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[Re]Gained in Translation I

Bibles, Theologies, and the Politics of Empowerment

Sabine Dievenkorn / Shaul Levin (eds.)

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Klaus-Dieter Baumann / Hartwig Kalverkämper /
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The Impact of Discourse Functions on Rendering the Biblical Hebrew Noun אִישׁ in a Gender-Sensitive English Translation

David E. S. Stein

ABSTRACT

This article examines a Hebrew-to-English Bible-translation project that prioritized contextual precision over word-for-word rendering. It reassesses how the general human noun אִישׁ [*ʾîš*], which is prominent in gender representation, was handled in *The Contemporary Torah: A Gender-Sensitive Adaptation of the JPS Translation* (2006), whose scholarly abbreviation is CJPS. It views that translation in light of the author's dissertation, which took a communication-oriented and cognitive path to explain the usages both of אִישׁ and of English 'man'. By taking into account the nature of discourse between speaker and audience, that work concluded that both nouns function as the default label for communicating about participants in situations. The present article shows how such a construal readily yields a coherent and informative construal of four sample biblical passages – Gen 4:1, 6:9, 24:65, and 30:43 – each of which represents a distinct discourse function of אִישׁ. Then, for each case, it evaluates the optimal rendering of אִישׁ into English, given the growing differential between what אִישׁ meant in ancient Hebrew and what 'man' nowadays conveys, with regard to their referent's age and gender. It concludes by proposing a refinement of CJPS in each instance.

The publishers of the two Hebrew-to-English Bible translations that I have worked on describe them as "gender-sensitive" or "gender-accurate."[1] One distinguishing feature of all such translations is how they handle אִישׁ—a noun that in the Torah (Pentateuch) alone refers to persons a total of 552 times.[2] Of course, in Ancient Hebrew other nouns likewise signaled that their referent is within the semantic domain of human beings. They include: נֶפֶשׁ 'person', אָדָם 'earthling', גֶּבֶר 'he-man', and אֱנוֹשׁ 'human being'. Of these, אִישׁ is the only one with a feminine counterpart. Whenever the composers of the Hebrew Bible labeled someone in a general way, they implicitly made a choice within this cohort of nouns. Most of the time, they chose אִישׁ—which means that translators must spend a lot of time reckoning with this noun.[3]

To illustrate the gender issue at stake for translators, let us consider the treatment of the ritual impurity that results from touching a corpse (an act that was often necessary, or merely accidental). According to the book of Numbers, both men and women are susceptible to such impurity, which threatens communal well-being (5:2–3). In one passage in that book, Israel's deity pronounces the following stricture (19:20), for which I cite two translations.

וְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־יִטְמָא וְלֹא יִתְחַטָּא וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִוא מִתּוֹךְ הַקָּהָל

> And a man who becomes unclean and does not cleanse himself, that person shall be cut off from the midst of the assembly..." (RA)[4]

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1 This is to be distinguished from a "gender-inclusive" or "gender-neutral" translation, which elides the differences between men and women according to the norms of ancient Israelite society. On the publishers' distinction between "gender-sensitive" and "gender-accurate," see below, note 14.

2 Counting both the grammatically masculine singular (אִישׁ) and plural (אֲנָשִׁים) forms in the Masoretic Text; David E. S. Stein. 2020. "Tabulations of the Meanings of the Masculine Noun אִישׁ in the Pentateuch (Torah)," Table 3. Unpublished document available online. purl.org/scholar/tally-penta. Although the biblical corpus seems to provide us with only a limited sample of what Ancient Hebrew must have encompassed, it reliably reflects the ancient Israelites' actual use of that language's highest-frequency words, such as אִישׁ; David E. S. Stein. 2020. "Relational Meanings of the Noun אִישׁ (*ʾîš*) in Biblical Hebrew." Ph.D. dissertation. University of Stellenbosch: Department of Ancient Studies. purl.org/scholar/stein-phd-diss, 11.

3 In the Torah, our noun אִישׁ, including its feminine form אִשָּׁה and their plurals, refers to persons 817 times, which is more than four times the *combined* total of 187 references to persons using the other four general human nouns. On communicative and cognitive preferences for אִישׁ, see below.

4 See the end of the article for a list of translation abbreviations used.

> If anyone who has become impure fails to undergo purification, that person shall be cut off from the congregation…" (CJPS)

Like Robert Alter (RA), many other translators have recently rendered the singular noun אִישׁ here as 'a man' or 'the man' (for instance, SB, NKJV, KJ21, LEB, MEV, ESV, NET). One reason for doing so is to maintain a consistent word-for-word correspondence wherever possible, as one aspect of faithfully reflecting how the Bible's composers expressed themselves.[5]

In contrast, many translations of this verse render אִישׁ with a gender-neutral English term.[6] The indefinite pronoun 'anyone' in the rendition above is typical.[7] Some of these translations make no special effort to attend to social gender; they simply render the noun's contextual denotation in a thought-for-thought manner.[8] Others among these translators are motivated by a stated goal to not obscure when

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5 Biblical lexicographers working in English have considered *man* to be the most broadly applicable single-word equivalent; David E. S. Stein. 2019. "When Did the Biblical Hebrew Noun אישׁ Become Lexically Gendered?" Paper presented to the Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew section, Society of Biblical Literature. Annual Meeting, San Diego, 24 November. purl.org/stein/lex-gender. Excursuses 3 and 8). Notably, however, many dictionaries present the attribute of maleness/manliness—if at all—only *after* indicating the noun's application to human beings in general. Taken together, biblical dictionaries are *vague* about the nature of אִישׁ with regard to gender (ibid.). Unfortunately, the traditional dictionary format is poorly designed to account for how referential gender functions in Biblical Hebrew; David E. S. Stein. 2011. "Improving an English Dictionary's Characterization of the Gender Representation of Personal Nouns in Biblical Hebrew." Paper presented to the Biblical Lexicography section, Society of Biblical Literature. Annual meeting, San Francisco, 20 November. On the meaning potential of אִישׁ in Ancient Hebrew according to the biblical evidence, see below.

6 Among the Hebrew Bible's influential ancient translations, in the Greek version (Septuagint) ἄνθρωπος 'human being' corresponds to אִישׁ in the Masoretic text here (Emanuel Tov and Frank Polak. 2009. "The Revised CATSS Hebrew/Greek Parallel Text." *Accordance Bible Software module*. Altamonte Springs, FL: OakTree Software), while the Latin version (Vulgate) reads *quis* 'any' (*Biblia Sacra Vulgata.* 2007. Ed. quinta. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft).

7 So already NJPS in 1962; similarly, TLB, NRSV, NCV, ERV. Translators have adopted other equivalences: demonstrative pronoun ('those', NLT, NABRE, NIV); personal pronoun ('you', CEV); another noun ('a person' or 'the person', HCSB, ISV, MSG, CSB); and more ('any person', AYB, CEB).

8 *Social gender* is the culture's continual construction of womanliness/manliness. See the discussion of NJPS in David E. S. Stein. 2006. "Preface." In: David E. S. Stein, Adele Berlin, Ellen Frankel, and Carol L. Meyers (eds.). *The Contemporary Torah: A Gender-Sensitive Adaptation of the JPS Translation* (CJPS). Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, v–xxxv, here vi–vii. purl.org/stein/cjps-preface.

women are in view.[9] In any case, given the conventional use of 'man' as a default rendering for אִישׁ, it appears that any decision not to do so here is preceded by a conclusion that this verse *does not specify* the referent's social gender.[10] Thus to render as *man* would be awkward, due to its normative meaning (nowadays) of "adult male."

The present paper addresses translation projects of the latter type—namely, all those for which אִישׁ, in a context as in the above example, might be rendered by something other than 'man'. (In such translations, word-for-word rendering is a secondary goal.) In this paper, I reassess how the key Hebrew term אִישׁ was handled in one such work: the translation that the then-prolific Bible blogger John Hobbins called "an inevitable point of departure in future discussions of gendered language used of human beings . . . in the Hebrew Bible."[11] This translation was issued by the Jewish Publication Society as *The Contemporary Torah: A Gender-Sensitive Adaptation of the JPS Translation*.[12] Its scholarly abbreviation is CJPS (already cited above). As the book's title suggests, we editors based it upon the respected NJPS ("New JPS") retranslation, which is a contextual rendering of the Hebrew text's plain sense into idiomatic English.[13] At the same time, the CJPS

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9 This paper will not attempt to classify the dozens of English-language Bible translations published during the past half century, nor evaluate their various competing (and even contradictory) claims of accuracy, sensitivity, neutrality, and inclusiveness with regard to social gender. In general, translators differ about the gender implications both in the Hebrew and in English. That is, disagreements are partly about what the source text was conveying with regard to the social gender of its human or divine figures, and partly about what the English noun *man* and the third-person masculine pronouns (*he/him/his/himself*) mean in various contexts of use.

10 On the difficulty in inferring what any translator was thinking about gender, see David E. S. Stein. 2009. "Unavoidable Gender Ambiguities: A Primer for Readers of English Translations from Biblical Hebrew." *SBL Forum* (Summer). purl.org/scholar/sbl-gender.

11 John F. Hobbins. 2007. "A Gender-Sensitive Translation of the Torah." On: *Ancient Hebrew Poetry* (blog). December 22. purl.org/scholar/hobbins2007.

12 David E. S. Stein, Adele Berlin, Ellen Frankel, and Carol L. Meyers (eds.). *The Contemporary Torah: A Gender-Sensitive Adaptation of the JPS Translation*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.

13 The NJPS translation was formerly known as the New Jewish Version (NJV). Its first volume, *Torah* (The Five Books of Moses), has undergone four significant revisions—in 1967, 1985, 1992, and 1999. Its translation committee, which was responsible also for the first two revisions, strove to establish the text's plain sense as the biblical composers meant to convey it to the canonical Torah's presumed first audience, while taking into account postbiblical Jewish interpretation. The translators explicitly valued clarity of expression, and they sought to emphasize a religious message. See further, Jewish Publication Society. 1999 [1985]. "Preface to the 1985 Edition." *The JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*. Philadelphia: Jewish

effort was also an extension—in both breadth and depth—of a revised translation in *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, issued a year earlier by a cooperating publisher.[14]

The Distinctive CJPS Treatment of אִישׁ and of *Man*

In supplementing the earlier adaptation project, we CJPS editors paid special attention to the instances of אִישׁ. We analyzed most of them at length.[15] As noted in an appendix titled "Dictionary of Gender in the Torah":

Publication Society, xxi–xxvii, here xxiii–xxvii; Harry M. Orlinsky (ed.). 1970. *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 3–40.

14 W. Gunther Plaut and David E. S. Stein (eds.). 2005. *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*. Revised ed. New York: URJ Press. This revision of a 1981 work newly incorporated a "gender-accurate" translation, with a 1999 rendition of Genesis by Chaim Stern. The publisher, URJ Press, had intended for Stern to translate the entire Torah, but he passed away in 2001. For the remaining books, the Press engaged me to adapt the translation in the commentary's first edition, namely NJPS. Our editorial adaptation team included Hara Person (Press editor-in-chief), Ellen Frankel (JPS editor-in-chief), and Bible scholars Carol Meyers and Adele Berlin as consulting editors. See further, David E. S. Stein. 2005. "Preface." In: Plaut and Stein, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary,* xxv–xxxi.

By "gender-accurate," the publisher meant that the rendering of terms referring to human beings (as distinct from God-language) accurately reflects the understanding of the text's ancient audience, given their likely assumptions regarding social gender. In turn, for the 2006 rendition, JPS preferred the term "gender-sensitive" to "gender-accurate" out of an abundance of caution, so as not to "claim too much authority" for the somewhat innovative methodology. That publisher viewed CJPS as complementing rather than replacing the NJPS translation; Ellen Frankel, personal communication, Feb. 14, 2006.

On the CJPS treatment of its God-language (not discussed in the present paper), see David E. S. Stein. 2006. "God's Name in a Gender-Sensitive Jewish Translation." *SBL Forum* (Summer). purl.org/scholar/god-name; Idem, 2006, "Preface," xxvi–xxviii; Idem. 2008. "On Beyond Gender: Representation of God in the Torah and in Three Recent Renditions into English." *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 15, 108–137. doi:10.2979/NAS.2008.-.15.108b. For errata, see Idem. 2020. "Errata for the CJPS Translation." purl.org/stein/cjps-errata.

15 Our understanding of the meaning potential of אִישׁ was based upon a pioneering study by Alison Grant. 1977. "*'Adam* and *'Ish*: Man in the OT." *Australian Biblical Review* 25, 2–11. For a discussion of Grant's findings, see David E. S. Stein. 2008. "The Noun אִישׁ (*'îš*) in Biblical Hebrew: A Term of Affiliation." *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 8, 2–24; Idem, "Relational Meanings of the Noun אִישׁ," 17–18, 51–52. For my translator's notes for Exodus through Numbers, see David E. S. Stein. 2014. "Part II: Translation (Notes)—Methodology; Exodus; Leviticus; Numbers." *Documentation for the Revised Edition of The Torah: A Modern Commentary*. purl.org/ccar/tamc.

> the present translation takes as the primary sense of אִישׁ […] 'a representative member of a group: a member who serves as a typical or characteristic example.' Thus this term exemplifies the group-oriented thinking found throughout the ancient Near East. […] The term אִישׁ presumes an inseparability from a larger entity.[16]

Our focus on אִישׁ had actually been prompted by our decision to restrict the use of *man* in English to mean 'adult male human being', absent a more salient relational meaning in context. Concomitantly, for all other nuances of אִישׁ, we would employ other English terms, as contextually appropriate. We adopted this stricture in service of a larger goal: for a given usage of אִישׁ, to make clear to our readers when womanly gender is also in view.[17]

Our construal of אִישׁ and our constraint on the meaning of *man* would have far-reaching and provocative consequences.[18] Ultimately, out of 458 instances of masculine singular אִישׁ in the Pentateuch, only 62 (less than 14%) were rendered as 'man'.[19] Our approach, and this striking result, became the main distinguishing feature of our revised translation within its gender-sensitive cohort. As the biblical lexicographer Reinier de Blois noted upon the book's publication (personal communication), the way that CJPS handled אִישׁ was "unconventional, innovative, and worthy of serious consideration." As such, it would be subject to future review and revision. The present paper now begins to undertake such a review. To anticipate my conclusion, I find that our previous analyses do warrant some refinement.

16 David E. S. Stein. 2006. "Dictionary of Gender in the Torah." In: Stein, Berlin, Frankel and Meyers, *The Contemporary Torah*, 393–412, here 394.

17 Stein, 2006, "Preface," xxiv–xxv, xxxi.

18 I use the term *construal* to refer to the human ability to conceive and depict a given situation in alternate ways. Also, the constructed result of that process of interpretation.

19 In all 62 cases, the qualities of adulthood and maleness were evident from the context, thus constraining the audience's interpretation anyway to referents with those qualities. More than 90% of these cases involve reference to a nonspecific type of adult male; Stein, "Relational Meanings of the Noun אִישׁ," 19.

The Need for a Reassessment

Since the publication of CJPS fourteen years ago, I have continued to study how אִישׁ was employed in Ancient Hebrew,[20] efforts that culminated in a doctoral dissertation.[21] It employed a novel, communication-oriented and cognitive approach to explaining the full range of usages of אִישׁ. The resulting insights have shed light not only on the nature of אִישׁ, but also of *man* in the target language. For I showed that both terms are similarly distinctive within the cohort of general human nouns that exists in each of their respective languages.[22]

We cannot fully grasp how אִישׁ (or correspondingly *man*) functions if we rely upon conventional wisdom, such as the notion that its meaning revolves around 'adult male'.[23] Even the more generic concept of 'human being' is seldom in the foreground of what אִישׁ contributes to an utterance's meaning.[24] Nor is אִישׁ among the nouns that the Bible uses to indicate a figure's human-like appearance.[25]

Significantly, in the vast majority of cases, the use of אִישׁ must be conveying

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20 Many of my studies have included also the feminine form אִשָּׁה, as well as its plural form נָשִׁים. These forms behave nearly the same as the masculine ones. However, with respect to translation, their gender implications are clear-cut, whereas the masculine forms are often ambiguous—and thus in need of careful analysis. Consequently, this paper dwells upon the masculine terms.

21 Stein, "Relational Meanings of the Noun אִישׁ."

22 The same kinds of distinctiveness appear to apply to *homme* 'man' with respect to its cohort in French. My dissertation therefore treated the three terms as a category, which I called "workhorse human nouns." Based upon their distinctive functions, I am now calling them "situating nouns."

23 Psycholinguists have found that during actual communication, audiences do not process a word on the basis of its "dictionary definition"—also known as its *residual* (or citation) meaning. This claim is especially true of general human nouns. Given their highly mutable nature (that is, context dependence), their residual meaning is hardly relevant. See further below, and Stein, "Relational Meanings of the Noun אִישׁ," 25–26.

24 This conclusion follows from the competition posed by other general nouns in the human domain that more readily serve to indicate a human being as such; Ibid. It is reinforced by analogy from linguists' observation that *man* in English and *homme* in French are seldom used to classify their referent as a human being (ibid., 34–35, 76–77).

25 David E. S. Stein. 2018. "Cognitive Factors as a Key to Plain-Sense Biblical Interpretation: Resolving Cruxes in Gn 18:1–15 and 32:23–33." *Open Theology* 4, 545–89. doi:10.1515/opth-2018-0043; Idem, "Relational Meanings of the Noun אִישׁ," 175 n29; Idem. Forthcoming. "Angels by Another Name: How 'Agency Metonymy' Precludes God's Embodiment." In: Kim Soojung and David Frankel (eds.). *Topics in Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures.* Vol. 2. Atlanta: SBL Press. Prepublication version: purl.org/stein/angels.

something other than gender information.[26] For in those cases, the referent's gender is actually precluded from being specified by the linguistic reference.[27] According to one tally, it appears that referential gender is communicated by only 31% of the Bible's instances of masculine singular אִישׁ.[28]

If, in Ancient Hebrew, אִישׁ seldom means 'adult male' or 'human being', then how is it being used? The most profound lesson to emerge from my studies—and the one that undergirds this paper—is that like all nouns used as a label, אִישׁ is always used to manage the speaker's communication with an audience;[29] yet unlike other noun labels, אִישׁ is employed almost solely for this purpose. That is, the key to understanding אִישׁ is the *discourse function* that it serves. During communication, the speaker's task is not only to inform the audience, but also to make sure that the audience is properly tracking the speaker's descriptions and references. In that regard, our noun אִישׁ plays a distinctive yet conventional role.

In the next section, I will explain the preferential place of the nouns אִישׁ and *man* in the management of discourse in their respective languages. I will show how this concept has revised my understanding of the meaning of אִישׁ in use, as well as my view of the suitability of *man* as an English rendering. Then for illustration I will treat four passages from the book of Genesis, with respect to issues of abiding concern to translators, especially the representation of gender. I will discuss each passage in light of not only the CJPS rendering, but also the

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26 English idiom leads me to depict speakers as "conveying" informational "content." More precisely, however, in actual language use, a speaker's utterance prompts an audience to construct meaning by making inferences. Words *evoke* meaning in the audience's mind; Idem, "Relational Meanings of the Noun אִישׁ," 16.

27 One of the basic properties of Hebrew is that *manly* referential gender is a function of the reference's *specificity*. When it is employed in *nonspecific* reference, a grammatically masculine singular noun is generally agnostic as to its referent's social gender. See David E. S. Stein. 2008. "The Grammar of Social Gender in Biblical Hebrew." *Hebrew Studies* 49, 7–26. doi:10.1353/hbr.2008.0014. purl.org/scholar/HS-2008; Idem. 2013. "Gender Representation in Biblical Hebrew." In: Geoffrey Khan (ed.). *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*. Leiden: Brill, 2:20–22. purl.org/stein/ehll-gender; Stein, "Relational Meanings of the Noun אִישׁ," 17–19.

28 *Referential gender* is an utterance's characterization of a referent as being socially gendered (or not). It is a function of the specificity of the reference. (In historical linguistics, this concept has been called "notional gender.") For the tally, see Stein, "Relational Meanings of the Noun אִישׁ," 18.

29 For consistency, I discuss all communication (including between the biblical text and its readers) as involving a "speaker" and an "audience." Both parties are styled in the grammatical singular.

original NJPS rendering, as well as other English translations—especially those that have paid special attention to gender representation, such as the NRSV, which is widely used in academia.

Discourse Functions of אִישׁ and of *Man*

Viewing a Noun Label in the Context of Communication

During communication, while a speaker depicts some situation, an audience evidently forms a mental representation of that depiction.[30] Scholars call the latter a "discourse model" or "situation model."[31] It is populated by participants whom the audience must keep track of. I think of it like a puppet theater. As the speaker telegraphs words from a remote location, a mental puppeteer attempts to faithfully portray the depicted situation on the stage.

Communication is thus a matter of synchronization between speaker and audience. The speaker must successfully manage the audience's "puppet" characters, including how they relate to the scene. As the linguist Knud Lambrecht observed, "Informing a hearer of something means informing him or her of some state of affairs, i.e. of something which necessarily involves not only participants but also something to participate in."[32]

Ultimately, a situation and its participants are interdependent. Nonetheless, a speaker can construe the same scenario in different ways, so as to emphasize either the overall situation or a certain participant. Compare the following two biblical treatments of homicidal assault (Ex 21:12 and Lv 24:17):[33]

30 Ideally, the following explanation would be directly linked to the human brain's neurological functioning. For simplicity, it is undertaken at a less detailed level of analysis that nonetheless suffices to account for the linguistic usages in question.

31 Stein, "Relational Meanings of the Noun אִישׁ," 15.

32 Knud Lambrecht. 1996. *Information structure and sentence form: Topic, focus, and the mental representations of discourse referents*. Vol. 71. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 46.

33 Here my renderings emulate the Hebrew text's alliteration. See the rendering and note in RA on Gn 2:17. On the importance of alliteration in the Bible, see Gary A. Rendsburg. 2019. *How the Bible Is Written*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 72–127.

מַכֵּה אִישׁ וָמֵת מוֹת יוּמָת׃

A dealer of death to another party shall be doomed to die.

וְאִישׁ כִּי יַכֶּה כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ אָדָם מוֹת יוּמָת׃

Any party who kills any of humankind shall be doomed to die.

The first case opens by casting the perpetrator solely in terms of the problematic act. In contrast, the second case starts with an unadorned individual, who only then gets into trouble. Thus, the first construal is *situation*-oriented (akin to "*When* someone kills…"), whereas the second is *participant*-oriented ("*Regarding* someone *who* kills…").[34]

Typically, the speaker's task in managing the discourse model involves cueing the audience to mentally perform any of the following four acts. For this purpose, the speaker's main linguistic device is a noun—judiciously deployed as a label within a noun phrase. These acts are as follows:

1. *Framing a Situation*.[35] Sometimes a speaker wishes to present the overall situation, rather than focus on one (or more) of its participants. In such a case, the speaker needs to describe the participants in only a schematic manner—merely indicating their existence, plus how they are related to the other elements in the situation of interest.
2. *Situating a New Participant*. When a specific intended referent is not yet active in the discourse, the speaker needs to prompt the audience to "open a file" for that participant within its discourse model.
3. *Elaborating upon a Participant*. In order to add some data about a participant (e.g., an aspect of character), the speaker needs to induce the audience to "access the file" that has been created for the participant in

[34] In the first case (Ex 21:12), the heinous act is indicated indirectly, via a substantival participle. Situation focus is even more obvious when the speaker uses a finite verb to mention the act first, as in Ex 21:18, 20, 26. Meanwhile, some utterances, when read in isolation, cannot be readily classified as emphasizing either the situation or its participant(s). For example, the hypothetical statement "I see two women playing chess" would be an acceptable response to either of the following questions: "Is anyone in the courtyard?" (a *participant* focus) or "What's going on in the courtyard?" (a *situation* focus). Hence in many cases we must consider the context of use.

[35] While not used as a category of analysis in my dissertation, I have later found that such framing is the most frequent motivator for our noun's deployment; see Stein, "Tabulations of the Meanings of the Masculine Noun אִישׁ."

question; that way, the new data can be reliably attached to the proper file.

4. *Re-situating a Participant*. As the depicted situation develops, the speaker may need to cue the audience beforehand to "re-open its file" for a participant of interest, so as to update its discourse model accordingly. Alternatively, the speaker may prefer to cue the audience to treat one of the participants as if fixed in place—as a handy point of reference—while focusing attention on the re-situation of another participant.

The above considerations thus enable us to identify four main discourse functions for a noun label:[36] frame; situate; elaborate; and re-situate. A tally of the Torah's 570 instances of אִישׁ (singular and plural, including 20 non-personal referents) confirms that each of them is deployed to carry out one of those four discourse functions.[37] Of these, *framing a situation* accounts for nearly two-thirds of the instances of אִישׁ.[38]

More importantly, our noun appears to be *the default term* for carrying out such discourse functions.[39] The next section explores why that is so.

The Most Efficient Noun Label for Communicating about Situations

Imagine that you are a speaker, standing in front of an audience. You want to communicate something about a certain participant in a situation of interest. What would be the most efficient (least-cost) way for you to ensure that the audience divines your intended message?

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36 More precisely: for an entire referring expression—and not only the noun as its head term. Herein I follow the lead of a corpus linguist: "The functions are not fulfilled by the noun alone, but for the sake of brevity I will talk about the noun having a particular function"; Michaela Mahlberg. 2005. *English General Nouns: A Corpus Theoretical Approach.* (= Studies in Corpus Linguistics. 20). Philadelphia: Benjamins, 107.

37 Stein, "Tabulations of the Meanings of the Masculine Noun אִישׁ," Table 1.

38 Ibid., Table 2. As is widely recognized, in the Bible our noun אִישׁ in the singular regularly carries out two schematic functions: distribution and reciprocation; For extensive discussion, see Stein, "Relational Meanings of the Noun אִישׁ," 197–212. I have found that either construction can be employed in service of the *framing* or the *re-situating* discourse functions described above; see Stein, "Tabulations of the Meanings of the Masculine Noun אִישׁ." Because their English renderings are rarely controversial, I will not discuss distribution or reciprocation any further in this paper.

39 Stein, "Relational Meanings of the Noun אִישׁ," 105–163.

As I mentioned, a noun will play a key role in signaling your intent. Presumably the *ideal* noun to use for such a signal would be a simple, straightforward, and streamlined word. That is, it would exact a low cost for you as the speaker to articulate: it would consist of just one syllable that is easy to pronounce, rather like a beep. And that would make it easy for the audience to process mentally. Rather than describing its referent's intrinsic qualities (as most nouns do) it would be understood to mean simply "Create a file for a new participant, please"; or "Go back to that file, please." This signal would have no other informational content that could distract from its discourse-focused impact.

Most of human cognition and communication is devoted to the activity of *situating and re-situating depicted participants*.[40] Consequently, the posited kind of efficient signal should be in high demand. Countless instances of linguistic communication presumably produce a modest yet relentless pressure to minimize the effort involved by both parties.

I submit that in some languages, a word that resembles our ideal signal has indeed come into existence. In Ancient Hebrew, it was אִישׁ (including what would eventually become that noun's irregular plural and feminine forms). In English, the noun *man* (including *woman*, which is a contraction of *wifmann* 'womanly participant') has long played that same role. That is, these nouns' use has been optimized for a vital task: the speaker's management of the participants in the audience's discourse model. This was my dissertation's hypothesis.

The hypothesis has important implications. When these special nouns are employed as the signal for the audience to locate (or re-locate) participants within a situation, *those participants are defined primarily in terms of their participation in that situation*. It is fair to say that 'participant (in a situation)' is the prototypical meaning that is evoked by the use of these nouns. This distinctive feature makes such a noun the appropriate—that is, the expeditious and thus expected—label to use whenever the spotlight is either on the *overall situation*, or on the *situated* participant as such.

My dissertation tested its hypothesis by validating a number of its resulting predictions. I found that throughout the Bible, אִישׁ is the default label when a new participant is introduced (for instance Lv 24:17, above), as well as when depicting situations where two parties' interests conflict (for instance Ex 21:12, above). As

40 Ibid., 58–61.

illustrated below, I documented that אִישׁ is often employed (and even preferred) as a label when the speaker wishes to supplement the data about a discourse-active participant, or to "reset" a participant's standing in the audience's discourse model, or to offer a reference point for some other aspect of the situation under discussion. Conversely, I showed that אִישׁ is *not* used in similar contexts when those discourse functions are not called for. And I demonstrated that in the Bible, such usage patterns are *consistent* across both its narrators and its narrative characters.[41]

Furthermore, the hypothesis proved to have explanatory value: it accounted for the use of אִישׁ in dozens of passages where its presence had puzzled previous scholars; and I applied it to resolve longstanding interpretive cruxes (Gn 4:1; 18:2; 30:43; Ex 2:14; 10:7; 1 Sm 26:15; Is 66:13; Jer 38:7; Neh 1:11). Meanwhile, it proved consistent with the documented behavior of the corresponding term *man/woman* in English (and *homme/femme* in French).

On account of all these validations, in this paper I treat that hypothesis as fact. To wit, the prototype meaning of אִישׁ and of *man* is to indicate participation in the depicted situation.

Differential Lexical Gender[42] and Age Specialization

Above I have described the classical meaning of both אִישׁ and *man*. Yet significantly for Bible translators, the latter noun has undergone a dramatic semantic change. To return to our initial example about remedying one's contact with a corpse (Nm 19:20), the Authorized Version's rendering in 1611—'But the

41 Crucially, the hypothesis is confirmed in the speech of characters that is nested within the narration. In those cases, the speaking characters are directly addressing their own audience within the story, rather than the text's audience per se. Even so, in order for those characters' speech patterns to have seemed *plausibly realistic* to the text's ancient audience, they must have resembled Ancient Hebrew as it was spoken. After all, the text's audience would predictably interpret that reported speech according to normal usage—while expecting each audience *within* the story to do the same.

The overall finding of consistency in usage regardless of speaker thus validates the hypothesis as a characteristic of the Ancient Hebrew language—and not merely a narrative convention, or even the idiolect of a few narrative voices. See further Stein, "Relational Meanings of the Noun אִישׁ," 105; Stein, "Tabulations of the Meanings of the Masculine Noun אִישׁ." Consequently, the examples in this paper are drawn from both narration and reported speech.

42 *Lexical gender* is a noun's semantic gender specificity, which is a matter of degree: it can vary according to the type of usage, and it can change over time.

man that shall be unclean…'—was surely construed as gender-inclusive, given the normal usage of *man* in English at the time.[43] In contrast, Alter's nearly identical rendering in 2004 (above, p. 284) presumably prompts the contemporary reader to wonder whether women are indeed in view. The predictable impact of *man* upon the reader is quite different.

The gradual lexical gendering of *man* over the centuries, along with a decrease in its use for certain discourse functions, is well documented.[44] Among many English speakers, *man* has newly come to be perceived as presupposing a male exemplar, and as excluding women from its denotation in a wider range of usages.[45] Nowadays few native speakers can even imagine that *man* used to evoke only the most minimal degree of lexical gender, and that it was formerly used almost entirely for other purposes than labeling gender.

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[43] For evidence, compare 'the man' in KJV to render the gender-inclusive Hebrew personal nouns אָדָם and אֱנוֹשׁ in similar situations (a general statement with nonspecific reference): Is 56:2; Ps 32:2; 84:6; Jb 5:17. Likewise, less than a decade after the KJV's publication, the Anglican clergyman Joseph Hall, while reflecting upon the verse in which Micah mentions his mother's cursing (Jgs 17:2), was able to moralize as follows: "A carnall heart … cannot foregoe that wherein it delights … without curſes [curses]: whereas the *man* that hath learned to inioy [enjoy] God … cannot curſe" (emphasis added); Joseph Hall. 1620. *Contemplations vpon the principall paſſages of the holy Story*. Booke X. London: Bvtter. Incorporated into: Joseph Hall. 1621: *Meditations and Vowes, Divine and Morall: Serving for Direction in Christian and Civill Practice*. London: Featherstone. 919–942, here 939. Presumably the author was commenting upon *human* nature, thus including women (exemplified by Micah's mother) in his intended referential scope of *a carnall heart* and its counterpart term *the man*. See also *Oxford English Dictionary* (hereinafter: *OED*), "man, n.1 (and int.)," s.v. I.1.b 'a person'.

[44] For references and on the linguistic connection between those two trends, see Stein, "Relational Meanings of the Noun אִישׁ," 225–27. See also Dennis E. Baron. 1986. *Grammar and Gender*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 138–40. On the lexical gender of nouns as a matter of degree, see Stein, "When Did the Biblical Hebrew Noun אִישׁ Become Lexically Gendered?"

This transformation—from a largely gender-neutral term (while *man* was mostly being used to indicate participation) to a solidly gendered one—was anticipated already in Hebrew. Compared to the patterns of usage in the Bible, the Rabbinic Hebrew of Late Antiquity came to employ masculine singular אִישׁ far more often in gendered contexts and used it to make sharper gender distinctions; meanwhile, some of the biblical discourse functions of אִישׁ were picked up instead by a cohort noun; Stein, "When Did the Biblical Hebrew Noun אִישׁ Become Lexically Gendered?" A parallel transformation is found in French with *homme* if we take the Latin *homo* 'participant, human being' as the starting point; see Stein, "Relational Meanings of the Noun אִישׁ," 25.

[45] *OED*, "man, n.1 (and int.)."

In short, the use of *man* without regard to gender—such as for discourse functions—is increasingly unthinkable. Meanwhile, already for centuries, its denotation has been limited to adults (versus children), as discussed below. Let me now show how these shifts challenge the translators of biblical texts involving אִישׁ, in terms of the four main discourse functions.

Framing a Situation (Gn 4:1)

After Eve has birthed her first child, she offers an explanation for his newly bestowed name. Although her audience is not explicitly named, it must be Adam—the only other person alive.

וַתֵּלֶד אֶת־קַיִן וַתֹּאמֶר קָנִיתִי אִישׁ אֶת־יהוה׃

she […] bore Cain, saying,
"I have gained a person with the help of יהוה."[46] (CJPS)

"[…] a life…" (Speiser)[47]

"[…] a male child…" (NJPS)[48]

"[…] a man…" (NRSV)

For centuries, this naming statement has been an interpretive crux. As noted by the commentator Claus Westermann, it poses a challenge partly because אִישׁ is normally not a label for a newborn infant.[49] Speiser's rendering accords with the view of some interpreters, including the 11th-century commentator Abraham Ibn

[46] Throughout CJPS, the tetragrammaton is reproduced using Hebrew letters, so that it functions as a name. Thus, too, the translation avoids recourse to an epithet that would limit the conception of God to a single quality. David E. S. Stein. 2006. "God's Name in a Gender-Sensitive Jewish Translation." *SBL Forum* (Summer). purl.org/scholar/god-name; Stein, 2006, "Preface," xxvi–xxvii.

[47] E. A. Speiser. 1981 (1964). *Genesis: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary.* 3rd ed. Anchor Bible 1. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

[48] Speiser's translation of Genesis was published just two years after the first rendition of NJPS. He served on the NJPS translation committee for the Torah—and may have been outvoted in this case.

[49] Claus Westermann. 1984. *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary.* (= Continental Commentary). Trans. John J. Scullion. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 289–90. The precise thrust of Eve's point has likewise been debated, for both her verb and her preposition are ambiguous in this minimally constrained context. However, below I suggest that Eve's utterance is best construed as intentionally schematic rather than precise.

Ezra, who have pointed to a spotlight on human mortality in the previous paragraph (3:22–24).[50] In that context, Eve as a new mother must be calling attention to the perpetuation of humankind. However, if that were truly her intent, then we might expect instead the label נֶפֶשׁ ‘person, life’ or אָדָם ‘earthling’.

For its part, NJPS expresses the view of many lexicographers, who construe אִישׁ in this verse as specifying a *male* child.[51] True, Eve is speaking about her son uniquely; and in unique or specific reference, the Hebrew language requires our noun’s users to match its referent’s social gender, by choosing either the masculine or feminine form. Thus Eve’s use of אִישׁ is indeed expressing a non-womanly referential gender.[52] However, that linguistically constrained fact is only incidental. Nothing in the context suggests that Eve is proffering a contrast on the basis of gender (or sex).[53] Furthermore, if she were seeking to specify that she did not bear a daughter, arguably another label would have been more conventional, namely בֵּן ‘son’ (Gn 4:25–26; 16:11, 15; 35:17; Ex 1:16, 22; Jgs 8:31; 1 Sm 4:20; Is 9:5; and many others—but cf. Jer 20:15, an apparent counterexample) or even יֶלֶד ‘boy’ (Ex 1:17–18). Hence the NJPS construal is hard to justify.

Meanwhile, NRSV matches the view of some scholars, such as the 13th-century commentator Moses Naḥmanides, who construe our noun as meaning ‘an adult male *in potential*’.[54] Granted, an audience will adopt a metonymic construal like that when a more direct reading is too implausible.[55] Here, that view assumes that Eve is looking beyond her immediate experience of the miracle of birth—producing the very first human being to ever be born. Is the prospect of his *adulthood* really what leaves the biggest impression on her?

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50 Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra. 2020 (11th c.). פירוש על התורה. In: מקראות גדולות מהדורת על־התורה. mg.alhatorah.org.

51 See, for example, N. P. Bratsiotis. 1970. “אִישׁ.” In: G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (eds.). *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum alten Testament*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer. 1:238–252, here 239.

52 Stein, “The Grammar of Social Gender in Biblical Hebrew”; Stein, “Gender Representation in Biblical Hebrew.”

53 This fact may explain why the Septuagint here reads ἄνθρωπον ‘human being’ (see Tov and Polak, “The Revised CATSS Hebrew/Greek Parallel Text”), while the Vulgate reads *hominem* ‘human being’ (*Biblia Sacra Vulgata* 2007).

54 Moses Naḥmanides. 2020 (1273). פירוש התורה. In: מקראות גדולות מהדורת על־התורה. mg.alhatorah.org.

55 Granted, too, in Job 3:3 גֶּבֶר ‘he-man’ does seem to be employed in a similarly anticipatory manner in a birth-announcement setting. However, that instance prompts the question as to why that label was not used here, instead of אִישׁ.

Happily, a readily coherent and informative construal emerges upon recognizing that, as noted above, אִישׁ is the default term for schematically framing a situation (a function that meanwhile accounts for the majority of the Torah's instances).[56] It is the most efficient label for situating its referent within any audience's model of a described situation. With that utterly conventional usage in mind, Eve's remark becomes the epitome of framing a new situation of interest—using the language's default term for this purpose. In other words, she profiles the referent of אִישׁ simply as *a party whose presence defines the situation*.[57] Her utterance's verb-first syntax focuses on *depicting the unprecedented situation* as she sees it (in order to explain how it inspired her son's name), rather than on her offspring per se.[58]

Notably, future adulthood is not in view. Indeed, the well-known nuance of adulthood is *not* part of the basic meaning of אִישׁ; rather, it is the result of a connotation that is evoked in certain settings. This noun is regularly used to indicate that its referent is essential to grasping the depicted situation; similarly, an adult is someone whose presence matters.[59]

With regard to translation, if 'party (to the situation)' is indeed the (informational-level) meaning of אִישׁ in this verse, then what is the best rendering into English? The earliest translations, such as Wycliffe and Purvey (Later Version, 1395; from Latin) and the Authorized Version (1611), rendered it as 'a

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56 In language processing, humans favor the construal that *readily yields a coherent and informative result*; Stein, "Cognitive Factors as a Key to Plain-Sense Biblical Interpretation," 551. Consequently, I adopt these criteria to decide among construals of a text.

57 For similar constructions used for framing, see, for instance, Gn 39:14; 42:30; Nm 16:30; 2 Chr 2:12. Here I am revising my earlier proposal that Eve was attending to the dramatic increase in human population, based upon the usage of אִישׁ elsewhere to mean a 'member [of the human species]'; Stein, "The Noun אִישׁ (*'îš*) in Biblical Hebrew," 3. Membership is a much less frequent, and thus less cognitively available, meaning of our noun. In contrast, framing a situation draws upon the word's prototypical meaning.

58 Thus Eve piously frames the momentous situation as resulting from a collaboration with her deity.

59 Stein, "Relational Meanings of the Noun אישׁ," 83, 96, 102. See the analysis in Ibid., 5–6, 99–102, 129–131. To insist that Eve is construing her son as an adult (in potential), as some interpreters do, involves an added cognitive step. That extra processing makes such a construal highly unlikely, so long as a simpler construal (as posited here) is available. On this verse, see Ibid., 108, 114.

man'—but in an era when using *man* to denote a child was unremarkable.[60] Given that range of meaning, 'man' would have been construed in terms of participation in the depicted situation.[61]

Although אִישׁ often corresponds to English *man*, nowadays a semantic void exists here between those two nouns. Whereas the biblical term אִישׁ is not age-restricted, *man* has come to be so; in a specifying reference, the English noun's denotation is restricted to adults. To that extent, 'man' is nowadays a misleading rendering in this case.[62]

Meanwhile, to render אִישׁ as 'person' (as in CJPS) carries a disadvantage: it represents Eve as focusing on that newborn participant, rather than on her main interest: the situation as a whole.[63] To that extent, 'person' is likewise a misleading rendering.

Let me suggest that the best available idiomatic English equivalent would be a combination of terms: 'someone new'. In that phrase, the indefinite pronoun serves to individuate the referent, while the adjective appropriately calls attention to the remarkable situation.

Situating a New Participant (Gn 24:65)

A camel caravan bearing Rebekah and her maids from Haran is approaching the vicinity of Abraham's encampment. Seeing someone on foot who is heading straight for them (namely Isaac), she dismounts and asks the servant in charge:

60 Witness an *OED* attestation from 1578, describing pagans in the New World: "Their Priests sacrificed ten children of *three yeares of age*, … fiue [five] of these children were *menne*, and the other fiue wemen" (emphasis added; "man, n.1 (and int.)," s.v. 4.e). *OED* glosses the earliest usages of this very frequent noun as denoting a person "irrespective of … age"; attested applications to a child extend at least to 1651 (ibid.). Thus it is highly unlikely that any English audience in 1611 would have construed the KJV's 'man' in Gn 4:1 as designating an adult; see also the previous note.

61 Stein, "Relational Meanings of the Noun אִישׁ," 81–85.

62 At the same time, in some other instances where אִישׁ is likewise used for framing a situation, a restoration in CJPS of the NJPS 'man' does seems justified. These include Gn 24:58 (in lieu of 'emissary'), 37:15 ('someone'), 42:13 ('householder'), and 42:30 ('official').

63 Stein, "Relational Meanings of the Noun אִישׁ," 82–83, 89.

מִי־הָאִישׁ הַלָּזֶה הַהֹלֵךְ בַּשָּׂדֶה לִקְרָאתֵנוּ

"Who is that dignitary walking in the field toward us?" (CJPS)

"…that man…" (NJPS)

As with Eve's reference to Cain in 4:1, here with Rebekah's reference to Isaac as אִישׁ, the social gender that is signaled is merely incidental. Either masculine or feminine form is required only by Hebrew's need to accord with the social gender of any specific referent; that referent's manliness is not actually at issue.[64] So what does it actually mean when Rebekah labels him as אִישׁ?

In the ancient Near East, relative social status was always being noted and acknowledged in encounters. Such considerations would have been evident here. The fact that the figure was walking directly toward them was a sign of his high status. (A mere servant would run home to inform the master that a caravan was approaching.) Presumably his dress and his bearing would have indicated such status, as well. Likewise, the caravan's presumed halt signaled his importance.[65] Tellingly, the servant answers her question not in terms of the figure's name but rather his position of authority: אֲדֹנִי 'my master' (v. 65b).

With this context in mind, I as CJPS revising translator recalled that אִישׁ could signify a person of consequence.[66] I believed that in this case, the context of use would have reliably evoked that admittedly unusual sense of אִישׁ.[67] That conclusion can now be corrected.

How Rebekah references the distant figure (to whom everyone in the caravan seems to be reacting) is best arrived at by considering the available alternative labels. On the one hand, her question does not employ a demonstrative pronoun ("Who's *that*…?"—compare Is 63:1; Sg 3:6), nor a definite participle ("Who's the *walking-one*?"—compare Ex 10:8; 1 Sm 11:12; Mal 3:2). Both of those methods

64 This fact may explain why the Septuagint here reads ἄνθρωπος 'human being' (Tov and Polak, "The Revised CATSS Hebrew/Greek Parallel Text"), and the Vulgate reads *homo* 'human being' (*Biblia Sacra Vulgata* 2007).

65 When Isaac was spotted, the caravan must have paused on its route. Rebekah would hardly have stopped to dismount on her own (v. 64) while the caravan kept going without her.

66 For the status construal of אִישׁ, the biblical *locus classicus* is Nm 13:3. This sense also accords with the pre-Israelite Canaanite usage of a cognate term; see Stein, "Relational Meanings of the Noun אִישׁ," 6, 43–44, 48–51, 177–78.

67 To her credit, our Genesis consulting editor (Carol Meyers) was not convinced by this argument.

would have been easy both to articulate and to apprehend, while spotlighting the observed activity (in this case, the fellow's movement). On the other hand, Rebekah could have referred to the approaching figure as a dignitary per se,[68] or indeed by any especially contentful term, but does not do so. Instead, her chosen label is relatively vague.

Yet it is adequate to the task. Given my new understanding of אִישׁ, I now see that Rebekah profiles the approaching figure simply as *a participant in the situation at hand*. That is, the most straightforward explanation for her recourse to אִישׁ is that it serves a standard discourse function. She has a communicative need to activate this participant within the servant's mental model of the described situation, so that he can be readily *situated* therein—and thus in her own mental model. She uses the default term for doing so efficiently.[69] Because this is the prototypical meaning of אִישׁ, it would have been highly available to the text's ancient audience, so as to readily yield a coherent and informative utterance. Thus they would construe that Rebekah's interest was on the figure's established relationships—how he is situated socially—which is precisely what the label אִישׁ brings to the fore.[70]

Regarding the translation of this usage into English, as noted above *man* corresponds to אִישׁ as a default term for introducing a discourse participant. The nearly universal rendering here as 'man' (including NJPS) relies upon that equivalent status in English. Thus 'man' accurately reflects the semantically streamlined (or vague) nature of Rebekah's chosen label.

The question is: as its lexical gender has intensified over time, has *man* continued to carry out that classical function? When we label someone across the field as 'that man', does it still invite a situated perspective—or is it construed more as calling attention to his intrinsic manly features? The use of 'man' here even in recent translations that strive to be gender-sensitive suggests that such

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68 Such as the terms שַׂר (e.g., Gn 50:7; Nm 22:40), גָּדוֹל, (e.g., 2 Kgs 25:9; 2 Kgs 10:6), or נָשׂוּא־פָּנִים (e.g., 2 Kgs 5:1; Is 9:14).

69 For similar instances of the situating of an identifiable participant via our noun, see, e.g., Gn 19:5; 34:21; Nm 22:9; Jo 2:3. Meanwhile, in other cases, אִישׁ is used to introduce a specific participant who is not previously identifiable to the audience, as in Gn 38:1; 1 Sm 1:1; Job 1:1.

70 For other instances of the interrogative personal pronoun מִי to inquire about someone's *relationships* (rather than their identity per se), see Nm 22:9–11; Jo 9:8–11; 2 Kgs 10:13; Ru 3:16.

usage is indeed still normative in English.[71] If so, then a reversion to 'man' in this case in CJPS is warranted—recognizing the vital role of *man* in signaling the audience to situate a new (male) participant.

Elaborating About a Participant (Gn 6:9)

At the beginning of the Flood Story, a narrative spotlight shines upon one particular individual, who had been previously introduced:

נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק

Noah was a righteous personage . . . (CJPS)

[…] a righteous man… (NJPS, NRSV)

In this verbless clause, our noun operates as the head term of a predication. For CJPS, we construed this predication as identifying Noah as a person of status or consequence.[72] At the time, I had no other answer for why our noun was invoked in this passage, rather than using a simpler predicate adjective. The apparently conspicuous presence of אִישׁ implied a heightened meaning on the informational level. Now I see that I misinterpreted the coincidence that the Bible's only other instance of the predicated phrase (אִישׁ צַדִּיק) in fact refers to a prince (Ish-Bosheth, the son and heir of King Saul, in 2 Sm 4:11).[73] High status seemed to fit here, too: Noah would soon display the economic and political wherewithal that befits a grandee.

Now, in light of my new awareness of discourse functions, I perceive this instance as an exemplar of employing אִישׁ to elaborate upon a discourse-active participant. Our noun is the default term for prompting one's audience to access its existing "file" for the character in question. On the discourse level of communication, it means: "get ready to modify your file for this participant—details to follow." As such, אִישׁ then introduces a simple statement of character-

71 See NRSV (1989); TNIV (2005); Chaim Stern (transl). 2005. "Genesis." In: Plaut and Stein, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, 19–316; and CEB (2011).

72 On this sense, see above, note 64.

73 In 2006, I construed אִישׁ in 2 Sm 4:11 as 'leader', whereas I now see it as performing its prototypical function of labeling the participants in a situation as such. Our noun is the default term within juridical pronouncements, such as the king is making in that verse; Stein, "Relational Meanings of the Noun אִישׁ," 149, 151.

ization.[74] In such usage, this label signals that the stated quality possessed by the participant in question is essential for the audience to properly grasp the depicted situation.[75] As the late biblical scholar Francis Andersen astutely noted: "*Everything in a text does something* […] What seems redundant on one level might be doing something extra on another level."[76]

What is the best rendering for אִישׁ here in idiomatic English? In that target language, the mission of opening the mind's door to admit a statement of elaboration about someone is most readily accomplished by *man*.[77] For that task, this noun seems to be better suited (cognitively speaking) than its alternatives—both pronouns and other nouns. Like אִישׁ, the noun *man* applies to the participant as already situated, with minimal articulation effort and processing load, so the predication is readily construed as a statement of character.[78]

I know people who avoid labeling anyone as a man, as if to do so would reinforce male dominance in society. In a case like this, they would prefer to render the clause in question as 'Noah was a righteous *person*'. Nonetheless, the apparent communicative and cognitive advantage of *man* is not easily dismissed. When a predication's subject is both specific and already identified as an adult male—as in this verse—it seems best to use *man*. For CJPS, doing so would mean reverting to the NJPS rendering, both here and in some other cases of elaboration.[79]

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74 A diagnostic for when אִישׁ (or in English, *man*) is serving the discourse function of elaboration is that the noun is employed in predication yet itself discloses no new information about its referent; Ibid., 85–86. Examples include Gn 27:11; 41:38; Ex 4:10; 15:3; Nm 13:32.

75 Contra ibid., 66 n19, 125. See now the discussion of elaboration in idem. 2021. "The Situational Noun in Ancient Hebrew: A New Understanding of אִישׁ." Paper presented to the Biblical Lexicography section, Society of Biblical Literature. Annual Meeting, San Antonio, Texas, 22 November. purl.org/stein/situational.

76 Francis I. Andersen. 1994. "Salience, Implicature, Ambiguity, and Redundancy in Clause-Clause Relationships in Biblical Hebrew." In: Robert D. Bergen (ed.). *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics*. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 99–116, here 106.

77 In Modern English, common examples include: "he's a man with a mission"; "he's a man without shame"; "he's a man of his word"; Stein, "Relational Meanings of the Noun אִישׁ," 30. Such usage of *man* to support the elaborating function is attested already in Old English, when—strikingly to us today—it was normal to apply *man* for this purpose even to people of womanly gender; see Stein, "When Did the Biblical Hebrew Noun אִישׁ Become Lexically Gendered?"

78 Stein, "Relational Meanings of the Noun אִישׁ," 87.

79 Those other cases include Gn 25:27; 39:2; Ex 4:10; and Nm 27:18.

Re-situating a Participant (Gn 30:43)

Near the end of Jacob's sojourn in Aram, the narrator describes the cumulative results of the protagonist's contract with his uncle, regarding the breeding of sheep (Gn 30:42–43):

וְהָיָה הָעֲטֻפִים לְלָבָן וְהַקְּשֻׁרִים לְיַעֲקֹב׃

Thus the feeble ones went to Laban and the sturdy ones to Jacob.

וַיִּפְרֹץ הָאִישׁ מְאֹד מְאֹד

So as a householder he grew exceedingly prosperous (CJPS)

Thus the man grew exceedingly prosperous (NJPS)

In this way Jacob became very rich (NCV)

Unlike in the previous example, here אִישׁ heads a referring expression. Its referent is a known adult male; it is not informative in that respect. No gender contrast is in view.[80] So why was this noun used here? Three aspects of its deployment demand explanation. First, why was a noun label used at all? Arguably the verb's masculine inflection alone would have sufficed to enable the audience to fix the reference. Apparently for this reason, Claus Westermann remarked that "there is no reason for the designation" here as הָאִישׁ.[81]

The second puzzle is a converse of the first: why was the employed noun label such a vague one? In this context, the referring expression is semantically underspecified: it does not distinguish Jacob from his rival Laban. In contrast, using Jacob's name would have been unambiguous (as the NCV translation illustrates).

And of all the vague (general human) nouns available, why was אִישׁ the preferred choice? That is the third aspect that needs to be accounted for. In 2006, because this usage of אִישׁ was so conspicuous, I concluded that its context must have evoked a specific sense of our noun. Given Jacob's expressed desire earlier, as he negotiated the business deal with Laban ("When shall I make provision for

[80] This fact may explain why the Septuagint here reads ἄνθρωπος 'human being' (Tov and Polak, "The Revised CATSS Hebrew/Greek Parallel Text"), while the Vulgate reads *homo* 'human being' (*Biblia Sacra Vulgata* 2007).

[81] Claus Westermann. 1985. *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary.* (= Continental Commentary). Trans. John J. Scullion. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 484.

my own household?"; v. 30, CJPS), the relevant sense of אִישׁ here in verse 43 seemed to be "head-of-household."[82] This is reflected in the CJPS rendering.

Revisiting this case now in light of communicative and cognitive considerations, a different understanding comes to the fore.[83] A noun label is called for because—as has been noted by discourse analysts—when a noun is used to refer to a discourse-active participant, it distinctively prompts a re-situating of that referent within the audience's discourse model.

Meanwhile, a vague designation suffices because, given the narrated events leading up to the present situation, and given the narrative conventions of Hebrew, the target audience could reliably infer that only Jacob is the intended referent. And as scholars of linguistic pragmatics have noted, speakers are normally expected *not* to articulate what can be reliably inferred.

Furthermore, the preferred noun is אִישׁ because that label prototypically profiles its referent *in terms of the situation*—as a participant in the situation at hand—rather than in terms of some pre-existing role, status, or relationship to others. Our noun thus has the cognitive advantage of maintaining the audience's attention on the overall situation.[84] Such a trait is helpful when the speaker is summing up a long and complex process, as in this case. Thus this verse's sudden change in designation for Jacob is meaningful: it quietly presents the depicted action (namely, the gaining of wealth) as being *the direct result* of the previously described situation.[85]

Given the Hebrew text's wording, what is the best rendering for אִישׁ here? Classically, the most efficient noun label in English for the "re-situate the partici-

[82] In Ancient Israel, the household was the society's basic unit of economic production. The household's head controlled its assets as a kind of trustee and allocated those resources on a daily basis. In the Bible, the default term for referring to householders is אִישׁ. This usage makes sense because: (1) householders were the society's *participants par excellence*; and (2) they were indispensable—and thus cognitively highly available, so a vague label sufficed to evoke their presence efficiently.

[83] For documentation of the following assertions, see Stein, "Relational Meanings of the Noun אִישׁ," 68–70, 76, 80–81, 82–83, 125–28.

[84] In contrast, other referring expressions (such as a name, or a distinguishing epithet) would evoke additional semantic information, which would then focus relatively more attention on the referenced participant—while detaching that participant from the situation.

[85] The narrative device of אִישׁ as a changed label—that is, its substitution for the given participant's default referring expression—likewise occurs in, for example, Gn 20:8; 24:21; 26:13; 34:7; Ex 2:21.

pant" function appears to be *man/woman*.[86] Like אִישׁ, *man* distinctively keeps attention on the situation. Although the NCV rendering shows that *man* is no longer a totally reliable signal of narrative development, it has retained some currency for such usage.[87] This favors 'man' as the preferred equivalent here.[88] Consequently, a return to the NJPS rendering is warranted.

Summary and Discussion

A concern for the accurate representation of social gender in the Bible's translation has stimulated a discovery about the operation of some languages—including both Ancient Hebrew and English—with regard to a distinctive and unusually frequent noun in that language: it is the default noun for communicating about participants in situations.

Back in 2006, I had concluded that אִישׁ does not behave like an ordinary noun. That basic conclusion appears to have been accurate. Nonetheless, until this past year, I (like prior scholars) overlooked the active role played by אִישׁ on the discourse level of meaning. Now, rather than positing that "the noun denotes relationship either to a group or to another party,"[89] I would instead assert that the usual purpose of this noun's usage is to manage the comings and goings of the participants within the audience's discourse model.

Twelve years ago, I told a roomful of Bible translators that the English noun *man* is an inadequate equivalent for אִישׁ, because it overtranslates social gender.[90] I confess a new appreciation for just how well *man* tracks the behavior of the Ancient Hebrew אִישׁ. With regard to discourse functions and in many usage settings, *man* is a natural translation equivalent for אִישׁ.

Nonetheless, in these two terms' gender (and occasionally age) connotations, a significant dissonance persists—and it continues to grow. Thus as our first example showed (Nm 19:20), rendering אִישׁ in English as *man* can make the

86 Stein, "Relational Meanings of the Noun אִישׁ," 90–91.
87 Ibid., 82–83.
88 So, too, in other re-situating clauses, such as Gn 26:13 and Ex 2:21.
89 Stein, "The Noun אִישׁ (ʾîš) in Biblical Hebrew: A Term of Affiliation," 2.
90 David E. S. Stein. 2008. The (In)adequacy of 'Man' as an English Equivalent of the Biblical Hebrew Noun אִישׁ." Paper presented to the Bible Translation section, Society of Biblical Literature. Annual meeting, Boston, 25 November. purl.org/stein/transl=man.

Hebrew Bible seem more focused on gender than is actually the case.[91] In that instance, the referent was *non-specific*. In contrast, however, in other instances such as the latter three discussed herein—in which אִישׁ was used with respect to *specific figures who are known to be adult males*—an allowance for discourse functions appears to justify the use of *man*. This is the case even though in the local context of the discourse, gender is not at issue.

Notably, in one example (Gn 4:1), the rendering offered herein as optimal ('someone new') arguably applies to all translations into English—not only the gender-sensitive ones—due to a differential between what אִישׁ means in context and what *man* is nowadays capable of conveying. In the other three cases (6:9; 24:65; 30:43), the preferred rendering turns upon the question of just how "male" a term *man* has become. Nowadays the answer may be a function of the translation's target audience. I judged that for the audience of CJPS, *man* is still acceptable in all of these types of usage. Meanwhile, among many of the Torah's other instances of אִישׁ that involve a specific male character(s), upon considering the discourse function involved, I have concluded that its optimal rendering newly appears to be 'party', 'participant', 'agent', 'householder', 'guy', 'one', or various additional contextually appropriate adjustments.[92]

Conclusion

If translation is to be faithful to its source text, we must take note not only of which aspects of meaning are more accurately conveyed by making clear when women are in view, but also which aspects may be lost along the way. Taking into account the concept of discourse functions alters our understanding of the role of אִישׁ in biblical texts. Consequently, it can affect how a given passage is rendered into other languages, such as English. Thus my translator's criteria for an

[91] Ironically, a parallel situation obtains in English itself, regarding earlier manifestations of *man*. When Old English texts have been translated into contemporary English, sometimes the noun *mann* (as it was then spelled) has been rendered mechanically with *man*, which is ostensibly the same word. Yet scholars of Old English have repeatedly cautioned that this practice makes those texts sound "much more male-oriented" than intended by their authors. See Christine Rauer. 2017. "*Mann* and Gender in Old English Prose: A Pilot Study." *Neophilologus* 101, 139–58, here 143–44, 154–55. doi:10.1007/s11061-016-9489-1.

[92] For a tally of the Torah's 570 instances of אִישׁ according to discourse function, see Stein, "Tabulations of the Meanings of the Masculine Noun אִישׁ."

idiomatic rendering of this noun now includes a new explicit goal: achieving a functional equivalence in meeting the relevant discourse-management need(s).

As we have seen, the concern to manage discourse can intersect with a concern for gender implications. That is because our noun אִישׁ and its counterpart English term *man* embody both aspects. Both play a unique role as harbingers of participation. Consequently, with regard to communication about specific male figures—even though their gender is not at issue—there is still a place in translation for the noun *man*. In those cases, employing *man* as a rendering promises to enable the Hebrew Bible's message to be grasped more readily by the target audience. At the same time, in many other cases, especially when אִישׁ is employed in making non-specific reference, rendering as *man* distorts the Bible's meaning.[93]

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Bible abbreviations used in this paper

AYB Anchor Yale Bible

CEB Common English Bible (2011)

CEV Contemporary English Version (1995)

CJPS Contemporary Jewish Publication Society translation (2006)

CSB Christian Standard Bible (2017)

ERV Easy-to-Read Version (2006)

ESV English Standard Version (2001; 2016 ed.)

HCSB Holman Christian Standard Bible (1999; 2009)

ISV International Standard Version (1995; 2014)

KJV Authorized (King James) Version (1611)

KJ21 21st Century King James Version (1994)

LEB Lexham English Bible (2012)

MEV Modern English Version (2014)

MSG The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language (1998–2002)

NABRE New American Bible, Revised Edition (2010)

NCV New Century Version (1987, 1991)

NET New English Translation (1998)

NIV New International Version (1973; 2011)

NJPS New Jewish Publication Society translation (1999 revision)

NKJV New King James Version (1982)

NLT New Living Translation (1996)

NRSV New Revised Standard Version translation (1989)

RA Robert Alter (2004)

SB Schocken Bible [Everett Fox] (1995)

TLB The Living Bible (1971)

TNIV Today's New International Version (2005)