in natural spoken Zargulla, the default way to connect sentences and paragraphs is through tail-head linkage. This did not come automatically as I worked on a written text. Also, I employed a LiFE-style translation model that encourages considering the Bible as a literary work and studying the linguistic and artistic aspects of receptor languages in a translation process that maintains translation quality.

At a subsequent meeting with a selected group of Zargulla speakers, they provided valuable comments to improve the translation draft's naturalness. They commented on many lexical items, and the language use of the older and younger generations was evident. For instance, a choice was made between *c'annak'uttettes manginne* (begun to worry) and *kunuttettes manginne*, which literally means "he found himself in a narrow place". The younger ones preferred the first one due to its multilingual influence (literally adapted from Amharic). Also, in places, the way direct speech was presented needed to be adapted.

Finally, an important lesson I learned from my translation process is that translators would likely be more effective if they internalized the stories and produced an oral version, which could then be transcribed as the first draft. Such a draft would follow the style of natural Zargulla, including the default connectives, and could be edited for accuracy.

### INTRO AND CLOSURE

The opening marker for the fictional story is used in verse 11 to show that the parable did not relate historical events; rather, Jesus used it to present his message after the Pharisees and Scribes confronted him about having fellowship with the tax collectors and "sinners" (Luke 15:1-3). The linguistic feature that marks the opening of the fictional story in Zargulla is *Zaga (wodega)*, meaning "long ago". This is equivalent to the English "once upon a time", which distinguishes between true and fictional stories.

#### Example 11:

Yesuusi manne, "Zaga, bizzi ?atsus nam?u na?a šatedette yešše" yaattes hinne.  
 Jesus again long.ago one man.DAT two boy children exist.PAST that:he said  
 Again, Jesus said, "Once upon a time, a certain person had two sons."

In example 11, the translation shows that Jesus begins telling them the third parable in the chapter, in which he introduces a father with his two sons. The younger son requested his share of the inheritance even though that was unacceptable in the Middle Eastern culture, as it is in Ethiopia, Zargulla.<sup>30</sup> It is only acceptable for the children to think of and request an inheritance after their parents have died.

<sup>30</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Finding the Lost: Cultural Keys to Luke 15* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 122.

As already demonstrated in the natural Zargulla texts, the opening words of Zargulla texts are critically important, because real or historical events narrated in the Bible, like Jesus’ birth, ministry on earth, sacrificial death, resurrection, and ascension, could not be translated with the opening marker *Zaga (wodega)*.

The ending marker of Zargulla's traditional story, *yaattiš biyuttide*, is like “this is the end of the story” in English. In the Greek text, we do not see ending markers, unlike in several other languages. Usually, in Zargulla, the ending marker appears at the end of the stories.

In the parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus intentionally left the interpretation (the moral) to the audience. Since Jesus intentionally used an open-ended story, I did not formulate a moral either. The repetition of sentences in the text from 23-24 and 32 points towards the theme, and I think Zargulla speakers will pick up on it.

#### CONNECTIVES

There are no default conjunctions in Zargulla texts that are equivalent to the Greek  $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$  and  $\kappa\alpha\iota$ . Conjunctions in Zargulla, such as *-nne* (and), and *manne* (again), appear seldom in natural Zargulla texts or stories. Thus, the default cohesion in Zargulla is tail-head linkage. In the Zargulla translation of the parable of the prodigal son, tail-head linkage is used in verses 13-14, illustrated below, as well as in verses 25-26 and 27-28a.

Verse 13b:

Hinaan be šiiši ʔeeme miizzo ʔudda budi kasaratesinne.  
 There his gathered brought.REL<sub>3</sub> property all scattered squandered  
 There, he scattered and squandered all the property he took with him.

Verse 14a:

ʔesi ʔudda kasari ʔolummatte  
 3MSg:NOM all squandered give.up-AFF  
 After he squandered his property,

Verse 14b:

ʔe hame gadiga ʔiita nayey kesinne.  
 3MSg:go.REL<sub>3</sub> country.in bad famine took.place  
 A severe famine took place in the country he went to.

The table below shows how the Greek  $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ , which serves as the default in the episode development marker, was translated into Zargulla. As indicated, I have used zero as well as the conjunctions *hi ʔute* (because), and *-nne* (and) in Luke 15:14b, 21, and 28c, knowing that they are not natural development markers as  $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$  is in Greek.

In verse 11,  $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$  connects the parable of the prodigal son with the previously introduced literary context and setting (Luke 15:1-11). Although there are no conjunctions in Zargulla that indicate a natural way of beginning a new episode, in v.11, *manne* (again), introduces a new parable that is similar to the previous two parables in the same chapter. *Manne* (again) is often used to introduce something that comes repeatedly and has a logical connection – i.e., it connects the present story to the previous ones by instructing the hearer to look for parallels.

As already has been noted,  $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ , as a development marker, can introduce both new episodes and steps within an episode (i.e., new units that build toward the climax or solution of the episode). However, no default conjunction in Zargulla particularly introduces a new episode, both at a higher and lower level, like the conjunction  $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$  does in Luke's Greek.

Verse	Episodes	Zargulla connectives
15:11	Jesus started telling the parable	<i>Manne</i> (again)
15:14b	The happening of a famine	Tail-head 13 -14a
15:17	The younger son came to his senses	<i>Higape</i>
15:20b	The father saw his son come back	Ø The first clause is not a true tail-head, but it is similar in using words from the same semantic field.
15:21	The genuine confession speech of the younger son	- <i>nne</i> (and) If it were a tail-head, we would have to repeat the whole nine words, which feels cumbersome.
15:22	The orders of the father to his servants	<i>Kaši maak'o Pattošin</i> (but, however) Using this conjunction draws more attention to the surprising action of the father.
15:25a	The reintroduction of the elder son	Ø To proceed immediately to the climax episode, <sup>31</sup> it is natural to have zero.
15:28a	The anger of the elder son	Ø There was discussion on this connective zero versus <i>yaa sidi</i> (his hearing); we did not consider the tail-head <i>yaa hiyumma</i> . It seems that immediately proceeding to the next action is needed at this point in the story.
15:28b	The father went to talk to him	- <i>nne</i> (and) We choose to keep the pace fast; theoretically, it is possible to slow down by using a long tail-head construction before the climactic final exchange.
15:29		- <i>nne</i> (and) Similar to above.

Table 4 Episode development Luke 15:11-32<sup>32</sup>

When I compare the Zargulla connectives in the table above with those in natural stories, after the translation process was complete, a discrepancy in their use is evident. It makes me wonder whether the lower frequency of head-tail linkage (connector) is due to working with written texts, or whether I might have been

<sup>31</sup> From the thematic point of view, the climax is in the second episode, even if from the narrative point of view, the father receiving the son is the high point.

<sup>32</sup> Yuen Wah Cheung, "Discourse Features: Rendering Greek Luke Narrative Text into 'Beli'" (MA thesis, Dallas International University, 2019), 91.

influenced by knowing the story in Amharic very well.<sup>33</sup> It might be that if I had recorded the story orally in an OBS/OBT approach and used a transcription as a first draft, more tail-head linkage would have appeared.

Having said this, there are good reasons for the current connectives, and the small community review showed that the text was perceived as good Zargulla. However, for SOV languages like Zargulla, translation practitioners will do well to carefully consider the overall frequency of tail-head linkage, given the number of people who will hear Scripture read to them rather than read it themselves.

#### PARTICIPANT REFERENCING

Zargulla has more participant reference strategies than Amharic and English. In the natural Zargulla texts, full noun phrases, pronouns, verbal person markers, as well as zero-marked verb forms, are used to refer to the participants in the story. In the translated parable, we find the same devices. The introductions and reintroductions of the main participants, as well as the references to continually activated, fall within the expected range.

In verse 32, the father uses an inclusive “we,” in which he requests the older son to join the joy and celebration upon the younger son's return; he was lost and is found, was dead and is alive. The “we” in verse 32 should be translated as the inclusive pronoun; otherwise, it will mislead the readers or listeners to even theological misunderstandings.

Also, in verse 20b, the frequent use of the converb can be said to mark the peak of the story. This is a place where the tension, problem, or complicating action comes to its climax.

Verse 20b:

ʔesi	hagahaakoga	yesumatte	ʔadezazi	deng-i	ʔol-i	mičutt-i
3MSg:NOM	yet	far	exist-DS.CNV.COP	father.DEF.M.NOM	saw-CNV	be.compassionate-CNV
ʔesukko	wos's'-i	hang-i	ʔudung-i	ʔol-i	laʔottesinne.	
towards.him	run-CNV	went-CNV	hug-CNV	give.up-CNV	kissed:3MSg	

When he was far, the father saw him, became compassionate, ran to him, hugged him, and kissed him.

The father finally kissed his son (final verb with person marking), but first came seeing, being compassionate, running, and hugging (with converbs).

#### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article explored how to translate the New Testament parables in the style of Zargulla narrative texts. The study was limited to the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). The parable was translated into Zargulla using Wendland's LiFE-style translation model. The opening and closing markers, connectives, and participant referencing in the Greek text and Zargulla narrative texts have been closely examined, and natural Zargulla linguistic features have been incorporated into the translation of Luke 15:11-32.

Firstly, the opening and closing markers of Zargulla traditional stories, *zaga (wodga)*, “once upon a time,” and *yaattish hijuttide*, “it is said like that,” respectively, have been incorporated to help the audience identify the type of story.

<sup>33</sup> Levinsohn, Nicolle, and Stirtz. *Discourse Analysis*, 11-12.

Secondly, the Greek conjunctions *καί* and *δέ* are the default conjunctions in Luke 15. *Δέ* plays a great role in the parable of the prodigal son by marking episode developments at higher and lower levels. However, no default conjunction in Zargulla is equivalent to the Greek conjunctions *καί* and *δέ*. The default connective in Zargulla is tail-head linkage. Other connectives in Zargulla are found in the analyzed texts and Zargulla translation: *-nne* (and), *ʔute* (because), *kaʃi maak'o ʔattoʃin* (but), etc. These are not equivalent to the Greek conjunctions, but they play comparable roles in linking phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs.

Thirdly, the default participant referencing in Greek and Zargulla is zero anaphora (Ø) in S1, and a full noun in S4. Participants are introduced, reintroduced, and dismissed in both Greek and Zargulla in similar ways across contexts, though Zargulla might naturally use more nouns in S2-S3 contexts.

Hence, it is important to consider the differences and similarities in the opening and closing markers, connectives, and participant referencing between the two languages to produce a natural Zargulla translation.

Further studies should examine additional Zargulla narrative discourse features, particularly quotation strategies, idioms, and figurative speech. In presenting this case study on Zargulla, I have identified potential problem areas in maintaining discourse flow in similar languages and provided considerations and solutions that Ethiopian Bible translation practitioners can apply to create a natural, clear, and accurate translation.

## LIST OF GLOSSING ABBREVIATIONS

ABST	absolute
ACC	accusative
ADD	additive
AFF	affirmative
ART	articular pronoun
CAUS	causative
CNV	converb
COP	copula
DAT	dative
DEF	definite
DS	different-subject (change of subject)
F	feminine
FOC	focus
FUT	future
GA	genitive absolute
GEN	genitive
PN	independent pronoun
INCL	inclusive
INF	infinitive
LOC	locative case Mmasculine
NOM	nominative
NP	full noun phrase
POS	possessive
PST	past tense
Q	question
REL	relative(izer)
lSg	first person singular

2Sg	second person singular
3Sg	third person singular
1PL	first person plural
2PL	second person plural
3PL	third person plural
Ø	no overt reference

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